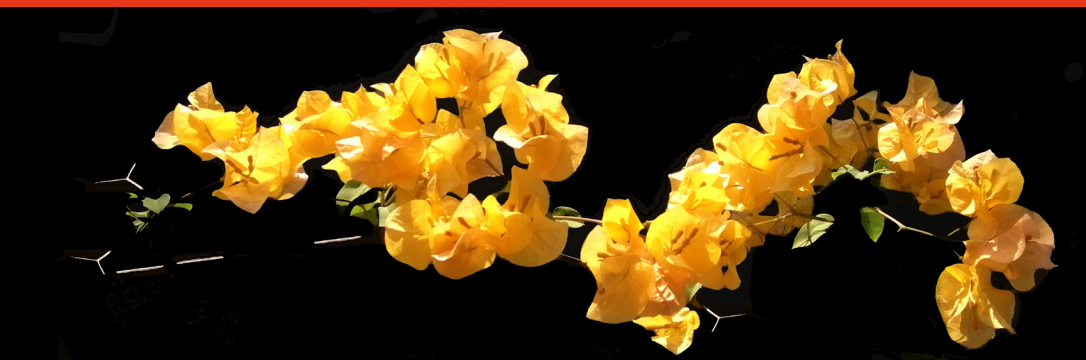


Molly Manyonganise, Masiwa R. Gunda and Linda Naicker (Eds.)

RELIGION, GENDER AND MASCULINITIES IN AFRICA

Essays in Honour of Ezra Chitando



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**Dedicated
to**



EZRA CHITANDO



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Religion, Gender and African Masculinities: Reflections from the Field (Introduction)

Molly *Manyonganise*, Masiwa R. *Gunda*, Linda *Naicker* & Joachim *Kügler*

Introduction

This volume is a critical reflection on religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa. Religion, gender and masculinities have been the subject of study globally and specifically in Africa for quite some time now. Scholars in the fields of religion, women, gender and critical men's studies on the African continent like their counterparts elsewhere have committed to analysing and critiquing the various ways in which religion, gender and masculinities as concepts intersect. Scholarship has also shown how religion influences gender relations on the African continent. While inroads have been made in ensuring the recognition of gender equality in some sectors, evidence on the ground shows that more still needs to be done. The home, religious and public institutions have remained gendered spaces. African women continue to be tangled in the intricate web of patriarchy. In light of the above, chapters in this book examine various themes and dimensions of the intersections of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa/African masculinities. They grapple with the following questions that arise from these intersections, namely, is African patriarchy ready to co-exist with powerful women? How do we untangle women and men from the intricate web of gender inequality that is reinforced through religion? What will it take for men to give up power and authority over women which they derive from culture and religion? How can the study of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa lead to societal transformation? In order to put the volume into its proper context, we provide an overview of the study of religion and gender in Africa in the next section.

The study of Religion and Gender in Africa: An Overview

Gender has become one of the most dynamic areas of research in Africa (Miescher, Manuh & Cole, 2007:2). Awumbila (2007:45) locates the emergence of gender and women's studies in Africa within a feminist intellectual tradition. Women's Studies as an academic discipline emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when women in the feminist movement began to question the absence of women's perspectives and women's lived experiences from which gender inequality was much more apparent as a system of domination (Manyonganise, 2023:24). Gender studies is a product of Women's studies (Scarborough & Risman, 2020:41). Gender studies came to replace Women's studies in the 1980s with emphasis on the difference between biological sex and culturally constructed notions of masculinity and femininity. Awumbila (2007) notes that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholars in [Africa] led an intellectual movement that challenged essentialist notions of womanhood and insisted on recognizing and interrogating difference. Their focus was on establishing how the social location of women is determined by race, ethnicity, class, status and access to privilege.

Within the academic discipline of Religious Studies and/or Theology, gender became a category of analysis more often showing the influence of religion on gender relations. Chitando (2007) notes that gender in religious studies has been largely associated with women's studies. This has been criticized by a number of scholars. For example, Oyěwùmí (2005: xiii) is of the view that 'women' as a category cannot be used as a synonym for gender while Miescher, Manuh & Cole (2007) argue that reducing the concept of gender to women runs the risk of failing to "engage gender analytically as a mode of generating and reflecting historically determinate forms of manhood and notions of masculinity and femininity." More generally, the intersection of religion and gender constitutes a central theoretical and methodological framework to address issues of inclusion and exclusion, production of difference and the complicated power relationships in societies (Hopflinger, Lavanchy & Dahinden, 2012:16). Within Africa, The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians has been steadfast in amplifying and highlighting the diverse experiences and perspectives of African women, ensuring their voices are heard and acknowledged.

The study of gender in Africa, as in other contexts, has been complex. However, many themes have been explored in the process. Western feminist scholars studying gender in Africa depicted the African woman as powerless, subordinated and devoid of any agency. African scholarship contested this view (see Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997, 2005). Amadiume and Oyěwùmí reject the existence of rigid gender roles in Africa prior to colonialism. They advance the thesis that gender in Africa was fluid. Oyěwùmí, in her radicalism completely rejects the existence of the notion of gender categories in Africa and argues that colonialism introduced this concept to Africa. She argues “the cultural logic of Western social categories is based on an ideology of biological determinism: the conception that biology provides the rationale for the organization of the social world” (Oyěwùmí, 1997:ix). These views have been criticized by a number of African gender scholars (see Mbilinyi, 1992; Mama, 2001; Manyonganise, 2023). The argument of these scholars is that the rejection of an existence of gender categories in Africa turns a blind eye to the many ways that religio-cultural beliefs and practices relegated women to the margins of African pre-colonial societies.

Another theme that has taken centre stage in the study of religion and gender is how colonialism and Christianity reinforced the patriarchal ideology and reconfigured gender relations in Africa (see Schmidt, 1988, 1991; Barnes, 1992; Allman, Geiger & Musisi, 2002; Vince, Rodet & Georg, 2007). Manyonganise (2023) reiterates that Western patriarchal ideology found a willing partner in the African one. As young men moved to towns, farms and mines in search of paid labour, they were constructed as breadwinners and providers of families while laws were put in place to domesticate women. The genderedness of the colonial education system widened the economic gap between men and women in Africa. This was generally reinforced by the Christian doctrine on silence and submission. Hence, in contemporary Africa, religious teachings continue to shape gender relations in ways that disenfranchised women. It needs to be noted though that women have started to make in-roads particularly in occupying positions in higher decision-making, and agenda setting jobs. As shall be discussed later, this has put masculinities in Africa in a crisis.

The issue of women’s leadership both in religious institutions and public offices has also been central in religion and gender studies. Religion and gender scholars have questioned the role of sacred texts in the marginalization of women from leadership posts. A study by Manyonganise (2023) is instructive of the many ways that both the written bible and the bible of

culture are utilized in marginalizing women from decision-making processes within the Zimbabwean context (see also Matutu's chapter in this volume). Oduyoye (1995) has critiqued African cultures and religions for treating African women as second-class citizens. In most cases, teachings in religious institutions have informed the way women are accorded space in the workplace as well as in national political processes in Africa. While some religious traditions ordain women, Manyonganise's study shows that this does not translate into effective women's leadership as church leaders indicated that they often establish parallel structures to disempower the ordained women. Even in those Christian traditions that scholars initially thought were accommodative of women's leadership, it is becoming clear that they, too, are oppressive when it comes to women's religious leadership which eventually translates to their marginalization in the wider society (see Mapuranga, 2018; Manyonganise, 2021). Other areas that cannot be discussed in this chapter in detail that have been examined are in the areas of sexuality, sexual reproductive health and rights, ecology, politics, peacebuilding, development, migration, etc. Some chapters in this volume continue to revisit these areas.

While the study of religion and gender in Africa tended to cast women as perpetual victims, scholarship arising in Africa has begun to focus on women's agency. In her study of the Shona, Cheater (1986) shows how through spirit possession women were able to subvert patriarchy as they were accorded respect and assumed authority in the space of ritual performance. In Christianity, Mapuranga (2018) notes that in the Pentecostal tradition in Zimbabwe, wives of Pentecostal church leaders are forming ministries within ministries which they lead. Manyonganise (2021), in her study of the *Ndadhinhiwa* (I am fed up) *Prayer Group*, shows that through agency the founder of the group was courageous enough to move away from the suffocating spaces of Pentecostal patriarchy to form her own group which accords her the opportunity to lead. The name of her group informs us that women in religious traditions are fed up with being relegated to peripheral positions and are doing something about it.

While the study of religion and gender in Africa has tackled a variety of critical issues affecting women and men in Africa, more still needs to be done. One area that has not received attention on the African continent is that of dangerous/ hegemonic/ toxic femininities. Hamilton et al, (2019: 316) notes that the role of femininity in social domination has not been a core concern in gender theory. In most cases, femininities have been de-

picted as vulnerable and in need of being saved. However, a critical analysis particularly in political spaces shows that we have femininities that are violent and are bent on subordinating both women and men. For a gender-equal society, such femininities need to be called out. Hence, scholarship should also focus on these issues and study them in their own right, rather than being solely fixated on the study of masculinities in Africa. It is imperative that research establishes how dangerous femininities partner with African patriarchy in oppressing other women. Hence, these femininities need to be studied alongside masculinities in Africa.

African Masculinities/Masculinities in Africa: An Analysis

There is a growing appreciation of the urgency of studying and engaging men and masculinities in Africa (Chitando et.al, 2024:2). Chitando et.al (2024:2) are of the view that the emergence of men and masculinities as an area of academic interest in the Global North had a definite impact on igniting interest in the field in Africa. Manyonganise (2023:23) avers that globally, the study of masculinities has come to complement the fields of Women's and Gender Studies. In concurrence, Chitando et.al (2024:3) argue that the focus on men and masculinities is closely tied to the feminist struggles against patriarchy and emerges from the call for men to become partners in the struggle for gender equality. In terms of definition, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005:836) contend that "masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished as social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular way." Therefore, masculinities are not monolithic. Amman & Staudacher (2021) explain that masculinities are not fixed male identities, but multiple, complex and intersectional social practices and experiences that are fluid and sometimes contradictory. Masculinities have been categorized into hegemonic, violent, subordinate, marginalized, militarized among others. Scholarship on masculinities note that hegemonic masculinity is the most common in most societies (see Connell, 1995; Nayak, 2023). Connell (1995) espoused the term 'hegemonic masculinity' which for Nayak (2023:171) operates as a framework for the production and reproduction of gender patterns across a grid of power. Yang (2020) is of the view that hegemonic masculinity is not static, but responsive to changes in the conditions of patriarchy. Abrahams, De Mori, & Knauss (2020) argue that a

critical study of masculinities must consider that notions of gender circulate and interrelate within complex arrangements of power and broader social systems of domination, one of which is patriarchy. These are some of the critical points that we need to be cognizant of even as we focus on African masculinities/masculinities in Africa. Before we focus on this, we need to discuss the politics of naming.

When writing on masculinities particularly on the African continent, naming becomes crucial. Pasura & Christou (2024:525) opine that naming is not innocent. Contestations revolve around the meanings of 'Africa' and 'African'. Mudimbe (1988) argues that the idea of Africa is an invention of the West. In his analysis, discourses on Africa have always shaped and are shaped by power. Hence, for him, the term 'African' has multiple meanings as it represents (i) a geographical entity, (ii) a historical reality, (iii) a political construct, (iv) a racial inclination and (v) a specific economic history. Mudimbe, therefore, criticizes explorers, missionaries, anthropologists among others for propagating an exotic idea of Africa. Mazrui (1980) is of the view that Africa is not a static notion or concept, but an ongoing reality that is invented and continues to be reinvented in the context of Africa's relation to other civilizations. Hence, for Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Njgulunga (2022:6-7) "Africa as an idea, concept, space, home and other iterations, continues to elicit contestations and animated debates in both scholarly circles as well as in political discourses of governance and development." In most cases, in the West, Africa is often seen as a country and not a continent. At times, when one indicates that they are from Africa, they are often asked questions like: "do you know a friend of mine who comes from Nigeria." This is often despite the fact that the person would be coming from a different part of Africa. Hence, when it comes to the study of masculinities by foreigners, the error has been to present them as homogenous. African scholars have rebuffed this notion (see Amman & Staudacher, 2021; Chitando, Mlambo, Mfecane & Ratele, 2024). They have drawn our attention to the fact that masculinities in Africa, or African masculinities, are multiple and varied.

But what is it that we are referring to as African masculinities/ masculinities in Africa? According to Epprecht (2007:1), African masculinities is an important contribution to a growing field of 'critical men's studies or gendered writing on men in Africa'. For Mbah (2023) the field of African masculinity studies seeks to understand gendered sociopolitical differentiation, historicize the constitution and contestation of patriarchy and heteronormativity and demonstrate how competing gender norms came to

define the modern identities of African peoples. He notes that “as a system of identity, African masculinities is much more than a cluster of norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Furthermore, it also refers to more than how African male bodies, subjectivities, and experiences are constituted in specific historical, cultural and social contexts” (Mbah, 2023). A critical question that arises is whether we can talk of African masculinities and/or masculinities in Africa. Are the two synonymous or different? African masculinities would imply that we have a particular set of masculinities that are distinctive to the African continent while masculinities in Africa may encompass those masculinities that are peculiarly African but inclusive of other masculinities from other contexts but resident in Africa. In this book, we are cognizant of the contestations that may arise in the usage of these terms. We have, therefore, chosen to work with both. Some authors chose to use African masculinities while others opted for masculinities in Africa as reflected in the title of the book.

Scholarship on African masculinities/masculinities in Africa have grappled with a number of issues. Some have examined the role of masculinities in perpetrating violence against women as well as society as a whole. Chitando (2020:52) notes that there is an interest in understanding how masculinities relate with violence at mass level as well as sexual and gender-based violence. Commenting on GBV, Fashola (2015:14) notes the influence of religion. He argues that through the use and abuse of religion and its sacred texts, some men justify their deployment of violence in intimate relationships. In his analysis, religious ideologies and manipulations of sacred texts are deployed to uphold physical, economic, spiritual and psychological violence against women. He charges that some religious leaders often prey on rather than pray for women in their institutions. In other words, religious leaders can also be perpetrators of sexual gender-based violence against women. In the final analysis, Fashola (2015:15) proposes that there is need for planned and systematic interventions to ensure that the interface between religion and masculinity promotes gender justice and development. Scholarship on masculinities and violence has weaved in youth masculinities as these are often deployed in war and armed conflicts in Africa. Barker & Ricardo (2005:24) note that there are direct links between violence and conflict with the way that manhoods or masculinities are constructed. In their analysis, many conflicts on the African continent are directly related to an attempt by young men

to acquire power, or to question the power of specific groups of older men and to live up to a specific version of manhood. An understanding of youth masculinities and violence may help African societies to reconsider the ways that boys are socialized.

Yet in contemporary Africa, some scholars have depicted masculinities as being in crisis. In much of the emergent literature, African masculinities are analysed in terms of crises (Kirby & van Klinken, 2021). It is important to take note of Hearn's observation that the issue of masculinities in crisis/crisis in masculinity takes very different shapes, sometimes even opposite constructions, in different parts of the world and within different discourses (Hearn, 2022:563). For Hearn, this crisis revolves around the issue of 'role' and 'identity'. He explains that "crisis is often presented as 'fact', identity and a result of 'role confusion' for boys, young men and men around what it might mean to be a boy and man in contemporary times" (Hearn, 2022:563). In Africa, the crisis emanates from the fact that masculinities have been challenged by the steady rise of women in positions of power who have become economically independent while at the same time some men have found themselves unemployed and financially dependent on women. McLean (2020) critiques the hegemonic depictions of African men as providers. He notes that rising unemployment and expanding inequalities across sub-Saharan Africa often mean that men are unable to fulfil these normative expectations, thus, they experience anxieties as they navigate employment, marriage and parenthood, leading to mental health challenges among men (See Makamure Chapter 26 in this volume). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mwiine (2020) coined the term 'lockdown' masculinities. Such masculinities were depicted as being in crisis in the sense that they had to respond to the pandemic in the most 'unmasculine' ways, for example, the lockdowns forced men who are often depicted as courageous to hide in their homes and had to find other means of expressing their masculinity. The very fact of hiding showed that African masculinities can also be vulnerable and afraid in the full glare of women and children. Research has shown that during COVID-19 lockdowns, new masculinities emerged in Africa as men participated more in household chores as well as taking care of their children's needs (see Mwiine, 2020; Dery, 2021; Manyonganise, 2022; Mwiine & Katushabe, 2024). However, some scholars have contested the view that masculinities in Africa are in crisis. For example, McLean (2020) in her study of Sierra Leone,

argues that masculinities in Africa are not really in crisis, rather new masculine ideals related to equality, compassion and love are developing (see also Amman & Staudacher, 2021).

Other scholars have focused on the potential for masculinities to be transformed. Ezra Chitando has termed such masculinities as ‘redemptive’, ‘liberative’ and ‘transformative’. His argument is that negative masculinities such as hegemonic, violent, militaristic, oppressive, complicit etc have the potential of being redeemed, liberated and transformed. Reading through some of his publications such as *A New Man for a New Era: Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and HIV Epidemic* (2007), *Religious Ethics, HIV and AIDS and Masculinities in Southern Africa* (2008), *Redemptive Masculinities, HIV and Religion* (2012) co-edited with Sophia Chirongoma, *The Palgrave Handbook of African Men and Masculinities* (2024) (co-edited with Obert Bernard Mlambo, Sakhumzi Mfecane & Kopano Ratele), it is clear that Chitando feels that patriarchy has privileged men more than women in Africa. However, he notes that it is imperative that when faced with pandemics such as HIV & AIDS as well as COVID-19, enjoying the patriarchal dividend is detrimental for men. He, therefore, argues that men can, should and must change. From John, Siwila and Settler’s point of view, “an analysis of the works of Chitando on masculinities shows that he has raised and engaged critical issues around men and masculinities in relation to religion in a bold and provocative manner” (John, Siwila & Settler, 2013). His call for men to constructively deploy their masculinity is critical for gender justice. The other works that have shown the ability of masculinities to transform are in the area of masculinities and migration. Pasura & Christou (2018) have shown how African masculinities are (re)configured in the diaspora. In most cases, they have to carve a more respectable masculinity in contexts, on one hand, they may find themselves also marginalized due to their race and on the other, their African patriarchal ideology is challenged, as women enjoy greater legal protections and economic independence.

The area that still requires attention in the study of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa/African masculinities is that of human sexuality. That is not to say no work has been done so far, but that certain areas still require further analysis. Some scholars like Van Klinken have sought to show the intersections of masculinity and queer studies. In his publication titled *‘Masculinities and the Male God’* (2017) van Klinken explores the relationship between the maleness of God and human masculinities. In his analysis, men in religions such as Christianity are often called upon

to exhibit traits of headship taking it from metaphoric expressions such as ‘god the father’. In a chapter titled ‘*Masculinities, Religion and Sexualities*’ (2020), Chitando focuses on the ways that religion influences masculinities and sexualities. He argues that there is a complex and dynamic play amongst the concepts of religion, masculinities and sexualities. In his analysis, “sexualities are crucial to the imagination and expression of masculinities.” While Chitando (2020) notes that there is growing interest in the study of religion, masculinities and sexualities, we contend that there is need to further interrogate the implications for gender as well as masculinities in homosexual relations particularly focusing on what it means when there is performance of gender roles in such relations. Gunda (2011) argues that gender prejudice has been foundational in the cases of homophobia in Africa, especially as it is provided a logical framework through an appropriation of biblical texts, such as Genesis 1-3. Bjar-nesen et.al (2023) opine that while the study of homosexuality has not been linked to the study of masculinities, it assists us in understanding the range of expressions of manhood in Africa. Reeser (2010:3), in the same vein, avers that another way to strip away neutral assumptions about masculinity is to consider what happens to masculinity in an age in which a person assigned female at birth can transition and be read as male. He asks a pertinent question: How can masculinity be natural when trans-men are read as masculine cisgender men? Reeser goes further to challenge gender scholars to also consider female masculinity and not to be obsessed with male masculinity. For him, such an attempt would assist in tackling masculinity as a disembodied concept, that is, not aligned to any gender. He argues that “female masculinity is a threat to male masculinity, a challenge to its hegemony”, and that attempts to ignore or suppress it could be viewed as ways to maintain the male body as the sole purveyor of masculinities (Reeser, 2023:139). In his analysis, female masculinity destabilizes imagined binary opposition between male masculinity and female femininity (Reeser, 2023:134). He notes, however, that the study of female masculinity has not been given attention in academic studies. Future studies may need to examine aspects of female masculinity as well as male femininity in order to ascertain the fluidity of these concepts. Within the African context, studies by Amadiume (1987) and Cheater (1986) may provide a valuable starting point. In her publication *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987), Amadiume points to the fluidity of gender in Africa. Cheater

(1986) notes how women's authority increased as they grew older and especially when they reach menopause. She posits that "commonly, post-menopausal women became a type of 'honorary male in the village society, having lost the mystical influence associated with domestic menstruation, abandoned domestic responsibilities to the work of younger women..." (Cheater, 1986:67). Mbah (2023) supports these views when he argues that "African masculinities, as historical subjects embodying distinctive socially constructed gender and sexual identities, have been both male and female." He further argues that by occupying a masculine sociopolitical position embodying masculine social traits and performing cultural deeds socially construed and symbolized as masculine, African men and women have constituted masculinity. These assertions require further probing, for us to fully understand the concepts of gender and masculinities in Africa.

Honouring Ezra Chitando: The Academic 'Prophet' of our Time

Contributors to this volume reflect on how far the study of religion, gender and African masculinities on the African continent has gone. The book is in honour of Ezra Chitando. Ezra Chitando has touched a lot of lives through academic mentorship and friendship. Most academics within Zimbabwe and beyond have benefitted from his academic guidance. He has been selfless in sharing his knowledge at times foregoing his comforts to make young scholars grow. He has been that academic light to many. This honour is befitting because he has disrupted the waters of patriarchy on the African continent and beyond. His works on religion and gender as well as in the area of African masculinities/masculinities in Africa are evidence to his affirmation that something needs to be done in the area of gender relations so that "all may live". His works have shaped how we think about gender, religion and masculinities. He did not shy away from calling himself a feminist and has been a friend of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians for years. Through his mentorship, he has managed to influence a change of attitudes towards women and encourage both men and women to be considerate in their relations. Since the book is in honour of Ezra Chitando, the authors are very intentional in engaging with his works specifically those that focus on religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa.

The book contributes to new knowledge through its critical reflection on the study of religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa. Such a reflection points us to new possibilities and avenues that can lead to the recognition of the humanity of both women and men. It enables us to ‘sit down in order to go forward’ (in Chitando’s words)¹.

Ezra Chitando is a ‘prophet’ with honour among his own people both in Zimbabwe and Africa in general. As evidenced by the number of chapters from Zimbabweans in this volume, his works speak to their context, and they have benefitted immensely from his academic leadership. In order to show that his mentorship is not confined to Zimbabwe, non-Zimbabwean authors have also contributed to this volume showing Ezra Chitando’s service to the African continent as a whole and also beyond.

Chapters in this volume

Section A: Celebrating Ezra Chitando’s Legacy and Advocacy: Tributes from His Family

In **chapter 1**, Tinevimbo Chitando, Mutsawashe Chitando, Akatendeka Chitando and Anna Chitando (the immediate or nuclear family of Ezra), discuss the theme of the book focusing specifically on how Ezra Chitando’s work in the field of religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa have influenced the choices made by members of his family particularly his wife and children. They argue that contrary to the past, where family settings were generally the bastions of patriarchy and male privilege, there are progressive men who have questioned old patriarchal traditions and are champions of social justice and transformation. In their analysis, such men transform, challenge and confront cultural beliefs and practices that stifle social justice in a bid to oppress girls and women. Such men are willing to construct new and alternative masculinities based on equality and equity. Therefore, the chapter is an appreciation of the distinguished work of the feminist, Ezra Chitando, and acknowledges that girls and women need to strategically build alliances with progressive boys and men in order to ensure irreversible

¹ Ezra Chitando gave a keynote address at the 2011 ATISCA conference in Johannesburg, South Africa titled ‘Sitting down in order to go forward’. While this sounds contradictory, it is important to always evaluate the work done so that one can complete the journey ahead.

social transformation. **Chapter 2** is a compilation of celebratory tributes from Ezra Chitando's siblings, nephews, and nieces (the offspring to his sisters). These tributes have been arranged according to seniority in terms of age. They provide us with Ezra Chitando's childhood and life experiences as a son to his parents, brother to his sisters and uncle to his nephews and nieces. His interest in questioning the oppressive nature of religion and culture on women may have been influenced by his socialization. This may not be a standard academic practice, yet in celebrating Ezra, the intersection of the man and the academic is critically important.

Section B: Theorizing Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Africa

In **chapter 3**, Happinos Marufu and Sarah Yeukai Matanga examine the depictions of gender roles from the Stone Age period to the present in order to establish whether there has been continuity and change. They argue that women have always played pivotal roles in the subsistence economy of Stone Age societies, a position which changed in the Iron Age period. For them, this marked the beginning of gender inequality in most African societies. However, a critical analysis of literary works in contemporary Zimbabwean society show that literary writers are advocating for gender equality. They locate the role of religion in bringing social transformation in the area of gender relations. In **chapter 4**, Sonene Nyawo proposes that religious literacy can assist in dealing with the scourge of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV). She argues that such literacy is crucial for both men and women. In her opinion, African feminist religious literacy would help women to be liberated from a dependency syndrome that put men at the top. Using African feminist lenses, she proposes liberative hermeneutics as a possible panacea to the ills of SGBV.

Linda Naicker, in **chapter 5**, makes an evaluation of the role of Christianity in promoting male hegemony and the disempowerment of women in sub-Saharan Africa. She addresses the challenge of androcentric biblical interpretation in this chapter which in her opinion have supported male agendas and positions. Her thesis is that androcentric biblical interpretations have entrenched male hegemony and treated women as second-class citizens thereby disenfranchising them economically in sub-Saharan Africa. In **chapter 6**, Susan Kilonzo focuses on how scholars of religion and theology can assume the responsibility of coming up with curricula on religion and masculinities with a view to educate future generations of young people. She contends that the current study of religion and masculinities in Africa does not show how young women and men benefit from it as

focus is usually placed on adults in most religious institutions. She, therefore, proposes ways in which a revised curriculum can lead to transformed masculinities and femininities.

Excellent Chireshe comes in, in **chapter 7** with an examination of Ezra Chitando's call for redemptive and transformative masculinities. She ventures into culturally contested space which calls for men not to shy away from crying as Jesus did the same over Lazarus. She argues that the very act of men crying shows that they can also be vulnerable and can lead to the adoption of masculinities that result in the health and wellbeing of all. She, therefore, challenges social norms and values that entrench patriarchal rigidity and calls for a transformed 'social curriculum'. In her opinion, this could lead to redemptive and transformative masculinities. In **chapter 8**, Paul Leshota discusses what he calls troubling African masculinities. He does this in conversation with Ezra Chitando's works. His is an investigation of Ezra Chitando's contribution to the study of religion, gender and masculinities focusing specifically on the HIV & AIDS pandemic.

Thando Soko-de-Jong, in **chapter 9** focuses on Ezra Chitando's advocacy as well as the contribution of African Women Theologians. She argues that Ezra Chitando, through his published works and activism has challenged the dominance of men in all religious spaces particularly in leadership positions. She, therefore, commends Ezra Chitando for his contribution to African Women Theologies at times co-authoring with African Women theologians. In **chapter 10**, Tenson Mabhuya Muyambo reflects on Ezra Chitando's contribution to the study of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa. His chapter makes a trajectory survey of how Ezra Chitando transitioned from phenomenology of religion to applied religion. He argues that Ezra Chitando's works demonstrate that religion is not an abstract but concrete entity that is experienced in the day to day lives of the people. He then concludes that Ezra Chitando has successfully engaged religion to find meaning and relevance on African realities, more particularly Zimbabwean realities.

Section C: Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Practice

In **chapter 11**, Gladys Mupangisana Hlatywayo focuses on the vulnerability of married women to HIV infection. She argues that when it comes to the HIV & AIDS pandemic, marriage does not offer women safe havens. She notes that while both genders are at risk of HIV infection, women are more vulnerable due to socio-cultural, biological and gender inequalities.

She further calls for the transformation of harmful masculinities through bold church and community action. She proposes that an HIV & AIDS discourse needs to engage both women and men so that they can work in solidarity as they confront the ills of the pandemic. She, therefore, argues for a theological framework that offers life and dignity to all humanity. Still on leadership struggles, Linda Tsara provides a critical analysis of how women's leadership is viewed in an African Independent Church, Topia Sungano Apostolic Church in **chapter 13**. Like Terrence Mupangwa, **chapter 12**, she argues that despite women constituting the majority in Topia Sungano Apostolic Church, they are absent in top leadership positions. Utilizing African feminist cultural hermeneutics, she highlights the oppressive tendencies in both African cultural and missionary education. The following **chapter 14**, Angeline Mavis Madongonda and Enna Sukutai Gudhlanga make a critical examination of the intersections of gender-based violence, religion and early child marriages in the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC) in Zimbabwe. They argue that girl children are sexual victims because they are forced to enter into these marriages. In their analysis, the association of religion with gender-based violence is both contradictory and unacceptable.

In **chapter 15**, Vengesai Chimininge examines the interface between African masculinities and sexual reproductive health focusing specifically on African Indigenous Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe. He argues that men's decisions and behaviours are shaped by rigid social and cultural norms relating to masculinity. As a result, religious and cultural beliefs influence the gender inequalities that may affect the sexual reproductive health care of women.

Moving on to **chapter 16**, Tawanda Matutu explores the gendered contestations for political leadership in Zimbabwe. He views these contestations as emanating from the masculinization of power in Zimbabwe's political turf. Through his analysis of gender power struggles in Zimbabwe's main political parties, he argues that the marginalization of women from political leadership is embedded within African indigenous religious beliefs and practices pertaining to leadership in governance. For him, this has entrenched patriarchy in political spaces where women have to occupy peripheral leadership posts thereby reinforcing the stereotyping of women in politics. In **chapter 17**, Nelly Mwale explores the intersection of religion, gender and health in Zambia. Using African eco-feminist theory, the chapter examines the work of Annie Chikanji and her Ubuntu learning hub showing how she promotes healthy living through offering herbal

courses that draw from indigenous knowledge systems. Nelly Mwale shows how Annie Chikanji's initiatives are driven by her religiosity. Documenting Chikanji's initiatives is seen by Mwale as critical in making sure that she is not overshadowed by patriarchy in the history of the study of religion in Africa in general and Zambia in particular.

In **chapter 18**, Beverley Haddad examines the concept of 'blessers' in the context of HIV in South Africa. She interrogates this concept in relation to transactional sex by young women showing how this is a challenge to African women's theologies. She positions young women as both victims and agents in a context of unemployment and poverty in South Africa. She argues that it is imperative for African women's theologies to speak about women's agency in ways that deal with unequal gender relations resulting from econo-patriarchy through the engagement with the intersections of economics, gender, and sexuality in contemporary South Africa. Kenosi Molato and Musa Dube, in **chapter 19**, examine the role of music in navigating through the complexities of life bringing healing in those times that words cannot be expressed. Using a case study of Culture Spears Traditional Group, the duo examines the concept of gender in songs. In **chapter 20**, Isabel Apawo Phiri interrogates the response of the African church leaders to homosexuality. She argues that their response is weak as it does not address issues of human sexuality in Africa in general. The chapter also traces the response of African theologians to homosexuality in Africa. Phiri refers to the World Council of Churches (WCC) document on creating safe spaces for broad conversations about human sexuality, arguing that forbearance needs to be the grounding spirituality for conversation on issues of human sexuality.

Section D: Intersections: Religion, Gender and Society

In **chapter 21**, Masiwa Ragies Gunda focuses on gender injustice, racism, sexuality and xenophobia. Using the intersectional approach, and drawing from Ezra Chitando's scholarly works, the chapter demonstrates how the intersections of these concepts have led to the failure to acknowledge the contributions of women to sustainable social transformation as well as to fragmented quests for diversity, inclusion and belonging for the most vulnerable groups in African society. The chapter then implores African women theologians to embrace an intersectional approach to confront the intersecting marginalizing forces and to guard against inverted patriarchy in the African women's pursuit of holistic liberation. Gerald West, in **chapter 22**, seeks to show the way in which economic systems intersect

with patriarchal systems. Using selected texts from the books of Samuel and Kings as well as works from African biblical scholars, the chapter reflects on the usefulness of the concept of econo-patriarchy to contemporary biblical and theological work on African masculinities.

In **chapter 23**, Joachim Kügler focuses on variations of God's masculinity that appear quite queer from a modern perspective on masculinities. He explores this subject using sources belonging to the New Testament canon, as well as sources that are post-biblical in the Early Christian literature corpus. Clemence Makamure, **chapter 24**, examines the intersections of toxic masculinities and men's mental health in Zimbabwe. He argues that socio-cultural constructions of men in Africa causes them to shy away from exhibiting emotions that portray them as weak and vulnerable. The chapter uses the Afrocentric theory to interrogate the social cultural ethical beliefs and their effect on the nature and character of men and boys. In **chapter 25**, Julius Gathogo explores the utility of what he calls triumphalist-futurity theologies in the 21st century. He contests the view that these theologies cannot be restricted to American prosperity theologies of success and self-esteem. Julius Gathogo argues that these go beyond American theologies of prosperity as these address the African agenda from an all-embracing perspective. He locates Ezra Chitando within the paradigm of triumphalist-futurity perspective. Gathogo argues that Ezra Chitando addresses the African agenda with great urgency and confidence. Moving on, in **chapter 26**, Lovemore Togarasei explores Ezra Chitando's work on HIV & AIDS particularly the way he rallied men to be proactive in their response to the pandemic. He further argues that Ezra Chitando, through his scholarship has rallied African scholars from across the academic divide to respond to HIV.

In **chapter 27**, Zandile Ngubane and Beatrice Okyere-Manu make an ethical and theological reflection of the challenges faced by families with children living with albinism in South Africa. They argue that children living with albinism are vulnerable, and they deserve justice and equal opportunities. Using the ethical theory of consequentialism, their findings point to the fact that children living with albinism feel that they are not treated the same as those without. They, therefore, conclude that Chitando's call and advocacy for vulnerable groups need to be extended to people living with albinism. In **chapter 28**, Fortune Sibanda engages with selected works by Ezra Chitando to examine the Rastafari perspectives on gender, climate change, health and human sexuality. Using Afrocentricity, For-

tune Sibanda found that Rastafari is steadily progressing towards the promotion of gender equality by constructing alternative African masculinities both in the private and public spaces. However, he notes that challenges remain when it comes to Rastafari views on human sexuality and reproductive health. He advocates for Rastafarians to promote transformative masculinities with a view that ‘all may live’.

In **chapter 29**, Francis Machingura and Matthew Mare examine the intersections of religion, gender and peacebuilding. The duo argues that Zimbabwe as a nation has remained largely patriarchal in both its private and public spaces. They note that while women are advocating for gender equality, they continue to be hindered by both religion and culture. In their opinion, this negatively impacts on peacebuilding efforts. In **chapter 30**, Molly Manyonganise, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, and Linda Naicker endeavor to present Ezra Chitando’s views based on an interview they had with him, on how far the study of religion, gender and African masculinities has gone, the achievements realized, lessons learnt and the future of the field. Their intention is to evaluate, critique and provide a way forward for the study of religion, gender and African masculinities.

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SECTION A



Celebrating Ezra Chitando's Legacy and Advocacy Tributes from His Family

1 Appreciating Ezra Chitando¹

Husband, Father, Professor – Defender and Promoter of Equality and Equity for All

*Tinevimbo Chitando, Mutsawashe Chitando,
Akatendeka Ethiel Chitando, and Anna Chitando*²

Abstract

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing realisation that gender polarisation does not promote girls' and women's interests. Although critics, especially radical feminists or womanists, have argued that this trend is diluting women's struggles, there are benefits to be gained from girls and women working with boys and men. While there are different, often competing forms of masculinities, it is important to identify and work together with progressive masculinities for positive transformation. This chapter discusses the theme in honour of Ezra Chitando, with particular reference to how his academic work has influenced his family's pathways. Contrary to the past, where family settings were generally the bastions of patriarchy and male privilege, there are progressive men who have questioned old patriarchal traditions. They believe in social justice and transformation. Such men transform, challenge and confront cultural beliefs and practices that stifle social justice and oppress girls and women. They are willing to construct new and alternative masculinities based on equality. This chapter is an appreciation of the distinguished work of the feminist, Ezra Chitando, and an acknowledgement that girls and women need to strategically build alliances with progressive boys and men in order to ensure sustained social transformation.

Keywords: Sustainable transformation, feminist, masculinities, girls, women, boys

¹ Given the number of the Chitanodos involved in this essay, we are going to use, "Ezra" to refer to the person who is the focus of this chapter.

² We are grateful to the editors for the opportunity and wish to thank Tinevimbo Chitando for serving as convenor of the writing of this chapter.

Introduction

For many centuries, the story of African girls and women has generally been that of suffering under patriarchy, although outstanding girls and women have emerged. They have mostly been silenced and erased in patriarchal traditions. The vulnerability of girls and women often stemmed from their dependence on men, who had all the privileges in patriarchal social settings. These men often took advantage of the girls' and women's dependence on them and subjected them to various injustices, including child marriages, subservience in society and exclusion from control of family resources. Even in contemporary times, the fight for gender equality remains a thorny and abiding issue. In families and in sites of employment, girls and women in Africa continue to push for their recognition. They have and continue to fight to transform their condition for the better. African women and girls, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, have refused to succumb to the dictates of patriarchy.

This chapter acknowledges that there are positive masculinities that are dedicated to working with girls and women for sustainable social and economic transformation. These 'new men' rewrite approaches to gender dynamics in a way that promotes the emergence and existence of compassionate masculinities that seek to advance girls' and women's causes. We could argue that feminism has generally worked towards the deconstruction of patriarchy without wanting to pay particular attention to ways in which positive masculinities have emerged and the extent to which they share the same concerns as marginalised girls and women. Close scrutiny shows that there are meeting points in the whole discourse. Indeed, there are progressive men who can make a difference in society. They can serve as allies (Dery 2020) who support the struggle for justice by women and girls. This chapter is a note of appreciation of such men as exemplified by Ezra, a feminist and reformist. In his career, he has significantly contributed to the emancipation, empowerment and enlightenment of girls and women, at family, local and international levels.

Identifying Male Champions

There are diverse masculinities, some progressive and others retrogressive. Adverse or toxic masculinities pose a variety of challenges and thrive upon making women abandon their ambitions and dreams. Progressive

masculinities advance girls' and women's causes and fights against unequal structures. Therefore, girls and women need the right strategies to continue to empower themselves to further their cause. One such strategy would be for girls and women to partner with boys and men for sustainable transformation. In one of his presentations, Chitando (2021) notes that while patriarchy promises a lot for boys and men, the same boys and men, the supposed beneficiaries, are also victims of patriarchy. Through a socialization process where they are brought up to dominate and control others, men often struggle to express vulnerability, to listen to women, to work alongside them or to apologize for their own mistakes (Chitando 2021).

Zimbabwean literature provides valuable insights into the importance of boys and men collaborating with girls and women. In *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tsitsi Dangarembga highlights oppressive patriarchal norms, particularly in the realm of education. Girls are often denied the opportunity to attend school, unlike their male counterparts. For instance, Tambu is forced to leave school, as the family's limited funds are allocated toward her brother Nhamo's education. Tambudzai faces a number of obstacles posed by the patriarchal society in her quest for education, becoming a victim of rigid masculinities that she persistently resists. She, however, does not succeed in the end because the colonial education scheme systematically colludes with patriarchy and does not allow African children equal access to educational opportunities. This, and the fact that traditional patriarchal societies in Africa often favoured the boy-child more than the girl-child, saw institutions of learning in Africa being dominated by boys and men, especially in the 1960s. This, however, changed after independence in most African countries, through the efforts of male champions in the struggle for girls' and women's empowerment. Although Babamukuru (uncle), one such male champion in society, still possesses elements of traditional patriarchy, he relatively represents those more progressive masculinities that realise the value of giving their daughters an education in a swiftly modernising society. Babamukuru thus becomes a role model, a position epitomised in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, (2006) where Tambudzai's life continues to be positively shaped by her uncle. Similarly, Ezra has been consistent in his struggle to invest in girls and women for gender equality and justice. In the next section, the chapter reviews and appreciates his efforts as he has sought to promote positive masculinities in Africa. The testimonies are drawn from members of his nuclear family. It was not possible to include the voices

of the many daughters, sons, nieces, nephews, friends and others that he has interacted with across different parts of the continent. The associated descriptive words are not meant to be exhaustive, but illustrative.

Ezra through the eyes and experiences of Anna, life partner and companion

Professor Ezra Chitando's works, and practical engagement show the possibility of males promoting girls' and women's advancement; males mentoring without being paternalistic. This has a positive impact on girls and women's opportunities in life, and in the empowerment of future generations. In this regard, Ezra, you are a true mentor who capacitates others with unsurpassed humility. Having entered academia earlier, you have been willing to recruit new entrants into the field. My debut journal article, *Black Female Identities: The Case of Young Women with Dreadlocks*, that I co-authored with you (Chitando & Chitando 2004), was borne out of this recruitment. Through this entrance article, you have mentored me in the academic journey. You reassured me in times of vacillation by saying, "There is nothing magical. People mystify these things. Do not underestimate yourself." Your encouragement influenced the trajectory. My career path took form from then on. According to Sall (2000), the scenario in institutions of higher learning is a space where women should be able to command respect and equality. However, "the struggle for gender equality within academic life continues to meet strong resistance all around the world. African campuses are no exception." (Sall 2000: Synopsis) Notwithstanding these challenges, you believed in me and encouraged me to accept leadership. I remember one day when I was hesitant to assume a leadership role, you jokingly offered to polish my shoes every day as your way of supporting me. We laughed it off! However, when I reminisce, the symbolism of you polishing my shoes is striking. Considering the way shoes are designed to be in contact with different types of surfaces, not to mention the dirty ones too, the recognisable significance of you, polishing my shoes, thus lies in your unpretentiousness, the same humility that one would expect in a leader, for transformative leadership. You have not hesitated to be supportive while embracing teachable moments from my own journey in the path of professional development.

Having been blessed with two daughters and one son, you have treated our children fairly, without favouring either the girl-child or boy-child.

While traditional African societies have been shaped by patriarchal thought patterns that often disadvantaged African girls and women, such thinking is changing and being challenged in contemporary societies. The discourse shifts from the unappealing view of African men in negative stereotypes to one that tries to capture masculine diversity. Much of the focus on gender relations has been on the inferior and subordinate position of girls and women in relation to boys and men. Yet there has been a constructive change in some masculinities. Positive transformation in masculinity is observed in men who do not subscribe to stereotyped conceptions that undermine girls, boys and women. Progressive men are in favour of girls' and women's emancipation, and they are ready to do all they can to support and mentor girls and women in their quest to advance careers and enjoy the freedom to express themselves. You epitomise this as a humble and sensitive family man. You have steadfastly refused to be a professor at home, in all social spaces and in the neighbourhood. You prefer being incognito but fighting for the rights and dignity of all. You have supported and you continue to motivate your family to pursue their careers, without standing in their way. You have influenced your family in many positive ways. You have made our family consistent practitioners and champions of the "Thursdays in Black: Towards a World without Rape and Violence" campaign³. You have contributed to our collective growth in faith, where we have sought to avoid embracing a stifling religious regime. You have been consistent in questioning and rejecting patriarchy. Your supportive fatherly deportment reminds me of one Sudanese proverb, "We desire to bequeath two things to our children; the first one is roots, the other one is wings." You have sought to empower your family (immediate and broader) with roots and wings.

Why roots and wings? When our children have roots, they will appreciate the struggles that girls and women have undertaken (and continue to undertake) to have their rights and dignity taken seriously. When our children have wings, they will become fearless and fly; fly high to become distinguished leaders even in a world that struggles to accept girls and women as leaders.

³ The idea of the campaign is simple: dress in black on Thursdays. This gesture reminds us all of our responsibility to speak out against sexual and gender-based violence and to ensure that all people, regardless of their gender, are safe from violence in their homes, schools, workplaces and throughout our society. In this campaign Black is used as a colour of resistance and resilience. <https://www.kirikonulkomaanapu.fi/en/thursdaysinblack/>, accessed 5 October 2023.

Powerful Sudanese proverb indeed!

Thank you, Ezra, *baba va* (father of) Mutsawashe, Tinevimbo and Akatendeka, for bestowing roots and wings to your family! Below, the three summarise how you have influenced their career paths and worldviews.

Prioritising Women's and Girls' Health and Rights: Mutsawashe (daughter and fellow strategic thinker) Reflects on Ezra's Crusade

What does it mean to be the first daughter of such a renowned scholar? It means that you are encouraged to dream, fall but not stay down, to occupy spaces, and collaborate on different themes. Above all, it means that you are loved for being the past, present, and future versions of yourself. It should be highlighted that Ezra's work intersects with the work of so many, the world over. I am privileged to be amongst those whose work intersects with his. As a budding public health researcher, I have benefited immensely from his expansive research on the interaction of public health and religion. Of note is his sound contribution to the body of literature on human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the African context. The discourse on the need to further the health and rights of women and girls is one that has been ongoing for decades now. It sprouts from the growing realisation that investing in the health of women and girls is crucial to the economic and sustainable development of countries and the world at large. African scholars such as Ezra have celebrated the African continent, while still challenging the cultural norms that strip women of their rights to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health possible. In the words of Ezra, he says:

If someone asks me if Africa is cursed, I will readily refute the notion. Instead, I will challenge them to anticipate Africa's prosperous future. Despite acknowledging the many traits worth celebrating in the rich tapestry that constitutes the continent, I refuse to gloss over its culture of impunity that characterises sexual and gender-based violence in Africa. I refuse to refute that as a man, I am directly implicated in the heinous crimes against women and children. I am a partaker of the patriarchal dividend, even as I constantly struggle to challenge myself to question my privileges. (Chitando, 2015:272).

Ezra alludes that sexual and gender-based violence is rampant in sub-Saharan Africa and in most instances, it is men perpetrating violence on women. The explanations behind some of these gruesome acts include men exercising dominance and power over women. Ezra has explicitly spoken against sexual gender-based violence in diverse settings. In a presentation focusing on gender-based violence, he said, “If beating up a woman is what would define me as a man, then I will step back and say I do not want to be a man” (Chitando, 2017). The social construct of men being providers and women being helpers creates power imbalances between men and women. These power disproportions deter women from negotiating for safer sex or speaking up when they are sexually abused by their intimate partners. Such practices have derailed progress towards the realisation of global, regional, and local development objectives, specifically on the health outcomes of women and girls.

Ezra has applied the concept of secrecy in a reflexive manner to illuminate the struggle against HIV in Africa. He argues that the lack of access to quality health services, the stigma, and secrecy around HIV exacerbated the disease burden in Africa (Chitando, 2008:173). This reinforces the fact that gender inequalities, particularly in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, lead to sexually transmitted infections being viewed primarily as women's diseases. When the HIV pandemic emerged (even to date in some instances), women infected with HIV were viewed as promiscuous, and often discriminated against. The presence of female sex workers fuels these notions, while there are limited to non-existent conversations on the structural factors that give rise to this phenomenon. Economic hardships are among the drivers of sex work, child marriages, and transactional sex. If stigma, discrimination, and structural inequities remain unaddressed, efforts to mitigate the threat and impact of various health threats are undermined. According to Ezra:

The social and cultural determinants of HIV infection in women are intertwined with the role of women within relationships, families and communities. In Zimbabwe, men generally occupy the dominant positions in various spheres of life. Powerlessness among women has translated to greater exposure to HIV infection. Married women in particular have little or no power to negotiate whether, when or how sex takes place. Most men claim that culture has given them exclusive and permanent access to their wives' sexual and reproductive rights. Tragically, most infected married women in Zimbabwe have been faithful to their husbands. Men are driving the epidemic, taking advantage of their positions in society. (Chitando, 2004:152-53).

To address some of these challenges would require a collaborative approach from various actors. These actors include the religious leaders whose position in society, as Ezra notes, is one which enables them to either promote or impede women's SRHR in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and 5 (Gender Equality). Religion has a strong bearing on people's attitudes and practices. As such, it is imperative for public health practitioners to contend with religious leaders for the realisation of development objectives.

Ezra highlights an often-overlooked area, that of religion, SRHR, and the youth. The general cultural and religious assumption is that the youth must be asexual. However, the challenge of teen pregnancies, child marriages and child sexual abuse should bring us into that space where we examine the intersections of religion, gender, and SRHR. Ezra argues that the proposed action should be one where religious leaders are mobilised to partner with adolescent boys and girls, young men and women to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 5. He also asserts that religious leaders could also utilise the existing youth groups within their congregations and communities to provide health education. The role of religious leaders in addressing public health concerns was also noted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some religious leaders were seen working with their communities to respond to the coronavirus. For example, the leadership across the Christian denominations moved to suspend public religious events and moved to online services. Globally, even one of the most important Muslim rites, namely, the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) was suspended for 2020. On the other hand, there were some religious leaders who did not promote safe practices in preventing the spread of the coronavirus. Nevertheless, religious leaders are an important resource to sensitise and empower their communities for improved health outcomes.

Ezra has also examined the role of African governments in creating environments where men, boys, women, and girls enjoy the same opportunities. In some of the policy briefs he has developed, he notes how structural and economic barriers impede adolescent girls and young women from accessing SRHR services. Adolescent boys and girls often lack an independent source of income and may be unable to request money to access SRHR services from their caregivers due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Another layer he addresses is that of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). In many contexts, adolescent boys and girls do not have access to CSE to understand their sexual and reproductive health needs.

They are not equipped to take measures to prevent unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. CSE is integral in informing adolescent girls and young women about their rights to sexuality and reproduction.

The empowerment of women is another theme that Ezra speaks on. He has examined some of the challenges and opportunities faced by some of the female artists in Zimbabwe in navigating their careers. Culturally and historically, women were supposed to be homemakers while men were breadwinners. This was predominantly a pre-colonial construct that was reinforced by the twin injection of colonial and Christian patriarchal ideologies and became readily accepted in society. The girl-child is socialised in some communities to regard marriage as the highest achievement, one which would grant them dignity and respect. Unfortunately, these doctrines expose girls to harmful practices. In addition, some of the religious dogmas encourage women to persevere in marriage, even in abusive ones. Despite all this, Ezra believes that women have the capacity to succeed in various spaces regardless of the patriarchal construction of spaces.

Thank you, Ezra ("EC" for us), for tirelessly challenging the norms that stifle the rights of girls and women.

What a Role Model! Ruminations by Akatendeka Ethiel (son and justice-seeker)

Imagine a person whom you can rely on, gain inspiration from, and a person who strives for change, a progressive man. My father, Professor Ezra Chitando is someone I seek to emulate. In my greatest moments, as well as my lowest, he is always there to encourage me to keep on keeping on. Every morning, as he accompanies me to school, we talk about various relevant themes in life, discussing different matters in society, football included! As we reflect on contemporary issues such as racism, gender inequality, religion, and discrimination, I cannot help but notice his passion to improve humanity. Hearing him point out the injustices faced by millions of people all over the globe enriches me with the knowledge of how to be a better male individual, a better member of society.

He always strives to aid me in improving in whatever I do. Before we leave home in the morning, he is often the first one to finish preparing. This is because he has a strong belief that getting to school on time is not the best

one can do, but getting to school earlier than the normal time is the best. Through such exemplary good time management exhibited by Prof Dad, I have learnt to be always time conscious. Life is lived in time. Therefore, she/he who wastes time, wastes life.

I am confident that the values that my activist father is sharing with me are equipping me to become a gender-sensitive boy, young man and man. He insists that as boys and men, we should be partners with girls and women. From an early age, I learned the importance of the Thursdays in Black campaign. I am a young advocate, and I am committed to a life of non-violence and gender equality. Even as I am currently a learner at a school dominated by boys, I am always sensitive to issues relating to the equality of girls and boys in all spheres of life.

My father is a keen football fan, and as a result, I also developed a passion, not only for watching, but for playing the beautiful game. When I first showed passion for the sport, he did not hesitate to promote my ambition. He started to take me to a local football academy, where he would attend my practice sessions, encourage me and he would always remind me to rest afterwards, as he knew that I would probably neglect taking a breather.

EC is a justice-seeking man and I look up to him.

I thank him for the man he is, and the man he is shaping me into.

I thank you Dad for being my biggest fan!

Girls and Young Women Matters Matter: Testimonial by Tinevimbo (daughter and friend)

Professor Ezra Chitando, Professor Dad is truly a remarkable man. My interactions with Professor Dad range from, which outfit to wear, to how technology, particularly how ChatGPT, is changing the world. What I find interesting about my Dad is how open-minded he is. Whenever something seems insurmountable or unachievable, he provides great assurance and demystifies what seems very formidable and foreboding. I can proudly say I am a daughter of this great academic giant. What an honour it is to contribute to this book that celebrates my Dad. Whilst most of you know Ezra as a colleague and mentor, I am blessed to know him as a Dad and best friend.

I am an Artificial Intelligence (AI) enthusiast and through constant support from my parents, I am making my mark in technology. Gender biases are imbued in the field of technology. We often hear of the ‘Fathers of Science’, but what about the great ‘Mothers of Science’? In Zimbabwe and generally, women (me included) have been made to believe that they cannot excel in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), subjects that (allegedly) were not built for women. Ezra, the progressive man, continues to challenge this very notion in my life. Whenever something seems daunting, he provides a great assurance and says, “You’ve got this TC, go for it!” Through investing in my education and supporting my dreams, there has been a paradigm shift in the climate of technology and my career path.

Whenever there is a call for applications, or when the inferiority complex or self-doubt hits, Dad’s words always echo, “You can only get something if you give it a shot. Never disqualify yourself.” Therefore, as I face this journey called life, I continuously draw motivation, and inspiration from Ezra. Sometimes we all need someone who believes in us, even just a little. That is my family. We are each other’s cheerleaders.

Commenting on patriarchy and the political economy of the biblical culture, Ezra argues that:

It is important to bear in mind that the overall patriarchal context shapes attitudes towards human sexuality. When men have been socialised to be dominant and to regard their desires as paramount, there is a likelihood of sexual abuse... Men must forego the privileges that patriarchy and gender injustice bring them (Chitando, 2010:28).

With a biblical reference, he maintains that:

Jesus does not bow to social pressure and conventions...he ignores what the man was saying. If men are to effect social transformation, they need to have the courage to ignore social pressure and proceed to challenge oppressive beliefs and practices (Chitando, 2010:30).

The above quotations are a testament to Ezra’s life. Through his life, his influence on his family and his academic work, he has fought for positive social transformation and effected it. We continue to cherish his simplicity and cheerfulness. We laugh at and with him when his favourite football teams lose. Against patriarchy’s construction of football as the game for “real men,” in collaboration with him, we have acquired full knowledge of the sport from an early age. Every year, alongside other moments, Ezra takes me out for a birthday lunch and rest assured, he will be cracking

jokes all the time. In 2021, my siblings also joined our lunch, and he shared a story of how two ladies ('slay queens') had to wash dishes because their date had a 'call' and to date, that man is still on that call. He never went back to pay the bill.

Fast forward!

Towards the end of that lunch, Ezra stood up and said that he had identified a colleague and he wanted to have a quick chat. I laughed and asked for his wallet - I was not going to fall for that one! We did not have to do the dishes. Ezra still came back, paid the bill, and tipped the waiter. That is the kind of man my Dad is. He shows up, he does not run away from responsibilities or make excuses for them. I also learnt another lesson from this joke. Unlike the 'slay queens' in question, I always carry money to pay for my lunch when I go out!

In Chitando (2021), Ezra argues that if independent, assertive, and non-submissive women are "bad news" to patriarchy, then they must be "good news" to women. This highlights that Ezra stands firmly for the emancipation and empowerment of girls and women. Our family is "bad news" to patriarchy. We were raised to be assertive, and in our respective walks, we are the embodiment of what Ezra believes, what he tirelessly fights for. When you look at my siblings, you see world leaders. My sister and I are making our marks in health and technology respectively. When you look at our brother, you see a progressive young man, one standing on Dad's shoulders, becoming a feminist and the best version of himself.

We celebrate you, your work, and your influence.

We thank you Dad, for being our unassuming hero!

*We are convinced that the roots and wings
you selflessly bequeath to us remain our enablers!*

Conclusion

Men who are sensitive to girls' and women's cause challenge patriarchal oppressive practices. They emphasise the need for a more gender-inclusive and egalitarian society where children, women and men thrive. They advocate that retrogressive and toxic masculinities move beyond ideas that

demean girls and women, as well as stereotyped discourses which do little to advance girls and women. They seek strategies that influence women-men partnerships in various ways. This chapter has honoured Ezra as a gender-sensitive advocate. The chapter also acknowledges that it remains strategic to nurture gender-sensitive boys and men within societies, as they truly make a difference. They believe in girls and women and their empowerment. Such boys and men would transform, challenge and confront cultural beliefs and practices that oppress women and children. They are willing to construct new and alternative masculinities based on equality and equity and are indeed pathfinders and originators who recognise the worth of empowering girls and women.

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2 Celebrating the Living Academic Legend

Insights from Ezra Chitando's Sisters, Nephews, and Nieces

*Sophia Chirongoma,
in collaboration with Ezra's sisters, nephews, and nieces*

Introduction

There could be no greater honour than being invited to write about my brother, mentor, confidante, cheerleader, and best friend. For those who know me well, the man I am writing about is one whom I fondly call '*bhudhi Ezzy*.' This is part of our Karanga culture, we address each other mentioning the relationship we share, so when I address him as '*bhudhi Ezzy*,' I am affirming that he is my brother whom I love with all my heart.

When in July 2019, Dr Molly Manyonganise first shared the idea of compiling this volume in honour of *bhudhi Ezzy*, I knew this was going to be a gigantic task for the editors. Knowing *bhudhi Ezzy* the way I do, he has so many colleagues, friends and protégés scattered across the globe and ensuring that all and sundry were invited was going to be a mammoth task. I wished her all the best of luck in compiling the volume and I politely declined from joining the editorial team because I felt like I would be indirectly writing my own story. I wish to congratulate Dr Manyonganise and her erstwhile team of editors for compiling this comprehensive volume to honour *bhudhi Ezzy*.

About this Chapter

This chapter is a compilation of celebratory tributes from *bhudhi Ezzy*'s siblings, nephews, and nieces (the offspring to his sisters). We have arranged these according to seniority in terms of age. The first piece is compiled by our eldest sister, Shumirai Mtero. She takes us through a rich tapestry of *bhudhi Ezzy*'s early childhood, it gives us a sneak peek into

some of his early shenanigans. As the ‘deputy parent,’¹ she has always been our family encyclopaedia and fountain of wisdom. Hence in this piece, she takes us through the memory lane to unearth the making of the professor whom we are celebrating in this volume. Likewise, the piece that follows is compiled by our second born sister, Viola Ingwani. In this piece, she creatively impersonates *bhudhi* Ezzy, she walks in his shoes and tells his life story in a riveting manner. Being the one who always had to wrestle with *bhudhi* Ezzy for literature sources bountifully provided by our late father, her account dovetails with that of our deputy parent. This is then followed by none other than me (Sophie), *waakasiira mukaka* (the one who comes after him in order of birth). The next piece is written by our baby sister Precious Ngoma, the last born in our family. Being the daring kid sister, she was always on the receiving end of *bhudhi* Ezzy’s pranks. I still remember how at some point *bhudhi* Ezzy got a thorough beating from our mother after he had exposed Precious to be stung by *Mago* (wasps).

After Precious’ rendition, the remaining pieces were compiled by *bhudhi* Ezzy’s *vazukuru* (nephews and nieces). The first one being written by Kudzai Mtero, the eldest *muzukuru* (nephew). This is followed by his (Ezra’s) nieces, Loveness Ingwani-Sola, then Kundai Allison Mtero, Isabel Ingwani, Anesu Ingwani and the last piece is written by his nephew, Tadiwanashe Calisto Junias Chirongoma. In all their contributions, *vazukuru* express their profound love and admiration for the warm, compassionate, humble, and wise *sekuru* (uncle) Ezzy.

A Celebratory Tribute of Ezra Chitando: The Legendary Academic Guru

By Shumirai Mtero

Introduction

My focus is on Ezra’s early life.

And the impact it has had on his life at large.

¹ This is the nomenclature commonly used in Zimbabwe to refer to the role of the first-born child who involuntarily adopts the parental role to assist the parents in raising the siblings.

I am Shumirai Mtero, nee Chitando.

The eldest of Ezra's four siblings.

I was born in 1963.

The next sibling is Viola Ingwani, nee Chitando, born in 1966.

Ezra comes after Viola; he was born on 21 October 1969.

Coming after Ezra is Sophia Chirongoma, nee Chitando, born in 1973.

The youngest sibling is Precious Ngoma, nee Chitando, born in 1978.

It is with nostalgia and a tinge of sadness that I recount this early part of our lives -- which has shaped our present lives.

Nostalgia because I recall some interesting details that I will never recapitulate.

Times have changed.

But that is the violent reality of the cycle of life.

Parents

Our early family set up has a profound bearing on how Ezra developed as an individual. Our parents- Constance Chitando, nee Masakadza and Ethiel Chitando met at Makwau Primary School in Jichidza, Masvingo province, Zimbabwe, around 1962. Our father was a newly qualified teacher. He trained at Morgenster Teacher's Training College in Masvingo, a Dutch Reformed Church institution in Masvingo province. Our mother was doing pre- training teaching and planning to train as a teacher. Fast forward - they developed a love relationship. Our mother fell pregnant with me at 21. I was born in November 1963. It was taboo then for teachers in this employment set up to have a premarital baby. They expeditiously arranged their big white wedding before the pregnancy showed. They happily wed at our grandparents' original home at Musharu village in Murinye district, Masvingo. Our mother kept her wedding gown up to when she died. It was a beautiful, very slim gown. The event set up was the big - *mushavhi* (wild fig) tree at the homestead. It's the same venue that Ezra and his wife Anna used for their wedding, 32 years later. The big tree is still thriving!

Ezra's Early Exposure to the Literary World

Our parents nurtured our culture of preparedness and dedication to studying. They prioritised good results - not only because they were academic professionals, but they were conscious of the need to develop wholesome individuals. They inculcated the reading culture and supplied the reading material. We lived in a rural area, and our father would routinely travel to town at the end of each month to collect his salary and purchase home supplies and groceries. He always brought back newspapers and magazines from town. If he happened to visit town again in the middle of the month or at other random times, he bought fewer groceries but made sure to bring any literary supplies he hadn't been able to get at the end of the month. We eagerly awaited baba's (father's) return from town. Not just for the anticipated goodies, but for the reading stuff. Back then - I think because of immaturity - we did not realise how much of a sacrifice - financially this was - but later we did. We had access to various types of literature. The magazines that come to mind are *Parade*, *Photo Action*, *Drum*, and *Moto*. These magazines featured both local and international content. Additionally, Baba brought home local newspapers for us to read, which included puzzles and comic sections. Ezra had an insatiable appetite to read and write from an early stage. These traits were not imposed on him. He read his material faster than all of us despite his age. And of course, also because he did not do any household chores - yet! So, what happened is that he would be too impatient to let anyone read a book that he wanted. He would pounce on the slow reader and snatch the book. This was a cause of 'strife' in the household! Many times, our parents had to intervene! I remember these mini battles between Viola and Ezra. She was really the target. I think it's mostly because they were closer in age. Thankfully, this was the only area where there were physical fights. I laugh every time I think of the situation back then.

Role of the Radio

Back then, the radio was a gadget not readily available in many households. It was for some working people and those who had gone to South Africa - commonly known as Joni - meaning Johannesburg. The radio was not just for entertainment, it was crucial as a tool for the dissemination of information. This was the liberation war era. Baba made sure that we had a functioning radio - all the time. He was inseparable from the radio himself. This was the pre- solar period. He bought the batteries to power it. And he would charge them in the sun if they lost power. We did not even

know about the versatile uses of solar power that now exist. The radio played a pivotal role as a source of communication especially during the Chimurenga war of liberation. I will focus on the years 1977 right up to the attainment of independence in 1980. A lot of people in our village - even immediate neighbouring ones - came to our house to listen to the broadcast on Radio Moza from Maputo in Mozambique. This was done in the evening / night. Every attendee would be accommodated - either inside the house or just around the yard. It was an orderly procedure with curtains drawn and very little lighting from the lamp or candles. There was no chanting allowed for safety reasons. People were vigilant because of threats of attacks from the Rhodesian armed forces. Our parents would attend political meetings at the local base camp called *Chikangare* in a neighbouring village. Here they would meet the liberation fighters, popularly known as 'comrades'. So, my point is to show the social interaction that existed between us and the society. We did not live in isolation.

Ezra's Early Social Interactions

My account would be incomplete if I did not mention how much Ezra interacted with his peers in and out of school. My focus will be on the home situation. Ezra was socially versatile. Our parents were not overprotective. They allowed and encouraged him to play with other kids at the river – kwaMutirikwi (Mutirikwi river). We did not have our own livestock then. But he joined the boys to play whilst they herded the livestock. He learnt to swim and play many games. The notable one was *nhanzva* (sliding downhill). This was played by sliding down from big rocks at the river. This game - *nhanzva* was very popular with the kids. But parents did not like it because of the potential risk of hitting dangerously against the rocks. I am not talking abstractly here, this was a real, concrete concern. Ezra experienced this kind of accident himself. Fearing that he might be stopped from playing at the river, he didn't report it right away. The incident only came to light when he became physically unwell due to a shoulder injury. So yes - my memories are nostalgic. Am very far away - physically - from home. But right now, I see and feel the Mutirikwi River's smells, the breeze. Such is life. Just to recapture the part on friends. I realise now that this was an informal way of his social integration. There are also social skills that he acquired. Consciously and subconsciously. For example, the boys made *mota dzezvidhinha* (toy cars out of bricks).

They also made *mota dzewaya* (toy cars made of fencing wires). So many versions emerged from the ambitious and aspiring engineers.

Ezra also learnt *kuridza tyava* (to use the whip). There was a click sound - from the fingers or tongue - (readers who are not familiar with this exercise will forgive me here because I cannot recall or explain the details, but for those who grew up in a rural context as ours, I am sure they will visualize what I am describing). This bit is important because Ezra found it challenging and could not do it. Mai (our mother), had to pay someone to teach him until he got it right! This is surely an early practical extra lesson! It is also evidence of forward thinking on Mai's part.

Ezra's Friends

As already mentioned, Ezra had many childhood friends. I unfortunately cannot remember all their names. But I know Ruka Musharu - since deceased - who was a close pal. Ezra grew up conscious of social and economic differences without being taught formally. I will explain here. His peers in primary school, most of them - could not afford shoes to wear to school. They went barefooted. It was normal then and not out of the ordinary to not have shoes to wear as part of the school uniform. Ezra could manage to wear school shoes, but he chose to also go barefooted to fit in the situation with his friends. To me, this is not peer pressure - but an expression of empathy and being able to assess situations at an early age.

Conclusion

I feel privileged to share this part of Ezra's life. I am grateful to God for letting Ezra blossom academically. More importantly, I am grateful to God for according to us the chance to witness his life unfold before us. I thank his immediate family for supporting him as he continues to grow. Mbuya Anna - it's not easy to be married to a literary genius. You basically compete with the manuscripts, meetings, and deadlines. They are a life on their own.

Peeking into Ezra's Life: Musings of a Sister who Walked and Danced with Him

By Viola Ingwani

Unto the Chitando Family, A Son is Born!

A thinly wooded bushy trail leads to the tiny village that has been my home from the time I was born. On either side of the path is a natural hedge formed by the interwoven *rukato* (lantana camara) where many a time, I have picked and enjoyed the tasty *rukato* fruit. Just up a small hill, half a kilometer from the main dust road, is my home. Legend has it that I was born in a small kitchen, made of wood and dagga walls with a simple floor, plastered with *ndove* (cow dung). That morning, my mother went into labour. She left the field where she had gone to attend to her small plot of *nyimo* (round nuts), because her back ached intensely. The *nyamukuta* (mid-wife) was around to assist mother to deliver. The mid-wife was my maternal grandmother, *mbuya* vaMamoyo (also fondly referred to as *mbuya* vaMurozvi.) She went straight to her task with diligence. Within a brief interval, a fire was roaring in the kitchen, while a simple bed was prepared in anticipation of the delivery.

“Ululu Ululu Ululu !!!!” came the celebratory ululation, piercing the serene morning atmosphere. A baby boy had just entered the world, and that was me. I grew up to be a fun -loving lad, with loads of energy. I grew up in the village chasing chickens, if there was an instruction to catch one for the pot. My early life was filled with adventure. I would create fast -moving cars from broken bricks and could be heard saying, “One day, I will drive a Mercedes Benz.” Before I could bathe myself, my mother or my elder sisters would bath me. I really loathed the task and would flee from everyone in the homestead, being pursued through the bushes, until eventually I was caught. Then and only then, would I bathe!! It was a game to me, and all had to sweat it out before I took my bath.

Tending Livestock

I was initiated into shepherding livestock through tending the sheep and goats. Growing older, I joined older boys in herding the cattle as well. We would take the cattle, sheep, and goats to the pastures. We learnt how to guide our herd to the nearby Mutirikwi River so they would cool off. I loved those days, especially before the age of six, when we relished the life away from the elders at home. I enjoyed the games we used to play while

we herded cattle. We played *nhanzva*, where we would slide down from the top of the hill. The uneven rocky sliding area would be pasted with the sticky *nhanzva* mixture, making it easy to slide downhill. However, such adventures were not all fun, as one could get injured. When I was in grade one, I banged my shoulder on a jagged stone as I slid down the slope and I sustained a nasty injury. I hid this injury from my mother, who was a no-nonsense mum. I vividly recall my grade one teacher narrating the pain I had, which only came to light when we were doing physical education lessons, and I could not jump because of the searing pain. I got treated, but not before I earned myself a thorough beating from my stern but loving mother. Often the cattle would stray away from us as we played. All hell would break loose as we ran helter-skelter trying to reassemble them to join the main herd. I always recall when the strays destroyed our neighbors' crops and how this resulted in us being beaten.

Swimming at Mutirikwi River

We also played other games by Mutirikwi River. We would swim in the murky waters, hardly wary of the impending dangers from crocodiles. One learnt to swim both for the fun of it and for survival. If the older boys thought a younger boy was afraid of diving into the water, they would force him out of the phobia by throwing him into the deepest part of the ferocious river. This could be dangerous and could result in near drowning. Then there would be games played in the sand, building sand dunes. There were designated places where males would bath and similarly where females would bath. We frequented the male spots, where we would bath.

Our vegetable gardens were stationed at the banks of the river. Using the knowledge that one has now, that would be termed stream-bank cultivation. At that time, we did not know that. The river served as a recreational area and a site for gardening. We also got drinking water from *mufuku* (riverbed), as we did not have boreholes. The river served as our community well.

Childhood Adventures

As young boys, we were often naughty. We tied up tufts of grass from opposite parts of the path. We would be camouflaged with bushes and watch our unsuspecting victims fall as they reached our traps. We always shrieked with laughter whenever this happened. We also enjoyed the natural guava fruit which thrives in our area. Different varieties of the fruit

existed, and one always ventured into the thicket to get the best fruit. On one such adventure, I was stung by wasps and my eyes were swollen from the sting while my head throbbed as if I had a thousand drums inside. The experience was unforgettable and painful.

Then also came the time when the *mashuku* (loquats) fruit would be ripe. The trip was undertaken at dawn, getting to our destination about early morning. We would gorge in as much of the fruit as possible before filling our containers with fruit. Then we would start our homeward bound journey, getting home to be heralded by my praise-singing mother. This always encouraged us, because she would praise us loudly whenever we accomplished even a little task.

Tilling the Land

Our field was about one and half kilometers from the homestead. We would wake up early in the morning before the crack of dawn. It was important to carry all the cooking utensils and foodstuffs to prepare the morning meal and lunch. This was done to save time, walking up and down from home to the field. Work in the field was laughter-filled. We would crack jokes and share hilarious stories as we worked. All the work was done together, be it tending the crops, or harvesting. Our parents taught us to work hard and to live an honest life.

We had our breakfast under the *mushuma* (wild ebony) tree. Afterwards, we got back into the field to continue whichever task we had to fulfil that day. There were times we would tend our crops and simultaneously dig up *makugwe* (crickets). The reason for digging them up was two-fold. Firstly, the crickets threatened our flourishing maize crop, cutting down the green stalks mercilessly. Secondly, the crickets made quite a delicacy, we would roast them up until they were crispy brown and have them with *sadza*. It was a rare relish.

Unquenchable Thirst for Reading

I was the only boy, being sandwiched between my two elder sisters and two younger ones. I was well loved by my siblings. Whenever my mother assigned me tasks, there was always a 'volunteering sister' to do that for me. My mother firmly stood her ground, instructing me to carry out the task. She always emphasized the importance of acquiring all the essential life skills.

My father was a loving, quiet, soft spoken but firm man. He was a primary school teacher. It was because of his love for the academics that I grew up to love reading and studying. At the end of each month, he went to Masvingo town to get his salary. He always bought us groceries and in addition bought us magazines such as Prize and Parade. I used to stare at the pictures when I was young. As I grew older, I developed a love for reading these stories. My older sisters loved reading as well. I remember vividly the fights I had with my immediate older sister (Viola) about books. If she showed me something eye-catching in a magazine, I was reluctant to return it. She was short -tempered and would grab the magazine from me, intent on finishing her story. This always made me cry, whereupon my mother would coax my sister to give me the magazine to peruse. The first novel my sister Viola and I read together was "The Potter's Wheel" by Chukwuemeka Ike. From there, I developed a hunger for reading and have been reading ever since.

Local Entertainment

At times, there would be films shown to us at the township, called "bioscopes". A large lorry blurring out the invitation would go through the villages, in the main road reminding everyone of the impending fun at dusk. As early as six o'clock in the evening, children, escorted by the older ones would hurry to the township to view the bioscopes. One of the movies I remember was about a character, Ticky who was a fast runner. There would be no chairs for people watching the bioscope. Those watching would sit on the bare floor. The little ones would fall asleep during the entertainment to be carried home on the elder brother/sister/aunt's back. Home could be as far as two or three kilometers from the townships. All and sundry would get home safely.

Early Years in School

The first primary school we attended (Mutusva Primary School) was about twenty kilometers from our home. My father taught there, so my immediate older sister (Viola) and I joined him there for the week. Our eldest sister was now in boarding school at Loreto in Gweru. My younger sisters were at home with my mother. We walked to Mutusva Primary School. My father usually cycled earlier to get to his workplace and prepare his work. My sister and I would leave on a Sunday, passing through the busy Chenhowe township. The place always filled us with joy for our grandfather (youngest paternal uncle to my father) had a shop there. I recall one

funny incident. My sister and I were carefree and whenever we left home to go to Mutusva, we hurriedly left without being thorough in cleaning ourselves up. My mother would always encourage us to be smart, but we would laugh it off and get on our way. On this 'fateful' day, we bundled our belongings into a rather dirty bag (*chisaga* in Shona). Usually, it was vegetables, tomatoes, *mabura* (sweet potatoes) or whatever else our mother would have packed for the week. We were warned about the dirty '*chisaga*' by mother but as usual, we brushed her off, gleefully starting our journey. As usual, we stopped at 'grandfather's' shop. The two of us were very good at jiving to rhumba music. We started dancing to the blaring music. One bystander exclaimed, *Kudzana munodzana henyu, asi chisaga chenyu chine svina- munapota muchiwacha*, (You two dance beautifully, but the sack you are carrying is filthy, you must learn to wash it). All the people around us stared and broke into loud, roaring laughter. Immediately, we left the place convincing ourselves that the bystander was full of nonsense and interference! Who was he to tell us to clean our '*chisaga*'? We broke into peals of laughter.

After leaving the township we would take a left turn past the Madanhire Seventh Day Adventist Church, that's the church where we worshipped during our childhood. We would meander through the villages, towards Mutusva. One memorable day, heavy rain pounded the earth till we thought it wise to seek shelter at a nearby home. We were allowed into the hut, but alas, the hut was leaking very much. We got so drenched such that we wished we had just continued walking in the rain. My years at Mutusva are fun-filled ones. This was despite the fact that the period marked the end of the Zimbabwean Liberation War, the period 1978 to 1979. During that time, the freedom fighters used to give our parents (teachers) lists of items to procure from town each month-end. They would demand denims, boots, blankets, and other essentials. I used to feel for the teachers who had a responsibility towards the welfare of the freedom fighters but also towards their own families, surviving on paltry salaries disbursed by the white colonial government. We, however, learnt to survive this harsh phase and it taught us some valuable lessons.

At Mutusva, my uncle (younger brother to my father) was the headmaster while my father was the deputy headmaster. My uncle had two of his children learning there so we were a big happy family, and we enjoyed each other's companionship. My elder sister found the company of Vakoma Martha (uncles' second born), quite heart-warming. I was almost always in the company of my cousin Clady, uncle's son who was almost my age.

In my early years in primary school, I was never one to prepare for lessons. I remember crying most mornings, remembering that I had not dug up my own lump of clay for molding in the Art and Craft lesson. The saving grace is that my mother would take up her hoe to get it for me, all the time promising to beat me up if I forgot next time. My mother and sisters always assisted me if I failed to plan ahead. I laugh a lot when I recall this.

Indelibly Etched Memories of the War of Liberation

The years rolled by, and the war of liberation reached its peak. One outstanding incident was when there was a soccer competition with a rival school, Chandipwisa. During the match, a group of gun-wielding freedom fighters joined the fun, going as far as holding a *pungwe* (mini rally) at the school. It became public knowledge that a group of freedom fighters had visited our school. By nightfall, the freedom fighters in the area called my uncle and my father to interrogate them on the purported hosting of Muzorewa's soldiers, known as "*maskuzu apo*."

My memories go back to the anguish-filled night when my uncle's family and my family huddled together as we anxiously waited for the return of my uncle and father from the camp of the freedom fighters. We hugged and wept in relief when both patriarchs sauntered back around five o'clock in the morning. Another incident was when all the teachers and villagers were forced to get large chunks of meat stolen from the white settlers' farms. Everyone had to have a chunk so that no one would sell out to the Rhodesian soldiers. We had no refrigerators, so we hung the meat outside to dry it. As fate would have it, two trucks filled with Rhodesian soldiers were seen descending into the school. We quickly bundled the meat into the nearby pit-latrines. The incident ended well with the Rhodesian soldiers explaining that they were aware that we had been coerced into getting the meat, hence we could eat it without fear.

Moving Schools

At the end of 1979, my father transferred to Mazanhi primary school, near our rural home. Resultantly, I also moved to the same school, and I was now in grade five. I walked three kilometers to school. The route to school passed through a thick bush, part of which was an old graveyard. I recall my grade seven year. There was an early bus which passed by our home. That was the bus that my father, younger sister and I always used to get to school. In that final year, I had a very strict teacher. He viciously insisted that we get to school by six o'clock in the morning to do morning tasks

before the scheduled school lessons commenced. The bus we used left at around seven and that meant I could not use the bus. Sadly, that year there was no one from our village doing grade seven, so I had to leave early in the morning, grappling in the dark alone and feeling terribly frightened of the old graveyard that lay in my path. That always made my hair stand on end but still I soldiered on.

Music Competition

Our family has always been musical. In my last year in primary school (grade seven), my mother was teaching at a nearby primary school (Chandipwisa). We had district choral competitions which were scheduled at Nemanwa growth point. My mother was leading the competition song at her school. She was an avid singer and sang the piece joyfully as we all listened. I noticed a part where the tune seemed off and mentioned there was some discord; my school sang it differently. She kept asking me to explain, but I didn't tell her. As a result, my school won the competition while my mother's school scored fewer points. I have always valued upholding principles and engaging in healthy competition.

Hopes and Aspirations for the Future

One of the things I believe in is hard work, listening to people, talking less and loving others. I have a conviction that honesty will build us a better Zimbabwe, where people feel for each other. If only we cast our thoughts on our humble past which has metamorphosed into perhaps flashy cars, big houses, and grand jobs, we would be kinder and more caring to each other. From the beginning, it has been the hands of the Almighty molding us into who we are now. It is also my belief that one's destiny is not marked by present circumstances. Our todays do not mirror our tomorrows. Whenever I travel early in the morning on a school day, watching the little boy and girl running to school, especially in the rural areas, I envision hope. Given the right chances, all people can reach their destinies. Children are our hope, they are our future backbone. We are duty bound to treat children well, provide satisfactory environments where the parent believes in the child. Our ugly ducklings may turn into beautiful swans, and oh what a Zimbabwe to yearn for!

A Social Commentary on bhudhi Ezzy: My Friend, Mentor and Path-bearer

By Sophia Chirongoma

It would be futile for me to engage in a conversation with the rich literature he has been churning over the years. That task has been undertaken very well by various well accomplished academics. Rather, my task in this piece is to briefly share about the brother who has always been my role model. Since it is impossible for me to write everything (this would need a separate volume), I will just pick a few snippets.

Playmate, Musician Par Excellence and Storyteller

Being the kid sister who immediately comes after him, from as long as I can remember, I have always been sitting at his feet, listening to his words of wisdom, revelling in his mischievous humour, and sharing the roaring laughter. One common trait that *bhudhi Ezzy* and I share is the gift of laughter!

Growing up, *bhudhi Ezzy* would tell me all sorts of tales and my inquisitive and naïve mind would enthusiastically embrace all the information. One incident that we still laugh about was when he made me believe that he was an orphan, who was adopted by our mother after his ‘real’ mum (an imaginary younger sister to our mum) had passed away. Being an energetic and adventurous young boy, he was always susceptible to being beaten by our disciplinarian mum. I could never fathom why he was always being beaten, so I ventured to ask him why this was so. That’s when he told me the tale about being an orphan. After some time, I gathered some courage to plead with our mum to stop beating up ‘the orphaned boy.’ That’s when our mum discovered the tale, and it earned him another thorough beating. We still laugh about this incident.

Whereas in some cases, siblings, especially the ones who come after each other have a preponderance of fighting due to sibling rivalry, *bhudhi Ezzy* and I were the best playmates. He would teach me games and tell me inspiring stories. Some of the games we used to play during our childhood include *chuti*, *pada*, tennis ball and soccer. He was a gifted soccer player, but our parents dissuaded him from pursuing sport because they feared that it would distract his focus on academics. He still loves soccer and is an avid supporter of Dynamos ‘De Mbare,’ and Arsenal.

Another special gift he possessed was to play the guitar. We always laugh about how one of the days he played the guitar so well such that our house help got distracted and delayed preparing food for our mother who was working in the field. When she was questioned about the delayed meal, to her defence, she explained that she could not focus on cooking because she was busy listening to Ezra playing the guitar. That marked the end of his musical pursuits, our parents banned him from playing the guitar because they wished for him to give undivided attention on academic pursuits. He has continued to appreciate music and often finds solace in listening to music.

Study Mate, Encourager and Path Bearer

In my early years of primary school, *bhudhi Ezzy* and I would often walk together to school. It was a long distance of about three kilometres. I have always been uncomfortable with the cold weather and sometimes during the biting cold winter mornings, I would feel like I was freezing. Being the protective and supportive brother, he would remove his jersey, and offer it to me. I would wear it on top of mine, and he would brave the cold. When our mum learnt about our ordeal with the cold, she ensured that she bought us warmer jerseys. Looking back, I realize just how much *bhudhi Ezzy* sacrificed to ensure that I was comfortable and did not drop out of school, such was the fate of countless children during our times.

When he moved to boarding school for secondary schooling at Gokomere high school, he would write me letters, encouraging me to study hard so that I could pass and enrol in the same boarding school. I always beamed with pride at school whenever I received a letter addressed to me, with his neat handwriting. Whenever he came home for the school holidays, he would take time to study with me. His favourite subjects were History and Bible Knowledge. Following in his footsteps, these also became my favourite subjects when I started secondary school. He always encouraged me to aim to excel and seeing the strides he was making, I felt inspired to aim higher and higher.

By the time I enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Zimbabwe, he was already a junior lecturer. I could not afford to slacken with my studies because all my lecturers knew me as Chitando's younger sister. I had to be at my best behaviour, and I knew that I had to perform very well in my studies because the last thing I wanted was to embarrass my brother by failing. He also had a humorous way of reminding me that I needed to remain focused, especially during my early days at university,

where many youngsters have wondered off the path. One incident has remained indelibly etched. I was taking one of the courses he taught and didn't make enough effort to research for a written assignment he had tasked us to work on. Towards the due date, I borrowed research notes from one of my good friends and I hurriedly wrote the assignment, citing some sources that I had not read. He marked the assignment, then on the references list, he commented on one of the texts, "what is the colour of this book?" When I met him the next time, we had a good laugh about it, I acknowledged my misdemeanour and that set me on the right path.

One of the rare and special traits that he possesses is that even if one submits a badly written piece, as a reviewer, he will never break your spirit by trashing it. Instead, he will first highlight the relevant sections, then he will politely and diplomatically suggest a hundred or more ways in which you can improve your document. That is one important lesson which I learnt from him. I always endeavour to adopt that approach whenever I read other people's work, whether as a reviewer or examiner.

I have always followed in *bhudhi Ezzy's* footsteps and almost everywhere I go, the moment that someone who knows him gets wind that I am his sister, doors are opened wide for me. However, since I use my married name, there are instances where some people take longer to discover that we are siblings. I have often watched with amazement as some people express disappointment that I didn't tell them sooner that I am his sister. Just being his sister is a huge blessing, many of the treasured friendships I have, emerged from being Ezra's sister.

Role Model, Mentor, Friend, and Confidante

I have learnt countless lessons from *bhudhi Ezzy*. He has taught me to love unconditionally, to be empathetic, humble, resolute, firm, truthful and more importantly learning to be cruel to be kind to self. His achievements have also taught me that hard work, dedication, collaborative efforts, and mentorship are pivotal pillars for success. He exudes our late father's traits, a father who loves, adores, and supports all his children equally and unreservedly. A father who spends time to listen to his children, counsel them, laugh and cry with them. In my father's absence, I look up to him as a father figure, he is my best friend. To him, I can speak all that is in my heart, knowing fully well that he will listen and counsel me whenever I am erring. He always looks at the bigger picture and keeps me focused on the glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. When he

speaks about and writes about redemptive, positive, and progressive masculinities, he surely practices what he preaches.

To my Beloved Brother Ezra

By Precious Ngoma

This is to give you your flowers whilst we are still here together (not to say you will go first, thus unto the Lord).

You have been a mentor, a counsellor, a shoulder to cry on, a friend and many other things.

You have taught me life in many ways.

Your life is a book from which I have read invaluable lessons.

You have taught me humility, although I am not sure I have fully mastered this one.

I cannot be as humble as you are.

I have not heard you blow your own trumpet despite all your achievements, academic and otherwise. Many a time, I have blown it for you.

I have observed compassion, you sacrifice so much to alleviate the next person's suffering.

I salute you for that.

You are thoughtful, gracious, and selfless.

You always see something good in somebody.

You do not judge people.

You are a blessing to many.

You have positively impacted countless lives, that's a blessing.

You have cheered on many in their journeys of life, may you find fulfilment in that.

The Lord has endowed you with a rich sense of humor.

I appreciate the many times you have lightened my burdens and many other people's with your well-calculated and humorously packaged words.

Keep on lighting other people's candles.

Associating with you by birth is a privilege.

I am quick to make it known that you are my brother because I am proud of you.

You do not take people for granted and you are unassuming.
These are rare qualities that the Lord has endowed you with and for that I am grateful.

I have learnt to value people through reading the book of your life.
You have been entrusted with the power to patiently deal with even the most difficult people.

You fit well in any context; I admire you for that.

I have greatly benefitted from the wisdom that the Lord has bestowed upon your life.

Continue to apply it to the benefit of many.

Your generosity is immeasurable.

Indelible childhood memories attest to this quality in you.

I have learnt to be a giver through your generous acts.

You have been the cement that has kept us together as a family.

May the Lord grant you a longer lease of life so that the family remains intact.

Thank you for being the brother you are.

Much love, your sister – Precious

Sekuru, Professor Ezra Chitando

Well known in the academic and development sectors for his enormous contributions, Professor Chitando has been a leading actor and voice for the poor and marginalised in Africa and beyond for many years. His work has cemented him as a voice of the voiceless including women and girls as Professor Chitando is a leading gender activist. This is rare for a man in our traditionally patriarchal Africa.

Whilst many know him as Professor Chitando, we are very privileged to know him as uncle, “Sekuru” in our Shona culture. Sekuru has been there for us since we were born and has been supportive in every way in our development throughout life. He has shown us love, care and compassion and has guided us throughout our life journeys through his rare wisdom and love. Personally, from an early age, he has provided me with invaluable advice and guidance that has contributed to who I am today. He also took me in when I had no refuge and took care of me when I was sick showing his compassionate and caring nature.

From opening up his house to host us as his extended family to being available and supportive at our important life events such as funerals, weddings, birthdays and graduations (despite his very busy schedule as an international professional), we really appreciate Sekuru's commitment to our family. We have also learnt from him and his wonderful wife (Mbuya Anna) how to be good parents and the importance of commitment, loyalty and love in marriage. These are lessons that we cherish as a family.

May the Lord bless and guide our Sekuru, Professor Ezra Chitando and his family. We love and honour this special son of Africa.

Kudzai Mtero (Muzukuru)

Sekuru Ezzy, a Man of Few Words

I have known you from my infancy

And will be the first to admit that you are not fancy

If I could describe you in one word, it would be the word "simple"

This simplicity is arguably the greatest reason why in your wake, you have left a ripple

Attesting to your unparalleled academic prowess

Only tempered by your immutable gentleness

I know you as a man of few words in conversation

But in your work, you have used words to express yourself without reservation

Writing many a critically acclaimed book

Convincing those with little interest in reading to have a second look

At your continuing life's work, that is unequivocally excellent

Achievements such as yours can only be attributed to talent

As I contemplate what to say about you

I realize that in this life, men of your caliber are very few

We now live in a world where language has been replaced by the emoji

Thank heavens, the few words that remain will find breath through your theology

If the world could have only half of your wisdom,

It would be enough to justly rule every earthly kingdom

Thank you for the academic legacy you are bequeathing to the next generation

A legacy that will bring the written and spoken word to its rightful position

I am proud to call you an uncle and role model

From the days when all I could do was toddle

You are an inspiration to many, and I could not ask for a dearer uncle

Your work speaks for itself and will never crumble

A man of few words in conversation,

But loud, emphatic and unapologetic in articulation

Loveness Ingwani-Sola (Muzukuru)

VaMacolour (Mr Colours)

Apparently, this was my nickname for him years ago, when I was a mouthy little girl. Maybe he really did mismatch his outfits a lot, or it was just the one day and the nickname stuck. As I grew up though, color would be the last thing to be associated with him...

Calm, composed, humble and exuding wisdom

Words I would use to describe my late grandfather, Sekuru vaKudzi

Father to my mother, her sisters and my one uncle

Sekuru Baba vaMutsa-Ezra Chitando

Who himself turned out to have these very same attributes

In a world led by harsh patriarchy

Where 'tozeza baba' (we are dreading having to encounter dad) is real

It's comforting to know and love a male figure such as Sekuru Ezzy

Little girls need uncles like you

To know that there are indeed perfect gentlemen in this world

And to expect nothing less for themselves

Little boys need uncles like you as well in their lives

What wouldn't we give to live in a world where the male figures in our lives were gentle, calm, wise, hard-working, and inspiring achievers, as you are?

You color our lives with all the best motivations

You are appreciated

Kundai Allison Mtero (Muzukuru)

My Dearly Beloved Uncle

When I think of my uncle, I cannot help but smile. He is the male version of my mother, more especially because they have the same haircut, look alike and both almost always have that infectious smile and laugh!

Growing up, he would always encourage us to be good, study hard and believe in ourselves. Looking at the way my uncle grew up and the success he has achieved both academically and in other areas is just impressive. Mum used to re-tell stories of how they grew up in their humble rural homestead in Murinye, Masvingo. She described how he would make toy cars and airplanes from wires and cardboard boxes and how he would play with them and announce that he was going to drive and fly. It is a marvel how all that came true, and it shows that words indeed have power. Looking at him now, I am truly encouraged, inspired and convinced that the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams!

My uncle is a compassionate and giving person and has always been. He always seeks to know if and how he can help and he is ready to assist whenever a family member is in a fix or needs help. I say this with conviction since I personally have been a beneficiary and witness to his kind deeds when he helps other family members, friends, and acquaintances.

I have always known him as the loving uncle who at family gatherings takes time to engage with every single person no matter how young or old they are. Discussions and debates on the economy, politics, and religion when we meet are what I mostly look forward to since he is a good listener but will never be shy to express his views and opinions, which is refreshing. He is accommodative and respects everyone despite who they are or what they have achieved. This is an admirable trait that many accomplished people like him do not possess.

To sum it all up, we are truly and richly blessed to have him: to cry, ponder, laugh, love and share together as a family in unity!

Isabel Tsakisani Ingwani (Muzukuru)

Sekuru Baba VaMutsa- Our Academic and Moral Icon

When I was informed that the family would be submitting small articles for my uncle for a book that was being written in his honor, and that I was being invited to write something as well, I knew that this would be a massive undertaking on my behalf. One would think that perhaps I had been asked to write a whole chapter because of the immense pressure that I

felt. Because how could I, a non-writer whose writing techniques are mediocre at best, fully and competently write about the greatest academic I know?

My uncle, you see, is a man of very few words, except of course when you engage him in discussions about religion, politics, and other intelligent conversations. I learnt quickly when I was younger that I had to put my thinking cap on, in order to have a conversation with him because that is the sort of person he is.

He is my mother's only brother. He is the icon of education and all things academic. When I hear of the mischief and fun that my mother and him used to have when they were children, it's almost impossible to identify that version with the calm, wise and honorable person that he is today. This book could not have been written for a more deserving person and I feel privileged to be able to contribute these few words in his honor.

Sekuru Ezzy, I wish you all the best in your future endeavors filled with tremendous success!

Anesu Ingwani (Muzukuru)

Sekuru Baba VaMutsa- Our Iconic Role Model

My Sekuru is a man of honor and values.

One of those values I always experienced whilst growing up was the importance of family.

For many of my school breaks, I would travel from my family's home in South Africa and spend weeks at a time at his home.

I did this for many years.

During those years, he showed me so much love and he exuded profound wisdom.

He is another amazing father figure in my life.

I would always appreciate the time that I spent at his family home during my childhood.

I am glad to have gotten to learn from and grow with an amazing Sekuru in my life.

Sekuru baba vaMutsa, you are an iconic role model to me and many others.

Tadiwanashe Calisto Junias Chirongoma, (Muzukuru)

Concluding Remarks

Compiling these celebratory tributes has been a heartwarming undertaking for each of Ezra Chitando's sisters, nephews, and nieces. We are sincerely grateful to the editors of this volume for granting us a rare opportunity to honor our beloved brother, uncle, friend, confidante, and counselor. We wish him all the best that life can offer. We continue to honor, cherish, and celebrate him.

To those who missed the invitation to contribute to this volume, may you kindly accept sincere apologies, it was not intentional. The editors tried their level best to invite the contributors whom they knew to be Ezra's colleagues and friends. However, since the book project was meant to be a surprise birthday present for him, it was not possible for the editors to solicit for some input from him on all eligible contributors. If all his colleagues and friends had contributed to this volume, it would be an unending story. Likewise, if all his relatives had been aware of this project, surely the editors would have been inundated with the contributions.

Long live VaChitando, VaChitsa, Baba VaMutsa, bhudhi Ezzy, sekuru Ezzy, sekuru Baba VaMutsa, sekuru Prof, Ezera, Ezara, these are the various designations that you joyfully answer to. May you continue to flourish and never tire to do good.

Section B



Theorizing Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Africa

3 Continuity and Change

Depictions of Gender Roles and Relations from the Stone Age period to the Present

Happinos **Marufu** & Sarah Yeukai **Matanga**

Abstract

This paper blends archaeological evidence, archival materials and literary sources to make an argument that the socio-cultural fabric of the Zimbabwean society has been constantly changing in line and in response to the prevailing and dominant ideological thinking of the time. Archaeological evidence reveals how, over the years, women and children have always played a pivotal role in the subsistence economy of Stone Age societies, as they were responsible for food gathering activities as well as the overall welfare of the family (Marufu, 2012; 2017). Men engaged in higher risk, hunting activities which, nonetheless, contributed less to the daily dietary needs of a family. This social setting changed during the Iron Age period where men acquired more economic opportunities than women and, resultantly, caused them to have dominance over women. This marked the genesis of numerous inequity challenges bedevilling the Zimbabwean society today and that scholars and artists in general are grappling with which Chitando, (2003; 2007) advocates for their disbandment in order to create inclusive and sustainable societies. From a creative writing perspective, early literary works have shown how heavy-handed and exclusionary the patriarchal system was on women. They also highlight how little changes were brought in by colonialism, together with the associated dynamics brought by the advent of Christianity. However, there now appears to be a paradigm shift in contemporary literary works, with scholars advocating more for women empowerment. Through an analysis of selected literary works that explore how religion has been used to deal with challenges that women face as a result of patriarchal systems in Zimbabwean societies, this chapter traces the development, over successive epochs, of the recognition of women. Reflecting on Ezra Chitando's contributions to women emancipation, our analysis enables *the identification of what needs to be done for societal transformation*.

Keywords: Ezra Chitando, gender roles and relations, patriarchy, religion, women empowerment, Stone Age, Iron Age

Introduction

The concepts of gender equality and gender equity are topical in the 21st century, especially as the world (particularly the Global South) seeks to address historical imbalances between men and women in terms of access and control of resources, as well as disparities in opportunities and decision-making processes. Where women suffer inequalities, society is the worse for it and, contrastively, there are evidentiary examples of how women inclusion, equality and overall empowerment has driven development agendas in the world. Azuh *et al* (2017:1)'s notion that gender equality and inequality negatively impact how women are perceived in their various communities is critical in this case and their argument is that:

Gender inequality and poor women empowerment retard improvement in living standards of women and act as a clog in their contributions to governance and economic development. In other words, gender equality empowers the transformation of women to access education, health, micro finance credit and recognition among other productive resources. Gender inequality lowers quality of life and culminates in limited productivity, hinders economic efficiency and growth. The benchmark for a successful society is the level of gender equality which reflects on the extent of women's rights and empowerment in that society.

The above emphasizes how addressing inequalities assists in the recognition and empowerment of women the world over. The major challenge in most societies has been the failure to both steer sensible development and impart or inculcate ideal models of a balanced society. At the centre of this struggle are ideologies, beliefs and traditions which deprive women of meaningful socio-cultural, economic, and political power compared to men. Women and children have always occupied marginal spaces since time immemorial. Societal roles, especially under African patriarchy, have always dictated the roles that women should play. In this chapter we trace the historical background and setup of the African situation and more specifically the Zimbabwean arrangement to demonstrate how this social structure has changed over the years.

Our analysis delves into how gender relations evolved and changed over time, from the Stone Age period, through the Iron Age period to the contemporary period. Throughout these phases of cultural development, women have played a critical role to the welfare of the family by contributing towards their daily needs. This is shown through the hunting and gathering activities that the women engaged in as a way of fending for the culinary needs of the family. This role has not been, however, applauded

as women have always been viewed as second class citizens. Their role in society is not considered as critical and essential.

Significantly, Chitando & Chitando (2022:58) have asserted that:

Both Zimbabwean women's writings and Zimbabwean women's theology are in basic agreement that women occupy the lowest rung on the economic scale. This is not peculiar to Zimbabwean women. It is known that across the world, women continue to be disadvantaged economically. Zimbabwean women writers have articulated the exclusion of women from formal economic systems. Although women were highly regarded in pre-colonial societies, missionary religions such as Christianity and Islam brought rigid forms of patriarchy.

The above assertion brings to the fore the debate that we seek to explore in our interpretation and reading of the nexus between religion, literature and history as far as the treatment of women is concerned. The quotation highlights and acknowledges the fact that women were highly regarded in the precolonial society, a position that we intend to dig deeper into in our analysis in this chapter.

Remarkably, contemporary scholars have fully engaged themselves to give a voice to women and to empower women from all walks of life. In this paper, we therefore, in particular, work closely with the contributions put forward by Ezra Chitando in an attempt to voice his concerns over the welfare of the females, be it their treatment, acceptance and/or involvement in various facets of life. This is to argue that the woman's place is not just in the house and scholars have advocated for women who rise to transform the home they live in as well as impact their communities. Our analysis is therefore cognizant of Chitando's contributions in attempting to break the barriers that hinder the full recognition of women as well as dealing with the various stereotypes that have been used as tools for women oppression.

Literary works and debates have also emerged as responses to these stereotypical perceptions and the marginalization of women. Our focus is however on how Zimbabwean women writers have contributed to women emancipation through their literary works. Chitando (2011:ii) avers "the possibility of literature to offer a platform for the liberation of women, or a counter-platform for reactionary politics". In this way, literature becomes an important lens within which issues affecting women can be explored. To this end, we discuss how literature has emerged as a site of empowering marginalized women and a platform that provides a voice for voiceless women.

Tracing the developments of patriarchal issues in the Zimbabwean context allows an entry point for the general discussion in this chapter where our major concerns are emphasised through an analysis of literary texts that represent real life situations. These texts become platforms of urgency and agency in dealing with issues affecting women as the perceived marginalised populations. We also give archaeological interpretations that help explain the role that women have played even in early societies.

Our conclusions are drawn from Chitando's conceptions of these issues as a way of coming up with solutions that wholly address these challenges bedevilling women's recognition and empowerment. Various stereotypes have existed in Zimbabwean discourses where women were *otherised* as supported by Gaidzanwa's assertion that, "while male Africans could be trained to lead Christian and heathen natives, native women were supposed to bear children and raise them in a fit manner for these leaders" (Gaidzanwa, 2006:196). It is such a view that women in Zimbabwe have risen to challenge and increasingly, Zimbabwean women writers have taken the role of rewriting these discourses that disempower women. The same is advocated for by Chitando as a male theologian to ensure that women are given opportunities and platforms to exercise power and authority even on platforms that have been regarded as dominantly male. Chitando & Chitando (2022:56) insist on and cite the role of men in a mentality and practice shift where gender issues are related. They acknowledge the way males have viewed issues to do with the emancipation of women; especially their contributions to the theories that can be used in understanding African women's writings and African women theology. On the other end of the spectrum, one has to also question why men are seemingly comfortable with these other theories, like Africana womanism, while rejecting others:

However, this popularity of Africana womanism among male scholars will require more careful analysis. Why would men, who are enjoying patriarchal privileges, be so comfortable with this particular literary theory? Could it be that there are greater possibilities of retaining the status quo under Africana womanism than under other literary theories? Applying a hermeneutics of suspicion, we would wonder why some male scholars are so keen on promoting Africana womanism in Zimbabwe. (Chitando & Chitando, 2022:56)

To Chitando, these groups of men that genuinely lobby for the emancipation of women exist among African men and these should not be viewed with suspicion.

Statement of the problem

The interplay between literature and culture has always been an issue for discussion in various forums the world over. Women have always been known to occupy marginal spaces and their presence in nation building platforms has been on minor issues. These challenges of marginalisation that women have faced over the years date back to the early days of the Stone and Iron ages in the development of societies. If history shows that women at one point in time occupied places of authority, how then did they lose it and what are the current developments that seek to empower women for the benefit of societies. In what ways do these developments, relating to intersectionality of gender, culture and religion, manifest in the Zimbabwean context and how have they been handled?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study is a qualitative enquiry where we analyse literary texts, archaeological evidence as well as texts that speak on women's issues such as abuse, emancipation and recognition. We seek to demonstrate the intersectionality of gender, culture and religion and how these three are critical aspects to be considered in a study of this nature.

This study is inclined towards sociological theories of gender, that is, examination of how society influences our understanding of acceptable and/or appropriate behaviours from men and women. More specifically, we subscribe to the Structural Functionalist view of gender inequality, which posits that sexual division of labour is predefined, continuously modified by the ever-changing socio-economic circumstances, but always maintaining complementary gender roles (Zevallos, 2003). From this theoretical underpinning, gender roles were developed as human culture evolved and became structured along sex lines, where men assumed most of the outdoor, energy-demanding and risky activities while women became accustomed to 'lighter', domestic responsibilities in and around homes (Boserup, 1970; Alesina *et al*, 2011). What was critical in this socio-cultural setup was the complementary nature of gender roles, and supporting the idea of fluidity of gender roles depending on the circumstances. For instance, during the liberation struggle between 1966 and 1979 in Zimbabwe (also known as Chimurenga II), several women assumed masculine activities when men participated in the protracted war and were deployed to various parts of the country. Apart from this, both

young men and women were at the war front during the height of the liberation war.

According to Azuh *et al* (2017:3), “[t]he functionalist perspective sees society as a complex system and suggests that gender inequalities exist to maximize social efficiency. This approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation and broadly focuses on the social structures that shape society as a whole.” In this chapter we maintain that gender roles are dynamic social constructs which can be altered or modified according to the socio-cultural, economic, and political setting of the time. Above all, these gender roles are structured according to the cosmological view of the world by the society.

On the Origins of Gender and Division of Labour: The Stone Age Period

In this section, we explore the origins of gender and division of labour from the Stone Age to the contemporary period, demonstrating how the socio-cultural transformations among early human communities influenced engendered societal roles today. We also demonstrate the critical roles performed by women and how their activities constituted the substance of past economies. The argument in this analysis manifests through an analysis of the representations of women and the roles they played as well as the positions they occupied. We, therefore, provide these representations, and their metaphorical implications through rock art paintings and other archaeological evidence that describe the roles played by women in the early days. We adopt Wienclaw’s (2011:111) definition of gender inequality as, “the existence of disparities among individuals based solely on their gender rather than objective differences in skills, abilities, or other characteristics.” Wienclaw’s definition allows us to posit how women have been unfairly treated based on their gender.

In this section we trace the origins of gendered roles and responsibilities during the precolonial era among communities in southern Africa, with particular reference to the Zimbabwean landscape. The earliest glimpse of the socio-cultural fabric of past societies we have is rock art; which is the earliest form of record of the past, showcasing how Stone Age foragers lived and organized themselves socially and economically (Adams, 1991; Marufu, 2012; Nhamo, 2020). Whereas Stone Age culture began around 2,5 million years ago (Toth and Schick, 2005), it is only in its later phase,

that is 20,000 to 2,000 years ago, that behavioural practices of Stone Age foragers were captured in rock art. This chapter focuses on those cultural aspects of Stone Age communities focused on division of labour along gender lines and as are depicted in rock art.

Rock art showcases the socio-economic organisation of Stone Age foragers, where both men and women had responsibilities of fending for their families and the society at large. Men were depicted as hunters; they are shown wielding bows and arrows, and or carrying hunting bags (also called quivers). Women and young children, on the other hand, were depicted as gatherers of plant foods. Their toolkit included weighted digging sticks and gathering bags. These contrasting and yet complementary roles are illustrated in Plates 1 and 2. This type of division of labour ensured that both sexes took up equally important roles in the survival of the family, and or society.

Early anthropological works conducted among hunter-gatherer communities have demonstrated that gathering activities contributed more food than hunting activities (Marshall, 1976; Lee, 1979). This observation has been further strengthened by Kusimba (2003) who argues that gathered plant constituted 60% of the hunter-gatherers' diet. Elsewhere, Deacon and Deacon (1999:140) argue that gathered plant foods dominated the diet of Stone Age foragers and was the rich source of carbohydrates while hunting provided proteins and fats, mostly during periods when plant food was scarce. Despite this significance of plant food, 'it is indeed ironic that more credit and prestige is given to the less successful 'man the hunter' than to 'woman the gatherer' (Deacon and Deacon, 1999:140). All these observations demonstrate that women had important socio-economic responsibilities over their families or bands in terms of ensuring food security and social welfare of their family/group members, both young and old. It should be noted that, at this stage of cultural development, there were neither stereotypes nor discrimination of people along sex lines. This idea is also buttressed by Chitando (2011:38) where she asserts that; "In the past, women had greater leverage through their control of agriculture and indigenous spirituality," an assertion that strongly points to the idea that the role that women played and can still play cannot be underestimated or doubted.



Plate 1. Depiction of three women clad in animal skin aprons, two of whom are holding digging sticks used for plant food gathering (Site: Gwangwadza Rockshelter, Murehwa). Photo by H. Marufu



Plate 2. Depiction of hunters (all men) wielding their hunting toolkit, i.e. bows, arrows and quivers (Site: Marirangwe Rockshelter, Murehwa). Photo by H. Marufu

Depictions of gendered behavioural patterns in Stone Age rock art have greatly influenced the traditional thinking that men were hunters while women were gatherers. Whereas this thinking has some elements of truth in it regarding the structure and organisation of these Stone Age societies, it closes out possibilities of overlap in gender roles. A recent excavation at Wilamaya Patjxa in Peru, conducted by Haas *et al.* (2020) has provided concrete evidence on sexual division of labour during the Stone Age. The

archaeological research found 9,000 years old remains of a young adult female buried with what appeared like a complete set of big-game hunting gear and animal processing tools such as blades, scrapers and spear points. According to Haas *et al* (2020), this break-through research revealed that women were big-game hunters, contrary to the much-popularised male-the-hunter hypothesis. If findings of this research are anything to go by, then it can be argued that there was fluidity of division of labour among Stone Age communities, with women engaging in both gathering and hunting activities. It is important to note that both men and women were active participants and/or contributors to the subsistence economy of the time.

Technological organisation of Stone Age communities in Southern Africa, in terms of production of utility tools and objects of adornment, presents another area where sexual division of labour can be traced. Who manufactured stone tools used in hunting and gathering activities? Who manufactured objects of adornment such as beads and pendants? Was the production process an exclusively masculine activity? There is no adequate archaeological evidence to answer these questions. As such, the authors make use of the recorded ethnographic researches conducted by early anthropologists in southern Africa such as Dunn (1931), Marshall (1971), and Lee (1979) among the descendants of San hunter-gatherers and Khoikhoi herders (jointly referred to as Khoisan). According to these ethnographic studies, stone-based technologies were not a preserve of men. Dunn (1931) observed that San women in the Northern Cape during the late 19th century were skilful stone knappers, who had knowledge and experience of ‘... how to flake, hammer, pick into shape, and finish [the manufacturing process] by grinding or rubbing ...’ All this testifies that there were no exclusive roles for men and women during the Stone Age, and that different sexes would take up tasks interchangeably. Thus, women would not require men in the production of equipment used for plant food gathering, the same way men would manufacture their own hunting toolkits. Elsewhere, Marshall (1976) observed that San women in the Kalahari region were responsible for the manufacturing of objects of adornment from ostrich eggshells. This, too, indicates the importance of women in the production of non-utilitarian objects. By and large, women were not excluded from the cultural technologies of the communities they belonged to.

Gender Roles and Relations during the Iron Age Period

Gender roles and relations became more pronounced during the Iron Age period, that is, the last 2,000 years. This is a fairly known period associated with the Bantu people, from whom the majority of present societies in the subcontinent of Africa can trace their ancestry (Phillipson, 2005; Huffman, 2007). What is clear during the Iron Age period is the advancement of cultural technology, craft specialisation, establishment of economic and socio-political systems, and origin of distinct gender roles and responsibilities. The purpose of this section is to trace the historical origins of sexual division of labour during the Iron Age period. What could have triggered sexual division of labour? Why were certain roles associated with either men or women? What impact did this have on present day societies? These are some of the issues this section shall try to answer in an attempt to understand gender roles and relations during the Iron Age period.

It is argued that sexual division of labour commenced when people started practicing agriculture, specifically land tillage (Boserup, 1970; Alesina *et al*, 2011). The argument is that land tillage is labour intensive in terms of soil preparation and other associated activities, required significant body strength and high energy expenditure. According to Alesina *et al* (2011), this gives men a relative advantage over women. Given the importance of agriculture to the subsistence economy of the people during the Iron Age period, societies developed a specialisation of production along gender lines. Accordingly, 'men tended to work outside of the home in the fields, while women specialized in activities within the home' (Alesina *et al* 2011:2). Further to this, societies then considered all out-door tasks which are labour intensive not appropriate for women, hence the genesis of gendered roles and responsibilities. Other labour-intensive tasks which were considered masculine include metal working and mining activities.

The subsistence economy of the Iron Age communities was anchored on agriculture (Scarre, 2005), an indispensable economic activity that constitutes one of the four critical pillars of Zimbabwe's economy today (*National Development Strategy 1*, 2020). Due to the significant role played by men in agrarian activities during the Iron Age, they continued holding grip in other economic activities of the society, thereby subduing women. According to Alesina *et al* (2011), these cultural beliefs tend to persist even if the economy moves out of agriculture, affecting the participation of

women on activities performed outside of the home, such as market employment, entrepreneurship or participation in politics. Thus, domination of men over women in several facets of life is a social construct which is traceable to the Iron Age period. Over the past centuries, these social constructs have contributed to the creation of male-dominated societies and the attendant stereotyping of women as subjects of men.

The socio-cultural fabric of prehistoric African societies is poorly understood. This is because of the absence of written records and fluidity of orature as sources of information. However, we have rock art as the earliest form of documentation across the breadth and length of the African continent. In Zimbabwe we have a fair knowledge of these foraging communities because of dense concentration of rock art in the country, compared to other parts of the continent. Provided with such a background, it becomes important to explore depictions of these perceptions in literary texts as a way of demonstrating the role played by art in addressing societal issues. This analysis also allows us to show the interplay of literature, gender, and religion as is similarly advocated for and explored by Chitando & Chitando (2005).

Positing Religion and Literature in Addressing Women's Issues in Zimbabwe

Literary arts also play a role in addressing women's issues. We read literary arts or literature in this discussion as fictional representations of reality. In this case we argue that literary texts can be viewed as tools for addressing societal ills and challenges. We draw on p'Bitek's (1986) notion that there is no art for art's sake. We demonstrate how literary texts act to expose the challenges that women go through when they are denied a chance to show that they are also capable of executing tasks that have been traditionally known as men's. The role that women play in society has always been viewed with scepticism. Women have always been treated as second class citizens in most societies (Chirongoma, 2012). Since time immemorial, women have been fighting for recognition and acceptance of the critical roles they play in societies (Parpart, 1995). African scholars have taken a key role in advocating for women empowerment and participation. Chitando is one such scholar who has stood for the emancipation of women in almost all spheres.

According to Chitando (2013:42): “African women writers have sought to weaken the patriarchal hold by articulating women’s voices. Where previously the discipline was dominated by men’s voices and visions, they have radically altered the face of the discipline. Women’s voices and experiences have become an integral part of African literature.” Chitando’s assertion, makes it imperative to highlight the need to recognise women’s voices and experiences that have become a critical part in African literature. This is a step further in the processes of emancipating women in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole.

Our chapter demonstrates how women have emerged in various circles and how they have been perceived, especially in the Zimbabwean context. Patriarchal patterns have largely influenced the way women are treated in African societies (Maunganidze, 2020). Male dominance has always been the order of the day with women having to suffer in almost all areas of life. Educating the girl child was viewed as waste of resources as it was believed that the girl would grow up and get married and whatever she would have gained from her parents’ home would benefit the husband’s family. This resulted in the girl child being denied education, which would have served as a source of empowerment. What is ironic is how the females have always played critical roles in society, including providing food for the family as has been alluded to in the previous sections.

In Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, the reader is introduced to a young girl, Tambu, whose full name is Tambudzai. The name alludes to the pain that Tambu as a girl child is subjected to. She is denied a chance to go to school while in the rural areas and preference is given to her brother Nhamo. This shows how the girl child was denied the right to empowerment by being denied an education. At one-point Tambu narrates, “the victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn’t depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn’t depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them...” (Dangarembga, 2004:118). This emphasises how women and girls were subjected to victimisation and abuse. Our argument holds water here because we see Chitando joining the wagon of creative writers to advocate for the empowerment of women. *She No Longer Weeps*, by Dangarembga also presents Martha, a young university Law student who was impregnated out of wedlock and later suffers abuse from her boyfriend, Freddy. Striking in this play is how Freddy tells Martha, “A woman like you has no place in Zimbabwe,” (Dangarembga, 1987:9) which represents some of the patriarchal voices that could not envisage empowerment and recognition of

women in Zimbabwe. This entails that there was need for men and women to come together in the fight against male dominance.

Significant to note also is Alumenda's *Marita goes to school* (1997) that speaks to the importance of educating the girl child. Set in Zimbabwe, the story depicts a society that looked down upon girls and their emancipation but in the end, turns around to applaud Marita's achievements. In the article entitled, *Zimbabwean Women's writing and women's theology, supporting women's struggles for full rights and dignity*, Chitando & Chitando (2022) content that the struggle for Zimbabwean women's full rights is an ongoing struggle. In this case, they acknowledge the role the literary arts play in dealing with women's issues. Linked to literary arts is the role that religion plays, hence most of Chitando's scholarly contributions are centred on religion and women. This study, therefore, is an intersectional analysis of gender and religion as forming the basis of Chitando's aspirations and conceptions of a sane Zimbabwean society that acknowledges women.

It was considered a waste of time and money to send girls to school because they were only going to get married. And if Marita went to school, there would be no one to help with the work at home. With the colonial subversion of indigenous African processes and systems of knowledge generation and dissemination, the school marginalizes the 'new' and by extension, 'enlightenment' and 'development' without which the girl child would forever remain entrapped in a distorted tradition (Muhwati *et al.*, 2010:207). Through an analysis of selected children's literature texts, Muhwati *et al.*, (2010) argue that even mothers have a role to play in society as buttressed by the view that:

In the Zimbabwean literary tradition, mother characters have been cast as the foil against which male agency, superiority and athleticism have been negotiated, celebrated and entrenched. This has resulted in a scenario whereby mothers have been discursively disenfranchised and negotiated out of the nation building effort. The net result of such negative depictions has obviously been the distortion and narrowing of the gender space such that the nation has not been fully benefiting from the collective energies of all its citizens, regardless of their gender.

The assertion speaks of how women were looked down upon in the Zimbabwean context but in the selected children's literature texts, the mothers rise beyond societal prejudices and fight for their rights and that of their children as what Sekai, Takadini's mother, does in the novel, *Takadini* (Hanson, 1997).

Chitando & Chitando (2005) have also noted the existence of a sisterhood between creative writers and women theologians as they unite to fight against men who use religion, be it traditional or Christian, to oppress women. By looking at Chitando and his work, we see how these two scholars, from two different fields, have collaborated to show the linkage between that which exists in literature and theology.

Critical Reflections on Chitando's contributions to African Masculinities

The discussion will be inadequate without highlighting Chitando's major contributions towards the empowerment of women through a practice of safe masculinities, where men respect women and do not use their power to stifle women's progress. Chitando stands as an example for other male theologians, mainly because of his decisive critique of the pervasive nature of patriarchy and his call to men that they must take radical steps to bring about the desired change towards equitable gender relations. To buttress this Chitando, (2012:138) writes, "men must be challenged to have new approaches towards power. This will require rigorous analyses of the religious and cultural factors that inform aggressive masculinities." Such a position allows men to rethink and treat women in a way that will bring social transformation and development.

Significantly, an exploration of Chitando's contributions clearly articulates how his vision is encapsulated in respecting women and the notion that men play a critical role in the empowerment and recognition of women's contributions to nation-building. Critical to note is how Chitando's works have looked at key issues that affect women and among these are issues related to climate change, environmental disasters as well as pandemics (Chirongoma and Chitando, 2021). Chitando (2012:141) in discussing how women theologians have focused on HIV, women and children as the ones who are hit hardest, bemoans how "the absence of men in the discourses of HIV and theology has been counterproductive." This is a direct call to men to be actively involved in these issues so that masculinities can be transformed. In a related argument, Chirongoma, Manyonganise and Chitando, (2022) further edited a volume that focuses on issues that are at the intersection of religion, culture and women's sexual reproductive health in the context of Sustainable Development Goals. Chitando's presence in the editing of this volume bears testimony to how

he is a key player in advocating for women's agency as well as participation of men in issues affecting women.

Chitando's work challenges the notions that came with the Iron Age where men exercised much authority and dominated the societies. This meant that even patriarchy became vibrant as the males dominated most aspects of the society. Women had to, therefore, suffer the ills of patriarchy and whenever disaster struck, women had to suffer doubly as they battled with disaster as well as the patriarchal system.

Through an analysis of *Nervous Conditions*, *She No Longer Weeps* and *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Mudzi, Svongoro & Mutangadura (2021) concur with Chitando's plea for the society to accommodate women as they conclude that women should be empowered through education and entrepreneurial skills that will equip them to leave abusive relationships. In this section, we have highlighted how literature acts as a vehicle for social transformation. Literature is used as a tool that advocates for the empowerment of women. In Dangarembga's *She No Longer Weeps*, the reader is presented with Martha, a young university female student who falls pregnant out of wedlock. She goes to stay with Freddy, her boyfriend but Freddy rejects her. Her family does not accept her, as they are bound by religious and cultural norms. Martha cannot be accepted in her family if she is not married because her father is a Pastor. The Christian religion does not allow her to be at her father's house whilst carrying what they consider a bastard child. Religion in this case becomes a tool of abuse, instead of the church acting as a safe space for women (Manyonganise, 2022). The church fails to protect Martha and, in the end, she is determined to complete her degree and fend for herself. This empowerment that comes with education is what is also advocated by Chitando as he has raised and mentored women scholars so that they can speak for themselves and other marginalized women. Literature in this case plays a significant role of exposing societal ills so that society can transform and act in a manner that recognises and accepts women as important members of society who should not be discriminated against based on their gender.

In this section we have made reference to Ezra Chitando's works of advocacy towards the empowerment of women in Africa and in Zimbabwe. Chitando's works acknowledge the vulnerability of women in post-colonial Zimbabwe hence the need to protect women and children. His collaborations with women scholars go unnoticed, and this has been applauded as Chitando does not only call for women recognition but walks the talk by collaborating with female scholars not just in theology but also

in creative works and literature, (Chitando & Chitando, 2005; Chitando & Chirongoma, 2021; Zvingowanisei, Chirongoma & Chitando, 2022; Phiri & Chitando, 2023; Manyonganise, Chitando & Chirongoma, 2023).

Reading through the Intersectionality: Implications for Women's Recognition in Africa

An interpretation of our argument in this chapter points to where such contributions may take the African nations to as far as women emancipation is concerned. We have acknowledged how women hold an integral part in the society, hence the need to consider women in policy implementations and nation-building programmes. If women could do it in the precolonial society, they can do it in the modern-day age.

There is, therefore, a need to ensure that there is equal access and control of resources among men and women in order to build a balanced economy from household level up to the national level. Our argument is also lobbying for a position where women are considered as equal partners in decision making processes that affect their immediate societies and the nation at large. We recommend that legal frameworks and policy frameworks be crafted in a way that addresses the imbalances between men and women and how these imbalances can be counteracted through initiatives that target women empowerment. Finally, we recommend the need to include issues to do with gender balances in the school curriculums to ensure that children are taught to see the value in women as potential leaders and policy makers.

Conclusion

We conclude that the challenges that women face today can be dated to the early periods in the history of Zimbabwe. We have highlighted how archaeological evidence is critical in the way we deal with the challenges bedevilling women and the factors that hinder women's emancipation. Our analysis has shown how the coming of Christianity altered the way women were viewed in the precolonial society. Our analysis has provided a background that links the past and the present and we argued that Ezra Chitando has contributed immensely to the emancipation of women in

Zimbabwe and that his contributions have been acknowledged and are relevant across the globe.

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4 Religious Literacy as an Alternative Solution to Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV)

Sonene Nyawo

Abstract

This chapter is a celebration of an intellectual maestro, Professor Ezra Chitando, whose academic life has flourished and earned him well-deserved accolades. His academic odyssey has yielded knowledge generation in religion within the context of gender, sexuality, development, security, climate change, to name but a few. However, it is impossible to engage with this prolific scholar in all his publications; instead premised on the African feminist framework, and guided by the interpretative approach, this chapter explores Chitando's insights on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). I share his sentiments that SGBV is rampant and that it is a regrettable social malaise in African societies. Whilst I fully endorse his analysis of the religio-cultural landscapes that breed violence against women, my contribution in this chapter is to propose an alternative solution to SGBV. I argue that the solution does not only lie with the beneficiaries of patriarchal favors, but the victims and survivors of patriarchy. If women were to be empowered in African feminist religious literacy, they would be liberated from the dependency syndrome that elevates men, as the solution to social ills. Hence, this chapter, employing African feminist lenses, proposes liberative hermeneutics as an approach that can open the eyes of African women and girls not to blindly succumb to religio-cultural constructs that exacerbate SGBV.

Keywords: church, liberative hermeneutics, patriarchy, religious literacy, religio-cultural constructs, sexual and gender-based violence

Introduction

Why do male Church leaders seem to have limitless energy when it comes to debates on homosexuality but appear frozen when it comes to confronting SGBV?¹

Professor Ezra Chitando is not just a man of history, he is history. His greatness inheres in his masterful engagement with existential issues that Africans grapple with in their diverse life worlds. The following candid description of himself intrigues the mind:

I am an African male scholar of religion and am thus heavily implicated in the subordination of women. Patriarchy grants me many privileges that I often take for granted (Chitando, 2007).

Clearly, Chitando in his writings demonstrates that he has crossed patriarchal barriers and has become a voice that makes noise on behalf of the marginalized and ostracized. I share his sentiments on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) being rampant and that it is a regrettable social malaise in African societies. His appeal to men is very profound, that they take responsibility to end violence, which they have created in the first place. The cited question in this chapter introduction depicts his concern about male Church leaders who fail to confront issues related to SGBV but spend all their energies on less threatening social ills.

Chitando is one scholar who has written extensively on Christianity from an African perspective. He joins other African scholars that have contributed to the intellectual project by continually documenting the developments of Christianity within the African context. Studies in African Christianity trace the influence of the religion across North Africa back to the earliest days of the Christian Church. It spread along the Mediterranean and Red Sea coastlands of north and northeast Africa and their hinterlands. The African form of Christianity represents a unique contextual tradition that seeks to tell the story of Christianity in African terms. Thus, while conversion to Christianity increased with the extension of formal European colonial rule, Western education, and new economic opportunities, Africans interpreted the new faith in light of their own religious

¹ Chitando, E. & Chirongoma, S. asks this question about men's response to sexual and gender violence, together with one that goes; "why is that many of them are eloquent when it comes to challenging colonialism, but are completely speechless when the issue of sexism comes up?" See Chitando, E. & Chirongoma, S. eds., 2013. *Justice not silence: Churches facing sexual and gender-based violence*. African Sun Media.

concerns and concepts and made it their own (Spear, 2016). In the process, Western missionaries were slowly displaced by African evangelists, who helped translate the Bible, interpret it for themselves, and spread the faith far beyond the mission compounds (Walls, 2002). Chitando and other African scholars of this generation picked up the mantle and consciously strove to make religion rooted in the everyday life of Africans. Thus, some of Chitando's works address practical themes like religion and masculinities in Africa and his insights on the subject have been described as ground-breaking (John *et al*, 2013). His co-edited volume titled *Justice not Silence: Churches Facing Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV)* provides the backdrop for this chapter, as it presents the issue of justice to be at the heart of SGBV. Whilst this chapter shares similar sentiments concerning women's plight in patriarchal societies, it seeks to advance that the solution does not only lie with the Church leaders whose limitless energies are misdirected, as the article claims. Instead, the Church must adopt a new approach in its response to violence against women and pursue religious literacy. What follows is a brief exploration of Chitando's ideas, as presented in the volume, together with a few highlights from his other scholarly works, which resonate with the gist of the volume.

Selected Works of Ezra Chitando

The volume that forms the key source of Chitando's ideas for this chapter has prefatory comments by Renier Koegelenberg (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2013:7). He whets our appetite for the different authors' insights in the volume on SGBV in Churches. He declares that the Church does not pay the due attention to SGBV; instead, it gives more voice to other public issues like human rights, democratic political rights, and economic justice. Yet, in his words, "SGBV are a scourge that defies our Christian understanding of human dignity, and it challenges the Church in all its formations to respond" (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2013:7). The editors of the volume, Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, introduce it by categorically stating that SGBV is a major contributor to the spread of diseases like HIV & AIDS. Regrettably, the Church, which is supposed to be the voice of the people displays what they term "silent eloquence" on SGBV, and that the phenomenon is very striking and concerning. Instead

of taking the bull by its horns, “most Churches and theological institutions...have tended to be consumed by more ‘heavenly matters’, leaving many women and some men bleeding” (2013:9). The authors then provide a catalogue of geographical locations where SGBV is ravaging societies, and victims or survivors are mostly women and girls. The picture they paint of how proliferating this phenomenon is, reminds me of what currently happens in my own location. In response to the scourge of SGBV in Eswatini the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office commissioned a national study in 2019, which among its many objectives, was to profile perpetrators and survivors of violence to understand the problem of SGBV. The profiles of the survivors who are mostly women, has a lot in common with narratives that the editors have cited in the volume.

According to Chitando & Chirongoma, at the heart of SGBV lies the issue of justice. Thus, they give credit to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle), who have tirelessly called for justice in the face of SGBV and HIV. The editors’ observation finds support in the works of African women theologians whose insights are represented in the volume. For purposes of this discussion, I am only highlighting extracts from chapters of three (3) authors. Nyambura Njoroge, in her chapter, *Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and tell HER Story*, confirms SGBV as a major driver for HIV transmission and a barrier to HIV prevention, care support and treatment. She asserts, “it is no exaggeration to emphasize that stigma, ignorance, fear and silence with regards to SGBV rob and destroy our God-given dignity and, worst of all, kill a slow painful social death before we dig the graves” (Njoroge, 2013:23). In the same vein, Beatrice Okyere-Manu laments the high prevalence of SGBV in many homes, families, and communities, despite interventions on educational and awareness programmes to educate women and girls. She posits that victims continue to suffer in silence because “some women are threatened by the perpetrators, yet the silence serves as an encouragement to perpetrators to continue to abuse women and girls” (Okyere-Manu, 2013:35). Okyere-Manu does acknowledge that Christians have been condemning the acts of violence, but there has not been any perceptible response given that sexual abuse remains rampant. Molly Manyonganise who has written about Pentecostals’ response to GBV in this volume, also confirms the close relationship between GBV and HIV transmission saying, the high prevalence of HIV & AIDS in the Church is an indication that GBV is also rampant in the Church. Thus, she challenges societal institutions, the

Church inclusive, to rise and fight GBV, whose victims are mostly women and girls (2013:145).

The authors in 16 chapters of the volume all agree that SGBV is a scourge that has remained a challenge in many societies and is a major contributor to the spread of diseases like HIV & AIDS. Most authors do submit some solutions out of the women's ordeal, the first being the change of men's attitude towards women and girls. Other authors bank their hopes on the Church, that if it can confront SGBV through educational and theological institutions cases of SGBV can be minimized. Scholars who share similar sentiments are cited in these various articles, arguing that values of masculinity are social constructs, which concentrate power in men's hands, but can change over time as they are not absolute. Hence, the chief beneficiaries of the power system have the responsibility to end men's violence which they have created in the first place. The articles further propose an overhaul of the patriarchal system, and that the Church should play a more dominant role in teaching all people the correct behavior. Seemingly most Churches, argue the authors, have not promoted biblical principles against SGBV but condone violence and abuse against women and girls. It is regretted that the Churches have failed to come up with an agenda on advocacy against sexual and gender-based violence, and yet this silence instigates men to slaughter their wives and girlfriends with great impunity, as also noted by Amanze & Moenga (2014) in other scholarly works.

Another body of writing where we hear Chitando's voice loud and clear is in his engagement with patriarchy in which he says the Bible is the product of a patriarchal culture. In his article *Patriarchy and the Political Economy of the Biblical Culture* (2010), he presents the Bible as a product of patriarchal culture, and that biblical narratives have been exploited either intentionally or unintentionally to reinforce patriarchy, at the expense of women's dignities. However, he does declare that certain Bible passages can be used to recreate masculinities for the betterment of societies. We find similar insights in two other articles Chitando co-authored with Chirongoma entitled, *Challenging Masculinities: Religious Studies, Men and HIV in Africa* (2008) and *Introduction to Redemptive Masculinities* (2012). His passion to make religion relevant to the African soil drove him to publish his insights in *Religion and Masculinities in Africa: Opportunity for Africanization* (2013), where he argued that despite the difficulties African theologians encounter as they pursue the task of Africanization, the study of masculinities and religion presents an opportunity for Africanization.

In summary, Chitando's focus on SGBV in his works warrants an investigation of the phenomenon to provide context to our discussion.

General Observations on Sexual and Gender-based Violence

Sexual and gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies (European Institute for Gender Equality-EIGE, 2021). Notably, gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of their gender, meaning that both women and men experience it, even though most victims and survivors are women and girls. There are different interrelated approaches to this phenomenon. For instance, there is the gender perspective which tends to emphasize "patriarchy, power relations, and hierarchical constructions of masculinity and femininity as a predominant and pervasive driver of the problem" (WHO, 2010:6). According to this view, toxic masculinities driven by certain cultural norms is harmful to societies including men themselves through its promotion of physical and sexual violence, especially in the home where most violence takes place (Nyawo *et al*, 2020). In this regard, perpetrators of violence are seen as using survivors of violence as a means towards their own ends rather than treating them as ends in themselves (Birsch, 2014). To treat human beings as a means to an end is to show disrespect for them as autonomous and rational human beings. Human beings regardless of gender have a right to life, dignity, health, non-discrimination, freedom from "torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment" (WHO, 2010:6). Many African countries are a signatory to many international conventions to protect the rights of its citizens including women and children who are the most vulnerable.

Activities associated with violence are overwhelmingly shaped by understandings of gender and gender roles. Gender violence, also known as gendered violence, is the term used to denote harm inflicted upon individuals and groups that are connected to normative understandings of their gender (Bloom, 2008). As noted by Brown (2004), this connection can be in the form of cultural understandings of gender roles, both institutional and structural forces, which endorse violence based on gender and societal influences that shape violent events along gender lines. While the term is often used synonymously with 'violence against women', gendered violence affects all genders; men, women, male and female children, and gender diverse individuals, but women and girls are the most affected (Nyawo *et al*, 2020).

As observed by Abrahams (2013), one of the most common forms of violence today is perpetrated by husbands or male partners. This usually happens in private and is often ignored or goes unreported. WHO population-based surveys (2020) have revealed the following statistics about violence against women in intimate partnerships: n 13–61% reported ever having experienced physical violence by a partner; n 4–49% reported having experienced severe physical violence by a partner; n 6–59% reported sexual violence by a partner at some point in their lives; and n 20–75% reported experiencing one emotionally abusive act, or more, from a partner in their lifetime. Significant with these statistics is the high percentage of those women that experience physical violence which often leads to death. This form of violence is so prevalent because in many countries and cultures, violence against female partners is often not perceived as a crime but rather as a private family matter (Abrahams, 2013). Seeking to depict scenarios of this nature, Kampeni (2019) posits that there have been reports from various societies on how women are beaten and burned alive as a form of 'love', mostly by people who purport to love them. Girls are often forced to marry early, they suffer female infanticide, they are raped by family members and are killed in every possible way because they are born female. However, this is always kept under wraps (Kampeni, 2019). Certain religio-cultural practices are seen to either condone or promote domestic violence and abuse. They include gender specific socialization; cultural definitions of appropriate sex roles; cultural and societal values that give men proprietary rights over women and girls; notions of the family as a private sphere and under male control; and the acceptability of violence as means of solving conflict (Nyawo *et al*, 2012). Chitando's co-edited volume (2013) depicts all these observations about violence against women and girls. The Church, being one of the key social institutions, which stand at a strategic position to influence or enhance people's behavior, is challenged in this volume to respond aggressively to the widespread phenomenon. The chapter submits that the solution to SGBV goes beyond men's attitudes changing, theological institutions offering courses on SGBV, but lies with religious literacy, as the next section illustrates.

Religious Literacy on Sexuality as the Church's Response

Chitando & Chirongoma (2013:10) have asked this question; why do male Church leaders seem to have limitless energy when it comes to debates on homosexuality but appear frozen when it comes to confronting SGBV? This question leads us to assume that men can have a solution to this

monster that terrorizes mostly women and girls. However, this chapter suggests religious literacy of women as a more practical response to men's violence against women and girls. This is an alternative that the Church could pursue, which would empower silenced voices of victims and survivors of SGBV, to garner some strength to speak out and be attentively listened to. Whilst it is true that men have a responsibility to end the violence they have created in the first place, a religiously illiterate victim would not even realize that it is men that create the mess or would even justify men's actions and behaviors. Hence, it is imperative that all women (not only those who attend theological institutions) be religiously empowered through feminist hermeneutics for a transformed society to be achieved.

What is religious literacy? A concise definition of the term is provided by Moore (2015), who describes it as the ability to discern and analyze the central connections between religion and social, political, or cultural life through multiple senses. A religiously literate person will have an elementary understanding of the history, texts, beliefs, practices, and contemporary manifestations of religious traditions and how they shape socio-cultural milieus. Not only that, but the person will also possess the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place, using critical feminist lenses (Moore, 2015). A religiously literate person will therefore understand the fundamental intersections between religion and other facets of life in context, and how religion permeates and influences all these aspects. In the case of violence against women by men in African contexts where the Church has a commanding voice, it is important that Christians become religiously literate. This means that they would possess the ability to discern and understand the intersection between Christianity and socio-cultural settings, and how these are intricately interwoven to the detriment of women's dignity.

African Feminist Hermeneutics as Appropriate Lenses

The editors of the volume (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2013), along with the authors of the various articles on SGBV, have unequivocally blamed patriarchal beliefs—such as male dominance and the devaluation of women—that are systematically entrenched in all social institutions, including the Church. However, it is regrettable that the Church does not address this 'patriarchal crisis.' Amanze and Moenga, confirm the authors' observations, and have this to say about the Church's response:

“[I]nstead of speaking out against SGBV with a prophetic voice, Churches have been part of the problem themselves by consistently preaching the theology of subordination of women to men. In this way the Churches have supported the culture of violence prevalent in patriarchal structures.... Churches have failed to come up with an agenda that would show an outrage against such murders” (2014: 216).

These profound observations lead one to conclude that cultural beliefs or traditions and Christian teachings are ‘partners in the crime’, as they influence each other and propagate each other (Kabonde, 1996:213). Dreyer (2008) makes reflective statements about cultural traditions and beliefs, suggesting that they are social constructs meant to maintain balance within societies. However, traditions differ, whilst some, such as dress and eating habits, change rapidly, others change so slowly that they seem immutable. This is especially the case regarding traditions of identity, sex, language, and ethnicity, which all change gradually (Dreyer, 2008). Fixed traditions are often regarded as so fixed that they are part of the order of creation. That is, they are viewed as God-given rather than socially constructed (Clifford, 2001). For instance, the Bible would often be cited as the point of reference for repressive actions against women (Nyawo, 2014). To therefore interrogate women’s experiences in a hybrid space of patriarchy and Christianity, which upholds male superiority and dominance and suppresses female voices, one needs to draw on the principles of African feminist hermeneutics.

Feminist hermeneutics is broadly defined as a theory, art, and practice of interpretation in the interest of women, which addresses a broad realm of things, ranging from the Bible and other theological texts to human acts and products, endeavoring to challenge and correct the effects of patriarchy on them (Camp, 1993). From a theological standpoint, feminist hermeneutics enables women to engage in the critical construction of religious meaning in ways that attend to the complex whole of women’s experiences, especially experiences of struggle against dehumanization due to patriarchy (Clifford, 2001). Where texts are concerned, feminist hermeneutics, like most forms of contemporary hermeneutics, holds that the meaning perceived in a text depends on the social setting in which it was produced as well as the social setting in which it is received and handed on (Fiorenza, 1983).

Thistlethwaite (1985) affirms that scripture is behind gender-based violence like rape and battering of women, for the seeds of these lie in the

subordinate position scripture assigns to women. She cites the household codes of Ephesians and Colossians that they are a primary legitimization of wife abuse, which must be challenged. Furthermore, Genesis 2:21–24 is a mostly cited text when justifying men’s control over women’s bodies, and the general restriction of women’s rights over their own bodies (Farley, 1985). African feminist hermeneutics therefore seeks to read the Bible “with African eyes” that would help women to recognize their potential to effect positive social change, whilst developing a greater sense of their human dignity (Rakoczy, 2004:174). This can be effectively facilitated through employing feminist theological hermeneutics, which as stated in its definition, looks at whether a particular text promotes male advantage at the expense of women’s dignity or any group of people whose life has been diminished by patriarchy. As further noted by Clifford, this African feminist approach:

[I]s interested in more than raising awareness of the manifestations of patriarchy and of constructing a liberating interpretation of biblical revelation and Church teachings; it seeks to make a difference in the Christian community and civil society (2001: 37).

African feminist hermeneutics takes cognizance of culture as an indispensable variable within gender discourse in Africa and argues that culture shapes and influences the experiences of African women (Kwok, 2004; Oduyoye, 2001). As noted by Phiri (2004:17), culture is a social construct which assigns roles to women and men based on how the society understands the identities of women and men. Whilst Phiri acknowledges that culture is important because it prescribes people’s identities, she also asserts that; “unfortunately African cultures have viewed women as less important than men, thereby making it difficult for women to have valid relationships with self, others, creation and God” (2004:17). Hence, culture can provide women with a communal identity and a sense of belonging, while at the same time it can be manipulated and used as a tool of domination (Kwok, 2004). Kanyoro (2002), Oduyoye (2001), and Phiri & Nadar (2006) have theorized on the humanity of African women and how it is so intricately tied with religio-cultural and social expectations of women’s subordinate status. These are the theories that this chapter proposes the Church could use to interpret the high incidence of SGBV in the prevailing environment. As noted earlier, and confirmed by Oduyoye (1995:183), in many African societies, “it seems that sexist elements of Western culture and *Christianity* (*my emphasis*) have simply fueled the cul-

tural sexism of traditional African societies.... resulting in traditional cultures and Christianity being interconnected.” That is, there are certain sanctions and expectations imposed on women in the name of culture, and Christianity affirms and conforms to them (Asamoah-Gyadu and Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007; Kanyoro, 2001). The duo therefore becomes an inseparable pair in defining the status of women as subordinate actors of history, thus shaping the societal perceptions on violence against women. In addition, it gives men the status as heads of households and decision-makers, all of which gives them control over members of the family and control over women’s sexuality (WLSA, 2001).

The Response of the Church and the Proposed Alternative Solution

Religion is often used as a tool to shred down women’s dignity, yet one important task of people of faith is to affirm its liberating potential (Kanyoro, 2001). Religion must help people, women in particular, rediscover and reconstruct the hidden information about women in the Bible, which then positively impacts on their identity. The solution to women abuses therefore, does not necessarily lie with men, but with religious literacy through African feminist hermeneutics, where women’s experiences are viewed through a lens that promotes and celebrates their worth. Feminists argue that the Hebrew and Christian scriptures originated in a patriarchal society and reflect the androcentric traditions of their culture, thus perpetuating traditional cultural values. It is for this reason that feminists challenge patriarchal bias in the scriptures and also the patriarchal reading of the texts (Hinga, 1990). Today, feminist analyses have uncovered the detrimental effects of the patriarchal traditions on women’s self-understanding and their role in society and in the Churches (Fiorenza, 2013), whilst also unearthing the liberating elements hidden in these traditions. That is why Hinga (1990:45) when commenting about the Bible confidently makes the claim that feminist hermeneutics does not only depict the Bible as a record of God’s revelation, but also a story of human beings as they confront and are confronted by the vicissitudes of life; hence the need for feminists to reclaim the story of the Bible as a story of both women and men. The initiative by feminists therefore calls for a paradigm shift in the Church’s approach in dealing with all types of injustices against women living in the hybrid space of patriarchal culture and Christianity. The Church, as Kanyoro (2001:164) notes, is part and parcel of the subject of analysis, given that it is in the Church that the dilemma of how Africans should live as Christians and a people of a culture exists. This

dilemma often divides women, and a divided house cannot stand. There are many cultural and religious practices that women do not agree on; there are those which some women find legitimate because they give them identity and a stable base in life, whilst conversely other women find the practices harmful and oppressive, for they reduce them to mere instruments of men and culture (Kanyoro, 2001). In addressing SGBV, the Church should first target women to enable them to recognize and resist any patriarchal biases that reduce them to objects of abuse.

Women being the custodians of cultural practices, who are also highly responsive to religion, must be the frontline supporters of religious literacy. Kanyoro (2001) shares a bitter truth about Christian women in particular, that whether in the pews, or among the theologically trained, there is only a handful that is comfortable with engaging the Bible by subjecting it to the hermeneutics of critical analysis. Hence, she claims, one of the immediate tasks for women is to gain confidence to face the dilemmas that are part of their history and present. A religiously literate African woman, drawing on the feminist hermeneutic tradition, would openly confront dehumanizing cultural practices that promote violence against women. She would also be free to speak of her own experiences as either a survivor of violence or a sympathizer to victims. Women have been obliged to hide or deny the fact of violence in their lives until their partners murder them. They would not want to expose their abusive partners because they are socialized by culture and religion to always 'push things under the carpet', to protect their partners' dignity. Also, if women choose not to conform to gender stereotypes, they are made to believe that they are not only deviating from gender norms and family expectations, but defiant to God's will. As a result, many women suffer in silence rather than be exposed to the perpetrators wrath or speak out against violence. It is therefore the duty of the Church in their agenda on violence against women to create safe spaces for women to speak about issues that threaten their life and dignity.

Conclusion

Society is concerned about the unprecedented increase in cases of violence against women and girls. It is this apprehension that provoked Chitando to pen down some thoughts about SGBV. While Chitando acknowledges that the Bible originated from a patriarchal culture and that biblical

resources and religion have been used to uphold patriarchy, he believes change is possible. The challenge is how to achieve it. One potential solution is for social institutions like the Church to adopt a form of masculinity that is liberating and more rewarding (Chitando, 2010). The chapter takes this argument further to suggest that change can be realized through religious literacy. It is emphasized in all the pages of the Chitando & Chirongoma's (2013) edited volume that the Church is silent about the heinous crimes of murder, yet violence is inconsistent with the religious duty to love others and to the obligatory healthy relationship families and Christians ought to have. Abusers often cite Bible verses to justify what they regard as their right to 'discipline' their wives and children. Unfortunately, abused Christian women, remain in or return to unsafe relationships, citing religious beliefs to support avoidance of 'family break-ups' despite violence (Nyawo *et al*, 2020). Thus, whilst religious texts and teachings can be resources to assist those who have experienced abuse in finding safety and in the process of healing, they can also be misused to excuse or condone abusive behavior. As argued in the chapter, and affirmed by Fortune & Enger (2005), religious beliefs and teachings serve either as a resource or a roadblock to women's full life. Given this predicament, this chapter has attempted to advocate African feminist hermeneutics as the appropriate lens to interpret culture and religion in a way that will rescue women and girls from the claws of patriarchy, which also manifest through SGBV. In its response to this social malaise the Church should develop a program that would aim at reconditioning women's attitudes and behaviours, to an extent that they find the stories in the Bible their stories too. I fully concur with Masenya (1995:153) when she asserts that though biblical texts can be oppressive towards women, and though they have been subjected to male-biased interpretations, they contain, if read critically and creatively, liberative elements for oppressed women-including African women. Thus, for all women and girls to benefit from the liberative elements of the biblical texts, African feminist religious literacy should be taken beyond seminaries, schools and universities, to Church pulpits for easy accessibility. This is where every churchgoing woman or girl will learn how to read the Bible in the context of their lived reality (West, 1995). As argued by Masenya, this approach will help women and girls come to grips with the fact that the culture that produced the Bible is just as *kyriarchal* as the ones in which we live (1995:153), hence the need to critically analyze and reconstruct biblical texts to find contextual meaning in them.

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5 Disrupting the Waters of Patriarchy

A Critical Evaluation of the Role of Christianity in Promoting Male Hegemony and Women's Economic Disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa

Linda Naicker

Abstract

The economic disenfranchisement of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is influenced by a variety of intersecting factors that create barriers to development and full participation in the economy. Addressing these factors requires a multifaceted approach. In this chapter, I address the issue of patriarchal biblical interpretation and male hegemony. Scholars have long argued that androcentric biblical interpretations have prioritized and advanced male agendas and positions. In so doing, women's roles, perspectives, and positions in society are deliberately cast as secondary to that of men, reinforcing patriarchy. Consequently, the subordinate and subservient positions of women have become a taken for granted norm. Following a qualitative research design using interpretive analysis of the work of Ezra Chitando and African Women's Theology, I contend that androcentrism, patriarchy and dominant and toxic masculinities, sanctioned by male hegemony and biblical interpretation, play a pivotal role in the economic disenfranchisement of women in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Sub-Saharan Africa, women, economic disenfranchisement, male hegemony, patriarchal biblical interpretation

Introduction

Despite numerous advances towards gender equality in various sectors, African women continue to struggle to attain economic empowerment.¹

¹ I use the term empowerment' to indicate increased economic, political, cultural, and spiritual agency of women. In the context of this chapter, empowerment would result in capacity building which was previously denied or inhibited.

While there exist numerous intersecting factors contributing to the economic disempowerment of women, this chapter focuses on the intersections of Christianity and hegemonic masculinities in the perpetuation of disparity in economic opportunities for women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through critical analysis of the intersections of Christianity, gender, and economics, I explore the embedded mechanisms that impede women's economic growth and development. While Christianity in Africa is undoubtedly a source of inspiration and upholds important values and beliefs, it arrived on the African shores hand in glove with colonialism and exploitation. Christianity's impact on gender relations cannot be ignored and has long been the topic of many feminist/womanist scholars in Africa, the likes of Professor Ezra Chitando who notes that some biblical texts are often selectively used to justify the oppression of women (Chitando, 2004:151). Chitando (2013:4) contends that Christianity is a major force in the construction of masculinities in Africa and that patriarchal power structures are sustained and maintained in the Church. I contend that this level of ecclesial justification and complicity contributes to a myriad of stresses economically disenfranchised women experience. Taking into account that Chitando (2007a:40) advocates for the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinities in Church and society, I adopt his work on masculinities as a framework to illustrate the link between Christianity, male hegemony, and women's economic disempowerment. Drawing on insights from African Women's Theology and several of Chitando's works, this chapter expounds that given the centrality of the Christian faith in Sub-Saharan Africa, it plays a pivotal role in sustaining and maintaining patriarchal power dynamics that impinge on women's rights to full participation in societies as well as access to economic opportunities and resources. In line with Chitando's scholarship and African Women's Theology, I offer alternative interpretations that challenge the patriarchal subversion of women and promote race and gender equity and economic justice. I maintain that for women in Sub-Saharan Africa to be economically uplifted, the ideals of male power and control over women sanctioned by Christian traditions must be addressed. Biblical interpretations that are inclusive and affirming towards women must be adopted as positive ecclesial practice and ecclesial traditions must be redefined to emphasise egalitarianism, full inclusivity, and full participation of all people in Church and society.

Christianity in Africa

The 19th century is popularly known as the period in which Europeans made a scramble for Africa to acquire the most economically viable lands and resources on the continent. Along with colonization, came Christianity. Christianity was in many ways used as a pacifier to facilitate colonization and the cultural assimilation of Africans. At that time, a new pseudo philosophy emerged in Europe known as scientific racism, pseudo scientifically ranking people from the most primitive to the most evolved. This vile ideology justified European expansion into Africa under the premise that both science and nature support the conquest of Africa because Africans were deemed inferior to Europeans and superable (Schmidt, 2015). Within the context of pseudo-scientific racism, white men were regarded as the highest order in the human race and the most evolved. Next in the hierarchy was white women. Black/African men were considered far less evolved than white women but far more evolved than Black/African women. Black/African women were, therefore, at the very bottom of the hierarchy and the most socially, culturally, religiously, economically, and politically disenfranchised and exploited. According to Masondo (2018:226), Christianity was brought to Sub-Saharan Africa for it to take root so that indigenous people become “*re-formed*” in the image of the colonizers. Christian missionaries were committed to Christianity, commerce and civilization and colonization and evangelization aimed to alter the consciousness of African converts. In sum, Christianity came to Africa hand in glove with colonial oppression and domination. Resultantly, missionaries who brought the Gospel to Africa, sought first and foremost, to advance the interests and cultures of their colonial peers.

Missionary activities in the colonies promoted patriarchal interpretations of the Bible, reinforced existing power structures, and advocated for male dominance. As a result, women’s roles were considered subordinate to those of men. Driven by patriarchal ideology, nineteenth century missionaries restricted African women’s access to resources and opportunities, thereby contributing to their economic oppression (Gunda, 2023). Colluding with colonial rulers, missionaries imposed Western norms and ideologies on African women, preventing them from participating in trade, working outside the home, and having ownership of land, thus propagating, and perpetuating their economic subjugation (Montgomery, 2017).

In the twenty first century, Christianity is entrenched in Sub-Saharan Africa with not less than 60% of the population pledging allegiance to the Christian faith (Togarasei, 2012:230). In fact, Christianity is so embedded,

that even people who have not attended Church for the past ten years still identify as Christian. Moreover, even those who do not consider themselves Christian, have in some way been exposed to and even impacted by Christian teachings through the medium of schools (Togarasei, 2012:230) and other social arrangements. Resultantly, Christian morality and teachings often determine the social constructs of societies. Moreover, scholars note that race and gender-based socio-economic disparities persist, favouring male access to and control of the economy (Lesetedi, 2018:193).

Feminization of Poverty²

The economic marginalization of women is perpetuated through patriarchy and often manifested through structural and institutionalized power and domination (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016:268). Uken (2018:3) elucidates that the feminization of poverty is an indication that women are poorer than men and that women's poverty is increasing to a larger extent in comparison to poverty among men. In exploring the effects of institutionalized power on women's economic disenfranchisement, it becomes crucial to investigate how these structures of power operate and contribute to the economic exclusion of women. The socio-cultural ways in which societies are structured influences the hegemonic configuration of gender. Within patriarchal power structures, economic status is a structural dimension of power and women's poverty is a consequence of structural power imbalances. Structural inequality that manifests in women's economic oppression is as a direct result of skewed gender relations. These gender biases in turn lead to disproportionate access to resources, education, employment, income, and assets (Ortner, 2006:6). Uken (2018:25) argues that women must increasingly deal with economic destitution and disparity in environments of progressively less choice. Moreover, Uken elaborates that even though monetary poverty is the main measure of the feminization of poverty, gender privilege in terms of women's social exclusion, livelihoods, training, and capacity building must not be ignored. Gender privilege must, therefore, be a vital consideration in understanding how gender poverty and gender inequality conflate in the feminization of poverty.

² The term 'feminization of poverty' was coined by Diana Pearce in 1976. Pearce observed that women made up almost two thirds of the poor in America and that these women represented an increasingly large amount of economically disenfranchised groups. See Pearce, D. (1976). 'The feminization of Poverty: Women, Work and Welfare.' *Urban. Society Change Review* 11, 26-36.

I contend that Christianity, as it intersected with colonialism and patriarchy in Sub-Saharan Africa, both historically and in the present dispensation, to a large extent, is conspiratorial and complicit in the economic oppression and disempowerment of African women. In normalizing women's economic disempowerment through customs, practices, beliefs, and cultural affiliations, the feminization of poverty has become entrenched. Through the perpetuation of male hegemony, women's economic freedom has been trampled on because economic freedom lies in who has access to resources. Hunter (2002:101) illuminates that men's economic privilege and the patriarchal masculine discourse that surrounds it reproduces patriarchal systems of power and domination.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and many Christian denominations have embarked on programmes that positively impact the social and economic wellbeing of women. Research reveals that many Christian organizations are involved in the economic empowerment of women through providing skill enhancement programmes and other practical initiatives to increase the economic viability of women. However, in the main, resources are scant, and these initiatives do not even scratch the surface in terms of comprehensively addressing women's economic disempowerment in the region (Njoh and Akiwumi, 2012). Moreover, it is seldom that such programmes take into account the manner in which patriarchal biblical interpretation impacts the wellbeing and economic viability of women.

I argue that the Church in many ways is complicit in the economic disempowerment of women through the perpetuation of practices, traditions and teachings that valorise men and both overtly and covertly disparage women. This takes place through religious and cultural ideologies and patriarchal biblical interpretation, which produces theological incongruities that lead to women's economic disempowerment and the feminization of poverty. Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:3) confirm that religious and cultural ideologies often reinforce hegemonic masculinities, and this brand of masculinity is generally recognized as the most desirable and most powerful within a given society. Tonono (2018:5) corroborates that the oppression of women in faith-based communities is perpetuated in both overt and covert ways. Overtly, the churches ignore issues that lead to the subservient positions of women by actively promoting the status quo of male hegemony. Covertly, the patriarchal interpretations of certain biblical texts advance a narrow and archaic understanding of what a "model Christian woman" should be. This macro-system within churches and

faith communities has created enabling environments for women's social, political, cultural, religious, and economic oppression.

A compelling argument as to how such oppression inhibits women's economic growth and development can be made through an analysis of the work on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by Siyabulela Tonono. Tonono (2018:5-6) contends that through biblical interpretation, the Church upholds male superiority and employs biblical narratives such as the creation story to enforce male headship and domination of women as ordained by God. Tonono expounds that Ephesians 5 is often used as spiritual basis for entrenching women's submission in the home and in society as the natural order of things. According to Tonono, the Church propagates and perpetuates hierarchical and male hegemonic conception of women within Christianity. Tonono articulates that the Church's teachings on what the model Christian women should be is deeply flawed and often entraps women in pockets of oppression in their own homes and in society at large. Astutely, Tonono goes on to say that patriarchal churches breed patriarchal societies as the stench of patriarchy permeates society with the same vigour that it permeates the pews, entrenching itself in all areas of social interaction. Patriarchal power structures, grant credence to male power, male might, male control, male force, male aggression, and male domination as God sanctioned and sanctified by biblical texts (Tonono, 2018). Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:3) corroborate that many men in various contexts use religious texts to justify the dominance of women the world over with some even justifying this dominance on the basis that it is sacred texts that afford them the privilege of domination over women. Haddad (2002:425) affirms that the feminization of poverty is propagated through women's marginalization, which leads to the gendered nature of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. The nexus between patriarchal practices, traditions and teachings and women's economic disempowerment and the feminization of poverty is, therefore, apparent.

Ecclesial Enculturation and Ecclesial Biblical Interpretation

Ecclesial enculturation or the formation of socio-cultural/religious environments often entrench male hegemony and patriarchal conceptions of women (Naicker, 2021:181). Such environments have the propensity to facilitate social injustices against women and very often, do not consider its complicity in entrenching structural and systemic oppression. The ways in which Church traditions frame what the model Christian women should be, for example, only serves to embed gender inequality and this

in turn becomes internalized by women in Church and society. The idealization of male figures in the Bible often serve to propagate notions of male headship and male supremacy. For instance, Proverbs 31 is often cited to exemplify women's domesticity, resourcefulness, and ingenuity. While these may all be praiseworthy traits to possess, one cannot ignore the subtle and often not so subtle ways in which this text is co-opted through ecclesial enculturation to cement traditional gendered roles for women and men. The woman is relegated to the household sphere, cooking, sewing, and providing food while the husband occupies a position of leadership and authority within and outside the home. While the Proverbs 31 woman does engage in the business affairs of the family, and this is noteworthy, she is often interpreted as the one who is carrying the entire workload of ensuring her family's provision and well-being to the exclusion of any input from her husband. This notion of perfection is what brings women to the point of exhaustion and unable to cope long-term, thereby affecting their productivity in the long run. This standard for women promulgated through ecclesial enculturation promotes the idea that if a woman is unable to attain this level of resourcefulness, she is not good enough. Masenya (2004:73) notes that the text serves mainly to "keep the patriarchal status quo intact."

Employing a Bosadi (womanhood) approach, shaped by Masenya's (2004:77) own experiences in an African socio-cultural context, the forces of oppression such as racism, classism and sexism are key concepts in the interpretive process. The depiction in Proverbs 31: 10-31, argues Masenya, is not of a flesh and blood woman but of an idealized woman based on societal expectations of women. Her industry, asserts Masenya, appears to be exaggerated because no human could carry out the numerous activities ascribed to her. The text also reveals the patriarchal nature of Israelite society and the expectations held of women. For Masenya, the text is obviously written from an androcentric male perspective. An alternative interpretation, following a Bosadi approach would critique the cultural oppression of women inherent in the text and take seriously the notion that there is no free-value interpretation of biblical texts. Furthermore, the idea that those who benefit from patriarchy, racism, classism, and sexism will always strive to maintain the status quo. It is the task of those who interpret the text from a liberative perspective to critically evaluate the context of the biblical text in conjunction with the context of the present-day reader of the text (Masenya, 2004).

The Book of Ruth is another compelling example of how ecclesial enculturation propagates male hegemony and female submission and subordination. Ruth is not seen as an agential, strong leader who takes initiative and becomes the breadwinner of her family, but rather, as a docile damsel in distress, who is dependent on the good graces of a man. The idealization of Boaz through ecclesial enculturation promotes male headship and authority and the control of women by men. The valorisation of clear-cut roles for women as confined to the domestic sphere and men as strong leaders internalizes and embeds gender inequality. Many ecclesial traditions valorise this theological positionality, paving the way for the poverty and destitution of women. It is, therefore, undeniable that there exists a strong relationship between the economic disempowerment of women and ideological oppression reproduced through unequal ecclesial and societal structures and systems. Ecclesial enculturation that valorises male domination, power and might stigmatizes women and is, therefore, oppressive, life denying and incompatible with the tenets of Christianity.

Indubitably, women's economic disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa is largely because of institutionalized structural and systemic power imbalances and male hegemonic domination. African women theologians illuminate how patriarchal systems and cultural norms, and standards contribute to the economic disempowerment of women in Africa, noting that limitations within these systems restrict women's access to resources, decision making power and economic opportunities (Phiri and Nadar, 2006). Another aspect that is related to women's economic disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa is gender-based violence which is inclusive of domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexual assault. These forms of violence restrict women from full participation in economic activities and often result in physical, emotional, and mental trauma which impinges on women's economic productivity. Moreover, unequal access to educational opportunities limits women's ability to acquire knowledge and skill to participate fully in economic activities and compete in the job market (Phiri, 1997). African women theologians emphasise that inequality in land ownership for women is a major factor in the economic disempowerment of women as customary practices and legal frameworks marginalize women's rights to land, restricting their access to productive resources and economic viability and independence (Phiri and Nadar, 2006).

The ways in which ecclesia enculturates adherents, construes and disseminates theological beliefs and principles and co-opts biblical interpretation, marginalizes, and inhibits every developmental trajectory of women.

Women's situational economic distresses, therefore, must be seen in light of their socio-religious, socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic positionality in societies and must be seen as the vice that hold them in pockets of oppression. Oduyoye (2004:99) avers that the Church must be seen as a community of "men and women walking together on the journey home, with the Church as the umbrella of faith, hope and love". If the Church is steeped in androcentric and patriarchal hegemonic hierarchy, then clearly, it has not yet become "a community of men and women walking together..." as Oduyoye envisions.

For the Church to realize this level of communalism and egalitarianism, hegemonic masculinities must be challenged and deconstructed in Church and society. It is also crucial that we take seriously the efforts made by womanist theologians, activists, and communities to challenge patriarchal power dynamics within Church and society and their promotion of the full inclusion and full participation of women in the household of God and in society. Ecclesial traditions that do not foster egalitarianism and the full economic participation of women must be challenged and alternative traditions and perspectives must be advocated for. Such initiative will play a critical role in women's economic emancipation.

To achieve this, a critical theological evaluation of how women's economic disenfranchisement intersects with religion, race, culture and politics and the ways in which male hegemony contribute to women's economic disempowerment must be confronted. This inevitably involves questioning of traditional interpretations of biblical texts that reinforce gender inequalities. To challenge and dismantle structures of male hegemonic power, we must advocate for policy changes in both the ecclesial and secular spheres of life and the promotion of gender equality in the home, in education, in employment and in decision making processes. In the critical evaluation of these intersections and the development of ecclesial and theological frameworks, there must be an affirmation of the equal worth and dignity of all people, regardless of gender, thereby promoting social and economic justice for all. To that end, hegemonic masculinities in Church and society must be deconstructed and redemptive masculinities that support gender equity and address root causes of women's economic oppression must be reimagined.

Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinities in Christianity and Society

Patriarchy and male hegemony function differently depending on women's social characteristics, as it intersects with race, class, and gender

oppression (Plaatjies Van Huffel, 2011:8). Ideological hegemony as it pertains to the lived experiences of economically disenfranchised women in Sub-Saharan Africa pervades every aspect of social interaction, rendering women the most marginalized of the marginalized. Ras (2017:2-5) elucidates that the devastating effects of domination of women amounts to death dealing forces that deny them wholeness and the full human experience. This level of domination results in physical, emotional, mental, and psychological breaking of their bodies as they struggle for survival. Women's economic marginalization is located within the political, cultural, and social context of under resourced communities, entrenching the feminization of poverty and rendering women's very bodies, sites of struggle (Naicker, 2021:123). Ezra Chitando (2007:114a) illuminates that there exists a diversity and hierarchy of masculinities and hegemonic masculinities are not only dangerous but also dominant. In co-opting patriarchy in a variety of ways, Church and society has intricately constructed, sustained, and maintained structures of power that economically disenfranchise women. The theological foundations of ecclesial biblical interpretation and ecclesial enculturation, therefore, serve to underpin male dominance, creating environments in which women struggle in a myriad of ways as they are forced to occupy subservient roles, inhibiting full participation in the economy. Resultantly, gender inequality intersects with economic disparity, creating situations of economic duress for women. It is, therefore, crucial that we confront and critically examine the ways in which theological perspectives and the selective use of biblical texts justify the oppression of women within Christianity and wider society. Understanding the economic implications of such power imbalances often sanctioned by the Church is vital in dismantling the systemic barriers that hinder women's economic growth and development. Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:3) note that men have used religious and cultural resources such as tradition, doctrines, and sacred texts to maintain dominance and sustain patriarchal privilege. Chitando (2007b, 2007c) actively engages Church and society towards redemptive masculinities and advocates for both Church and society to foster environments where men are developed and encouraged to be responsible, egalitarian, and not conform to oppressive patriarchal ideologies. Chitando (2007a) goes on to say that efforts at transforming hegemonic masculinities are often hindered because of patriarchal thinking, language, and structures. Furthermore, that a transformative outlook regarding masculinities that are toxic and dangerous is more liberating and more rewarding for men and that change is

indeed possible. For the transformation of masculinities to be realized in Africa, elucidates Chitando (2007a), men must act with compassion and stand in solidarity with women. Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:28) argue that “masculinities can and do change” and that the Church and faith-based organizations must “work towards the emergence of redemptive masculinities” and the emancipation of women, children, and fellow men from all forms of oppression. Elsewhere, Chitando (2010:2) notes that biblical texts can and must be used to reconstruct liberative masculinities. African women theologians assert that concerted efforts must be made to empower women in Church and society. The calibre of education must challenge patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and traditions and promote gender equality. Moreover, women and men must disavow toxic interpretations of religious texts and traditions by reinterpreting these to affirm women’s full personhood and full participation in all aspects of social and ecclesial life. In so doing, male hegemonic power structures and the social and economic structures that perpetuate women’s disempowerment will be challenged. The key is education that is redemptive, inclusive and life affirming (Phiri and Nadar, 2006).

The Role of African Women’s Theology in the Economic Emancipation of Women

By and large, the wider Christian community is profoundly divided on the role of women in Church and society. While some uphold the full autonomy and equality of women, others assign gendered roles to women which are defined in complementarity to the roles of men. It is crucial to affirm that patriarchy and its consequences do not represent God’s purpose for women in Church and society (Pokrifka, 2016). Kanyoro & Oduyoye (2006:5) elucidate that it is the prerogative of women and men to bring reform to both church and society regarding the purpose of God in the lives of women. Telling women’s stories of struggle and faith experiences of women will force the Church to listen to the silenced voices of women thereby enriching the Church through the talents and gifts that women have to offer. Chitando argues that a willingness to engage with the Bible with an open mind has the potential to unlock life giving interpretations that challenge oppressive masculinities and discover alternative masculinities that are not harmful to women, children and subjugated men (Chitando, 2010:29).

African women theologians acknowledge and understand that interpretation of texts and traditions is never innocent and that forces such as power,

ideology and social construction of knowledge all influence interpretation. Moreover, that it is crucial that we engage in analysis that goes beyond face-value interpretations to include the ideological vices and structures of power that are designed to elevate one group through the exploitation of another. Furthermore, that the economic oppression of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is complex, and deeply rooted in social, cultural, and historic contexts. It is, therefore, crucial that we understand these specific contexts in addressing the contextual challenges faced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chitando, 2010). Critical and contextual biblical interpretations that affirm the inherent worth and equality of all people are essential. These interpretations will challenge gender roles and norms, promoting justice and inclusion (Chitando, 2017).

African Women's Theology seeks in this regard to engage and re-evaluate patriarchal interpretations and to put forward biblical and ecclesial teachings and practices that promote gender justice and women's economic empowerment through the recovery of women's voices in text and context. Through emphasising the abuse of Esther in the Book of Esther (Nadar, 2003), and the ingenuity of Ruth in the Book of Ruth (Naicker, 2021), and in other biblical texts, African women theologians highlight the presence, contributions, and violations of women in the Bible and challenge male centred interpretations that serve to economically marginalize women. Significantly, African Women's Theology acknowledges the intersectional nature of women's economic oppression and investigates how gender intersects with other social categories and women's economic disparity. Moreover, African Women's Theology proposes and provides frameworks that promote women's economic empowerment. In particular, the Bible is a key source of doing African Women's Theology. Moreover, African women theologians are concerned with reimagining and emphasizing ways of theological and biblical engagement that empowers women and promotes gender equality. The value of African Women's Theology does not only lie in its liberative outlook regarding gender and all forms of oppression but also in its potential to transform religious beliefs and practice by making issues of justice and equality key concepts in theological, biblical, and ecclesial interpretations and practices (Oduyoye, 2001c:32).

Justice and Economic Emancipation

Within African Women's Theology, justice is seen as a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses not only legal and social equality but also the idea of restoration in all areas of lived experience in the pursuit of full

human existence that is holistic, fulfilling, and complete. Within this framework of justice, the interconnectedness of individuals within their communities is foregrounded. This level of justice necessitates addressing comprehensively, the historic and current structures of injustice and advocating on behalf of those who suffer inequality and prejudice. This level of justice also promotes healing and reconciliation. Oduyoye (1995:42) states that “justice is about the restoration of relationships in such a way that peace and well-being are restored within the community”. Justice then, incorporates economic, social, political, cultural, and religious dimensions of reality. For justice to be realized, redemption and liberation must be seen as transformative processes that bring about freedom and restoration. Redemption within the African context, posits Kanyoro (2002:115), is a communal experience that demands liberation from all forms of oppression and the renewal of human dignity for all. Moreover, it demands transformation of oppressive structures and systems and the creation of a meaningful and fruitful environment in which all people, individually and collectively, enjoy safe spaces to exercise their agency and resourcefulness (Kanyoro, 2002).

Economic emancipation and justice are central concerns within the framework of African Women’s Theology. Oduyoye (1995:62) argues that women’s economic empowerment is an essential component of justice because it grants women autonomy, dignity, and equal opportunities. Oduyoye notes that economic justice for women must encompass fair monetary remuneration, access to credit, land ownership, and the eradication of discrimination in the workplace, in Church and in society. Kanyoro (2002:108) argues that women’s economic emancipation is vital for overall liberation. For such emancipation to take place, patriarchal systems wherever they appear in Church and society, must be dismantled because these are the vices that hinder women’s economic growth and development. African Women’s Theology calls for collective action and advocacy in this regard, to challenge oppressive economic structures, create opportunities for women to engage in entrepreneurship, and support women’s economic networks. Kanyoro goes on to say that without such levels of intervention, the way will not be paved for sustainable development in Africa and economic justice for women will not be realized.

Conclusion

The economic disenfranchisement of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is a complex issue and is influenced by various intersecting factors. This chapter has critically evaluated the role of Christianity in promoting male hegemony and women's economic disempowerment in the region. The chapter acknowledges the strides made by Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa to empower women economically but contends that much more can and must be done. This analysis revealed that androcentric biblical interpretations, sanctioned by male hegemony and patriarchal power structures, play a key role in perpetuating the subordination and economic discrimination of women, hindering women's access to economic opportunities and resources, and contributing to the feminization of poverty.

The Church, to a large extent, has been complicit in the economic oppression of women through the perpetuation of practices, traditions and teachings that reinforce male superiority in the Church and in society at large. Through ecclesial enculturation, the Church has aided the undermining of women's agency and valorising male domination and control of women. In addressing the economic disempowerment of women in Sub-Saharan Africa, comprehensive approaches that recognize the influence of Christianity, challenges patriarchal norms and standards, and promotes gender equity and economic justice must be imagined, reimaged, and disseminated. Through such processes, the ecclesial landscape will be transformed to promote women's economic empowerment in a comprehensive way and the creation of inclusive societies where men and women have equal access to economic opportunities will be realized.

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6 Handing over the baton

Re-examining curricula on masculinities for Africa's Youth

Susan M. Kilonzo

Abstract

This paper focuses on the responsibility of scholars in the fields of religion and theology to use their platforms to develop curricula on religion and masculinities that can educate future generations. Additionally, it interrogates how church teachings shape young boys' understanding and adoption of transformed masculinities. These two areas of focus—curricula development and church teachings—are intended to illustrate both theoretical and practical approaches. Literature in religious studies does not always demonstrate how young men and women benefit from the study of African masculinities. In churches, such training and sermons often target adults and couples, rather than youth. The key research question for this paper is: How do Christian churches and tertiary education curricula transmit knowledge of masculinities and build capacity for youth? Ezra Chitando has been instrumental in promoting scholarship on masculinities within marginalized groups, and this paper responds to his call by conducting a critical literature analysis. It explores how knowledge and understanding of masculinities are appropriated in churches and educational institutions. This chapter will exemplify ways in which these avenues can build the capacity of young men (and women) for embracing transformed masculinities and femininities.

Keywords: Chitando, Curricula, Mainstreaming, Masculinities, Masculinity Studies, Religious Studies, Youth

Introduction

In an email exchange with Prof. Masiwa Gunda, a colleague and friend, while appreciating the progress of a handbook my colleagues and I were editing, he remarked that authors are "immortal." His exact words were: "...may you find satisfaction in knowing that this contribution will not go unnoticed, and you continue to lay claim to immortality. Writers do not

die!” The works of Ezra Chitando dominate the field of religious and theological studies on the continent and beyond and will continue to do so long after many of us have physically departed this world. His contributions to the fields of religion (and theology), health, development, and masculinities are particularly remarkable. All of us involved in this volume appreciate his influence as an impeccable, resilient, exemplary, and motivating academic force—one who is kind-hearted, rare, and humble enough to lead anyone who crosses his path into the world of training, conferences, research, writing, publishing, and consultancy.

I met Ezra (as he likes to be referred to) in 2007 at an African Study of Religions (ASR) conference in Gaborone, Botswana. Then, I was a young upcoming scholar, and the world of technology was not as vibrant as it is today. He was young then. Probably in his late thirties. Although Ezra had already made a name for himself in the academy, and in the field of religious studies, this did not deter him from “walking along” with a beginner. In fact, in the year that followed, 2008, Ezra edited a book volume on: *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Theological Education: Experiences and Explorations*, where he encouraged me to contribute a chapter on *Women, Youth and Development in the Era of HIV and AIDS: Integrating Issues in the Curriculum* (Kilonzo, 2008). This was among my first key writings in the field of religion and health. In the year that followed, October 2009, he invited me to present a paper, at a training of trainers’ workshop, on: *Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in Kenyan Religious and Theological Education for Sustainable Development*, at Mukono, Uganda. In March 2010, at a convening in Cape Town, through Ezra’s invitation, I presented a paper on: *The Challenge of HIV-Healing among the Youth in the Kenyan Context*, a workshop that ignited my passion in studies around and among young people. Later in July of the same year, I presented a paper on *Pastoral counselling for Children Orphaned through HIV and AIDS*, at a Church Leaders’ workshop in Lome, Togo. Most of these conferences or workshops were funded by WCC, where Ezra was the consultant on the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA).

From the title of the presentations and publications above, a number of things are evident. They mainly center on health, women, children, adolescents or youth, curriculum review, and, theological as well as religious education. These are part of the many passions that I have observed in Ezra. He has a keen attention on vulnerable and marginalized groups and communities, and the evolution of religious and theological education in

African institutions. Further, his love for masculinity and femininity studies in the continent also attest to the passion towards vulnerabilities in the continent. In fact, in later years, Ezra was to ignite a love for masculinity studies which yielded our first co-authored article: *Towards a 'Proverbs 31 Man?' Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Masculinities in Kenya* (Chitando and Kilonzo, 2018). Later, we have co-edited and co-authored in many other areas including climate change, peacebuilding, as well as Church and political engagement - see Chitando & Kilonzo (2023), Kilonzo & Chitando (2023), Chitando, Conradie & Kilonzo (2022), and Kilonzo, Chitando & Tarusarira (2023).

This chapter is based on the intersection of Ezra's passion for the evolution of religious and theological education in the younger generation, his work in masculinity studies, and our interactions within the academy. I focus on "Handing over the baton: Christian education on masculinities to Africa's youth." The words "handing over the baton" in this chapter is multilayered. The process of handholding, influential mentorship and exposure explained above, in a sense, speaks to the "handing over". Subsequently, the meaning of handing over the baton may require us to do what Ezra has been doing with us: mentoring upcoming scholars to master the ropes in the field. Further, the term is also used to refer to the process of knowledge transfer from the "immortality of authors, through authorship" – to borrow the words of my friend and colleague Prof. Gunda. In this sense, it is to say, at the moment in the academy, we need to re-examine the curricula of masculinities, not just in religious and theological studies, but other fields, since masculinities is an inter- trans- and multi-disciplinary area. Special attention should be paid to the area of youth and masculinities and inbuild our observations on what we perceive to be of relevance for the present young generation. This will in many ways be important in the years to come, when the current young generation will be reviewing the curricula for the benefit of yet another generation to facilitate another process of passing over the baton. Beyond scholarship, are the spaces and institutions within our communities, and how education and training around masculinities is tailored and *passed on/handed over* to the youth. This may be through religious spaces or any other educational spaces in the community.

The chapter glosses over a few examples of what is offered in African institutions, in the area of youth and masculinities. It also reflects on existing literature on religious spaces and how content related to masculinities

is packaged for sermons or training. The first section of the chapter presents a theoretical overview of youth, religion, and masculinities in Africa; the second is on religious and theological curricula and masculinities with specific scrutiny and focus on youth; the final highlights how religious spaces, especially churches, handle training/teaching on issues around masculinities among the youth.

Masculinities, as Uchendu (2008) and Togarasei (2007) show, are society specific. The society accepts certain things as features associated with the male gender and expression of maleness, validating a sense of male, boy or men (Uchendu, 2008:3, Whitehead, 2003:4). In fact, Meischer and Lindsay (2003:4) explain that "... masculinity is, a cluster of norms, values and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others," while Connell (2000:12) shows that "masculinities are neither programmed in our genes, nor fixed by social structures, prior to social interaction. They are actively produced, using the resources and strategies available in a given social setting." If this is the case, within the African context, and in the curricula of education, there is an avenue to mainstream these studies for a better understanding among the young generations. This is because, as the section below will show, one of the challenging confrontations facing the youth in the 21st Century is that of Information Technology.

Youth, Religion and Masculinities in Africa

Although scholarly arguments point towards malleability and fluidity of the term youth, depending on various factors including cultures, geographical regions, and economic stability of youthful population, the African Union categorize youth as persons between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five (AUC, 2006:11). In almost all African countries, this is the bulk of the population, and has in various ways been termed as a time-bomb, because they are energetic and mostly without matching workload to occupy them for positive productivity (Abbink, 2005). Abbink argues that although the youth in Africa face tremendous odds in the continent, they do not seem to have their future figured out, and subsequently, as Jaji (2020) shows, they have to depend on the older generation, especially politically stable adults.

It is also important to show that the present generation of youth are growing up in an interesting epoch – the era of technology. In this 4th wave of revolution, everything, for the young generation, seems to revolve around Information Technology (IT). In the recent past, there has been a lot of

focus on what this wave of revolution is doing in religious circles. The observable changes have even been catalyzed by the recent experiences of pandemics, and especially the COVID-19 period, where the “how, where, what and by whom” of religion and religious teachings largely moved to mainstream and social media (Sibanda, Muyambo and Chitando, 2022; Kilonzo and Omwalo, 2021; Parsitau, 2020). What does this era, therefore mean, in the context of youth and masculinities in the continent. It is true that most of what the youth garner now, is from social media. Statistics show how most of them own smartphones that enable them to access the Internet, and social media, whether they are in rural or urban areas. Further, as scholars have argued, the profound effect of coming together of the contemporary media technologies such as mobile phones, computers and the Internet in production of content for public consumption, has a decisive and simultaneous impact on the calibration of African public sphere and reconfiguring of audiences (Tsarwe and Chiumbu, 2023:1). This therefore implies that the youth, in the era they are growing up, only need access to gadgets and the Internet, and they grow wings to fly in whatever direction, good or bad. On the African continent, this has its own challenges, given that the structures provide limited opportunities for growth, and that development of the young people is stifled in many ways by the politics of nations, where gerontocratic politics assumes that it is the old generation that is, and should be wealthy (Jaji, 2020). It is this form of masculinity that the youth have been forced to believe is the norm. They have therefore, in the words of Jaji (2020:79):

...been co-opted into political spaces through incentives and coercion. They submit to older men in politics, sustaining a gerontocratic system that marginalizes them from political spaces and leadership positions... those that perform a masculinity challenge to this political norm by labeling the old politicians as lacking wisdom, foresight and relevance, encourage a counteraction that pits the young against the old.

Although Jaji (2020) discusses this kind of masculinity relations between the youth and the old in the perspective of politics, it is a trend that seems to apply in every sphere of life. Such is demeaning to the youth, and they, therefore, must invent ways of breaking the barriers. One of the tools that the youth have then resorted to is Information Technology, and through social media, they are able not just to know what they want without the help of older generations, but to break geographical barriers and apply

their masculinities and femininities in ways that are either useful or harmful to them and society.¹

In a book entitled *Dying to be men: youth masculinities and social exclusion*, Baker (2005:9-14) provides several reasons why it is important to focus on men. His arguments centre around “first time everything” – penetrative sex, intimate relationships, first jobs, earning, crossing into adulthood, taking on complex and demanding roles, becoming aware of realities of life, among other “firsts”. These “firsts” require some form of help and guidance, and as such, the need to deconstruct ways in which hegemonic masculinities in most African communities have handled such issues. African societies have predetermined characteristics of what constitutes a man, and thus masculinities. These are associated with aggressiveness, intelligence, assertiveness, and power (Uchendu, 2008:4). However, these characteristics seem to be transforming, since masculinity, like other related concepts, is not static. Togarasei (2012:150) captures how hegemonic masculinity has been transforming by noting that:

Like culture, hegemonic masculinity is not static. It is dynamic as it is affected by cultural changes in society. This can clearly be exemplified in the African context where, prior to the coming of the missionaries and the imperialists, traditional African masculinity was defined by specific behaviour patterns that underwent a major revolution with the coming of Western civilisation. Independence and, in particular, globalisation have also changed the definition of a real man. In our globalised world, hegemonic masculinity is affected not only by the changing local culture but also by the changing global culture.

Subsequently, an understanding of the histories and specificities of these forms of masculinities may help in the deconstruction of the same if African cultures are to operate within a healthy masculinity and femininity environment. One of the ways in which such histories can be discovered is by ensuring that educational programmes take into account a proper representation of masculinities studies.

¹ See the discussion by Kilonzo 2023 - on ways in which the youth use social media to engage in global terrorism and other harmful activities, but also how this medium has been used to help them rethink their actions.

Youth, Educational Programmes and Masculinities

The youth is a population that is mainly in school, dependent, and/or seeking employment opportunities. AU (2006:9) identifies the various needs of these youth as education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women and youth participating in decision-making, challenge of HIV & AIDS high rates of infection, in need of ICT skills, Inter-generational dialogue gaps, among many others. While most of these factors focus on health and economics, the religious/spiritual and cultural perspectives that breed gaps between men and women, girls and boys, and in the context of family differences in parental responsibilities are hardly mentioned. In fact, what most of the policy documents do not tell us is what the problem is, with the structures in Africa, that do not provide a basis for the youth to prosper in a wide range of areas. Further, what is not discussed is how the political structures alienate and divisively create typologies of the population – men and women, youth (young men and young women), the poor and the rich, educated, and uneducated, et cetera, and how these influence ways in which development in various sectors, function. On the latter - education- the need for universality is blanketed, and hardly is there aggregational reporting of what is taught to who, by who, for what purpose, and to what end. Around this question is the field of masculinity and femininity studies.

There is evidence that points towards how the youth are marginalized in state policies and at the same time have weak legal positioning. Subsequently, they, especially young men, are over-represented in insurgent movements and criminal activities. This may be a resultant effect of not just the earlier mentioned challenges, but also what Alcinda Honwana (2012) describes as hurdles of “waithood.” Honwana (2012:3) shows the predicament of the youth who are “in waithood” (more on this term, also see Dhillon and Yousef, 2009). Honwana writes:

After they leave school with few skills they [youth] are unable to obtain work and become independent—to build, buy, or rent a house for themselves, support their relatives, get married, establish families, and gain social recognition as adults. These attributes of adulthood are becoming increasingly unattainable by the majority of young people in Africa. They are forced to live in a liminal, neither-here-nor-there state; they are no longer children who require care, yet they are not yet considered mature social adults.

In the context of African cultures, this speaks to the need to achieve certain statuses, and if we speak to masculinities within African communities, this does not go unnoticed among the youth. This is tied to inequalities and dependencies that result from age differences. Age acts as a social distinction and power marker (Abbink, 2005:11-2), yet gender aspects are also a contributory factor, especially in economies that are still struggling to ensure equality and equity. What do these challenges, therefore, imply in an education system? What is the current focus of most curricula in diverse countries in Africa? How can the current focus help us engage in productive discussions in the area of masculinities as we forge a way forward for handing over the baton to the next generations? How can we help the youth to move forth and not fall back into a bleak future of a generation without hope, skills, and ability to mentor others?

The educational programmes, in most institutions especially tertiary levels, target the needs flagged by countries for economic growth. In fact, in the recent past, most institutions in Africa are in a move towards curriculum review that has seen shedding off, of most Arts and Humanities courses in favor of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). In Kenya for instance, the Ministry of Education has been rallying around to consolidate education under certain specific subjects that are in favor of economic, and not social growth. Lately, the endeavor has been to encourage learners to move towards pure and applied sciences, and probably the humanities, with Arts receiving least attention. Students qualifying to pursue Bachelor of Arts (BA) in public universities in Kenya and probably other universities in other African countries, either change or try to change their courses from BA to Bachelor of Science (BSc.) or Bachelor of Education (BEd). This is a common practice, as certain programs are not considered marketable. As a result, introducing courses that address social issues, such as masculinities and femininities, becomes challenging. The common approach has been to integrate these topics into larger programs and courses, such as religious studies, gender studies, and other sociological disciplines. This chapter will provide examples of how this is done and demonstrate how these topics are structured. Additionally, it will explore how these concepts and their content are presented in religious spaces, such as churches. Although the field of masculinities (and femininities) has received quite a lot of attention in the recent past (Togarasei, 2007; Chitando, 2020; and Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023), seemingly, there are few (if any) courses that specifically focus on these important fields and concepts, especially given that they

are still evolving. As a socially constructed and fluid term, the study of masculinities (and femininities) should be given a lot more attention. This is especially so because those still in tertiary levels are youth. They need to benefit from the changing dynamics of these concepts and applicability of the same in their communities.

The histories and contexts of the notion of masculinity in the continent remains relevant, especially if the younger generations are to understand the transformation of the field. Uchendu (2008) for instance shows the need to dig into history and show how roles of men and women in ancient Africa continues to define the kind of masculinities that exist to date. Through the present patriarchal and matriarchal societies, the current generations can walk back to the past and decode the present happenings through historical retrospection. For instance, Uchendu (2008:5) shows that the focus on invention of building, writing, and record keeping of ancient Egypt was by boys and men, suggesting that the history of the country was (and still is to a great extent) male-dominated in many spheres of public life. In other countries, before the advent of colonialism, women led in many fronts, including trade (Kilonzo and Akallah, 2020). These histories remain relevant if there is to be a progressive deconstruction of negative masculinities. Although current curricula in gender studies may carry some aspects of these histories, it may be necessary to have purely masculinity and femininity studies within the curricula that does not just gloss over, but provide in-depth understanding of the fields, which may help shape future generations.

It is simply baffling that all masculinity and femininity studies are lumped under gender programmes. A quick Internet search shows that there are virtually no curricula or programmes that exists, especially in African institutions that are purely focused on masculinity and femininity studies. Even those that are available from institutions abroad, aspects of masculinity and femininity studies are either given one topic, or are ignored, and may find mention as the course delivery progresses. I came across a PhD program in Gender Studies offered online by an international institution. The program appears to be research-focused, with no coursework requirements. It welcomes research proposals in areas such as critical gender and development, critical mental health, feminist political theory, gender and culture, gender and development, gender and reproduction, gender and sexuality in comparative literature, gender and sexuality in writing and media, gender, sexuality and religion, intersectionality studies, queer ecologies, queer theoretical approaches to the study of religion, queer theory,

and sex work politics and policies, among other topics. Notably, there is no focus on masculinity. This suggests either a lack of awareness or an assumption that masculinity is implicitly addressed within these fields.

This trend mirrors that observed in gender programs and courses at African institutions, at least based on what is available online. A sample of Master's and PhD programs from a renowned public university in East Africa includes the following courses for the MA program: Concepts in Gender Analysis; Integrating Women & Gender Mainstreaming; Gender, Social Change and Sustainable Human Development; Social Science Research Methods; Theoretical Approaches in Gender Discourse; Education and Training of Women; Media, Literary Works and Gender; Gender Violence and Conflict Resolution; Gender and Employment; Gender Issues in Agrarian Development; Religion and Gender; Gender and Law; Democracy, Political Participation & Gender; Gender, Language and Socialization; Changing Gender Roles and Relations; Gender and Poverty Reduction Strategies; Gender and Reproductive Health; Gender and Technology Transfer; Gender Issues in Cross-Cultural Studies; Gender and Urban Development; Gender & Global Communication Networks; and Gender & Natural Resources Management. The program also includes a Research Project.

The PhD programme from the same university had the following content: Theoretical Discourses in Gender Studies, Advanced Research Methods in Gender Studies, Data Analysis in Gender & Development Seminar, Gender Analysis in Practice Seminar, Gender in Development Practice, Contemporary Issues in Gender & Development Studies, Research Proposal Development Seminar, Scientific Writing and Publication Seminar. So given such content, and with the advancement in the study of masculinities (and femininities) in Africa, and across the globe, when is in-depth content in the area taught? There seemingly is no place for it in the existing curricula.

The field of masculinities (and femininities) extends beyond the social sciences into various other disciplines. In the natural sciences, biology is a notable example. In applied sciences, such as agriculture, engineering, medicine, and epidemiology, this field is also crucial. In the social sciences, masculinities are prominent across nearly all subjects and pro-

grams, including sociology, religious and theological studies, conflict resolution, and political science.² Hopkins (2006) demonstrates that research on the geographies of masculinities addresses a broad range of concerns related to men's everyday lives, masculine identities, and gendered performances. Consequently, masculinity studies appear as an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary field. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the field's significance and relevance across these disciplines. Structuring curricula to reflect this field and its interconnections with other disciplines is both logical and beneficial.

The chapter shows why it is important to focus on the youth and emphasizes the relevance of their "first" experiences. This implies that the curricula should not just start when the boys (and girls in the case of femininities) are men. As boys mature into men, they require handholding. To illustrate this point, I borrow the discussions by Jaji (2020:80), who juxtaposes what she sees in the Zimbabwean present politics to what existed in traditional society. She notes that, masculinity as an acquired rather than intrinsic trait, in Zimbabwe, for communities that did not circumcise boys and girls, was learned through training in spaces called *dare* in shona language.³ Here, unlike in the current political system, hierarchy had a patriarchal and reciprocal logic based on a *quid pro quo* relationship, which seemed to be socially and culturally sustainable. Passing on the baton was important if positive masculinity had to make sense in cultural social relations. Perhaps the curriculum for masculinity (and femininity) should be introduced at the secondary school level. This is important because it is during this stage that boys and girls are still in their adolescent years. By doing so, the transition and content development will be more logical as students' progress to tertiary education.

In the current generation, the loss of traditional structures, and the meaning they had in communities, begs the question of how presently, young people who are socially excluded negotiate alternative versions of masculinities and femininities. We then worry about: What is included in the curricula? What do studies/literature show? And how does the era of technology influence young people's engagement in the area. Although the chapter might not provide sufficient answers to these questions, our goal as scholars is to find ways in which we can balance these different aspects

² See discussions by Baker, 2005; and on the involvement of men and women in peacebuilding, see (Kilonzo, 2021).

³ See also (Togarasei, 2007:152).

as we think of befitting curricula for the current generation of youth, and ways in which we can use the available tools and technologies to pass on the baton in appropriate ways. Young men need to understand, through the education system, ways in which they can acquire independence outside of the traditional system that continues to wear out from the effects of globalization (Chitando, 2020; Lindsay, 2003; Gilmore, 1990). In programmes like political science a course on masculinities and politics would for instance generate examples in the continent on how young men have prospered in politics, using case studies from different countries, thus debunking the notion that it is only the “aged” who have the right to vie for elected positions. Similarly, in Commerce and Business studies, a course on femininities would help young women benefit from an exploration of how young upcoming entrepreneurs are breaking the glass ceiling to make a name for themselves, debunking the notion that only a certain cadre of men and women can be successful entrepreneurs. In Migration and Transnational studies, masculinities have been shown to be a significant field, and experience, for men whose identities are being re-configured in new territories, and therefore must find ways of fitting within new workspaces, communities and families. Some individuals face the difficulty and challenge of witnessing their women become breadwinners, which challenges traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity (Chitando, 2020; Kulkarni, 2019). This situation forces men to negotiate new forms of masculinity (Pasura and Christou, 2018; Igonya and Moyer, 2013) and addresses how HIV infections transform family dynamics (Chitando, 2007; van Klinken, 2011). Additionally, the transformation of masculinities in the context of secularization is another area where curricula need to focus. The “Whole Man” ethos as perceived in the YMCA, as Wignall (2016:302) shows,

...has been watered down, partly in response to a wider secularisation of social life in Europe and America, and partly due to the YMCA's original ecumenical goals of outreach and engagement. In this context, for the modern YMCA the Whole Man has morphed into more-generic forms of holistic development, losing its Christian foundation and becoming a transferable set of skills, habits, attributes, and virtues encapsulated in their Mind, Body, Spirit motto.

How can these transitions, transformations, and development of the field of masculinities be conceived by the youth in Africa, if not through comprehensive curricula that speaks to the field.

In the field of Religion and Theology, there is considerable scope for programs or courses specifically focused on religion and masculinities (Chitando, 2013; Chitando and Kilonzo, 2010; Chitando, 2023). For example, within the study of African religions, numerous contributions have highlighted that there is still much to learn about masculinities. This area could be one of the most promising for developing religious courses or programs on masculinities. Recently, a publication edited by Chitando, Chirongoma, & Nyakudya (2023) explored the concept of "Chihera" in Zimbabwe, aiming to deepen our understanding of the resilience and strength of women in Zimbabwe and Africa more broadly. In the introductory chapter, Chitando, Chirongoma, & Nyakudya (2023:2) explain that "chihera embodies the idea of African women's emancipation in African idiom, unsettling those who seek to maintain gender oppression." Although this chapter focuses on women rather than masculinity studies, it illustrates the potential for learning and teaching about masculinities if appropriate programs and courses are developed. Many such concepts and idioms remain unexplored and are not taught to young people, either within formal school curricula or informal settings like religious spaces. The section below provides examples of how religious teachings and programs address the topic of masculinities.

Religious Spaces and Masculinity Education

The Pew Research Centre (2018) shows that younger adults tend to be less religious than older adults. This implies that they may not attend services regularly as the older adults. Although this is a general observation, there might be variances across the continents. The Pew Research Centre (2018) shows that in Africa, 17 out of the 21 countries surveyed showed that there is not much significant difference between older and younger adults in terms of relevance/importance of religion in their lives. This is an indication that in some parts of the world, youth may take religion seriously. Other studies have shown that, in order for the youth to find attraction in attending church services and training, these have to be specially packaged and attention given to things that attract their attention, such as camps, sports, technology, among others (Bottingnoles, 1984; Kilonzo & Omwalo, 2021).

The Bible and other religious texts have been extensively used in training on masculinity and femininity within religious contexts. These texts are interpreted and applied to illustrate various situations and contexts related

to these concepts. For example, Chitando & Kilonzo (2018) reversed Proverbs 31:10-31, which describes a virtuous woman who is hardworking and dedicated to providing for and caring for her family, into "Proverbs 31 man." Their aim was to highlight how Pentecostal preachers in Kenya portray a hardworking man. They argue that, in Pentecostal churches, where male religious leaders are esteemed as "big men" and treated with great respect, male followers are similarly tasked with the responsibility of caring for their families. Chitando & Kilonzo (2018:67) explain,

...masculinity, based on this model, constitutes both a promise and a threat. On the side of promise, the young Pentecostal man seeks to overcome the so-called "crisis of masculinity," namely, men falling behind women in academic, family and other endeavours in life. To this extent, therefore, men are mobilised to strive to achieve in the various pursuits of life. Pentecostal preachers seek to move men out of their comfort zones and to become the heads that certain interpretations of the Bible uphold.

This pushes men towards hegemonic masculinities where they are trained to take charge, be leaders in their echelons, and providers for their families. This, as Chitando & Kilonzo (2018) show, reaffirm the model of man as the "breadwinner". They argue that the "Proverbs 31 man" pushes a man to be hard working, and like his partner, the Proverbs 31 woman, the "Proverbs 31 man" is exceedingly industrious. He is not limited by the diminishing economic opportunities, because he is a child of God. The young men are therefore challenged to adopt more life-giving masculinities, thereby re-inventing the narrative of Proverbs 31 woman, to centre on Proverbs 31 man, while emphasizing transformative masculinities.⁴

In similar accounts, in a book edited by Chitando & Nyambura (2013), the authors provide short write-ups that explore the many facets and roles of men in both public and private spheres through various biblical texts. These brief accounts draw from Bible stories, excerpts, and experiences. For example, Chitando (2013) describes Zacchaeus as "although short, not a short-sighted man," while Chitando, Klagba, & Lusey (2013) discuss "Joseph: A man who challenged popular interpretations of masculinity." Zengele (2013) presents a text on "Jesus who dealt justly with women." These narratives, which are common not only in churches but also in other religious spaces, including faith-based organizations, can serve as

⁴ For more on transformative masculinities see van Klinken 2012.

educational tools in deconstructing toxic masculinities in churches and community group meetings.

Wignall (2016) studies the Gambian youth through the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) in which he depicts the leader of the association as an astute male leader, who does not want to show any weaknesses to the young men, thus setting an example of an “African male leader,” devoid of fear. He implies a *machoman* character that some community organization may wish youth to develop in order to face the challenges ahead. Wignall (2016:293) exemplifies the need for Faith Based Organizations in training youth on masculinities. He notes:

Starting in nineteenth-century London as a series of prayer groups for young men, the YMCA grew in tandem with a late nineteenth-century Evangelical revival that focused on a disciplining of young men’s leisure time and activities. Part of this movement was known as ‘Muscular Christianity’, and encouraged men to holistically self-transform their bodies, minds, and spirits. At the YMCA, this became a model of ideal masculinity known as ‘The Whole Man’, embodied by YMCA leaders and enshrined in their ‘red triangle’ emblem that is still used today.

Wignall’s work therefore argues that studies on NGOs and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and masculinities can contribute to the important discussions on “waithood” (Honwana, 2012) and the difficulties that presently face young men in attaining adulthood. Wignall (2016) shows the importance of the involvement of these organizations in the lives of the youth as they grapple with adapting to new avenues and opportunities that allow them transit towards taking up new roles in their contexts. Such opportunities allow for access to aid funds and formation of new networks that help towards the empowerment of these young people. This then means a need to re-examine masculinity studies and training from the perspective of dynamics of institutions and unions; and not just personality of individuals or families (Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 2004:153), since these organizations seem to have a say in how the notion of masculinity is transformed. This finds emphasis in some Pentecostal sermons as the section below shows.

While centering on sermons by Dr. Joshua Banda, a prominent preacher in the North Mead Assembly of God (NAOG), van Klinken highlights that this Pentecostal church uses the mission statement “Men of Truth” as a political tool in the area of masculinities. This is in an effort to effect change in the various engagements of men, not just in the family but also

the nation (2016:130). van Klinken argues that with such a mission, the Pentecostal discourse on masculinity is not only about men's domestic and intimate roles but also their public contributions. He uses the sermons to analyze gender dimensions of Pentecostalism, and through a series of teachings titled "Fatherhood in the 21st Century", van Klinken exemplifies the usefulness of narratives, delivered through a "performative path," in setting people into motion (van Klinken 2016:135; Tomlison 2014:6 as cited by van Klinken). The preacher, using this approach, in a sermon on the position of Adam, encourages men to "break from the past" to build a better future... a future marked by a second liberated Adam, not the first, who is sinful (van Klinken 2016:143-144). The point to be made here, in the context of teachings/training on masculinities, within religious spaces is that, if sermons can be used to build positive masculinities, that enable young men to move away from hegemonic masculinities, there is much more to learn, and cross-fertilize within the religious spaces and formal academic programmes that are devoid of such texts. In such teachings, close attention should also be paid to the youth, especially those who are in "waithood", and may not be married, or those yet to establish themselves as young adults.

To strengthen the work of religious leaders, in the recent past, quite a number of tools have been developed not just in the area of masculinities but also on issues that affect masculinities. The INERELA+ SAVE tool kit, a tool for training trainers, is designed for religious leaders to engage their communities to help those living with or are affected by HIV & AIDS. This tool kit has been in use for a while and was recently (2022) revised to take into account the advancing arguments and contexts, such as Information Technology, and, pandemics.⁵ Others include Religious Leaders Toolkit on Adolescent, Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (ASRHR).⁶ and Interfaith Brief on SRHR.⁷ All these resources are rarely considered when structuring training curricula in tertiary institutions, despite being rich with experiences. The need for cross-fertilization of ideas and the use of existing resources cannot be overstated.

⁵ See <https://inerela.org/save-toolkit/>, accessed 15 July 2023.

⁶ See <https://inerela.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Religious-Leaders-Toolkit-ASRHR.pdf>, accessed 15 July 2023.

⁷ See <https://fp2030.org/sites/default/files/Our-Work/Advocacy-cso/Interfaith-Brief-Sexual-Reproductiv-Health-Rights.pdf>, accessed 15 July 2023.

Conclusion

Towards a comprehensive Masculinity (and Femininity) Curricula

This chapter concludes that Masculinity studies is without doubt a multi-disciplinary, trans-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary field. This is evident in the latest editorial works. Examples are seen in the wide range of topics in edited volumes that take a global perspective. For instance, an edited volume by Kulkarni (2019) on “Global Masculinities” explores a wide range of topics, including: violence against women, gender identities at work, conflict prevention, social norms, social structure and law, male initiation rites and culture of politics, interpersonal neurobiology and gender based violence, faith and gender-based violence, involving men in sharing of contraceptive burden, role of men in childbirth, promoting new forms of fatherhood, migrating men and gender roles exchange, men’s healthcare and gender equity, among other topics. This is just one volume which exemplifies the multi-disciplinarity of masculinities studies, and which forces us to move beyond boxing the study of masculinities and femininities under gender studies as it has been the norm in many institutions.

There is an urgent need to structure comprehensive masculinity curricula, in the different fields. The tailoring of such curricula as already noted should separate these studies from the already existing programs such as Gender, Sociology, Political Science, Geography, and the rest, and pay attention to either stand-alone programs on masculinity, or independent courses on the same. In this way, it would be easy to link the content of the courses with other fields to show the interconnectedness between or among the fields, without losing the gist of the course. If this is not done, we will never get to fully appreciate the field of masculinity (and femininity) studies in African institutions, and elsewhere.

In religious and community spaces, like churches and community organizations, it would help to offer training and capacity building services on masculinities that are particular to boys and young men. The blanket cover of masculinities, and especially what is thought to be transformational trainings offered to adult men, may not benefit the younger generations. Leaders in these spaces should therefore be deliberate in structuring their training sessions or sermons. Such an approach will help pass on the right content to the youth while ensuring a transformed generation.

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7 'Men must cry like Jesus'

Discoursing Ezra Chitando's call for redeemed and redemptive masculinities

Excellent Chireshe

Abstract

The paper seeks to analyse the views of Ezra Chitando on African masculinities in the context of 'crying', a theme in one of his writings. The aim is to rally readers behind the notion that harmful ways of being a man, often justified on religious and cultural grounds, can be transformed. As a man, Chitando inspires other men to adopt masculinities that promote the health and wellbeing of all by calling upon them to 'cry' because crying is the essence of being human. A 'crying' man is an embodiment of all that repels violence in all its manifestations. Through a number of publications, as well as his support for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Chitando demonstrates that seeking gender justice is the responsibility of both men and women. Being aware of the role of socialisation in the internalisation of social norms and values, as well as character formation, he suggests a change in the 'social curriculum.' Although men must and can change, this is slow to take effect because of entrenched religious and cultural beliefs and norms. However, the collective efforts of men and women will gradually lead to a paradigm shift, wherein dangerous, hegemonic masculinities give way to redeemed and redemptive masculinities. While the springboard of the discussion shall be his analysis of the book *'When a man cries'* (by Siphiwo Mahala), his other writings and those of like-minded scholars and theologians are going to be taken on board.

Keywords: African masculinities, Ezra Chitando, Gender justice, Hegemonic masculinities, Redemptive masculinities, When a man cries

Introduction

The subject of men and masculinities, which is at the heart of this chapter, has captured the interest of researchers, especially those in the humanities and social sciences. The interest in men and masculinities has been

reinforced by gender-based violence and HIV & AIDS (Togarasei, 2012b). There is a plethora of research and data on the subject (for example, Chitando, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012; Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012; Dube, 2012a, 2012b; Nadar, 2012; Oduyoye, 2006; Togarasei, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). This chapter focuses on Ezra Chitando and his desire to transform dangerous, hegemonic masculinities. Although there is some documentation on Chitando and his call for men to embrace redemptive masculinities (for example, John, Siwila & Settler, 2013), it appears not much has been documented (about him) in relation to masculinity and the notion of crying. Furthermore, since Chitando is a champion of gender justice, it is necessary to contribute to the body of knowledge on his views, with a view to influencing readers, particularly those who support and live out hegemonic, dangerous masculinities, to transform. To navigate the subject, the chapter will be organized as follows: definition and description of masculinity, a note on Ezra Chitando (one of the people at the centre of the masculinity discourse in Africa), conceptualisation of 'crying' and Chitando's quest to transform masculinities, the role of social institutions and individuals, and a conclusion which wraps up the chapter. The next section unpacks the notion of masculinity.

Conceptualising Masculinity

Dube (2012:334) says masculinity is the 'construction of male identities which is a process which changes with time, and varies according to different classes, ages, places, races, and groups.' Togarasei (2012a:231) defines masculinity as a 'set of behavioural patterns that men ought to follow in each given society'. Thus, it is the qualities considered as normative for a man in a given society. To be regarded as truly masculine, one has to engage in certain activities and eschew others (Ratele, 2008). As Dube (2012:334) argues, there will be normative and less normative masculinities in any given society. Similarly, in every society, there is a masculinity that dominates women and other masculinities (hegemonic masculinity) (Togarasei, 2012b). In light of the definitions and descriptions provided, masculinity is socially, politically, and culturally constructed (see Togarasei, 2013:2). Since masculinity is constructed by a given society, it is a fluid, dynamic and varied concept. In this connection, Togarasei (2012a:241) asserts that masculinity is 'not a birthright but an achievement'. This finds a parallel in Simone de Beauvoir's (1942/2009:330) statement on women that 'one

is not born, but rather becomes, woman'. This is because expectations and expressions of masculinity are socially and culturally constructed. For, example, in the Karanga society, where I belong, a real man is expected to be a courageous leader, a risk-taker, a breadwinner, a heterosexual, one who marries and bears children, and is a decision-maker. However, some men do not perform this normative form of masculinity. As John, Siwila & Settler (2013:62) argue, 'men sometimes choose what kind of masculinity to perform'. This seems to hold true for men who choose to support gender equality in societies where this is considered countercultural. For example, supporting feminist ideals, as Chitando does, is a potential source of criticism since society, under the influence of religion and traditional culture, has not fully embraced the idea that men and women are equal in all spheres of life, notwithstanding that the Constitution of Zimbabwe upholds that.

Masculinity, brewed in a patriarchal culture, has been constructed in ways that give more power and agency to men and boys, leaving women and girls in a vulnerable position. Hegemonic masculinity, sometimes referred to in the plural (hegemonic masculinities) because it can be performed in various ways, is the most valorised form of masculinity. Given that it emphasizes male dominance and subordination of women and other men, it is largely oppressive (Togarasei, 2013). Thus, in any society there are dominant and subordinated masculinities. Because hegemonic masculinity entails some dangerous behaviours such as toughness, power, risk-taking, sexual prowess, and suppression of emotional expression (Togarasei, 2013:1), it is associated with various forms of gender-based violence. Such a masculinity is oppressive and endangers both men and women. Those of a feminist orientation (for example, Dube, 2012; Nadar, 2012; Oduyoye, 2006) consider hegemonic masculinity as dangerous because it insists on its way and emphasises control, and use of force to ensure compliance. It is a masculinity that induces fear in the subordinated, particularly women, children, and marginalised men, robbing them of a voice, thereby making them suffer in silence. The subordinated usually develop a low self-esteem and an inferiority complex, psychological states that impede human flourishing. In view of this, Ezra Chitando considers an alternative masculinity, a liberating one, as a must for a healthy society. Liberative masculinities set men and others free from discrimination and violence (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012).

In spite of legislative and other measures that have been and are being put in place by the government of Zimbabwe to ensure gender-equality

and eliminate gender-based violence, the two phenomena continue to wreak havoc because of the persistence of hegemonic masculinity. However, notwithstanding the prevalence of gender-based violence in both overt and covert ways, there is evidence of some change, particularly in men's attitudes related to gender equality, which is a necessary condition for the realisation of peace and just societies.

Although it is men and boys who enact masculinities, conceptions of masculinity are not the preserve of men alone, since women embrace them and use them in ways that are either oppressing or liberating (Chirovamavi, 2012:215). This is reiterated by Togarasei (2013:2) who states that women, actively and passively, also play an important role in the production and sustenance of masculinities. It has to be acknowledged that 'men are not what they are simply because of men. Women also play a role in moulding them into who they are' (Togarasei, 2012b:157). In a similar vein, Njoroge (2023:8) states that toxic masculinities collude with life-denying femininities, which should be interrogated. As such, the dislodging of harmful masculinities and promotion of life-affirming ones requires the concerted efforts of everyone in society, men and women.

Worth noting from the preceding discussion is that there are different forms of masculinity (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012), hence in this chapter the terms masculinities and masculinity are used interchangeably when talking about cultural expectations related to how men ought to behave and how they indeed behave. This is because while masculinity can refer to a way of being a man, it can also refer to a collectivity, that is, various forms of masculinity within one class, for example, redemptive masculinity finding expression in different forms (hence, redemptive masculinities).

The forthcoming section provides some background information on Ezra Chitando, particularly as it relates to his writings on masculinities and religion, with a view to situating the discourse to follow.

Ezra Chitando: A Brief Background

As already highlighted, the thrust of this chapter is to discuss masculinities in the light of Ezra Chitando's clarion call for men to adopt redeemed (liberated) and redemptive (liberative) masculinities that promote dignified human existence, health and well-being for all. It is prudent at this point to give a brief background of Ezra Chitando.

Ezra Chitando is a Professor in History and Phenomenology of Religion at the University of Zimbabwe. He was also a theology consultant for the World Council of Churches (Sibanda, Muyambo & Chitando, 2022:i). He is one of the leading scholars in the study of masculinities and religion in Africa (John, Siwila & Settler, 2013:159). Chitando is well published. His work is far-reaching and well-known. He is socially engaged in projects that seek to influence men to adopt healthy masculinities (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012; John, Siwila & Settler, 2013). His support for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is testimony that Chitando walks the talk when it comes to support for initiatives to promote gender equality. His publications focus on a variety of issues in theology and religion. He has also been highly influential in feminist theology, and discourses this in relation to the subject of masculinities. It is this subject, whose definition and description has already been provided, which forms the core of this chapter.

Chitando challenges hegemonic masculinities which he regards as the most dominant and most dangerous form, which dominates women and other men (John, Siwila, & Settler, 2013). Instead, he advocates for redemptive masculinities, that is, ways of being a man that are liberating to all (Chitando, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2012). Such masculinities are conducive to human flourishing and provide a fertile ground for men and women to work together for the betterment of society; a society that is characterised by gender justice, that is, equity and dignified treatment of all. Such a society shuns violence and enables all to live life to the fullest. Although this ideal is not completely achievable, Chitando believes that once men and women are freed from hegemonic masculinities, the world will be a better place for all. He does this through consciousness raising in his works. He seeks to influence change, to transform hegemonic, toxic masculinities into liberating ones which serve as the 'raw material' for peaceful coexistence between men and women. His is a quest for a prosperous and liveable life for everyone. Chitando is a remarkable academic mentor as evidenced by the researches and publications that he has accomplished in collaboration with others, particularly rising academics. To the extent that Chitando is an academic who seeks to transform society, he is an academic-cum-activist. To borrow Phiri & Nadar's (2006:6) terminology, he is 'bilingual', as he speaks the language of the academy and that of his society. It is necessary at this point to highlight that in Chitando's writings, terms such as redemptive, liberating, transformative,

life-affirming, healthy, and health-giving masculinities are used interchangeably to refer to positive ways of being a man. On the other hand, terms such as hegemonic, toxic, dangerous, and intolerant masculinities are used as synonyms. In this chapter, the terms are used in like manner. Since Ezra Chitando is the subject of this chapter, references to other scholars' writings will only be made when necessary and in light of his viewpoints.

After a brief description of what Chitando stands for, the next task is to unpack the notion of crying, which is a significant concept in this chapter.

Conceptualisation of 'Crying' in the Light of Chitando's Analysis of Siphiwo Mahala's *When a man cries*

Crying has traditionally been largely associated with women and children as an expression of pain and a sign of weakness. Men are socialised not to cry in many societies. Although crying can be an expression of anger, it is mostly associated with feelings of pain in the face of an unpleasant experience such as assault or loss. Crying can be done by one who is experiencing unpleasant conditions or one who is sympathising with those suffering. In the context of this chapter, crying signifies redeemed and redemptive masculinities.

The term 'crying', used in both literal and figurative terms in this chapter, emanates from Chitando's (2012) publication entitled, 'Redemptive masculinities, HIV, and Religion in Siphiwo Mahala's *When a man cries*'. The publication, based on a novel whose setting is Grahamstown in South Africa, is a chapter in a volume he co-edited with Sophia Chirongoma: *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion* (249-265). Crying is depicted, by both the author of the novel that Chitando analyses, and by Chitando himself, not as a sign of weakness as traditionally held, but as a sign of being human; an indication that one has a heart. The capacity to cry is considered as a mark of a man who follows a redemptive masculinity script; one who groans with and on behalf of those who are suffering. In advocating for redemptive masculinities, Chitando uses the image of a 'crying man' and calls upon men to 'cry' like Jesus, an ideal model for men. By summoning men to cry, Chitando is demanding for a masculinity that is based on the principles of justice, equality and peace. I found the notion of crying intriguing, and hence decided to take it on board in

discouraging Chitando's call for transformation of masculinities, from dangerous to live-giving ones. The context of the novel Chitando analyses is the HIV & AIDS pandemic. The text maintains that men must be able to cry if women, children and men are to flourish (Chitando, 2012:249).

The novel, *When a man cries*, which is an 'exposition of the crisis of masculinity' (Chitando, 2012:249) shows how hegemonic masculinities can be dangerous as they tend to valorise sexual prowess which fosters the vulnerability of men and women to HIV & AIDS. The main character in the novel, Temba, initially follows a hegemonic masculinity template to the letter. He prides in being a sexual protagonist who abuses young women and schoolgirls (Chitando, 2012). He does so without feeling any remorse because for him it is manly to have multiple sexual partners. He looks down upon men who cry because crying, according to the hegemonic version of masculinity he has embraced, is at variance with being a real man who is associated with suppression of emotions. For Temba, power is not for service but for access to female bodies (Chitando, 2012:250). In this regard, he subscribes to a version of hegemonic masculinity that Chinganga (2012:270) refers to as 'genitalized masculinity'¹.

Later, after things have gone wrong in his life, including infection with HIV, Temba has a rude awakening which engenders his transformation (Chitando, 2012). It is then that he realises that his pursuit of women has been fruitless, and that crying is an integral part of being human and that without crying a man is incomplete (Chitando, 2012:250). Indeed, he cries at the end of the novel. He gets 'redeemed' from a toxic masculinity to a redemptive one. Starting off with a conviction that 'real men do not cry' he ends up admitting that 'a man needs tears if he is to be complete' (Chitando, 2012:263).

The theme of the novel resonates with Chitando's conviction that masculinities can change, just as Temba undergoes a 'conversion' experience. To cry is to be sensitive, to identify with the needs and aspirations of others, particularly those in vulnerable positions, hence Chitando's call for men to cry; to abandon dangerous masculinities for healthy ones that promote justice and peace in society. Men who can cry, that is who feel and express pain, sympathising with those suffering, are, according to Chitando (2012:263), 'an invaluable resource to the struggles against gender-

¹ A version of masculinity that is centred on the genitals. It values sexual prowess expressed in having multiple sexual partners, acquired using both persuasion and coercion.

based violence and the HIV & AIDS pandemic'. Men who cry, in Chitando's view, emulate the 'God-man' Jesus who in John 11:35 cries because he is touched by the death of Lazarus (Chitando, 2012:264) and feels for Martha and Mary for the loss of their brother. In the imperative mode, Chitando (2012:264) says men must cry, 'in practical and figurative terms'. This is a call for abusive men to embrace redemptive masculinities and abandon versions of masculinity that prevent them from 'crying', that is, being caring fathers, loving partners and sensitive leaders as well as taking practical steps to 'restore life, health and well-being' (Chitando, 2012:265). Seen from this perspective, 'crying men' are proactive. They do not merely refrain from violence, but are actively involved in ending violence and providing psychosocial, economic, and other forms of support that they are able to provide for victims of violence; they are not just peace lovers but peacemakers. They are each preoccupied with the following questions: What can I do? How can I make a difference? How can I make someone smile? In Lampe's (2020:122) words, such men make 'kindness and humanity the undercurrent of all acting'.

Chitando does not suggest that all men do not cry because, as already mentioned, there are different forms of masculinity, resulting in men behaving differently and following different masculinity scripts. Some men are already 'crying' by way of following a redemptive form of masculinity. Such men work side by side with women towards the achievement of gender justice. They are 'gender-equitable' men who have the following attributes: believe that men and women have equal rights, are opposed to gender-based violence, and 'help with some domestic chores' (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:26), all of which are repelled by hegemonic masculinities. The forthcoming section discusses Chitando's quest for transformation of masculinities and the role that social institutions and individuals can play, bearing in mind that transformation entails a change from being insensitive to pain to expression of pain; a transition from a state of being unable to cry, to one of being able to do so without being remorseful or being told that 'men don't cry'.

Chitando's Quest for Transformation of Masculinities and the Role of Social Institutions and Individuals

As already pointed out, Chitando challenges hegemonic masculinities and calls upon men to transform. He shares a critique of destructive ways of

being a man with many African women, as well as some male, theologians who are uncomfortable with ways in which masculinity is constructed in most African societies (for example, Dube, 2012; Leshota, 2012; Togarasei, 2012; Oduyoye, 2006; Maluleke and Nadar, 2002). He challenges hegemonic, death-dealing masculinities that have been reinforced by religious and cultural ideologies (Chitando, 2004, 2007a, 2007b 2009, 2012; Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012). In so doing, he is inviting men who have not been 'crying' to do so and those who have been 'crying' to continue doing so. To 'cry' signifies subscription to a redemptive form of masculinity. Like Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, a like-minded Black male theologian, Chitando argues for a more empowering view of masculinity that emphasises mutuality rather than domination and control (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012). This liberating masculinity, rooted in respect for women and responsible use of power, does not subscribe to male chauvinism, male privileges, patriarchy, and does not thrive on violence (Chitando, 2009:111). On the basis of the conviction that masculinities are amenable to change and that men 'can and do change' (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:28), Chitando emphasises the need to inculcate masculinities that promote health and well-being in all aspects of existence. This quest for health-promoting masculinities and women's empowerment is also shared by other scholars (for example, Chinganga, 2012; Dube, 2012; Chitando, 2011; Oduyoye, 2006; Phiri, 2004; Maluleke and Nadar, 2002;) who call upon society to shun negative masculinities.

Chitando's redemptive interpretation

In his interpretation of scriptures, Chitando distances himself from what Tamez (1994:197) refers to as 'macho' readings which reinforce male dominance and female subordination. He applies a hermeneutic of liberation with a view to liberating men from upholding dangerous masculinities, and liberating women from nurturing the dangerous masculinities, for example, the perception of the man as a sexual predator (Chitando, 2004:152), which results in tolerance of infidelity by married men and intolerance of the same when perpetrated by married women. This compromises the sexual and reproductive health of both men and women, particularly in the context of HIV & AIDS, hence Chitando's (2004:153) assertion that men are drivers of the pandemic. Chitando (2004) avers that the custom of bridewealth (*roora*) consolidates hegemonic masculinities, as

some men force themselves on their wives without protection in spite of their engagement in extramarital sexual affairs. Such men argue that they have unlimited sexual access to the sexual services of their wives on the basis of the bridewealth they have paid (Chitando, 2004). Chitando finds this unacceptable.

In his re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31, Chitando challenges the traditional interpretation of the 'good wife' which promotes 'the gospel of docility and domesticity' (Chitando, 2004:157). The passage praises the wife for pleasing her husband all the days of her life but does not show reciprocation of the same. This has led to a skewed interpretation which demands wives to make sacrifices while not expecting to be served. On the contrary, Chitando embarks on a liberating re-reading of the text. He argues that the ideal of the 'good wife' can only be realised when women are given the same rights and privileges as their male counterparts (Chitando, 2004:157). His interpretation of the passage places emphasis on alternative family relationships that are grounded in mutuality and justice. This resonates with Masenya's (1997) views on gender roles, based on the same text. She suggests flexibility in gender roles whereby both males and females can choose to operate from home, without stigmatization on the part of males who undertake domestic chores and home management.

In an article he co-authored with Susan Mbula Kilonzo, based on the same passage, Chitando subscribes to the notion of the 'Proverbs 31 man', as articulated by Pentecostal preachers in Kenya (Chitando and Kilonzo, 2018). Such a man works in close collaboration with his 'Proverbs 31 woman' and is industrious like his partner, 'the Proverbs 31 woman' (Chitando and Kilonzo, 2018:73). The man pleases his wife and those around call her blessed, like the 'Proverbs 31 man'. The 'Proverbs 31 man' is a 'crying' man in the sense that he is 'supportive, non-violent, hardworking, appreciative of his partner' and does not enact a traditional form of masculinity which places emphasis on male dominance and female subordination (Chitando and Kilonzo, 2018:75).

Masculinities as amenable to change, with men and women working together

Given that masculinity is socially constructed, and changes in response to changes in society, it can be socially deconstructed and reconstructed (Togarasei, 2012b). In this regard, oppressive behaviour, informed by toxic

masculinities, can be 'unlearned' by both women and men (Chitando, 2009:139). Although it can be argued that men who have been used to dominating women face the challenge of social transformation (Chinganga, 2012:285), Chitando is hopeful. In his writings, Chitando leverages the fluidity of masculinity to make the case that men who have become accustomed to the potentially destructive hegemonic masculinity can change and adopt more sensitive, appealing ways of being a man. This, Chitando suggests, is possible with the involvement of the whole society through social institutions such as the family, religious organisations and educational institutions, and men and women working in partnership; a sentiment expressed by many African women theologians including Musa Dube who states that churches need to engage with men in order to challenge dangerous masculinities (Dube, 2012). It needs to be pointed out, however, that Chitando (2007b) acknowledges that change is a gradual process which does not occur overnight.

Realisation of healthy ways of being a man requires that men and women work as partners. In connection with this, Chitando proposes a multi-sectoral approach to combat violence against women. He calls upon various actors to work together to 'break the covenant of violence against women and to ensure that no woman will curse the day of her birth' (Chitando, 2004:158). Taking cognizance of the role of religion in shaping masculinities, Chitando (2007a, 2007b) turns to churches and calls upon them to reach out to men and persuade them, through sermons, to shun dangerous masculinities and adopt redemptive ones because this benefits them (men) as well. He also challenges churches to 'exorcise the unholy trinity of religion, culture and socialisation and promote mutuality and respect in marriage' (Chitando, 2007b:11). This is because, in his view, religion and culture have socialised men to embrace dangerous masculinities that make them look down upon women, especially in the context of marriage. As such, they need reorientation. It is worth noting that Chitando's (2007b) call to churches is for them to be prophetic; to denounce violence against women and advocate for harmonious gender relations. In a chapter he co-authored with Chirongoma, Chitando challenges women's fellowship groups in churches to interpret scriptures in ways that are empowering to women, and in so doing challenge hegemonic masculinities (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012). In view of the preceding, it can be noted that Chitando perceives churches as the potential vanguard of the transformation of men and empowerment of women. Underscoring the role of

churches in transformation of masculinities, Chitando (2007b:45) invites the church to chant the slogan: 'Down with dominant masculinities...!'.

Men and women to collaborate in home-based caregiving

Chitando (2004, 2007b) is concerned about strict gender roles that leave women to do all the caregiving work, particularly in the context of HIV & AIDS. The tendency for men to shun caregiving on the basis that it is the duty of women also characterised the COVID-19 period. Chitando appeals to churches in Africa to socialise men to participate in home-based care, which has traditionally been a women's role. In so doing, he embarks on a health-giving subversion of culture and tradition. At present, not many men and women would buy Chitando's idea because of internalised notions of masculinity and femininity (Chitando, 2004). However, those who dare embrace it are set to bring warmth to their social spheres because it signifies justice, love and compassion (Chitando, 2007b:48).

Men as shouldering a greater responsibility to transform masculinities

While calling upon everyone to participate in the fight against hegemonic, often toxic masculinities, Chitando places more responsibility on men, as 'partakers of the patriarchal dividend' (Chitando, 2009:68). He argues that boys and young men must be trained to embrace alternative, redemptive masculinities if men, women, and children are to thrive (Chitando 2007, 2012), that is, if they are to unleash their potential to contribute to Africa's economic growth (Chitando, 2009:139). Chitando's writings, therefore, demonstrate how important it is to engage males in programmes aimed at transforming masculinities. Such programmes can enable men to respect the rights of women and children by giving up patriarchal privileges. This has the effect of inculcating, in women and children, especially girls, a sense of self-affirmation.

Since religion can promote the adoption of redemptive masculinities, it is necessary to engage men in faith communities to serve as ambassadors for gender justice in the face of gender-based violence, so argues Chitando, in collaboration with Chirongoma (2012:6). In view of the notion of crying as articulated by Chitando, gender just societies that provide safe

spaces in which men, women and children can flourish, have men and women who 'cry'. Chitando suggests that giving up the patriarchal dividend by 'crying', that is, using power to serve and protect, being considerate and respectful of those with less power in society, does not diminish one's maleness. Jesus was a man who challenged hegemonic masculinity by crying, and in so doing serves as a role model for men.

Accusation that Chitando is privileging male agency

While some may accuse Chitando of 'privileging male agency' (see John, Siwila and Settler, 2013:174) because of his emphasis on the need for men to change for gender justice to be realised, I do not subscribe to the same. Chitando is aware of the fact that masculinities are socially constructed and supported, hence he calls upon both men and women to promote redemptive masculinities. He calls upon women's fellowship groups to promote women's empowerment and challenge dangerous masculinities. He also upholds the notion of partnership between men and women and describes transformed men ('crying' ones) as those who do not feel threatened by gender equality. His emphasis on transformation of men is understandable, given that they have historically enjoyed the 'patriarchal dividend' by their domination over women and other (marginalised) men, thereby subjecting these under the 'yoke'. As such, women's liberation from the entanglements of hegemonic masculinity cannot be attained without the cooperation of men who have historically held the 'keys' to power under the banner of patriarchy which supports hegemonic masculinities. As Togarasei (2012b:157) asserts, 'The liberation of women cannot materialize without the cooperation of men'. What Chitando does, in challenging men to transform, is reminiscent of Jesus' saying in Mark 3 verse 27, 'No one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house'. In the same way it is necessary to persuade men to accept women as their equals for women to realise gender equality. When men have a buy in, it will be easier for women to assert their equality and to support redemptive masculinities, otherwise there is a tendency for resistance and a backlash when men are not taken on board. Influencing men to change is tantamount to 'tying up the strong man' in the biblical passage cited. Related to this is Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza's view that women's empowerment requires a two-pronged theology which seeks to influence men to give up some of their

patriarchal privileges and for women to be self-affirming. She asserts that feminist theology 'advocates for men a theology of relinquishment' and 'articulates for women a theology of self-affirmation (Schussler-Fiorenza, 1995:xy). As such, for real social transformation to materialise, the liberation of masculinities must go hand in hand with the liberation of femininities.

Conclusion

Following the preceding discussion, it is evident that Chitando is a prophetic voice, calling upon men (and women) to reform by embracing redeemed and redemptive masculinities. By advocating a masculinity of love and care rather than one of power, he shares a feminist quest; a quest for gender justice which is only possible with a transformed 'social curriculum'. He mostly discusses masculinity in the context of HIV & AIDS. However, his ideas are transferable to different social situations that have challenges associated with toxic masculinities, particularly gender-based violence. Chitando is optimistic that men who are not yet transformed can change through re-socialisation. Men have over the years been socialised to dominate women and engage in ways of being men that endanger both women and men. In some men this hegemonic masculinity is so much ingrained that it is not easy to unlearn. However, with the concerted effort of men and women, working as individuals and through social institutions, transformation of such men, in Chitando's view, is possible. The proverbial wisdom saying which goes, 'habits die hard', implies that entrenched habits will eventually die though it might take time. The good news is that already some men are working in partnership with women to transform dangerous masculinities so that the world can become a better place for all.

Chitando, being a man himself, calling men to bid farewell to harmful ways of enacting masculinity, demonstrates that it is possible to rethink masculinities and assist other men to get enlightened on how toxic masculinities endanger their lives and those of everyone around. In using the idiom of crying, Chitando emphasises the need to be human, to express emotion, to feel for others, and to feel hurt when those around are suffer-

ing. A man who cries is an epitome of redeemed and redemptive masculinities. In calling for men to transform, Chitando is inviting them to 'live and let live' because most hegemonic versions of masculinity negate the health and well-being of both perpetrators and victims. To be alive is not only to be breathing and engaging in human activities, it is to be empowered to have a personal vision and have the opportunity and power to work towards realisation of the vision; to have agency. If society could take heed of Chitando's call, justice and true peace would prevail.

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8 Troubling African Masculinities

In Conversation with Ezra Chitando

Paul Leshota

Abstract

Ezra Chitando is one of the most prolific and erudite African scholars of our generation. He has to his credit, well-researched chapters, articles, and books on a wide range of topics in history, religion, and theology. Originally located within the African Traditional Religious Studies domain, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and his call to serve as Theology Consultant for the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) connived to catapult Ezra into serious reflection on emerging issues and the signs of the times. Africa in general and Southern Africa, in particular, were the epicenter of HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS constituted the sign of the time and presented the most formidable challenges to the entire human family as well as the Church in Africa. EHAIA cut a niche for itself by stirring up the Churches through building pastoral and formal theological education competencies for HIV/AIDS responses, amongst other things. It is in this context that “EHAIA series” under the auspices of the World Council of Churches was produced to build HIV/AIDS-competent Churches. That men were also drivers of the pandemic was not a secret anymore. Their participation had become indispensable if HIV/AIDS were to be nipped in the bud. To that end, Ezra Chitando identified masculinities as one area for attention and exploration. This chapter investigates the contribution to scholarship that Ezra Chitando made, particularly in the realm of gender in general and masculinities in particular, their contexts, practical aspects and what came out as Ezra’s signature in his troubling of African masculinities in the many articles, chapters, and books he wrote on the theme.

Keywords: Ezra Chitando, HIV/AIDS

Introduction

Since the wrestling of the concept of African Traditional Religion from Geoffrey Parrinder (1954) by Bolaji Idowu (1962) and John Mbiti (1975), first generation doyens of Africa in the field of African Traditional Religion, scholarship in the field of Religion in Africa has never looked back.

Generations of African scholars schooled under the in-vogue phenomenological approach to religion took up the baton. While the agenda of the first generation of African scholars of religion was a protest against the long history of derogation of Africa and its cultures by both Christian missionaries and European colonisers, subsequent generations have expanded the horizons of the study of African religion in African universities in terms of scope, content and theoretical basis. This marked an important shift from the phenomenological study of religion to a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of religion. A convergence of factors catapulted Chitando into a new strand in Religion Studies known as applied Religion Studies with a focus on the challenges confronting modern globalized society. It is the scourge of HIV/AIDS that set the stage for a new multi-disciplinary trajectory. The role of Applied Religion Studies is to respond to these issues in a practical and clinical manner, based on the study of diverse religious cultures and traditions of ethics and thought.

The advent of HIV/AIDS in the late 80s and the beginning of the 90s brought with it a lot of challenges that required serious reflection and engagement. Having attended some of the workshops organized by Musa Dube, the Theological Consultant on HIV/AIDS for the World Council of Churches, Chitando felt engulfed by the need to contribute to the struggle for the survival of humanity that was being decimated by AIDS. He sprung in and went to the heart of the problem. There was no denying that women were more susceptible, physically, and biologically, to violence and HIV, than their male counterparts. Worse still, men happened to be drivers of the infection with culture and the Bible fanning the flames of gender-based violence and HIV. This constituted a moment of Kairos¹ for Chitando to immerse himself in research and advocacy on replacing dominant masculinities with life-giving masculinities. This chapter is a conversation with Ezra Chitando's scholarly works on masculinities. The idea is to investigate the contribution he has made in the realm of gender in general and masculinities in particular. The contexts, the practical aspects and what emerged as Chitando's signature as he troubles the troubled and troubling African masculinities will be explored and exposed.

¹ Kairos is a Greek word representing a critical, special or opportune moment. It has been used in Liberation/Black theological circles to refer to a moment of discernment or truth which is critical at a particular time in which we live. It has been applied within the context of South Africa at a period between the exit of the apartheid dispensation and its horrors and the onset of the New South Africa and the hope it promised.

Methodology: Desk Research

Within psychological circles the perception of threat, resulting from an impending danger, would normally activate the sympathetic nervous system which in turn triggers a stress response associated with, fight, flight and freeze. The HIV/AIDS pandemic was indeed a menace whose onset troubled everyone who cared about human life. With the suffering and loss of life that had engulfed human existence, almost all people were overwhelmed. While some froze, others went into denial and others chose to wage a war in varied ways. It became clear that a multi-sectoral approach was the best way under the circumstances (Dube, 2004:12). Chitando, in the field of theology and religion, is counted among those who chose to wage war by empowering pastors and theologians through training, writing and research on what the Churches can, should, and must do to prevent the spread of HIV and to mollify suffering that resulted from the spread of the disease. This chapter, therefore, adopting a desk research method, has done a review of Chitando's published works as well as some conversations that the author had with him on different occasions. The aim is to underscore his contribution in the identification of the main factors around gender-based violence and the spread of HIV. In his reckoning, dangerous masculinity (ies) was one of the major drivers of the pandemic. It is to the operations of these masculinities, as discussed by Chitando in several of his works, that the author focuses his attention.

The tree does not move unless there is a wind

I first met Ezra Chitando in an HIV/AIDS workshop at the Lutheran Conference Centre in Kempton Park, South Africa in 2005. He struck me as a humble but knowledgeable and inspiring man. He was an Associate Professor at the time who always introduced himself as Ezra Chitando and preferred to be called as such. One of the stories that he told me on that occasion was about how his lackluster and complacent attitude nearly ended his budding career as an academic. His two years of probation were coming to an end, and he was showing no signs of passion for scholarly productivity as expected. He had hardly published any articles and was not driven or motivated by anything to want to follow in the footsteps of those who came before him in terms of publishing. Around that time, he attended a workshop in South Africa where Tinyiko Maluleke was also present. In one of the brief interactions they had, Maluleke asked him about

how much he had published. He had very little to show with Maluleke already boasting more than twenty publications at the time. That happened to be the wind that moved and catapulted Ezra Chitando into the scholarly stage/space where he belonged. Chitando was moved not only to enter the scholarly space but to critically engage it, how masculinities was at the centre of the HIV pandemic. His engagement with HIV/AIDS was therefore motivated by the pandemic with a gendered face where women's vulnerabilities were intricately intertwined with the behaviours of men.

HIV/AIDS and GBV as a context for Transformative Masculinities

When HIV/AIDS came onto the scene around 1986 it caught everybody by surprise. No sector was adequately prepared for it. Unique about it was that it affected all aspects of our lives (Dube, 2003:7). Africa received it with mixed feelings and attitudes. While some saw a human hand in it, others opined that it was God's punishment for a wayward world. These theories did little to placate the intensity of the spread. It spread like wild-fire as it wrote itself on the bodies and souls of Africans (Dube 2013). As Chitando observes, "Within a short time, HIV had become Africa's worst nightmare. It decimated communities; brought economies to their knees, and deepened levels of poverty". It is not as if the Christian Church was better prepared for it. As Maluleke (2003:61) observes, the Church and the theological fraternity were caught off-guard by the HIV pandemic.

Though the African Church boasted human resources, infrastructure, and presence even in the remotest of areas, all of this could not translate into tangible benefits particularly because of the ignorance of the pastors about the disease (Parry, 2013:14). For the Church, HIV had become a disease of sinners and AIDS had become a punishment for their sinfulness. What had become clear though was that HIV was mostly transmitted through sexual intercourse. The vulnerability of both women and girls to infection had become too conspicuous to ignore. They were more susceptible to violence with men mostly as perpetrators. Culture and the Bible connived to reinforce and justify violence against women and girls and therefore to infection against HIV. Unfortunately, the resounding message coming from the Church smacked off condemnation and not compassion; death and not life; despair and not hope. Chitando was, therefore,

not new to the challenges associated with HIV/AIDS as he participated in a number of HIV/AIDS workshops that were organized by his predecessor in the office of a Theological Consultant on HIV/AIDS with EHAIA Musa Dube.

It was under these circumstances that he rolled up his sleeves and joined the fray with a two-fold mission cut out for him, namely 1) to promote HIV competence among Church leaders and like-minded organisations and 2) to empower theological institutions to address the root causes of the pandemic. To achieve these, Chitando (2007) appealed to the Churches to put on friendly feet, warm hearts, and anointed hands in order to journey with, be compassionate to, and heal people living with HIV, and the affected and to break the barriers between 'us' and 'them' that had characterized the Christian Church. In addition, the Christian Church had to engage in the sharpening of the minds to produce a critical mass that will transform the thinking, attitudes, and actions of the people (Chitando, 2007a: 55).

Masculinity posed as a trouble that needed to be troubled by anyone who was concerned about the deleterious effects of HIV/AIDS. The urgency of the pandemic called upon Chitando to evoke the African proverb, "The speed with which you run depends on what is chasing you." Behind the pervasive spread of HIV infection was, amongst other factors, death-dealing masculinities that required special attention. The pace at which the pandemic was moving required the Church and anyone engaged in the work of empowering Churches and communities to increase the speed to match the rapid spread of the pandemic.

Ubuntu-fied Solidarity and Compassion for Gender Justice

In his *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 1*, Chitando (2007a:51-62) harvests his thoughts, puts them together, and lays bare the driving force behind such passion for transforming masculinities from being a problem to being a solution to gendered structural inequalities which are at the centre of the HIV pandemic. This passion cannot be separated from Chitando's association with African Women Theologians in general and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (henceforth referred to as "the Circle") (Chitando, 2007b:43) in particular, as well as his social location in the African context.

The notion of Ubuntu has been popularized by a number of African scholars of Religion and Theology and it remains central to their accounts on gender and HIV. Chitando, the Circle matriarchs, and other African scholars (Setiloane, 1986:56; Kaunda, 2010:39) conceive of Ubuntu as humanity living in a community with others. At the heart of Ubuntu is the belief that humans, as Setiloane (1986:24) puts it, possess some quality of divinity that can only be lived in community with others (Setiloane, 1986:56; Kaunda, 2010:39). As such it expresses itself in harmonious relations as well as respect for others.

Though almost all African scholars attach value to Ubuntu, they do so with caution. Musa Dube suggests that Ubuntu requires men to rethink their understanding of masculinity, especially in its relationship with women and girls, as it is not a given, but it has to be earned. Fulata Moyo (2005:135-136) contrasts Ubuntu with *agape*. While marking the limitations of Ubuntu especially in its leanings towards patriarchy, she embraces *agape* for its associations with companionship. Chitando (2008:56) proposes the concept of solidarity as a component of the concept of Ubuntu. In his view, it is more apt especially because of its features of the willingness of men to self-empty; stand for and with women; and its inclination toward self-reflection on men's contribution to the oppression of women. Chitando (2008:58-60) therefore models his notion of solidarity on Jesus who not only identified with the marginalized but also spared his life for their sake.

It is with the above in mind that we coined *Ubuntu-fied solidarity and compassion for gender justice* to capture the ethical ideal of masculinity as a relational solidarity that expresses itself through compassion. For Chitando, gender justice becomes, at the same time, both the end result and the catalyst of this relational solidarity which is founded on human dignity applicable in equal measure to both men and women. Chitando's masculinity project, therefore, has as its driving force the divine aspect in every human which calls for compassion and respect for all irrespective of their gender. It reverberates with all his efforts to trouble the troubled and troubling masculinities.

Troubling Masculinities

Chitando's interest in the men–violence nexus within the context of HIV led him to widen his scope of research to earlier reflections on the subject.

Morrell's *Changing Men in Southern Africa* (2001); Lindsay & Miescher's *Men and Masculinities in Africa* (2003) as well as Ouzgane & Morrell's, *African Masculinities* (2005) and their location within the context of Africa, provided an impetus to deepen Chitando's gaze into the background provided by these volumes. What emerged clearly from this search was a significant focus on masculinities within the African context. This observation coincided with the onset of HIV in Africa which became an occasion for serious reflection with men at the centre of this reflection.

These men–violence nexus led Chitando to a catchy and multivalent label of 'troubling masculinities.' The double meaning in the phrase is captured well by Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:2) who assert that the first meaning refers to masculinities that are troubling, toxic, and at the centre of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. The second is an expression of intent to challenge and trouble masculinities on a continual basis and render them accountable.

Troubling and toxic masculinities

The advent of HIV/AIDS in the late 90s plunged the whole world into panic mode. With infections rising, numbers of death doubling, and understanding of the disease evasive, the entire human family was thrown into a state of frenzy. Because of its association with sexual intercourse, it was shrouded in taboo and shame (Maluleke & Dube, 2001:120). While it cannot be denied that the virus infects and affects both men and women it has a predominantly female profile with gender inequalities and norms being its main drivers (van Klinken & Chitando, 2015). That notwithstanding, HIV had a male face and patriarchal oversight all of which had a hegemonic hold over female bodies. Man as father adopted a new reputation of being a child molester and girl predator; man as husband earned himself a new label of wife batterer. A man was identified more with aggression, exploitation, abuse, and violence. Studies on men and HIV all converged to communicate that there is a clear correlation between hegemonic masculinities and HIV/AIDS (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012: 3,15).

Men and boys, riding on the privilege of culture and the Bible, have unleashed violence on women and girls, infecting them in the process. It is no secret that the construction of men as more powerful than women has led them to behave in a domineering and sexually aggressive way to

women (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:6). Within the context of HIV & AIDS this meant more infections for women and girls as well as other men. Having said that, I pay heed to Chitando (2007a) and van Klinken (2013) that agitating for more responsible masculinities should not necessarily lead us into colonising discourses that always see only African men as coextensive with dangerous masculinities. It is, therefore, these kinds of masculinities that we call toxic and troubling masculinities. On the receiving end of these troubling masculinities are women and girls. Chitando believes that these troubling masculinities need to be isolated and challenged, for ‘men Can, Should and Must change’ (John et al. 2013).

Troubling troubled and troubling masculinities

Chitando & Chirongoma (2008) are adamant that toxic masculinities need to be challenged and troubled. The reasons for the need to challenge these dominant masculinities are spelled out as endangering women, children, and men themselves as well as preventing alternative masculinities from developing and women and children from thriving (Chitando, 2007b:45). Given the multipronged nature and complexity of the problem posed by hegemonic masculinities, Chitando proposed a similarly fitting approach(es). In his words, only holistic approaches have the potential to “bring about gender justice and roll back the tide of HIV/AIDS” (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:3). This holistic approach consists of various partnerships with all concerned parties and institutions. We discuss here below these partnerships as outlined by Chitando. One of the most powerful words by Chitando, was made on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism in 2019. He said, “If men and women are locked in mortal combat there are basically no winners. What we need are boys and men who are secure. Who are not afraid of empowered women.”

Partnership with Men

At the basis of this approach is the need to mobilize and include men in all programs that are aimed at reversing the spread of HIV and stemming the tide of gender-based violence (Chitando, 2007:40). If men are the drivers of HIV, there is no way that they cannot participate in programs aimed

at ending gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV. In the earlier approaches, men, despite the critical role they played in the ensuing problem – were not involved in seeking solutions to the very same problem. Chitando's "A New Man for a New Era" (2007); as well as John's (2013) coinage, "Men can, should and must change" gleaned from thematic analysis of Chitando's writings, are a clear articulation of his vision about masculinities within the context of HIV and gender-based violence.

Change forms the basis of Chitando's optimism (John, 2013:38). Not only is there a need for men to change, but there should also be an equally aggressive and radical strategy to bring about that change. That radical change must and can only start with men. Their awareness of the benefits they enjoy, simply because they are men is a good starting point. Patriarchy, with the support from both the Bible and culture, has remained a foundation stone for hegemonic masculinities (Chitando, 2007:45). Men must be aware of this benefit and the damage it has caused to women, girls and men themselves. The same religion and culture must be tapped into in constructive ways to generate positive masculinities because they have the potential to achieve this.

Chitando (2022) notes that the majority of organisations, the Church included, are led by men. He opines that the Church should use its resources, material, and personnel, to reach out to men in places that are called worldly, "to sacralize such spaces" in an effort to challenge toxic masculinities while promoting liberating masculinities (Chitando, 2001:49-50). In order to reach out to men and boys who are always available in these *worldly* spaces and are hidden in plain sight, the pre-existing Church structures, such as youth and male groups, could be tapped into in more positive ways (Chitando, 2019).

Within the Ubuntu axiology humans are fully human in relationships and partnership with others. Respect, harmonious relations, and compassion are but a few expressions of Ubuntu. Aberrant and hegemonic masculinity has no place in Ubuntu axiology. Partnership with men is therefore critical if patriarchy and its dangerous tributaries are to be mitigated and eventually throttled as they undermine the dignity and the divine inherent in every human.

Partnership with Women

The harrowing story of the brutal rape of a ten-month-old baby Tshepan in the Eastern Cape, South Africa (Phiri, 2003:3) provides a glimpse/snapshot of the problem that humanity is faced with as a result of HIV. According to Phiri (2003:4) this sad story is a convergence of culture, myth, violence against women, poverty, justice systems, morality, and religion. Unfortunately, they converged to hurt women and a girl child. It is such disturbing experiences, amongst others, that extremely disturbed the Circle, called them to arise, and showed them how not to stay dead (Dube, 2004:115). The demand for liberation and justice was at the heart of their mission and mandate. Given the urgency of the matter and the need to coalesce around it by both men and women, Chitando could not resist the call to arise and join the chorus.

In the face of these painful experiences, Chitando's scholarship (2012:2) completes the wings of Idowu's bird². He advocated for masculinities that are more accommodating and sensitive. In his view these are the masculinities that are opposed to death-dealing masculinities that set women as easy prey to men-induced injustices under the guise of maintaining the sacred order. Taking a cue from Mercy Amba Oduyoye who, despite the entrenched patriarchy of the time that saw men riding on a supremacy horse, regarded men as important partners in the quest for a just world (Oduyoye, 2001:242-243). Idowu's discerning words to Oduyoye (Oredein, 2016:160) that a bird with one wing does not fly were not only far-reaching in scope and depth but they were also visionary. They did not only inspire the foundation of the Circle, which was Oduyoye's brainchild, but they also stimulated more reflection on the need for men to stand in solidarity with women if gender equality and justice were to be achieved. Building on Oduyoye (2001), Njoroge (2008), Moyo (2005), Dube (2003), Dibeela (2003), (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:18-21) and others, Chitando embraced the participation of men in the agenda of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians constituting as it were the second wing of Idowu's bird. Not only have men participated in conferences by African Women Theologians, but they also continue to collaborate with them in bringing about gender equality and gender justice. While there is need to

² It would seem that the metaphor of a two winged bird that Amba Oduyoye used to represent the relationship between men and women was used by Idowu in his conversation with Amba Oduyoye in one of their conversations.

do more in terms of healing of women in relationship with men, at least there is a will to move in that direction (Landman, 2022:16).

Gender Justice

Partnership with women is by nature intertwined with gender justice. It is at the centre of male-female relationships and as such it is grounded, as van Klinken (2011:288) suggests, in our being created in the image of God. That is the core aspect of our humanity, which gender justice is concerned with. The concept of gender justice within the context of HIV/AIDS goes back to two of the most outstanding Circle theologians, Musa Dube, and Isabel Phiri. Two articles that they published in 2001 and 2002 respectively reflect an ardent desire to see a world where men and women live in a space free from oppression and with the fullness of life as God's gift being mutually exchanged between them (Phiri, 2001:78). For Dube, justice is not only a special attribute of God which is embodied in Jesus through whom God takes flesh among us (John 1:18), it is something that must be embraced and put to use in people daily struggles. Van Klinken (2011:289) adds that, Dube (2007:92) presents Jesus as someone who fights for gender justice.

While Chitando builds on the foundation laid by both Dube and Phiri, he takes the narrative further by bringing the masculinity perspective founded on patriarchy under scrutiny. At the heart of his view of women's struggle for liberation from oppression is the recognition that they are full human beings with the same rights and privileges as their male counterparts (Chitando 2004: 157). The man versus woman nexus which sees the latter as only docile and domestic, finds no sympathy in Chitando's scholarship (Chitando, 2004: 157). It is this respect for the dignity of all human beings that undergirds gender justice.

Over and above the dignity that goes with all humans irrespective of gender, Chitando, taking a cue from the Circle, identifies dialogue, transformation, liberation, and collaboration as the key features characterizing, as it were, the relationship between men and women (2012:21). His subtitle; "Come Now Let Us Reason Together: African Women Theologians and Conversation with Men" (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:18) sums up the aspirations of the Circle in their cry for justice. In fact, in the context of gender justice empowerment of women should not constitute a scare for men. It should not lead to a decrease in stature for men (Chitando, 2019).

For him, empowerment for women should translate into empowerment for men and vice-versa.

Critical Appraisal of Chitando's contribution

HIV/AIDS constituted a stage/locus for the re-examination of masculinities. Taking cue from the works of Morrel (2001), Richter (2006), and others, it is patent that masculinity is not a monolithic but a dynamic phenomenon (Kaunda, 2014:4). The latter notwithstanding, there is a consensus that masculinities are constructed relationally and communally (Kaunda, 2014:4). Not only do they reflect the culture within which they are lived, they are also malleable and easily adapt to new circumstances of time and place. It is in this sense that we talk about masculinities in the plural instead of masculinity. Sadly, masculinities became the worst enemy for women and the girl child in the context of HIV. Alongside this trajectory was another important development of the Circle which was driving the collective solidarity agenda with men as important partners in the troubling of patriarchal masculinities (Kanyoro, 2001:106).

This was the cradle that stimulated and nurtured Chitando's intellectual, spiritual, and advocacy curiosity. His shift from Phenomenology of Religion to what one would call Applied Religion marked an important step in the vision of Fanon (1968:206) that "each generation must out of obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it or betray it." Chitando became one of our generation who took up his mission seriously. He wrestled with the problem of the role of men in the spread of HIV/AIDS. He exposed the fault lines and the cultural and religious ideas that reinforced hegemonic masculinities (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:3).

Inspired by his conviction in the sacredness of human life irrespective of gender, Chitando spared no effort to dethrone patriarchy. In his view, it was patriarchy that constituted the biggest stumbling block to gender equality and equity. To that end, he exploited the other side of the culture-religion nexus and their capacity to assist in the fight against gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS if tapped into positively. His involvement of men as partners with women is indispensable if gender justice is to be achieved. The Church with its moral authority has no choice but to be at the forefront of the radical gender transformation agenda. Words of Chitando (2017) strike the chord for radically transformed masculinities:

If raping a woman makes me a man, I refuse to be a man.... If beating up a woman is what would define me as a man, I would step back and refuse to endorse such a of masculinity. This is an urgent time for us as men. The time for the involvement of boys and men is yesterday tomorrow may already be too late.

Conclusion

Chitando has undoubtedly laid a solid foundation for the fight against gender-based violence by advocating for alternative masculinities that would not only respect women and other men but can sit with them and reason together. The Churches, in their pastors and theologies, became his prime targets. Through workshops, seminars, training, and writing, he has succeeded in reaching out to all levels of the Church, from the less educated to the most educated. His *Ubuntu-fied* solidarity and compassion for gender justice will forever remain the hallmark of his work on gender equality in general and alternative masculinities in Africa in particular. Thanks to Ezra Chitando for his selfless production of literature on masculinities as well as crisscrossing of the continent and beyond to preach the message of gender justice “after the example of Jesus, who embodied an alternative masculinity” (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:19). What remains is for the two wings of a bird, referred to above, to work together in bringing about gender justice in all our spheres of life. While much remains to be done in terms of preaching the message to the converted, the tools of the trade and the strategies have been prepared and laid out.

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9 Ezra Chitando's Advocacy and the Contribution of African Women Theologians

Thandi Soko-de Jong

Abstract

Ezra Chitando plays a vital role in advocating for greater recognition of the academic contributions of African women theologians. This chapter has employed the methodology of document analysis to highlight and examine Chitando's advocacy, particularly his critique of male dominance in academic theology and church leadership. Thus, this chapter has discussed, for example, his support of the concept of *her-stories*, which places a strong emphasis on the perspectives, experiences, and agency of women in scholarly writing and research. The findings of this chapter show that Chitando's commitment extends to both the content of his scholarly work and his practical approach, wherein he positions himself as an ally of African women theologians rather than an advocate on their behalf. It follows, therefore, that his literature cited in this chapter has been co-authored with African women theologians. The chapter has demonstrated Chitando's leadership in advocating for increased engagement with the accomplishments and contribution of African women theologians.

Keywords: African women theologians, theologies in Africa, Ezra Chitando

Introduction

Ezra Chitando (Zimbabwe) has made a significant contribution to advocacy for wider recognition of the academic contributions of African women theologians. The present chapter does not claim to exhaust all his advocacy on the topic. However, it seeks instead to draw out some of the key observations that have emanated from his discussion of the scholarly contributions of African women theologians. To accomplish this, the chapter has employed the methodology of document analysis. Document analysis is a qualitative research technique that entails the systematic interpretation and understanding of documents to develop empirical knowledge based on the information they provide (Bowen, 2009). Various forms of documents, such as books and journal articles, can be utilized

for systematic evaluation. In the context of this chapter, document analysis proves beneficial as it provides the necessary data through quotations, excerpts, or entire passages. These can then be organized thematically or into categories and case examples through content analysis (Labuschagne 2003 in Bowen 2009:27-28).

Before delving into the themes that emerged from the literature using this methodology, I will begin by defining the term, 'African women theologians' as offered in a selection of Chitando's publications that will be highlighted below. This will serve as an opening for the discussion of his observation that there is a larger focus on the theologies and practices of male African male theologians and church-based women's movements such as prayer unions¹ than there is on the contributions of African women theologians.

In the context of this chapter, African women theologians are defined in three interrelated ways. First, the term 'African' refers to women theologians of African heritage that theologically engage and/or address issues affecting communities in Africa and its diaspora. There are 'many Africas' (Oduyoye in Phiri, 2008:67). Therefore, this chapter does not define the African women theologians' community as monolithic but as representing many social locations and lived realities. Second, the term 'women' is inclusive and has been opted for in this chapter in line with Black womanist theologians that aim to interpret the Bible from the perspective that it is concerned with Black women's liberation (Cannon, 1988). This is a significant position held by African women theologians, particularly those whose approach critiques the influence of *kyriarchy*² on Christianity in African communities and beyond.

Finally, the term 'theologians' is narrowed down for this discussion to refer to the Christian academics that Chitando discusses in his contributions. Christianity is among the many religions that have a socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-political bearing on African communities.

¹ These prayer unions include movements such as the *manyano*'s that are covered extensively in the work of Beverley Haddad (2004).

² *Kyriarchy* is a term that was coined by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza from the ancient Greek word for 'lord/master' κύριος (*kyrios*). *Kyriarchy* is a term that extends patriarchy to encompass and connect to other structures of oppression and privilege, such as racism, ableism, homophobia, capitalism, and other social markers, in recognition of the intersectionality of oppression into overlapping, transversing and complicated power dynamics. See Schüssler (1992).

Thus, there has been a growing interest in how gender plays a role in its influence. Chitando seems to concur with the Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye who advocates for the two-winged bird analogy. The analogy argues that just as a bird with one wing/weakened wing cannot fly very high, similarly, African theology fails to adequately respond to the concerns of its diverse communities when it ignores or refuses to dialogue with African women's theological reflections.³ Finally, this chapter recognizes that African women scholars' contribution to theology is not limited to bookcase seminary theology (formal academic theology), rather, it also encompasses other modes such as theology of the open air (grassroots) (Namusoke, 1993). Before exploring Chitando's contribution to the topic, it is important to begin with a brief overview of African women theologians and their socio-religious context.

African Women Theologians and their Contexts

Background

The study of theology and religion on the continent has historically been male dominated. Like in other fields that study religion after the colonial era, "one could note that in many African countries there was a transfer of power from European males to African males" (Maguje & Muchena, 2016:2). Male scholars whose work dominated theological discourse include John S. Mbiti (Kenya, 1931-2019) and E. Bolaji Idowu (Nigeria, 1913-1995). While they ably critiqued theologies imposed by colonial influences, low female representation weakened the ability to provide equal attention to critically interrogating patriarchal beliefs and practices in their contexts (Headley, 2022).

Changes began with the arrival of African women theologians that elected to challenge this status quo. The status quo was influenced by Victorian notions of morality spread by several mission churches that promoted women's domesticity. These notions included encouraging women to be homemakers with limited access to the outside world. The domestic and marital roles promoted by such interpretations of Christianity can be

³ According to Musimbi Kanyoro, Mercy Amba Oduyoye first discussed the two-winged bird analogy in her opening address at the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians' inaugural meeting in Ghana, 1989. See Kanyoro (2002).

summed up as preparing African girls for the role of being “future spouses of Christian men, mothers of Christian children, makers of Christian homes” (Gaitskell, 1990:255). This emphasis on domesticity clashed with indigenous approaches (in Africa) that allowed women greater access to decision-making (Juwayeyi, 2020) and the outside world (Chitando & Mateveke, 2012:44). The appeal of an emphasis on domesticity was particularly strong among men and male church leaders who favored it (Chitando & Mateveke, 2012:44).

Thus, using women’s (embodied) experiences, a significant number of African women theologians introduced approaches that are, among others, “depatriarchalizing and decolonizing” (Dube, 2005). Some early examples of literature that brought these themes to the fore include *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* (1992), *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (1995), and *African Women, Religion and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye* (2006).

African women theologians are not a monolith. They do not all espouse definitions that group them together. Additionally, they have different aims and methods that range from (but are not limited to):

- the study of religions in Africa using gender analysis tools and frameworks;
- the study of the impact of religion on society and women’s agency using gender analysis tools and frameworks;
- research and praxis from the perspective of theologies of liberation that advocate for inclusivity and the empowerment of women and other marginalized communities;
- advocacy for women’s representation in theological discourses;
- advocacy for equitable representation in church leadership;
- and the examination and interrogation of traditions and socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-religious practices that harm women and other marginalized groups.

In summary, women scholars employ their aims and goals to promote the well-being of their communities and societies, where everyone’s voice is valued. Having established this background, the next section will define ‘African women theologians’ within the context of this chapter.

African Women Theologians

African women theologians are often part of church-based Christian women movements within their communities such as church women's prayer unions. However, they fall under a community of their own, because they are specifically professional theologians. From examples from her South African context, Beverley Haddad seems to place the two (inter-connected) groups side-by-side and thereby notes their distinctive roles by stating that:

Indigenous African Christian women in South Africa responded to the missionary endeavor through subversive action! They formed their own movement known as the manyano (or prayer union) movement. For academic women engaged in theological discourse, it is imperative that the survival theologies of marginalized women be recognized. These, I argue, are most clearly expressed in the manyano groups that meet each Thursday across the country (2004:4).

Although some women's unions can be subversive and explicitly oppose, challenge, and/or address gender injustice, others take a more conservative stance. The latter group includes women's unions that have their roots in Puritanism, which was spread by the missionary movements of the colonial era (Soko, 2013). Women's unions like these tend to uphold gender norms that restrict or hinder a critical approach to ideals surrounding gender. Among the ideals are women's submissiveness to their husbands in marriage, the emphasis on motherhood roles, and submission to male authority in religious institutions.

Considering such realities and the ongoing challenges facing church communities and their societies, which include religiously based gender inequality and economic inequality, it is critical to learn from the significant contribution of African women theologians. Their contribution impacts theological approaches to societal challenges from a better-informed place of understanding as many African women theologians have a lived experience and/or memory of the social issues that they are addressing through their work. For instance, instead of being limited by theory and/or literature-based approaches of knowing, they critically reflect on how hermeneutics and church traditions impact their contemporary realities. Thus, their work plays a crucial role in (a) interrogating issues and

systems that disproportionately affect women and various social minorities, and (b) promoting more inclusive and just communities of theological scholarship.

It is worth noting here that African women theologians encounter numerous obstacles in their pursuits. In *Major Challenges for African Women Theologians in Theological Education (1989-2008)*, Isabel Apawo Phiri (Malawi) identifies four examples of obstacles as follows:

- (1) re-defining the identity of African women theologians
- (2) encouraging more women to study theology and be on permanent staff
- (3) inclusion of African women's theology in the theological curriculum
- (4) collaborating with male theologians (2008: 66-67)

This chapter will discuss Chitando's response to some of these realities. More broadly, the chapter will highlight how Chitando's responses, in solidarity, delves into the struggle with limited resources, fewer opportunities for academic training and publication, cultural stereotypes, and patriarchal systems that undermine the contribution of African women theologians. Against this background, the next section will delve into some of Chitando's views regarding the contribution of African women theologians.

Chitando's Views Regarding the Contribution of African Women Theologians

Her-stories

In several publications Chitando outlines some of the challenges facing communities today to highlight how African women theologians have and continue to tackle these challenges from a research, teaching, and advocacy perspective. Additionally, he calls attention to how in many cases, their research contribution continues to be marginalised in the theological landscape.

In *Other Ways of Being a Diviner-healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS*, Rosinah Gabaitse (Botswana) and Ezra Chitando reiterate that the study of African Christianity has tended to focus on men's achievements within the church (2008:29). They add

that this has prompted African women theologians to call for a turning towards her-stories (Chitando & Gabaitse, 2008:30).

Whereas Haddad notes that there is a focus on indigenous church women's movements, Gabaitse and Chitando observe that in the shift towards her-stories, there has also been a tendency towards focusing on charismatic women founders of African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated/Instituted Churches (AICs) (2008:29). However, they observe that:

While this is a positive development, as it brings the achievements of such women to the fore, it runs the risk of overlooking the progress that African Christian women scholars have made in the academic arena. Rarely have young African Christian women been acknowledged for their academic achievements and leadership in addressing contemporary issues that affect the continent (Chitando and Gabaitse, 2008:29).

A first reason they provide for documenting and analyzing the contribution of African women theologians is their work significantly contributes "to the growth and vitality of the faith on the continent" (Chitando & Gabaitse, 2008:51). This is often through women theologians' commitment to providing a *her-story* approach to praxis – that is, writing and researching from "the point of view of women, and giving importance to their experiences" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023) and agency. This approach underpins the active involvement and direct impact many African women theologians have within their church communities.

Furthermore, in the quote above Gabaitse and Chitando highlight young African Christian women academics. This chapter - as previously stated - focuses on African women theologians generally. However, their focus sheds light on the reality that although women have long played critical roles in African church communities, their recognition in theological scholarship remains hampered by gender-based opposition. Therefore, it is of particular importance to nurture emerging young women scholars in this field. In the article, Gabaitse and Chitando highlight Musa W. Dube (Botswana), an African woman theologian who has addressed a range of issues of impact both at a personal level and those involving the Southern African community.

A broad overview of Dube's academic influence affirms Gabaitse and Chitando's assertion that African women theologians' contribution is on multiple fronts, yet under-recognized. Thus, in the example of Dube's schol-

arly work, her contribution ranges from responses to HIV & AIDS in Africa (see Dube, 2003) to introducing African, postcolonial⁴ feminist interpretations of the Bible (Dube, 2005:177-202). Her postcolonial feminist interpretations interrogate Western institutions and traditions that dominate African economies, scholarship, cultures and health sectors (Chitando & Gabaitse 2008:31). Gabaitse and Chitando observe that Dube's commitment to HIV & AIDS awareness and destigmatisation and her scholarly output and advocacy in relation to this topic enabled her to call on African church communities "to initiate a conspiracy of hope" (Dube, 2004). Her conspiracy of hope had several implications. According to the authors:

Dube became the most active African Christian woman scholar to challenge churches in Africa to provide an effective response to the epidemic. She combines womanist activism with penetrating social analysis to lay bare the church's paralysis in responding to the HIV epidemic. She has sought to challenge the complacency of the church by highlighting the extent to which it is implicated in fueling stigma and discrimination (Chitando and Gabaitse 2008:32).

Additionally, her leadership roles in Africa and beyond include activities within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) (Chitando & Gabaitse 2008:30), numerous academic bodies, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and editorial boards. This demonstration of a broad spectrum of academic, research and leadership input underscores Gabaitse and Chitando's position that the undermining of the progress that African Christian women scholars have made is counterproductive.

This position is further addressed by Anna Chitando and Ezra Chitando's chapter entitled, *Zimbabwean Women's Writings and Women's Theology: Supporting Women's Struggles for Full Rights and Dignity* (2022).⁵ In the chapter, they discuss how Zimbabwean women writers and women theologians have sought to uphold women's dignity and human rights (2022:51). Additionally, the writers and theologians interrogate coloniality

⁴ In terms of background, "choosing not to become "landless", Dube's parents migrated to Botswana and settled in the Borolong area, where Dube was born. Dube's life therefore represents a personal encounter with settler colonialism, which was to shape her analysis of globalisation and uneven power relations between Blacks and whites" (Chitando & Gabaitse 2008:30-31).

⁵ In *Gendered Spaces, Religion and Migrations in Zimbabwe* (2022).

and are united in their determination to ensure that Zimbabwean women enjoy total liberation (Chitando & Chitando, 2022:51).

These are similar motifs to that of other African women theologians such as those discussed above (Oduyoye, Dube). This seems then a second layer of Ezra Chitando's advocacy, that is, the acknowledgment of the liberatory potency of African women's contribution. They describe this as writings and theology that posit that the survival of Zimbabwean women is an assault on both patriarchy and colonialism (Chitando & Chitando, 2022:51). Thus, Anna Chitando and Ezra Chitando define the writers and scholars' liberatory aims and methodologies as focused on:

- women's economic empowerment, women's health, and women's leadership,
- the well-being of Zimbabwean women,
- shunning patriarchal and colonial nomenclature and placing emphasis on Zimbabwean women's autonomy and agency (2022:51).

Chihera Phenomenon

Finally, in another collaborative effort, Chitando focuses on a phenomenon that is helpful in summarizing his advocacy and why he thinks it is important. Thus, in *Introducing a Radical African Indigenous Feminist Principle: Chihera in Zimbabwe* (2023)⁶ Ezra Chitando, Sophia Chirongoma, and Munyaradzi Nyakudya draw attention to the *Chihera* phenomenon. According to the authors, the *Chihera* phenomenon cannot easily be pinned down to one dominant idea but deploys a number of terms or concepts interchangeably (2023:2). However, they do endeavor to capture its essence by describing it as a phenomenon that has been enhanced by social media. It is a code name for all women and girls who refuse to be treated as second class citizens by patriarchy (Chitando, Chirongoma and Nyakudya, 2023:3).

Chihera describes (a) "one who descends from the Mhofu totem" (the homeland of the legendary anti-colonial spiritual leader, Nehanda)⁷ and

⁶ Introductory chapter in *Chihera in Zimbabwe: A Radical African Feminist Principle* (2023).

⁷ Ibid.

relatedly, (b) “a symbolic reference to all women who are assertive, fearless and independent thinking, women who do not hesitate to subvert and subdue, trash and defy patriarchy in the quest for their emancipation, women who strive to exorcise the demon of patriarchy” (Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023:3-4). In other words, *Chihera* is “a Black Zimbabwean/African woman with an attitude, who makes no apology for who she is, namely, a liberated woman and the nemesis of patriarchy” (Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023:2). She is lionized by her supporters but loathed by her critics for daring to confront and deflate patriarchy (Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023:2).

In the chapter, Chitando, Chirongoma and Nyakudya utilize the *Chihera* frame to reflect on Zimbabwean and African women’s quest for full liberation and the achievement of sustainable development (2023:3). They argue that from the perspective of the *Chihera* principle, African womanism and feminism relies on theories and categories that emerge locally, within the women’s social contexts.⁸ This seems to align with the ethos of groups such as the Circle and the work of African women theologians that have been discussed above. In this line, the authors recognize that women’s refusal to *carry the burdens spawned* (2023:7) by patriarchy and colonization is enacted by women in various spaces that include social media.

The chapter does not focus on African women theologians. However, it can be observed that apart from theological aims, the aims of *Chihera* and that of many African women theologians are identical. Both are disruptive of the status quo and are “creative of the next phase of egalitarian gender relations” (Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023:8). Additionally, the authors view the role of (women) academics as part of the *Chihera* phenomenon, stating that the “patriarchal backlash against *Chihera* seeks to retain the status quo. However, gender justice activists, development practitioners and academics devoted to gender transformation should use the momentum created by *Chihera* to strategize further for women’s rights in Zimbabwe and Africa” (Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023:18). Finally, it is noteworthy that the majority of contributors to the book introduced in the chapter are African women scholars. Now that Chitando’s

⁸ According to the authors, the dominant response within African womanism or feminism has been a resounding “no!” to using foreign/external theories and categories to achieve full liberation and flourishing.” (Chitando, Chirongoma and Nyakudya 2023:5).

support for the recognition of the contributions of African women theologians has been established, the next section will discuss his advocacy before concluding this chapter.

Chitando's Advocacy Regarding African Women Theologians: A Discussion

As indicated in the examples above, Ezra Chitando is among the leading voices advocating for the recognition of African women theologians' contributions to theological discourse on the continent and beyond. Ways in which this recognition can develop further include the prioritization of the scholars' theologies in academic institutions (curricula and research programmes) and in adopting their insights in the pursuit of just and equitable academic and church theology and praxis. Chitando's advocacy is founded on the premise that African women theologians have made invaluable contributions to the development of theology in Africa, and their work deserves to be recognized and valued.

A critical point may be to question whether Chitando, as a man, should be involved in the task of writing about women – instead of *listening* to African women theologians. In their aforementioned chapter, *Chihera in Zimbabwe: A Radical African Feminist Principle*, Ezra Chitando, Sophia Chirongoma and Munyaradzi Nyakudya acknowledge the concern many have about the role of men in women's resistance and liberatory efforts. They state that, "some critics wonder if the erstwhile oppressors and beneficiaries of the patriarchal dividend can suddenly become passionate advocates for women's liberation" (2023:7). In the case of Chitando, however, he has been consistent in identifying his positionality and thereby, choosing to write *with* as opposed to writing *about* African women. This is why it is possible to extensively cite his collaborative work with women scholars, as this chapter has attempted to do.

Chitando, Chirongoma and Nyakudya point out that in their volume, at least, most contributors – including Chitando himself, "consider men as having the capacity to make a meaningful contribution to the struggle for gender justice" (2023:7). It follows, therefore, that we can infer that Chitando as an ally upholds principles guided by objectives of the African women theologians discussed above and the *Chihera* ethos. Such principles may include:

- a radical feminist principle that counters the argument that African cultures are synonymous with patriarchy and that women's equality and their pursuit of an abundant life is a foreign idea (Chitando, Chirongoma and Nyakudya 2023:10-13);
- solidarity with African women theologians and other womanists and feminists in challenging the ideological deployment of culture and offering instead an alternative interpretation of African culture that promotes women's wholistic health and well-being (Chitando, Chirongoma and Nyakudya 2023:10-13).

The alternative interpretation is based on understanding that the spirit of gender justice is present within indigenous values and systems but “is muted or featuring less prominently than the version of gender inequality sponsored by patriarchy” (Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023:10-13). The recognition – and advocacy for such principles helps ensure that theology in Africa and beyond can develop to be more diverse, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and experiences of African communities. Additionally, such principles help ensure transformed masculinities. In ‘*Nhai Varume, Tapindwa Nei?*’ (Men, What Has Entered into Us?): *Oliver Mtukudzi and the Complexities of Transformative Masculinities* (2022), Chitando and Munyaradzi Nyakudya advocate for transformed masculinities. In the chapter, the authors highlight the transformative masculinities promoted by the renowned Zimbabwean musician Oliver Mtukudzi. Mtukudzi urged men to take up “active opposition to men’s violence against women and girls” (2022:23). Ultimately, Chitando is fully in support of initiatives, scholarship, and activism that will help ensure that theology plays a significant role in transforming the lived experiences of women and girls positively.

It is useful to consider that some may argue that what Chitando is endorsing and advocating is unnecessary and a distraction from more pressing issues. Detractors may argue that academic achievement should be recognized based solely on merit, regardless of gender. In other words, it can be argued that the recognition of women scholars as a separate theological group may essentialize them as a homogenous group. This may perpetuate gender inequality by ignoring the particularities of individual scholarly contributions and the impact of intersectionality on individual women scholars of theology. This in turn may reinforce the idea that their worth and value must be measured against male counterparts. From such a per-

spective, Chitando's advocacy can be perceived as reinforcing gender divisions rather than promoting true equality in theological discourse or disrupting power imbalances.

Additionally, some may argue that women scholars of theology may opt to be complicit in the system of patriarchy – conforming to what some scholars have argued, namely that some women are “subtly and perhaps unwittingly manipulated to strengthen the patriarchal system” (Chitando, Chirongoma & Nyakudya, 2023:25). All these aspects, it can be argued, could potentially further marginalize African women theologians, relegating them to isolated spaces within academia, ecumenical and church communities and beyond. However, given the critical points made by Chitando and his collaborators, his advocacy seems to focus on a critical reflection of gender in theological discourse itself and its systems of impact (in academia, church communities, etc.). In doing so, he recognizes the work of women scholars who have already identified the key issues that concern them and their achievements. Therefore, in my view, his advocacy is in solidarity with work that is already created, articulated, and developed by women scholars of theology. He is simply adding his voice in the call for those who have failed to acknowledge it to turn and begin to pay serious attention if we are to successfully witness an inclusive theological discourse across the continent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ezra Chitando's advocacy for the recognition of African women theologians is crucial for promoting gender equality in theological discourse and acknowledging the important contributions of these scholars to the field of theology. This chapter has highlighted his leadership in this area and the overarching message of the plea for greater and better engagement with African women's theological achievements. This chapter has discussed Chitando's advocacy and support for the diverse but interrelated contribution of African women theologians. Against this background, this chapter has also emphasized the significance of African women theologians in critiquing the influence of *kyriarchy* on Christianity in African communities and beyond. Their contribution has significantly influenced the theological discourse on the socio-cultural, socio-economic

and socio-political realities of African communities. This confirms Chitando's assertion that African women theologians ought to receive greater recognition for their ongoing contributions to the development of current African theology and its future.

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10 Transitioning from Phenomenology of Religion to Applied Religions

Contributions from Ezra Chitando

Tenson Muyambo

Abstract

This chapter is a reflection of Ezra Chitando's contributions to the study of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa, particularly from a Zimbabwean perspective. It is a chapter that makes a trajectory survey of some of Chitando's works that have transformed the phenomenology of religion as promulgated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) into applied religion, where religion has been found to be the centre of human existence, which is at the centre of people's lived realities. To achieve this, I used some of Chitando's works where he applied religion to address human existential challenges such as masculinities in the context HIV & AIDS, gender and other pandemics such as COVID-19. I also used casual conversations with him on matters of religion and development, health, climate change and through working with him on a number of book projects just to mention a few. Using grounded theology as the lens for this chapter, I argue that Chitando has demonstrated beyond doubt that religion is not an abstract/utopian phenomenon but a concrete entity that works through, with and for people. The chapter concludes that Chitando has successfully engaged religion to find meaning and relevance in African realities, more particularly Zimbabwean realities.

Keywords: Phenomenology of religion, applied religion, development, masculinities, pandemics, grounded theology

Introduction and Background

This chapter consists of two parts: firstly, the part that situates Ezra Chitando as an academic and secondly his contributions to the transitioning from phenomenology of religion to applied religion as he navigates the intersections of religion, gender, masculinities, development, politics and health. The first part (a) demonstrates Chitando's attributes that have seen him as an academic, and the second part (b) situates the chapter into

proper perspective as to what Chitando has done and continues to do in nurturing young scholars.

A Seasoned Scholar of Religion: Nurturing Emerging Academics

While eulogies from an Africa perspective are cited and recited when an individual has transitioned from this physical world to the 'other' world/worlds, it does not defy logic to do so when the individual is still around and with us. I have had and continue to have enviable opportunities of working *under, through* and *with* Ezra Chitando both as a student and as an academic. The formative years of this interaction were characterised by a tutor-student relationship. With the passage of time, it developed into a mentor-mentee relationship.

One of Ezra Chitando's most remarkable attributes is his humility. I remember always referring to him as "Prof" in our conversations, but he consistently insists on being called Ezra. His humility is matched by his unparalleled patience in academic circles. Many Religious Studies scholars who were part of the then Department of Religious Studies, Philosophy, and Classics at the University of Zimbabwe can attest to this. I experienced his patience both as a student and as a fellow publisher. As an academic supervisor, he provides constructive and instructional critiques, always finding an encouraging way to offer feedback on a supervisee's work.

Due to this patience, Ezra Chitando has become a young academics nurturer *par excellence*. It is a joy and a learning journey to co-edit books with him. I have had some privileges of working under, through and with him in some book projects, where I am either a chapter contributor to his edited book or a co-editor with him. I recall an incident where I complained bitterly about authors who were not cooperating in a book project. His comments were just, "...the only reason why there is no violence by the editors on authors is that editors finish their work AWAY from the authors..." (WhatsApp communication on 18 April 2023), encouraging me to be patient with them and to not lose hope. Such subtle advice is not only humbling but indicates that editorship takes much sacrifice, patience and endurance. At one point when I almost quit a project we were working on together, he said "...don't even panic... But let's push", reassuring me and I had to soldier on. He works with young academics with lots of

love and accommodation, and builds in them a sense of confidence. Having given this brief, the next part of the chapter discusses Chitando's contributions to the transitioning from phenomenology of religion to applied religion.

Religion, as a discipline, has suffered immensely from what Cox (1996) calls reductionism. It has been studied, largely from other disciplines rather than itself. This has created enormous challenges in defining religion. In some circles, religion has been dismissed as 'confessional' and not scientific in nature (Muyambo et al, 2022; Muyambo and Tendere, 2023). Secularisation theories have worsened the matter. In a world ravaged by several challenges not limited to pandemics, inequalities, climate change, poverty and underdevelopment, religion's role has been questioned.

While the preceding argument holds merit, I must acknowledge that religion has stood the test of time. This resilience is largely due to academics whose unwavering belief in religion as a vital aspect of people's livelihoods remains steadfast. To understand the trajectory of religion, from the writings of Edmund Husserl and James L. Cox to those of Ezra Chitando in Zimbabwe, it is essential to first conceptualize how religion is understood in this chapter. According to Smith (1964, 1987), Cox (1996), and Chitando (1997), the term 'religion' has been subject to a long-standing debate regarding its elusive, culture-specific, flexible, non-normative, and non-universal nature. Simply put, 'religion' is "fluid and, at times, associated with misleading connotations, as it is seen as both binding and confessional" (Sibanda et al., 2022:2). In response to this ambiguity, Smith (1964) suggests discarding the term 'religion' altogether, replacing it with the concepts of 'personal faith' and 'cumulative traditions.' Similarly, Smart (1969) argues that defining religion is unnecessary. He advocates for using the term 'worldviews,' which he sees as more inclusive and beneficial. Smart further contends that separating religion from the secular is not productive, as what we are truly dealing with are the religious and symbolic aspects of human life—rituals, ultimate beliefs, myths, and so on (Sibanda et al., 2022). In light of this, I define religion as a people's worldview—how they engage with the core of their existence. It is within this context that the following section aims to highlight how religion has been freed from the confines of reductionism and scientism. Special recognition is given to Ezra Chitando for his significant contributions to

the popularization and contextualization of the phenomenology of religion, which has restored dignity and integrity to religions that were once dismissed as insignificant or non-existent.

Phenomenology of Religion: Chitando's Perspectives

Religion was and in some circles is still viewed as an abstract phenomenon that only the privileged could comprehend, except the African. Emil Ludwig, a Western anthropologist, comes to mind here when he was so perplexed to hear that an African knew God. He wondered "how can an untutored African conceive of God" (Uka, 1991:40). For him God was a philosophical concept that 'savages' were incapable of framing (Uka, 1991). I am obliged to indicate that such mischievous and scandalous undermining of the religious sphere of the African was shamed by the introduction of the phenomenology of religion as both a method and theory in the study of religion. Although Edmund Husserl and to some extent James L. Cox are said to have popularised this method and theory in the study of religion, it suffices to argue that Ezra Chitando, a student of Cox, made it Zimbabwe's, if not Africa's most cherished method and theory in the study of religion. Cox's (1996) explanations of the method and theory further finds traction in what Chitando did in applying the method and theory in the study of religions, particularly African Traditional Religion. Chitando's (2010) insightful explanations and application of *epoche*, *eidetic intuition* and *cultivating empathy* does not only save religion from unjustifiable reductionism but offers dignity to other religions previously dismissed as 'fetish', 'juju', 'primitive' (Idowu, 1973). Below is a brief explanation of Chitando's (2010) description of the three principles of the phenomenology of religion:

Epoche

While I won't delve into the etymological complexities of the term *epoche*, I will explore Ezra Chitando's expansion of the concept, building on earlier contributions by phenomenologists and philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and Van der Leeuw. Traditionally, *epoche* has been understood as meaning "to stop" or "to hold back." However, Chitando

(2010:267) adds that "*epoche* cultivates an attitude of openness to the phenomena of religion." This suggests that researchers should suspend their judgments regarding the truth or falsity of a religion. Chitando's perspective is insightful because it allows every religion to be viewed and appreciated on its own terms. For non-practitioners, *epoche* requires them to 'step back' and 'bracket' their own beliefs in order to understand religious phenomena from a more neutral standpoint. This contrasts sharply with the approach of figures like Emil Ludwig, whose failure to adopt *epoche* led to skewed views of African religions. According to Chitando, *epoche* helps researchers avoid making distinctions between 'true' and 'false' religions. In his view, such distinctions are inherently judgmental and inappropriate within the phenomenology of religion, where the focus is on understanding religious experiences without bias or preconceived notions.

I must quicken to say that Chitando is alive to the fact that inasmuch as *epoche* makes a lot of sense in an attempt to have an objective analysis of phenomena, it has some limitations. He questions its practicality. How does one approach phenomena with an open mind? Where does he/she leave his/her cultural excesses that are inherent within cultures? To overcome this dilemma, Chitando urges researchers to be fully immersed in the religious beliefs and practices of the communities they are studying. In the words of Chitando (2010:268) researchers "must overcome the distance between themselves and the focus of their research." This has enabled scholars of religion who, hitherto, had difficulties in carrying out reliable and valid studies on religions, do so. Chitando, as a phenomenologist, solved the puzzle of how to phenomenologically carry out research. Having been equipped with such instructive insights, many researchers can do research on any religion without bias and/or prejudice. It is at this juncture that studies on African Traditional Religion, which have been far in between, became and continue to be plenty. The inferior tag on religions of the South waned as such religions found and continue to find space among the league of religions. Another aspect of the phenomenology of religion that Chitando sheds light on is *eidetic intuition*.

Eidetic Intuition

This principle does not function in isolation from *epoche*. Chitando (2010) makes it clear that having 'stopped' or 'holding back' presuppositions

about phenomena, one is supposed to intuit the meaning of what actually manifests itself in the world. This is seeing into the very nature of phenomena as they exist, commonly referred to as *eidetic vision*. The combination of *epoche* and *eidetic intuition* results in an objective view of phenomena and prevents scholars of religion from being judgmental. As one combines the two, there is a third one that Chitando regards as a premium, that is *cultivating empathy*.

Cultivating Empathy

Coupled with *epoche* and *eidetic intuition*, a scholar of religion must cultivate empathy towards the religious individuals and communities that they are studying. The underlying idea is that the focus of religion and its study is human beings. Chitando (2010) urges scholars of religion to be conscious that they are dealing with human beings hence the need to “feel for” and “feel with” adherents of the religions they are studying. This is what is now popularly known as ‘doing research with’ practitioners as opposed to ‘doing research on’ them. The scholars of religion must ‘put themselves in the shoes’ of the practitioners for a better and more informed understanding of the phenomena under study. This can only happen when one has already practiced *epoche* followed by *eidetic intuition*. This is quite essential for researchers who use participant-observation as a method for studying phenomena. Equipped with this vital information participant-observation, characterised by respect and mutuality, research becomes enjoyable and beneficial both to the researchers and the participants as co-researchers.

It will be unscholarly not to question pitfalls of cultivating empathy. Chitando cautions his readers that while it is advisable for a researcher to participate in the religious rituals of any religion under study, there is need to be able to ‘walk out of’ that immersion lest one becomes a convert of the religion one is studying. Scholars of religion must be able to balance participation with immersion so that after the study they revert to their role as scholars not as believers. It is with such caution that we begin to see young scholars flourishing and beginning to excel in research. While I am aware that Chitando did not break virgin lands in this regard, his contribution to the phenomenology of religion brings new insights as he does not only buttress what other scholars have done, but uniquely does so. He makes religion a lived reality as he interfaces it with HIV & AIDS,

gender, development, patriarchy and more recently with the COVID-19 pandemic. Such application of religion got the notice of the World Council of Churches (WCC), particularly in the context of the HIV pandemic, resulting in Chitando publishing reassuring and hopeful narratives for the HIV affected and infected individuals and communities, one of which is the church community.

Having discussed the role that Chitando has played and continues to play in ensuring that religions get a decent study through transitioning phenomenology of religion as both a method and theory the following sections are illustrations of how Chitando applied religion to address human existential challenges.

Religion, Gender, Masculinities and Pandemics

Religion has been accused of perpetrating and perpetuating gender inequalities and toxic masculinities (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012; Barker & Ricardo, 2005). Yet it is by the same religion that issues around gender, masculinities and pandemics can be addressed, thanks to those who came before Chitando but not forgetting his insights in several of his works. One such illuminating work is his co-edited *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*. This is a book that brings to the fore that religion, in its various forms, can be applied (applied religion) to address issues of gender and masculinities. Due to the patriarchal nature of most African communities, pandemics such as HIV & AIDS, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affect women and girls. The tendency has been and continues to be leaving out men and boys in addressing some of the issues that affect women and girls like gender-based violence, child marriages, genital mutilation, etc. The tendency is to focus on the survivor and not the alleged perpetrator. According to Chitando & Chirongoma (2012) and Barker & Ricardo (2005), it is prudent that if communities want to squarely deal with social ills that hit women and girls the hardest, they need to involve those who perpetrate and perpetuate the social ills, men and boys. Leaving them out of the advocacy backfires in that the perpetrators remain unchanged. They must be shown how life-threatening their actions are towards women and girls for them to transform. This can be achieved through the same religion that men and boys use to justify their life-denying actions.

It is quite instructive that Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:17) admit that “religion is a double-edged sword in relation to masculinities in the face of gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS”. For them religion, on one hand, reinforces dangerous masculinities, while on the other hand it has an enormous potential to transform masculinities. Chitando, among other scholars like Musa Dube (2004), Musimbi Kanyoro (2004) and Gerald West (2006), question some readings of the bible which support male dominance and supremacy over women. Their position is that there is a need to re-read those scriptures that perpetuate the stereotyping of women. For the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) culture needs to be interrogated in order to weed out those beliefs and practices that dehumanise women. The fault lines found in religion that disproportionally affect women and girls should, can and must be queried in order to make religion safe for all. This is what I can refer to as ‘applied religion’. Feminist male scholars who include Ezra Chitando and Tinyiko Sam Maluleke contributed a lot towards ensuring a gender-sensitive religious space where issues of toxic, life-denying masculinities are interrogated in order to bring about transformative or rather redemptive masculinities. The involvement of male feminists is no mean achievement towards ensuring that religion is indeed an inclusive space for all. Examples of incidents and scriptures from different religions have been used to promote gender-sensitivity and redemptive masculinities. This is a case of from phenomenology of religion to applied religion. Certain religious beliefs and practices are applied in order to enhance human flourishing.

Chitando’s works *Troubled but not destroyed: African Theology in dialogue with HIV & AIDS* (2009) and the co-edited *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians facing HIV* (2009) are examples of what religion can do in addressing human existential challenges. Religion is called upon during stressful times such as the HIV & AIDS and the COVID-19 contexts. At the peak of the HIV & AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe and Africa by extension, Chitando, through a number of works, demonstrated that on one hand religion has faulty lines that exist which disproportionally affect women and girls. On the other hand, he demonstrates that religion can be used to redress the same challenges women face in the context of HIV & AIDS. For instance, his co-edited book with Nothando Hadebe, *Compassionate Circles: African Theologians Facing HIV*, contributors (Ambasa-Shisanya, 2009; Akintunde, 2009; Siwila, 2009) bring to the fore the religious and social conventions that make

women suffer in the face of the HIV & AIDS pandemic. The contributors do not only bring to the fore these factors but also suggest how the factors can be changed to improve the conditions of women (Pillay, 2009; Labeodan, 2009). For instance, Pillay (2009) challenges women in leadership positions to transform the church by confronting sexism and patriarchy. In other words, Pillay is asking women in leadership positions to use their power to create compassionate churches that take care of each other. When this happens religion would have been used to create “a community in the context of HIV and AIDS” (Pillay, 2009:95).

In *Troubled but not destroyed: African Theology in dialogue with HIV and AIDS*, Chitando (2009) challenges African theologians to do more on the development of social and personal mechanisms to cope with the HIV & AIDS pandemic utilizing the various strands of African theology. He yearns for the vibrant and militant African theology of the 1960s and 1970s which managed to deal with existential challenges of those times, such as colonialism, apartheid, and racism, just to mention a few. If religion could be employed to deal with such challenges, equally the same theology can be harnessed to deal with 21st century dilemmas like HIV and COVID-19. When religion can be applied in this manner, then religion becomes an important cog for human flourishing. This importance of religion is also stressed by Adogame (2007) who accuses international and African discourses on the HIV & AIDS pandemic and intervention of neglecting the role of religion and religious organisations. Adogame (2007:475) argues thus, “social science perspectives in tackling health and disease neglect religious doctrines and faith central to worldviews and praxis of religious groups”. Through writings by Chitando and other scholars of religion this neglect has been challenged as religion, in its various facets, has become a lived reality for most of the African people, especially in times of crises. The foregoing points to “the changing role of religion in the public sphere” (Bompani, 2010:307, Clarke & Jennings, 2008).

The other books that are co-edited with Chitando are *Religion, Women's Health Rights, and Sustainable development Volume 1* (2022) and *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change* (2022). In *Religion, Women Health Rights, and Sustainable development: Volume 1*, Chitando and his co-editors continue to argue that without considering women in any discourse, it is very difficult to talk of sustainable development. The theme of the need to consider and include women in all human endeavours

keeps recurring. In an introduction to this book Chirongoma, Man-yonganise & Chitando (2022:1) clearly set the mandate of the book when they say “Without paying attention to women’s sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the Sustainable Development Goals will remain a mirage or an expression of wishful thinking”. This is a clear reference to SDGs 3 and 5. This resonates with earlier views on women by Chitando (2009), especially in the context of HIV & AIDS. We can argue that having exposed how women are disproportionately affected by pandemics, this volume pushes the inclusion and empowerment of women even in matters that concern their sexualities. The matters that have been regarded as taboo, sexuality in general and women sexual reproductive health rights in particular are brought into public domain for the promotion of human flourishing. This is a feat that this volume must be applauded for and Chitando with his co-editors and chapter contributors dare speak of the traditionally taken to be unspeakable, more so in public for public consumption.

To demonstrate that religion is no mean discipline, Chitando (2022:3) in Chitando, Conrade and Kilonzo’s *African Perspectives on Religion and Climate Change* argues that inasmuch as HIV & AIDS as well as Climate Change can be addressed from the perspective of science, this is not enough. He proposes the multi-sectoral approach which include religion. Chitando calls for all stakeholders who include religious and traditional leaders to come together and implement strategies to counter climate emergency. While on one hand religion can be said to promote climate change through insistence on human dominance over nature, on another hand, more liberating approaches to religion/ theology are possible. The use of taboos to protect the environment can be such a liberating approach. Humanity is forbidden to wantonly exploit the environment without recourse to ensure sustainability.

It is also prudent to acknowledge that in a bid to make religion alive in people’s livelihoods, Chitando has come up with book chapters in book projects where he instructively intersects religion and development with a view to demonstrate that while religion can be associated with negativity such as its promotion of patriarchy (Rubaya, 2022; Oduyoye, 2001), it is, too, developmental. In doing so, Chitando et al. (2022, 2023) discuss the positive role of religion in people’s health and well-being. It is within this context that religion plays a developmental role, especially when it dis-

cards gender inequalities perpetrated and perpetuated by toxic masculinities. The section below looks at religion and development as presented by Chitando in some of his works.

Religion and Development

There has been a traditional thinking that religion has nothing to do with development. This myth has had a negative attitude towards religion, especially on African Independent Churches (AICs) but surprisingly Bompani (2010) demonstrates beyond doubt that AICs from a South African perspective are indeed development oriented. They engage in livelihood changing projects that benefit societies like “saving clubs, lending societies, burial societies and *stokvels* (informal saving funds) (Bompani, 2010:307). This does not only transform people’s livelihoods but contributes immensely to the fiscal coffers of South Africa’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While religion and development may need unpacking here, due to limited space and time, I will gloss over them without necessarily getting into the complexities of the two terms. The two terms are not easily understood and do not mean the same thing to different people. Simply put, religion is associated with established traditions, characterised by a supreme being and codified in sacred texts (Clarke & Jennings, 2008). For purposes of this discussion, I will leave it at that but the definition Clarke and Jennings offer falls far too short of what religion entails. The scholars assume that for religion to exist there must be codified sacred texts, a position taken by only those who believe that Christianity and Islam are the only religions. Defining development is again contentious but I will simply conceptualise it as ‘growth-oriented’ development. For Gardner & Lewis (1996) development should attend first to the primary material needs of those living in poverty. Sen (1999, 2009) and Nussbaum (2000) add that development should lead to an expanding of people’s capabilities, enlarging their choices, and allowing them to lead full lives and to meet their potential. Suffice to mention is that both religion and development are human-centred and are bent on wanting to promote human flourishing.

Given the foregoing, religion was and in some circles still continues to be matters of faith with nothing to do with development. Inasmuch as this may be the case, works by theologians have demonstrated beyond doubt that religion and development are intertwined. A study by Thompson

(1977) revealed that there are prerequisites that are needed for development to take place. The study revealed the prevailing thought of the time: that people cannot develop politically if other forms of development, including 'development of faith and belief' are not attended to. It is evident that with the influx of world challenges such as poverty, pandemics, and natural disasters, religion has been found to be an essential component of efforts to address such eventualities. For instance, Chitando has co-edited books on religion and COVID-19, and religion and climate change. In some of the books like *Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southern Africa*, Chitando has a chapter in the book titled: 'Religion and COVID-19 in Southern Africa: implications for the discourse on religion and development'. This is the concluding chapter of the book. In the chapter Chitando (2022:246) argues that despite secularization and modernization theories, "religion has stubbornly persisted and remains vibrant across diverse contexts, including the so-called 'developed' countries where it was expected to become less influential". It is more important to note that Chitando, in the chapter, illustrates the role of religion in international relations, where in the context of COVID-19, religion calls upon nations of the Global North to share vaccines with the Global South. The World Council of Churches was at the fore of this call. If ever we have witnessed faith-based organisations contributing to community transformations, it was during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith-based organisations were seen to be at the thick of things, providing essential information, facilities and counselling services in a bid to curb the pandemic. It must also be admitted that while we can talk of the positive side of religion in ensuring that COVID-19 was curtailed, Chitando (2022) talks of both positive and negative positions of religion and argues that religion can either be positive or negative towards development, but not both. While this is the position he takes, the 'either/ or', not both, more important to note is that there can be some aspects of religion which can be negative towards development, for instance patriarchal biblical interpretations, while at the same time, the same religion can be positive like charitable giving of resources to enable human flourishing.

In a co-edited *Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe* (2013), Chitando, Gunda and Kügler urge African scholars in biblical and religious studies to be contextually relevant by focusing on religious phenomena found in Africa, Zimbabwe in particular. This call came at a time when the Zimbabwean religious arena was witnessing the grip of 'prophetic craze' (Chi-

tando et al., 2013:9). The book is a caution against being duped by unscrupulous prophets. Similarly, in an edited *Prayers and Players: Religion and Politics in Zimbabwe* (2013), Chitando showcases that religion can be abused for political expedience where politicians come to religious gatherings towards elections seeking to be voted for. In a more recent co-edited *Religion-Regime Relations in Zimbabwe: Co-operation and Resistance* (2023), Chitando and others seem to argue, too, that religion and politics “are two fundamental dimensions of human society, and yet they are often at loggerheads” (Turner, 2013:1). Chitando and others have managed to demonstrate that religion transverses politics and other dimensions of life, it “permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it” (Mbiti, 1969:1).

Suffice to say is that Chitando and others seem to be saying that religion devoid of masculine perpetuated gender inequalities is pro-development contrary to traditional views. Faith-based organisations have moved from being confessional to being pragmatic. This shift to praxis has been achieved through scholars of religion who have persistently and consistently showcased the positive side of religion. These scholars have moved from phenomenologically studying religion to practical religion. Religion is no longer viewed as an abstract reality but a lived reality that humanity leans on and utilizes wisely when the need arises.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has illustrated Ezra Chitando’s contribution towards the role of religion, both positive and negative, in a bid to demonstrate that approaches to human existential challenges that ignore religion are not only limiting but deny human ingenuity enshrined in their faiths. The chapter has made a trajectory survey of the works that Chitando and colleagues have written on the role of religion in development in general. All the works emphasise the centrality of religion in human existence, revealing religion as a lived reality, without which humanity diminishes. The chapter also celebrates the enormous contribution that Chitando has made towards applied religion and in nurturing young academics. His commitment to women wholeness, and liberation has not only encouraged women scholars but has made them realise their potential. The likes of Sophia Chirongoma, Molly Manyonganise, Susan Kilonzo, and many oth-

ers are traversing the domain of religion with aplomb, thanks to Chitando's mentorship. These feminists now speak about HIV & AIDS, speak out against gender-based violence and many social ills through getting support from male feminists like Chitando. Chitando, as a writer and leader, has become a model for us to emulate. We now challenge harmful cultural practices and we question the sacred texts which have been used to suffocate women and girls. This chapter salutes Ezra Chitando who has taught women and men alike that when "*You strike a woman, she bleeds*" as opposed to when "*You strike a woman, you strike a Rock*" (Sprong, 2012). He has achieved this by transitioning from phenomenology of religion to applied religion, where religion engages with African realities in different contexts.

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Section C



Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Practice

11 Marriage No More a Safe Haven

HIV infection and Married Women in sub-Saharan Africa

Anniegrace Mapangisana Hlatywayo

Abstract

In the midst of much reverence and sanctification within the church and communities in the African context, the institution of marriage is identified as a major risk factor and a 'potential death trap' for many married women given the current scale of the HIV & AIDS pandemic. Increasing studies reflect that marriage is a major route of HIV transmission. Sexual intercourse within marriage places women at risk of HIV infection primarily from their spouses' extramarital sexual relations. Whilst this study acknowledges that both husbands and wives are at risk of contracting HIV from their spouses, a myriad of barriers at individual, relational and community level inclusive of socio-cultural, biological and gender inequalities render married women more susceptible to infection. In order to preserve the sanctity of life for women within marital unions, this chapter argues for a theological framework that offers life and dignity to all of humanity. Additionally, in order to redress the gendered nature of the HIV & AIDS pandemic, this study calls for the transformation of harmful masculinities through a bold church and community praxis as mitigation strategies. Drawing from selected works of Chitando on HIV & AIDS, firstly, the study argues for the active engagement of men in the HIV & AIDS discourse. Secondly, the study calls for solidarity between men and women as a strategy for redressing the challenge of married women's vulnerability to HIV infection.

Keywords: Institution of marriage, HIV & AIDS, bold church, community praxis, Chitando, married women, transformative masculinities

Introduction

A growing body of studies reflects that marriage is a major route of HIV transmission in sub-Saharan Africa whereby a large number of newly infected people are women contracting the virus from their spouses (Gumbo 2015; Hagemann et al. 2010; Kamau 2011; Mugweni et al. 2015;

Setume 2016). This means that sexual intercourse within the context of marriage or long-term relationships exposes women to the risk of HIV infection particularly from their partners' extramarital sexual relations. While it is acknowledged that both husbands and wives are at risk of contracting HIV from their spouses, socio-economic, cultural, behavioural, structural and biological gender inequalities expose women to the vulnerability of HIV transmission from their husbands or partners (Awoleye et al. 2022; Ramjee & Daniels 2013; Shoko 2012). It has since been noted that in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, married women (25.8%) are twice likely to be infected with HIV as compared to their never married (13.4%) female counterparts (UNAIDS 2022). Recent studies also reflect that 54% of all people living with HIV are women and girls who accounted for 49% of all new infections in 2021 (UNAIDS 2023). In 2021 in sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls accounted for 63% of all new HIV infections. These figures are alarming given the fact that sub-Saharan Africa commands only 12% of the total global population (UNAIDS 2023). Furthermore, in sub-Saharan Africa, adult women comprise 1.4 times more the number of adult men living with HIV. This reflects the disproportionate level of the pandemic in the region. A large number of new HIV infections are recorded within heterosexual marriages and/or long-term cohabiting partnerships (UNAIDS 2011b). Accordingly, sub-Saharan Africa is identified as commanding the highest prevalence of HIV amongst women of reproductive age. Drawing on these observations, the institution of marriage is identified as a major risk factor for HIV infection amongst many women. It is against this background that this chapter seeks to interrogate the many drivers that expose married women to the susceptibility of HIV infection.

In a bid to redress the gendered nature of the HIV & AIDS pandemic, the chapter draws on selected works of Ezra Chitando, an outstanding African male theologian who has been on the forefront of engaging with the pertinent subject of HIV & AIDS. As an African male theologian, Chitando's activism and publications interface with religion, gender and HIV & AIDS and have immensely contributed to the deconstruction of patriarchal notions that result in harmful masculinities. In some of his publications, Chitando has proffered strategies that can be adopted for promoting the fullness of life for women in Africa and beyond. This chapter, therefore, engages with Chitando's conception of transforming masculinities as well as lobbying for solidarity between men and women as bold church and community praxis for addressing the gendered challenge of the HIV &

AIDS pandemic. The chapter is based on secondary sources of data collected from the internet and research articles. Literature consulted includes publications from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle) and publications on HIV & AIDS authored by Ezra Chitando.

Women and the Institution of Marriage from an African Worldview

In many African societies, marriage is regarded as the focal point of human existence (Mbiti 1989). It forms the rhythm of life. All members of society are expected to participate in the institution of marriage at an appropriate time. Through the institution of marriage, “all the dimensions of time meet, the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized” (Mbiti 1989:130). Failure to partake in this revered institution is believed to be a curse and those who fail to fulfil this traditional expectation are regarded as sub-human. When one fails to get married under normal circumstances, then that person has rejected society, and therefore, society responds by rejecting them (Mbiti 1989). When persons die without being married and in the absence of an offspring, they are deemed to be totally disconnected from society, hence, it is perceived as forfeiting their connectivity to human life.

Drawing from African traditional culture, a woman is only considered to be fully human through marriage which suggests that a woman needs a husband to ‘complete’ her (Masenya 2003). Furthermore, traditional beliefs stipulate that a woman has no honour outside of marriage (Oduyoye 1995a). Marriage is, therefore, regarded as the basis for women to attain honour and dignity within their communities. Accordingly, African marriages are instituted mostly for procreation and are validated through the evidential fruits of that union. Marriage is therefore the avenue for humanity to procreate (Baloyi 2022). Given this understanding, much reverence is assigned to marriage because it is regarded as “...the sovereign social regulation of sexuality and a union of persons of the opposite sexes for the purpose of the procreation and rearing of the human species” (Beya 1995:155). Culturally, it is believed that a husband and wife are reproduced through their offspring hence conserving the continuity of life (Mbiti 1995). It therefore becomes the social responsibility of every mar-

ried couple to procreate and contribute to the continued existence of society through their offspring. Marriage serves as the “vital mechanism in maintaining the consistency of all societies on earth” (Baloyi 2022:1).

Whilst it is believed that the conjugal life of a marriage union is for fertility and pleasure of the couple, in most African societies, the wife is not expected to seek sexual gratification (Kamau 2011). Cultural beliefs that promote the notion of masculinity encourage men to adopt patriarchal attitudes which regard their wives as possessions thereby leading men to demand conjugal rights without rejection (Kamau 2011; Kemboi 2011; UNAIDS 2012). The wife is always expected to assume a passive role within the marital union. Drawing on the same perception, Oduyoye (1995a) and Ayanga (2008) observe that this situation positions women such that their sole purpose within a marital union is to procreate to the advantage of their marital relations. Oduyoye further argues that within the African context of marriage, no due attention is paid to women’s “...personal or psychological needs to the locus of life” (1995a:134). The only imperative for women is to get married, “be fertile, and bear children as a matter of absolute priority” (Ayanga 2008:34). Failure to fulfil these expectations would render a woman a societal misfit.

The vulnerability of married women to HIV infection is worsened by the fact that a married woman does not have any right over her own body, and she cannot have any say in matters of sex and sexuality whilst the husband’s sexuality can be shared with other women outside marriage (Masenya 2003; Setume 2016). Women also stay married even though they know of their husband’s infidelity because they do not have dignity outside marriage. In this regard, unmarried women are considered as ‘loose’ (denoting promiscuous) and unmannered and they often become vulnerable to sexual abuse (Masenya 2003). In the event of the death of a husband, a wife is inherited by a surviving brother or another member of the immediate family and her expectations of being a wife and mother continue, hence, a married woman’s societal value is her sexuality and reproductive capacity (Mbuwayesango 2007). These values are owned by all the men in the husband’s family. Similarly, Phiri points out that the “African marriage is at the centre of the African community yet it is also the centre of patriarchy, which constructs the subordinate position of African women” (2003:10). Such a situation is detrimental to the well-being of women in societies especially in the current context of HIV & AIDS where statistics reflect new and increased infections amongst married women (Mugweni 2015; Ramjee & Daniels 2013). Additionally, even

though married women or those in long term and stable relationships express their fears over being infected by their spouses, research shows women believe they have no right to withhold sex from their spouses as well as to negotiate for safer sex (Mugweni et al 2015; Shoko 2012). Women are socialized into believing their role in sexual relations is to please their husbands as opposed to expecting “mutual sexual satisfaction” (Marshall and Taylor 2006:366). Resultantly, many married women consider their marital status as a major risk factor for HIV infection as they are powerless to protect themselves (Awoleye et al. 2022).

Drivers of Increasing HIV Infections among Married Women in sub-Saharan Africa

The common belief that marriage is a safe haven establishes a ‘false sense of protection’ against HIV infection since most married couples do not utilize any form of protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Awoyele et al. 2022). Additionally, lifetime fidelity is not enough to protect married women from the risk of HIV infection (Hagemann 2010). This suggests that in most cases, husbands may have been infected prior to entering into marriage and/or they fail to be faithful within the marriage (Hagemann 2010). A myriad of factors expose women to the vulnerability of HIV infection. These are inclusive of socio-cultural, biological, behavioural, economic, and structural risks. Mugweni et al. (2015) make reference to individual, relational and community level barriers as drivers of HIV infection among married or cohabiting women.

Economic Drivers

Many married women’s economic dependence on their spouses within rural and urban African communities in sub-Saharan Africa is a result of skewed gender relations and high levels of unemployment and poverty (Kemboi et al. 2011; Mugweni et al. 2015; Ullah et al. 2021). Many women stay in risky sexual relations as a result of their social subordination and economic dependency on men (Kemboi et al. 2011; Ullah et al. 2021). Likewise, the unfavourable economic position of women denies them the right to determine whether, where and how sexual relations should take place as well as the ability to challenge their husband’s extra marital sexual

relations (Shoko 2012). Ramjee & Daniels (2013) posit that a lower economic status is linked with lower condom use because women do not have financial agency to negotiate safe sex, exposing them to the vulnerability of HIV infection.

Increasing levels of poverty resulting from the high unemployment rate is also reported to have an effect on the male psyche. The inability to provide for the family impacts negatively on masculine identities. Men therefore seek to redeem their bruised image through "...sexual prowess with multiple, concurrent partners" (Marshall and Taylor 2006:366) rendering many married women vulnerable to HIV infection. In addition, the affirmative action that is practiced by some countries within sub-Saharan Africa accords priority to women within the employment sector as well as the political arena (Slater 2014). Affirmative action has resulted in qualified women commanding higher positions of employment as compared to their husbands. This affects the male psyche and impacts their socially expected status as head of the family. This situation is further compounded by incessant calls for gender equality. As a result, men who are faced with such challenges tend to be violent towards their wives through asserting sexual dominance within the marital union.

Migration which results in husbands leaving their rural homes in search of work mostly in urban areas renders married women vulnerable to HIV infection. This is because, in many cases, their husbands would engage in extramarital relations to ease their loneliness as well as to assert their male psyche amongst peers. According to Gumbo (2015), migration, which might be in the form of internal (rural to urban), circular (predominantly within the region) and international, alter couple's living arrangements which may result in the engagement of risky sexual behaviour and consequently HIV infection. Recently, in the context of Zimbabwe, we see the mass exodus to the United Kingdom for greener pastures. Whilst it is commendable for partners to seek economic relief in the current context of economic depression, this practice separates couples for prolonged periods of time, often resulting in illicit sexual affairs. It has also been reported that sexual favours are exchanged for passage to the United Kingdom. Fake marriages are part of the arrangement for safe passage. Such an arrangement often results in sexual intercourse in exchange for financial assistance. This practice also fuels the spread of HIV infection as married people are also taking part in this financial arrangement.

Socio-cultural and Religious Drivers

Cultural practices such as dry sex, female circumcision, widow cleansing and inheritance expose married women to the risk of HIV infection (Kamau 2011). Dry sex and female circumcision are mostly undertaken to ensure the sexual gratification of husbands within the marriage union. The payment of *lobola/ bogadi/* bride-price, which is considered as the transfer of a woman's sexual rights from her father to her spouse is another cultural practice that exposes married women to the risk of HIV infection (Mugweni et al. 2015; Setume 2016). The new bride, after the payment of *lobola/ bogadi/* bride-price, is expected to be submissive to her husband. The vulnerability of married women to HIV infection is also intensified by higher coital frequency within marital unions (Tolan 2005). Sexual intercourse within marital relationships is regarded as part and parcel of the marriage deal and the wife is therefore expected to avail herself whenever the husband has a sexual urge.

Biological Risk Drivers

Women do possess an elevated physiological risk of contracting HIV from their male partners due to their "greater mucosal surface area that is exposed to pathogens and infectious fluids for longer periods during sexual intercourse" (Ramjee & Daniels 2013:2). They are also reportedly more prone to increased tissue injury during sexual intercourse (Ramjee & Daniels 2013). Abaasa et al. (2013) reports that 60% of adults living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa are women, and between 30-40% of the infections is a result of heterosexual transmission through the female genital tract (FGT) (Kaushic et al. 2010). It is also reported that several characteristics of the FGT inclusive of changes in the FGT as a result of infection by bacteria are known to expose women to heightened susceptibility to HIV infection (Machado et al. 2014). Abbai et al (2016) posit that damage to the mucosal lining of the vagina increases women's susceptibility to HIV infection. Other biological factors that increase the risk of HIV infection for women include the presence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), genital warts/sores/ulcers, reproductive tract infections, abnormal vaginal discharge and the disruption of the vaginal epithelium (Abbai et al. 2016). A healthy vaginal epithelium (which is the inner lining of the vagina) prevents intrusive infections hence its disruption increases a woman's susceptibility to STIs and HIV infection.

Individual, Relational and Community-level Drivers

Individual barriers result from the lack of sexual decision-making power, economic dependence, and low self-efficacy. According to Mugweni et al (2015), individual barriers emanate from women's lack of autonomy. Individual barriers disempower women thereby rendering them voiceless and unable to negotiate safer sex. Individual barriers also result in the fear of definite or the predictable penalties of negotiating for safer sex (Mugweni et al. 2015). In most cases, negotiating for safer sex within the context of marriage often results in intimate partner violence.

Relational barriers centre on trust and the ability to self-disclose within a relationship (Mugweni et al. 2015). Community level barriers are also termed structural barriers and are inclusive of social, economic, cultural or organizational dynamics that restrain individuals from negotiating for safer sex. They are further driven by extended family members and religious leaders who implicitly discourage women from negotiating safer sex (Mugweni et al. 2015).

Gender-Insensitive HIV Prevention Strategies

The vulnerability of married women and those in long-term sexual relations is further compounded by gender-insensitive HIV prevention strategies which lack a focus on married women. The common and widely used strategy for HIV prevention has been the traditional Abstain, Be faithful and Condom method, henceforth, the ABC method which has been considered a key strategy in comprehensive HIV prevention programmes (Kurian 2006). This simple and catchy acronym has been credited with considerable success in reducing HIV infection particularly in Uganda (Larki et al. 2022). However, the 2004 Joint United Nations programme on HIV & AIDS report published during the period of Uganda's success story of HIV prevention based on the ABC model revealed a new face to the pandemic (Dworkin & Ehrhardt 2007). The report indicated that about fifty per cent of the total number of infected people worldwide were women with an estimated thirty-five per cent increase from previous years (Dworkin & Ehrhardt 2007). In addition, the report detailed that fifty per cent of new HIV infections were reported between spouses with women identified as those at most risk of acquiring HIV from their principal partners (Dworkin & Ehrhardt 2007:13). This report reflected the

gendered nature of HIV & AIDS, and it brought the credibility of the ABC model under scrutiny.

Evidence emerged that the ABC model fails to address the important issues of gender and masculinities in HIV prevention initiatives (Larki et al 2022; Tumwebaze et al 2023). This popular model does not take into account the powerlessness of many women who are denied the right to negotiate safer sex in their relationships (Tumwebaze et al. 2023). Furthermore, it fails to pay attention to gender inequalities and socio-cultural issues inclusive of poverty and harmful traditional practices that fuel the spread of HIV infection (Larki et al. 2022). Economic contexts that reflect a 'critical intersection' between poverty and women's vulnerability to HIV infection are overlooked (Larki et al. 2022; Mugweni et al. 2015). The powerlessness of many women who are denied the right to negotiate safer sex in their relationships is not taken into consideration. Neither is their subordinate position resulting from their lack of property rights; differential access to literacy and education; lower wages; and lack of assets which in turn determine the risk context for many women is not accounted for (Gupta cited in Dworkin & Ehrhardt 2007).

The ABC model is lacking in that it implies that any person can prevent HIV infection by choosing any one of the options from the ABC short menu (Larki et al. 2022). However, abstinence is not an option for married women. The second component of faithfulness only becomes valid when both spouses are aware of their HIV status before committing to marriage and to the practice of serial monogamy. Being faithful entails engaging in sexual relations with a single partner in a long term or life-long relationship such as a marriage union (Kamau 2011). Accordingly, advocating for faithfulness is a futile initiative especially for millions of women who cannot protect themselves against their spouses' infidelity (Chireshe & Chireshe 2011). Within the African context, faithfulness is believed to apply only to married women. The being faithful code is silent when it comes to married men who are culturally sanctioned to have extramarital sexual relations.

The last component of the ABC model advocates for condom use. Sadly, in many parts of African communities within sub-Saharan Africa, condom use is associated with those who would have failed to abstain and/or to be faithful in their relationships (Larki et al. 2022). This notion gives rise to the stigmatization of condom use as it is associated with promiscuity. Additionally, the condom is negatively perceived within the context

of marriage and or stable unions (Setume 2016). Within the African culture, the condom is mostly unacceptable within marital unions as it is associated with 'loose [promiscuous] and unmarried women' (Ramjee and Daniels 2013). This means that the condom is seldom used within the marriage bed but for extramarital sexual relations (Muhwava 2004). It is further observed that condom use amongst married couples is between 2-6%, a situation that creates an environment for HIV infection in cases where there is partner infidelity (Muhwava 2004). Given this perception, discussions about condom use within marital unions would evoke feelings of mistrust. Furthermore, married women, even if they are knowledgeable about condom use, must feign ignorance or they might be suspected of infidelity. In addition, a husband would be "...surprised and enraged if a wife suggested the use of a condom...condoms are seen as things to be used with prostitutes only" (Muhwava 2004:119). Therefore, Collins and Coates rightly point out that if HIV prevention only encompasses the ABCs, the social reality of the majority of women, especially those in marital union and long-term to permanent relationships in the African context are unable to choose A or C (Collins & Coates 2008). B offers very minimal protection or even greater risk (Collins & Coates 2008). In a nutshell, it is clear that the ABC method is inadequate and shallow and fails to recognise that HIV can also be transmitted in non-sexual ways. Furthermore, it does not pay attention to the importance of treatment in the HIV & AIDS discourse but focuses on individuals. Moreover, it does not consider the importance of the family, the community and government institutions in responding to the devastating pandemic (Tearfund 2015).

Towards a Bold Church Praxis in Reducing HIV Infection Amongst Married Women in sub-Saharan Africa

Faith communities also contribute to the vulnerability of married women to HIV infection. This is enabled through their endorsement of patriarchal values whereby they uphold the notion that men are superior and dominant especially in marital relations hence they are not chastised even if they have extramarital sexual relations (Chitando 2011). In this regard, Chitando (2011) points to the ambivalent position of religion, on one part it is the problem, on the other part, it is the solution. Therefore, in order to curb the increasing rate of HIV infection and to promote the sanctity

of life for many married women who are facing death from AIDS related illness, the church is called to be equally proactive. As such, the church is called to adopt a bold praxis towards mitigating the challenge of HIV & AIDS. In many cases, men are the drivers of the pandemic, a situation necessitated by masculine beliefs that postulate them as sexual predators (Chitando 2007a). Therefore, in order to mitigate the increasing levels of HIV infection amongst married women in sub-Saharan Africa, there is need to lobby for the transformation of hegemonic masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is considered a multidimensional concept that perpetuates patriarchy and dominance over women (Morrell et al. 2012; Morrell et al. 2013). It is associated with extreme violence, oppression, the use of force and risk taking which includes sexual risk taking (Morrell et al. 2013). In this regard, male dominance and sexual risk-taking increases women's susceptibility to HIV infection. The transformation of hegemonic masculinities would create a safe space for men to forfeit harmful practices dictated by societal norms that are detrimental to their wellbeing as well as that of their spouses. The transformation of hegemonic masculinities can be enabled through embracing the concept of solidarity, and engaging men in the HIV & AIDS discourse.

Solidarity between Men and Women

Solidarity is a concept borrowed from the liberation struggle whereby freedom fighters had to unite to win the fight against apartheid and colonialism (Chitando 2008:56). In the current context of the devastating HIV & AIDS pandemic, the concept of solidarity, which Chitando (2008:56) argues is a liberationist paradigm, is crucial in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic. Chitando defines solidarity as "...standing for and standing with 'the Other'" (2008:56). In addition, solidarity "transcends sympathy and represents an existential transformation on the part of the one who commits himself or herself to stand with the suffering and the marginalized" (Chitando 2008:56). Therefore, solidarity is a concept that emerges from 'empathetic interpolation' which is described as a situation in which an individual assumes the world view of another in order to understand his/her experiences which are different from one's own (Chitando 2008). A common interpretation of this situation would be likened to putting oneself into another person's shoes/situation in order to understand their pain and suffering. Empathetic interpolation would entail that

men forfeit their hegemonic masculinities and consequently, identify themselves with the experiences of women who are culturally and religiously oppressed (Chitando 2008).

Chitando (2008) identifies solidarity as a process that invites men to be self-emptying of their constructed masculine identities. Furthermore, solidarity involves men reconsidering their positions of power to enable them to identify with the oppressive situation endured by women (Chitando 2008). It also demands that women be given the opportunity to assume a leading role in their struggle for liberation. The role of men is to act in solidarity with women who will be championing their own struggles (Chitando 2010).

Within the context of African communities, the principle of solidarity could be adopted as an extension of the concept of *ubuntu*. The philosophy of *ubuntu* informs the locus of life within the African worldview. However, Chitando (2008) observes that even though African communities give reverence to the concept of *ubuntu*, the embrace of this principle has not paid due attention to the oppressive masculinities that continually marginalize and disadvantage women. In this regard, the transformation of masculinities therefore, calls for the recognition of women as fellow human beings who form part of the locus of life within the African worldview.

Engaging Men in the HIV & AIDS Discourse

The transformation of masculinities as a response to mitigating the increasing levels of HIV infection amongst married women calls for the church to reconceptualise its mission towards men. Chitando observes that men spend time in places that are labelled as ‘worldly’ by religious and faith institutions therefore, the need to “...sacralise such places and reach men” (2007a:49). In its endeavour to reach out to men in the context of the HIV & AIDS pandemic, the church needs creative evangelism, and this can be enabled through the reconceptualization of mission inclusive of the need to desist from demonizing places of leisure frequented by men during their spare time (Chitando 2007a). This should include reaching out to men in professions that increase their vulnerability to HIV infection i.e., those in military, migrant labourers, and truck drivers (Chitando 2007a). Accordingly, Chitando (2007b) also argues against theological rigidity in the fight against the HIV & AIDS pandemic. Instead, he calls for

a fresh understanding of religious truths and castigates traditional theology where God rewards the good and punishes evil. This gives rise to the doctrine of retribution and reward in responding to the pandemic since HIV & AIDS is associated with punishment for the promiscuous and rebellious, thereby overlooking the various drivers of the pandemic as well as innocent people being unknowingly infected with HIV (Chitando 2007b). Furthermore, Chitando (2007b) rightly contends that theological rigidity overlooks structural sin that drives the pandemic and also obstructs the church's response to the pandemic that brought about death and destruction in Africa. Structural sin, sometimes interchanged with social sin, refers to societal oppressive structures that violate human dignity and gives rise to inequality (Kelly 2019; Shadle 2015). Structural sin also includes the subordination of women (Shadle 2015) hence exposing them to the vulnerability to HIV infection.

Engaging men in the HIV & AIDS discourse calls for faith communities to engage in a bold community praxis through working with men's organisations in addressing the challenge posed by the pandemic. Faith communities are encouraged to partner with organisations that focus on men (Chitando 2007a). In addition, faith communities are mandated to seek collaboration with organisations that pay special attention to male reproductive health, violence against women as well as organisations that speak against gender injustices (Chitando 2007a). Such a call is a worthwhile endeavour to address the challenge of harmful masculinities that expose women to HIV infection.

Engaging men in the HIV & AIDS discourse includes advocating for men's accountability for their actions in the current context of the pandemic. In essence, I contend that African men, including church men, have not been socialized to be accountable to anyone, least of all to women. Therefore, the church is advised to encourage the formation of men's movements that will aim at challenging men "... to be accountable to their families, the church and society at large in all areas of their life including sexual, socioeconomic and political justice" (Moyo 2005:194). And so, Chitando justly contends that responding to the increasing levels of HIV infection among married women includes appropriating the pulpit "... in the struggle to transform masculinities ... sermons that challenge men to embrace gender justice must be preached with clarity and compassion" (2007a:49). He further points out that it is the duty of the church to always "remind men that true discipleship entails questioning

traditional (both Christian and indigenous) attitudes towards masculinity” (Chitando 2007a:49). Such a call as proposed by Chitando also calls for reconstruction theology. In one of his publications, Chitando (2009) presents reconstruction theology as one that embraces various filaments of African theology such as inculturation, black theology and African women’s theology. Inculturation theology centres on reconstructing African ethos, black theology focuses on reformulating Christianity to enable it to be life-giving especially to black African people, and African women’s theology strives to overcome patriarchy and to reconstruct gender relations (Chitando 2009).

Holistic and Multi-faceted Gender-sensitive HIV Prevention Strategies

In order to effectively respond to the gendered nature of the HIV & AIDS pandemic, there is need for a bold church praxis that incorporates holistic and multi-faceted gender-sensitive HIV prevention methods. The SAVE approach is a model that was developed by the African Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV & AIDS (ANERELA+) (Kurian 2006). This model was developed as a holistic, comprehensive, and multi-faceted approach designed to respond to the challenge of the HIV & AIDS pandemic. The SAVE approach comprises of four key principal elements to HIV prevention and care which are safer practices (prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT); post exposure prophylaxis (PEP); mutual fidelity within permanent relationships; vaginal microbicides, which are chemicals that reduce the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases and are suitable for use by women who are unable to negotiate safer sex; condom use which can also be used in marital relations where one partner may be HIV positive); available medical interventions (inclusive of anti-retroviral therapy (ART); Nevirapine for pregnant mothers; treatment of opportunistic infections); voluntary counselling and testing (all persons must be aware of their HIV status; churches must mobilize for HIV counselling and testing); and empowerment through education and advocacy (Kurian 2006).

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to pay attention to the increasing levels of HIV infection amongst married women in sub-Saharan Africa. The paper gave a critical analysis of the drivers giving rise to the increasing levels of HIV infection amongst married women in sub-Saharan Africa. The chapter focused on the interface between marital unions and/or permanent sexual relations and HIV & AIDS. The common understanding is that the marital bed is sanctified, and the marital union based on love, trust and faithfulness hence positioned as a sanctuary and a safe haven against HIV infection. However, of late, scholarship indicates increasing levels of HIV infection among married women and those cohabiting or in long-term sexual relationships. As a result, marriage is no more a safe haven but a major risk for HIV infection and a potential death trap especially for married women who are restrained from negotiating for safer sex due to religio-cultural as well as other drivers that render them powerless. I discussed the common drivers of HIV infection among married women. Some of the identified drivers include economic, socio-cultural, religious, biological, individual, relational and community level drivers. The chapter also discussed gender insensitive HIV prevention models as contributing to the spread of HIV infection. In a bid to find ways to redress the challenge of the increasing levels of HIV infection among married women, the chapter drew upon Chitando's publications, one of the outstanding black African male theologians who has comprehensively engaged with gender and HIV & AIDS. Chitando's work on the transformation of harmful notions of masculinities for addressing the challenge of the gendered nature of HIV & AIDS is profound. The chapter focused on Chitando's notion of solidarity between men and women and the importance of engaging men in the HIV & AIDS discourse as mitigation measures to curb the increasing levels of HIV infection among married women.

Author's Contribution

The chapter draws on the author's Masters dissertation titled 'From the marriage bed to the graveyard: Towards a bold community praxis in reducing HIV infection amongst married women in sub-Saharan Africa. The author acknowledges the mentorship and supervision of the Masters' dissertation by Professor Beverly Gail Haddad who also kindled the flame to research on the interface of gender and HIV & AIDS.

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12 Contemporary perspectives on women leadership in religion

A case of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

Terence Mupangwa

Abstract

The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ) was established in 1915. Women are the majority members in the AFMZ and yet they occupy periphery positions especially in leadership. Through interviews with male pastors, female pastors, deacons, and elders, two elderly women and focus group discussions with committee members of four departments within the church, this paper highlights the perspectives on women of the AFMZ. Even though AFMZ has been in Zimbabwe for more than a century and women are the majority, AFMZ is still lagging in promoting equality between men and women especially in leadership. The picture that is painted may be an indication of the church's perspectives on women. The study intends to highlight the perspectives of the church on women especially on whether they should be in leadership or not. Using African Women's Theology to analyze the findings, it was observed from the interviews and the focus group discussions that there are mixed views on women among the members of the AFMZ. Most members are of the view that women are more hardworking, committed, faithful, more prayerful, and more transparent than men and therefore should be given more opportunities in leadership for better governance within the church. However, a few members still hold beliefs that women are weak, and they need a man in their lives for them to succeed in life.

Keywords: Apostolic Faith Mission, church, governance, leadership, religion, women

Introduction and background

Researchers in religion and gender in Africa have shown significant interest in Pentecostal forms of Christianity (Kalu, 2008). This interest could be linked to the perception that Pentecostalism possesses a unique ability to effect social change, particularly in the realm of gender dynamics (Kalu,

2008). Women are the majority members in the AFMZ and yet they occupy peripheral positions especially in leadership. The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe is still lagging in promoting equality between men and women especially in leadership (Kwaramba and Dreyer, 2019). The impression which is created may be a pointer of the church's standpoint on women. It is against this backdrop that this study intends to highlight the perspectives of the church on women especially on whether they should be in leadership or not.

The history of AFMZ

The Apostolic Faith Mission is one of the biggest Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe and it is said that it is the one that introduced Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe (Ndhlovu, 2018; Chivasa, 2017). Women comprise the greater percentage of AFMZ's membership. They teach Sunday school, clean the church premises, engage in fundraising, and singing in the praise and worship team whilst men occupy the decision-making positions (Kwaramba & Dreyer, 2019). Women in AFMZ are often barred by the church's Constitution to be in decision making except if they are pastors. However, even as pastors, women in AFMZ have never been accorded the opportunity to be an overseer or president. These positions have been a domain for male pastors only which female pastors could not enter since the church's establishment in 1915 (Kwaramba & Dreyer, 2019; Madziyire & Risinamhodzi, 2015).

The governmental policy on women

Since gaining independence in 1980 the Zimbabwean government has made great strides in terms of policy to ensure gender parity in socio-economic and political spheres. The Zimbabwean government has been a signatory of both regional and international gender equality policies. This is because the world over, women have been under-represented in decision making processes and in situations where they are included, they are usually relegated to marginal positions (Maphosa et al., 2015; Dziva & Dube, 2014).

In 2013 the Zimbabwean government adopted a new Constitution in which gender equality is underscored and upheld replacing the Lancaster

House Constitution which failed to meet all women's needs and lacked conceptual clarity on the rights of women (Dziva, 2018). Zanzi (2013) proffers that the Lancaster House Constitution's provisions were retrogressive with regards to best practices in gender equality allowing discrimination in areas where personal law was applicable. It did not provide constitutional protection leading to women not having access to land, education, health, and participation in socio-economic and political development. The 2013 constitution is widely acknowledged because of its commitment to gender equality. It upholds equal treatment of men and women in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. This constitution is against anything that infringes upon the rights of women and girls. The Zimbabwean Constitution mandates the state to promote gender equality. Under section 17(1) equal representation of men and women in institutions and agencies of the government is stipulated. It also makes provision for women to constitute half membership of all commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any act of parliament (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013:20). The government has already begun to take steps towards fulfilling clauses that deal with issues of gender balance in the Constitution (Dziva, 2018). By 2017 the Zimbabwe Human right Commission had a gender balanced commission, whilst the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) and the Zimbabwe Gender Commission were being head by women. However, in terms of the cabinet, despite the Constitution that upheld the fifty percent inclusion of women in 2013, the then president, Robert Mugabe, only included three women out of 26 members in the cabinet which was way below the fifty- fifty percent inclusion (Dziva, 2018). The current Mnangagwa cabinet in 2018 increased women to six (Herald, 8 September 2018). This is a slight improvement, but it is still way below the expectations of the Constitution.

Through the Ministry of Women, Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development, the government came up with the National Gender policy (NGP) (2013-2017) which replaced the first one which was drafted in 2004. The ministry came up with a new NGP to cater for new and emerging development priorities both at regional and global level and because there has been a tremendous change in the political landscape of Zimbabwe. In this document the vision of the government is to create an environment in which men and women are equals. Its objective is to eliminate all gender disparities in life and development (NGP, 2013).

Regionally, Zimbabwe signed the SADC Protocol on gender and development (Zinyemba, 2013). This protocol emphasizes upholding affirmative action and removing all barriers to meaningful participation of women in all spheres of life including leadership. The SADC calls for a 50 percent participation of women.

The Zimbabwean government should be applauded for making efforts to put gender equality into practice and living the talk of the inclusion of women in decision making. Since there has been a lot of change and advocacy for equal treatment of women, this paper seeks to address whether the efforts of the Zimbabwean government have made an impact on the way the church views women with special focus on the perspectives of the members of the AFMZ.

African world view on women

There is debate among scholars on whether Shona culture was or is accommodative and life affirming to women. Scholars such as Muringa & Makaudze (2014) and Machingura & Nyakuhwa (2015) contend that African culture is life affirming. According to them, in the original African setting, women were highly regarded and could become anything they wanted to be in life. They were not domesticated as is the situation nowadays where women are not public figures and are expected to do only reproductive work such as bearing and nurturing children, which is unpaid. These scholars argue that before colonialism there were no barriers for women. For them the original African culture did not oppress women. Muringa & Makaudze (2014) strongly believe that what Africans are experiencing now as culture is not true African culture but is a culture that was imposed on them by Europeans. There is a possibility that the Shona people are no longer acquainted with their original culture because of the colonization which they experienced for almost a century. One can therefore strongly argue that the oppression of women by men reflects the colonizer's culture (Muringa & Makaudze, 2014). In the Shona culture, a woman as an aunt, mother or grandmother was highly regarded. Women could take up roles that are considered manly roles these days and men could also cook and do other household chores especially at functions such as funerals. Roles were flexible and not fixed as they are now. Furthermore, a woman was considered as a full human being and not a lesser one. The emphasis was more on the humanity of a person than gender or

sex. For example, in the Shona culture a girl is called 'mwanasikana', a boy 'mwanakomana'. 'Mwana' means child 'sikana' means girl and 'komana' means boy. So, the emphasis is that he or she is a child and the sex come after. A woman is called 'munhukadzi' and a man 'munhurume'. 'Munhu' means human being. Emphasis is on one's humanness and sex are secondary (Muringa & Makaudze, 2014). Steady (2015:27) in her book *Women and leadership in West Africa: Mothering the nation and humanizing the state* concurs with Makaudze & Muringa (2014) that Europeans imposed their oppressive culture on Africans and that women held leadership in African culture before the coming of the colonizers.

On the other hand, there are some scholars such as Biri (2016), Dodo (2014) as well as Biri & Mutambwa (2013) who strongly argue that African culture is oppressive and marginalizes women. For Biri the functioning and activities of the church are being influenced by African culture. She argues that the oppressive treatment of women in society is a true reflection of African culture. According to Biri & Mutambwa (2013), in their article *Socio-cultural dynamics and education for development in Zimbabwe: Navigating the discourse of exclusion and marginalization*, (2013:27), in African culture a woman cannot do anything on her own, instead she needs a man by her side for her to perform outstandingly. Dodo (2014) in his article *Traditional Leadership Systems and Gender Recognition: Zimbabwe*, argues that Africans have a perception that women are weak and are ceremonially unclean due to the menstrual cycle they experience every month. According to Makaudze (2016:73) "men label women negatively and close doors for women who want to emancipate themselves in life" among the Shona people. These scholars seem not to be taking into cognizance the fact that the colonizers indeed disrupted and distorted African culture. Whilst the arguments of the scholars mentioned in this paper hold some truths one cannot ignore the interaction that has taken place between African and the Western cultures and the influence, they had on each other.

AFMZ is a Pentecostal church which believes in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ whose mission statement in the gospel of Luke was to liberate the oppressed and bring deliverance to humanity. The mission statement of Jesus on the liberation of humanity eradicated all cultural practices that were not life affirming. This paper intends to bring out contemporary perspectives of religious people regarding women and leadership.

Theoretical grounding

The theoretical grounding of this study is African Women's Theology. African Women's Theology examines contemporary perceptions on women in religion using African women's experiences as a lens. The researcher is examining perceptions of African members of AFMZ in Zimbabwe. Experiences of women are not generic around the globe. It is therefore imperative that we employ a uniquely African lens. African Women's Theology is propounded by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, popularly known as the Circle. The Circle is a group of African female theologian scholars who advocate for the equality for both men and women. Examples of such female theologians are Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Isabel Asapawo Phiri, Teresa Hinga, Sarojini Nadar and Musimbi Kanyoro just to mention a few. This a theology that emerged out of the need to liberate women from oppressive constructions both in society and church. It seeks to liberate women from all forms of oppression associated with patriarchy. Phiri argues that "the construction of womanhood by patriarchy is one of the central issues for feminist theologians globally and particularly in Africa because it has influenced the way women are treated and perceived and the roles that women can play in African church and society. Patriarchy has defined women as inferior to men thereby perpetuating the oppression of women by religion and culture" (Phiri, 1997:11). African Women's Theology challenges cultural practices that are not life affirming to women. Regarding women and culture, Musimbi Kanyoro contends that women in Africa are guardians of culture and for a long time they have defended certain cultural practices that are life denying to women (Kanyoro, 2001:159). African Women's Theology gives women a voice as they seek to liberate themselves. Oduyoye (1995:3) proffers that "Over time, African women had to learn to know their oppressors but had held their peace, because "when your hand is in someone's mouth, you do not hit that person on the head". African women understand that men were oppressing them, but the conditions did not allow them to question the status quo. African Women's Theology acknowledges the view that women are alive and should speak about their own experiences. According to these theologians, women have been spoken of by men as if they are dead. They advocate for men and women to complement each other. According to African women theologians, if men are working alone especially in leadership, they are like a one-winged bird (Oduyoye, 2001). For a bird to fly properly it requires two wings therefor the inclusion of women will result in the bird, which is the church, having both wings.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study which utilized interviews and focus group discussions as tools of data collection. The interviews were conducted with 10 male pastors, 10 female pastors, two former presidents (highest leader) of the church, three elderly women, two men serving as elders within the church and two deacons. The focus group discussions were conducted with the Boy's Fellowship, Girls' Fellowship, Sister's Union Committee, Ladies Committee members and one of the Assembly's main church boards ('Dare raana baba). Each focus group consisted of 8 participants. Semi structured interview questions were administered. The 62 participants were all purposively sampled.

Findings and discussion

In the following sections I will discuss women's commitment, organizational skills, faithfulness, love, and spiritual strength as key findings of this study.

Commitment

During both the interviews and focus group discussions it was observed that most members of the AFMZ view women as people who are more dedicated to God's work when compared to men. M1 who is a pastor had the following to say about the dedication of women to church activities:

They are always present to execute duties they are expected to fulfill. If they are cell group leaders, they are always present as the leaders unlike men who are always absent. Men usually lead remotely. Unlike men, women sacrifice their personal commitments to full fill church commitments.

Concurring with MP1, FP who is a female pastor also highlighted that women are more committed and dedicated to accomplishing church assignments. She said:

Most females usually are committed to the projects that the assembly will be running. For example, if we have agreed to buy a stand female pastors make an effort to make sure that all the resources are channeled towards the buying of the stand. This is unlike some

male pastors who can divert the funds towards buying a pastor's car which will only benefit him unlike a stand which will benefit the whole church.

During a focus group discussion with the Girls' Fellowship, this perspective was also registered, that women are more committed to God's work. This is what they said:

We once had a female pastor at this assembly and now we have a male pastor. It is unfortunate that she had to leave because the church board did not want a woman to be their leader. But to tell the truth what we achieved when we had that female pastor is way more than now when we have a male pastor. The female pastor made sure that whatever the church would have agreed upon will be achieved. As for now you cannot really tell whether we are going forward or backward.

D1 who is both an administrator and deacon at his assembly noted that:

Using my experience as the administrator at our assembly women are more reliable, more focused and goal oriented than men. When given financial tasks women unite and they achieve the target quicker than men. Therefore, women should be given the opportunity to be leaders.

One reason why women are more committed to doing church activities is that they often have more time to devote to religious practices. Many African societies are still patriarchal, and women are often expected to prioritize their domestic duties over other activities. However, church activities provide women with an opportunity to engage in activities outside of their domestic roles, which can be empowering. Importantly Kanyoro (2012) states, "The church is a safe space for women to gather and engage in activities that are meaningful to them."

The commitment of women in the church sometimes is not recognized because most of the time they are made to be spectators of the activities taking place in the church. Chitando (2010) stated and rightly so that patriarchy puts women down in the church. Patriarchy makes women invisible in the church. It accords men the privilege of being leaders in all aspects of life. Importantly Mupangwa (2021) also argues that most Pentecostal churches, AFMZ included, because of the influence of patriarchy, have male bloated leadership structures even though women are the majority. Because women are not included in leadership, their commitment to church activities is obscured.

Women are said to be more committed to church. This however does not overshadow that women are underrepresented in leadership roles. Some Western feminists who outrightly dismiss women working together with men fail to appreciate that men and women complement each other. Both men and women are important, and they exist for a purpose on earth, therefore there is need for men and women to work together. That is the reason why Chitando (2007b) calls for the rise of a new man in this new era who accommodates and has empathy for women. Such a man is willing to work side by side with women. Chitando (2007b) agrees with African feminist theologians who acknowledge that masculinities are fluid and can be deconstructed and reconstructed. Chitando (2007a) who hails the efforts of the Pentecostal churches such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), in trying to replace hegemonic masculinities, which oppresses women with accommodative masculinities that are liberative to women.

Another reason why women are more committed in doing church activities is that they often find solace and comfort in their faith. According to African Women's Theology, the experiences of African women are unique and often marginalized (Oduyoye, 2001). Therefore, women may turn to their faith to find comfort and support in difficult times. As Oduyoye (1995), explains, "African women often turn to God as a source of strength and hope in the face of adversity."

Furthermore, and significantly, women often tackle their church activities as a community, and they take collective action as they lead activities such as organizing fundraising events and leading prayer groups. Through these activities, women form strong bonds with other women in their communities, which is empowering. As Phiri (2011) notes, "women are often the backbone of the church community. They work tirelessly to ensure that the needs of the community are met".

Organization

Women in the AFMZ are also said to be more organized than men. Female pastors especially are said to have a clearly defined goal and steps towards achieving that goal. D6 who is deacon a member of the church board narrated how female pastors are more organized than men and male pastors during meetings:

Men usually make an issue out of a very simple matter resulting in a lot of arguments. This leads to a meeting that was supposed to only last an hour to take almost a day. A simple issue is augmented and discussed for hours leading to the meetings being too long. We have never held meetings that are less than 5 hours since I became a member of the board.

FP1 who one of the former concurred with D6 and said:

Meetings of an assembly being chaired by a male pastor take longer hours than of those of assemblies being chaired by a female pastor. Meetings at a church being led by a male pastor usually take at least five or more hours. In some instances, the meetings may start around six o'clock in the evening and they end in the early hours of the following day and usually debating on simple matters. Male pastors always want to be seen as the best and above all others, so they spent a lot of time arguing. However, those being led by women the longest time that they can take is two hours and in those two hours they accomplish their objectives.

This was also confirmed by the two elders who attend church at assemblies being led by female pastors.

Women focus on the matter at hand and how to achieve it. They implement the ideas that would have been brought forward whilst men focus on arguing. On top of that men do not even put into practice whatever they suggest.

In the context of the African church, the observation that women are more organized when carrying out church tasks than men, can be seen as a reflection of the roles and responsibilities that women have traditionally held in African society. Mupangwa (2021) observed that women are so organized because historically they have been responsible for the care and management of the home, including organizing and planning family activities. This role has translated into the church, where women are often tasked with organizing and planning church events and activities.

Women's organizational skills and attention to detail are essential in ensuring that church activities run smoothly and efficiently. However, despite them being so organized women in the AFMZ are still not playing any leading role in the decision-making processes of the church. In a way women in the AFMZ are experiencing a form of religious oppression. Significantly, Oduyoye (1992) aptly elucidates that there is need for all people to be "concerned with the liberation of women from oppression in all its forms, including economic, political, and religious oppression."

However, it is important to note that the observation that women are more organized than men in the context of the Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe should not be used to reinforce gender stereotypes or limit women's roles and responsibilities within the church. Importantly, Chitando (2007b) argues that stereotyping allows one to presume that separate is equal. To justify specific roles and activities appropriate to men and to distinguish them from other specific roles and activities appropriate to women is subtle sexual discrimination. Such a perspective allows one to deny that the roles and activities of one sex are superior to that of the other while at the same time not allowing persons to choose their roles and activities. The church should aim to seek ways that challenge and dismantle patriarchal structures that limit women's participation and leadership in the church.

This section has demonstrated that women have very good organizational skills. This is evidenced by the way in which they prioritize family, community, the nation, and the church. Promoting patriarchal thinking only serves to promote male hegemony and marginalize women. Considering this, it is imperative that women be involved in the decision-making processes of the church.

Faithfulness

In the AFMZ women are perceived as being more faithful when compared to men. MP8 a male pastor said the following about the faithfulness of women:

Women are more 'cleaner'. By this I mean that, they do not cheat and are less likely to be corrupt as men. This is the reason why most male pastors want women to be administrators of their assemblies and be responsible for the church's finances. Usually, women do not steal church funds or divert funds for other purposes unlike men. Hence, I recommend that women be in leadership.

During a focus group discussion with a committee of the Women's Department, a lament about the unfaithfulness of male leadership was recorded:

We wish if women were also involved in leadership, transparency over money issues would be better. We have been contributing money towards the construction of the Rufaro conference, but

nothing has really taken place. We still have a temporary shelter 100 years after its establishment in Zimbabwe. By now the leadership should have built a conference center, with proper accommodation, ablution blocks and a proper water and sewer system, but that is not the case. The lady's department is more transparent in their use of money. When they called for finances for the generator, and truck for the national office, we saw what our monies was used for. They bought the generator and the truck.

One of the female pastors also supported the view that women are faithful especially when it comes to the use of finances: FP 4 had this to say:

As a woman, I am not comfortable with diverting finances to something which is not the reason it was raised for, but our male colleagues do not hesitate to do so. If their personal needs are not being met, they can use the money which was meant to roof a church to meet that need they have. As for me I am prepared to suffer and meet the goal we all have as a church.

The youths also through the Boy's Fellowship committee registered the view that women are faithful: Below is their view about women:

Most women who are pastors we believe were truly called to be pastors. As for some male pastors you can really tell that they were not called at all. They do not hesitate to steal monies from the church coffers. For a woman it is difficult to do that. Generally, women are faithful.

One reason why women are more faithful than men in church is that they are often socialized to prioritize religious practices. In many African societies, women are responsible for instilling religious values in their children, and they are expected to set an example of faithfulness. Oduyoye (1995) explains, "Women are often seen as the guardians of religious traditions and values in African societies".

Another reason why women are more faithful than men in church is that they often find a sense of community and belonging in religious spaces. African feminist theology emphasizes the importance of communal values and the role of women in building and sustaining communities. Women often take on leadership roles in church communities, such as organizing prayer groups and providing pastoral care to members. Phiri (2011) notes and rightly so that, "Women are often the driving force behind church communities, providing support and care to members in times of need."

The role of religion is to provide a sense of hope and empowerment for marginalized groups, including women. Women who face discrimination and marginalization in their daily lives may turn to religion as a source of strength and resilience if faithfulness is experienced in churches. As Kanyoro (2011) aptly states, "religion can be a powerful tool for empowering women and helping them to overcome the challenges they face." Religion is empowering to the whole church, men and women alike, through the faithfulness of women (Kanyoro, 2012).

Women are often socialized to prioritize religious practices, find a sense of community and belonging in religious spaces, and turn to religion as a source of empowerment and hope. By recognizing the unique experiences of African women and their contributions to the Christian faith through their faithfulness, we can better understand the role of women in the church and work towards greater gender equality. The call for faithfulness, however, should be to both men and women. Chitando and Biri (2013) postulate that men are urged to be faithful in all areas of life, even as God is faithful to God's people.

Love

The statement that women are more loving than men in the church is a common observation in many African churches. This was also expressed by the members of the AFMZ about their female members. One of the male pastors MP7 said the following during an interview:

Women are usually driven by love when they do things. That is the reason why they are more committed to accomplishing whatever they set out to do. It is unlike men who are mostly driven by their ego and would want to prove certain people wrong.

The youth also supported the fact that women are more loving, and they express their love all the time.

The pastor's wife usually is the one that holds the church through her love. If mai Mufundisi (the pastor's wife) does not have love, usually there is no stability in the church. Those women are powerful, and their power is expressed in the love they provide to the church. It is unfortunate she is not the leader of the church, but she plays a very critical role.

Generally, women are associated with loving even in family set ups. A mother's love is well celebrated in many communities. According to Oduyoye (1996), "African Women's Theology is rooted in their experiences of love, caring, and nurturing, which they bring to their families, communities, and the church." This emphasis on love, caring, and nurturing is often associated with women in the African church, and is sometimes used to suggest that women are more loving spiritually than men. In the context of the African church, the observation that women are more loving spiritually than men can be seen as a reflection of the roles and responsibilities that women have traditionally held in African society. Women have historically been responsible for the care and nurturing of their families and communities, and this role has translated into the African church, where women often take on pastoral and caregiving roles without being formally recognized.

Women's experiences of love and caring are often different from men's, and their insights and perspectives can enrich the church's understanding of what it means to love spiritually. In the era of HIV & AIDS and COVID-19, research has shown that women are the ones who are always taking care of the sick. It can only be love that drives them to tackle such a task. In the case of COVID-19, the disease is infectious but despite that, women looked after the sick. The call to love should be extended to men as well because the emergence of epidemics and pandemics allows churches like AFMZ to revise its gender relations in the church. Love may help men to practice liberating masculinities that may help transform social relations (Chitando, 2007a).

Churches that are loving, open, warm, and welcoming serve as a vital resource in a world facing numerous challenges that impact people emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually. When a person is shown love, given the freedom to openly share their stories, and find solace from their struggles, they tend to thrive and become more effective members of society. Women in the AFMZ if given a chance to lead, having these characteristics, can impact the nation positively. Even though the church is sometimes regarded as an unsafe place due to the factors associated with patriarchal oppression, the women in the AFMZ portray that the church can still be a safe haven for many. Though Chitando (2007a) analysing issues around HIV & AIDS observed that in some instances, the church suffers from failure to love and that it is an insensitive and judgmental institution it can also be argued that there is a remnant of people in the

church who have got love and are sensitive and not judgmental. The work and dedication of women in these churches is testament to that.

The AFMZ is encouraged to be a warm life-giving church especially in this current world full of uncertainties. In the words of Chitando (2007a) “love erases the artificial separation between ‘us’ and ‘them.’” My arguments are not meant to suggest that the church has not been engaging in acts of love. However, it can and must do better because there is a great need for the church to be contextually relevant. Even though the role of showing love and care is normally associated with women, men must also demonstrate love in the community together with women. I concur with Dube (2000) who argues that the church must take into cognisance Jesus’s “answer to a group of his male disciples who were arguing who is great, was to bring a child to them and command them to welcome/care for a child, a role that is normally associated with women. Yet one cannot over-emphasize the importance of getting men involved in giving quality care...”

Women’s commitment to and demonstration of love enables them to accomplish great exploits such as the buying of a truck and generator as indicated in the narration above by the members of the youth. As Chitando (2007a) aptly puts it, love pushes people into putting ideas into reality.

Spiritual strength

Most of the participants also highlighted that women in the AFMZ are more prayerful as compared to their male counterparts hence making them spiritually strong. MP5 showed his appreciation of the fact that women pray more by saying:

Women meet more for prayer than men. They have their own prayer meetings as women, and they also join those organized for the whole church. At the end of the day, you would find out that they have more time to pray than men, which works to their advantage.

FP 4 who is a female pastor also said:

Women are more prayerful. They pray more for their ministries more than men. It starts when you are still training as student pastors at Living Waters Bible College. Most of the time, you would

find female student pastors praying in the chapel. It was very rare to find the male students.

The youth also expressed the same view during focus group discussions. They expressed their opinion by saying:

Women should be stronger than men emotionally and spiritually. God said that I will make you a helper. A person who needs help is weak. A helper should be stronger than the one who needs help. If a man dies a woman can continue without a man to look after the family. If a woman in a marriage dies everything falls apart and a man remarries as soon as possible because he cannot manage on his own. Therefore, women are stronger than men.

Women experience struggles and challenges in society and church such as marginalization and poverty just to mention a few. This is likely the reason for their frequent engagement in prayer. According to Dube, (2000) "African women's experiences of religion have been shaped by patriarchal cultural and religious norms that have marginalized them." Despite these challenges, women have played a significant role in the spiritual life of the church. It should be appreciated that spirituality is an integral part of women's lives and that women often use their faith as a source of strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Women's perspectives on spirituality are often different from men's, and their experiences and insights can enrich the church's understanding of spirituality. Women, drawing on their resourcefulness and agency, often turn to God for guidance in nearly all aspects of life, which underscores their strong inclination towards prayer.

Women may not match the physical strength that men have but they have this aspect of spirituality which men can learn from if they are included in leadership and decision making. Mupangwa (2021) in her doctoral thesis strongly argued for celebrating the differences that may be observed between men and women. By doing so, both men and women find common ground in complementing each other. Even though women are said to be more prayerful, it does not nullify the fact that they need men in their lives and that church and society would function better if men and women lived in an egalitarian way.

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that all people, men included, hold such positive perspectives about women. From the foregoing discussion, one might conclude that the perspectives advanced by Apostolic Faith Mission of Zimbabwe about women are characterised by ambiguity and ambivalence. This is so, in the sense that even though they know women possess such good and strong characteristics they are still in the periphery when it comes to decision making. As Chitando (2007b) aptly states, even though the views being emphasized by Zimbabwean Pentecostalism are remarkable, they continue to be inclined towards placing men above women. Their views contain a lot of promise to breaking new ground as there is recognition of the powerful characteristics that women possess which they can use as equal partners in the church leadership in pursuit of gender justice. Since masculinities are not frozen as Chitando (2007b) rightly states, men in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe can change the narrative of the history of the church by putting the positive perspectives highlighted in this paper into practice. Change in the leadership structure can be experienced if liberating masculinities are employed in the AFMZ. The findings of this study are evidence that women should not operate in the shadow of men. They should be recognized as worthy agents. Women should never function behind the scenes, I strongly, contend that they should come to the fore and work side by side with men in decision-making and all other leadership roles in the church.

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13 Leadership struggles of Women in Topia Sungano Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe

Lindah Tsara

Abstract

The chapter builds up from an interview conducted on the history and origin of the apostolic churches under my PhD study on women, education, and sexual and reproductive health rights in African Apostolic Indigenous Churches (AAICs) of Tangwena area of Nyanga District (Manicaland province), Zimbabwe. During an interview, the general secretary of Topia Sungano Apostolic Church (TSAC), after narrating the history and origin of the church as founded by Bishop Chakonza as known by the whole church, he confidently revealed that the owner of the church was Mbuya Chakonza (the wife of Chakonza), but because of culture, “She could not lead the church because she was only a woman”. This statement became one of the leading factors that motivated this research although there are several factors, which include my previous experience as a member of TSAC where I observed that despite women being the majority in terms of TSAC membership, they are not included in church leadership. The thrust of this chapter is to analyze the leadership status of women in TSAC based on the general secretary’s words quoted above. This empirical study uses African feminist cultural hermeneutics to raise awareness of the oppressive tendencies of missionary and African cultural education. Although women are the majority members in TSAC they are mostly found where labour is needed and not where important decisions that affect them are made. This chapter envisages that gender awareness can be provided to this church to show the capability of women to hold leadership positions just like men do. The chapter concludes by noting that women are marginalized in the name of culture and the colonial education syndrome that does not seem to promote women in terms of education and leadership roles.

Keywords: Apostolic Indigenous church, leadership, struggles, women, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Although women constitute most of the membership in TSAC, they are mainly associated with the provision of labor rather than anything else. The study delineates the leadership status of women in TSAC. It is based on what the African cultural system of education in general and the Manyika culture in particular and missionary education have taught the girl child in as far as the status of women in leadership positions is concerned. The study critically looks at TSAC's teachings and practices pertaining to the status of men and women to find out if they are equal in terms of creation, religiosity, and level of spirituality. The study uses African cultural feminist theory to analyze the leadership status of women in TSAC who seem to treat women as second-class citizens in society. The study emanates from qualitative empirical research where interviews were contacted purposively among the members of TSAC in Tangwena.

Background and motivation to the study

As I conducted interviews during my PhD research, after narrating the history and origin of the church. The general secretary confidently uttered that despite Mbuya Chakonza being the founder of the church as you know our culture, "she could not lead the church because she was only a woman" (Interview with Mr. P, 12 January 2018). This statement became one of the leading factors that motivated this research although there are other factors which include personal experience as a member of TSAC where I observed that despite women being the majority in terms of TSAC membership, they are not included in church leadership. The TSAC has a strong African cultural background which seems to have shaped some of its teachings, particularly on women's education and leadership status in society and the church.

In relation to this, Chitando & Chirongoma (2012) acknowledge that religion plays a major role in promoting male dominance in society. Their vision is that faith communities become institutions that nurture and support gender equality. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the educational and leadership status of women in TSAC paying particular attention to the church's general secretary's words quoted above.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses African cultural feminist theory which addresses the specific situations and experiences of women in Africa (Oduyoye and Kanyoro 2001) alongside the theory of intersectionality (Gunda 2023) that seeks to address the oppression of women from multiple angles of race, gender, ethnicity, and patriarchy. Some of the specific issues that African women's theologies address, and which are also of vital importance to this study include, women's struggle with African patriarchal culture, their participation in colonialism, missionary Christianity, and the aftermaths. Because of these struggles, African feminist cultural hermeneutics have been developed as a theory by Oduyoye (2001) and Kanyoro (2002). This theory has been used as a tool to analyse culture and the Bible as these operate in the lives of a woman in the African context. This theory is used to expose and criticise those aspects of African and biblical cultures which are life-denying for women and to reclaim life-giving aspects. It is the concern of the theory to expose and analyse the life-denying aspects of such teachings as that of TSAC on women which include the marginalization of women in taking leadership positions in the church and their teachings that seem to let women receive limited education, they are subjected to a certain dress code, they are not allowed to attend important meetings held annually that govern the path to be followed by the church. Furthermore, women are treated as second class citizens to their male counterparts.

Rakoczy (2004:34) further states that, "feminist cultural hermeneutics help women to read the biblical texts in dialogue with their own cultural understanding and become critical of the intersections between them". Kwok (2001:22) adds that, "feminist cultural hermeneutics is an important tool that African Women Theologians have developed to analyze their culture, religion, and Christian heritage". Kanyoro sees most African cultures as a double-edged sword which can be used both as a creed for the community's identity and as the justification for oppression and injustice especially towards women. Explaining further on women's experience of culture, Kanyoro (2002:21) contends that:

Women in Africa are custodians of cultural practices. For generations, women have guarded cultural prescriptions strictly governed by the fear of breaking taboos and harmful traditional practices that are passed on as cultural values and therefore are not to be discussed, challenged, or changed.

Following Kanyoro's argument, this study also asserts that in the name of cultural preservation, the marginalization of women in taking leadership positions has been perpetuated in TSAC as part of a cultural norm. Therefore, Kanyoro (2002:54) argues that issues such as women being custodians of culture illustrate the reality of women's vulnerability in the face of culture in Africa. The need for cultural hermeneutics in this sense cannot be over-emphasized. In another development, Kanyoro (2002:55) argues that in trying to analyze women's experience of traditional marriage practices, there is a need to deal with the historical and social context of the people involved in the culture coupled with factors that influence these cultures.

Kwok (2001:8) further argues that "since African women's cultural heritage is multi-layered, their cultural hermeneutics too must be multi-dimensional so that it can analyze different aspects of culture". This then calls for a need to address women's experience of culture holistically and contextually. In an endeavor to analyze culture, it is also important to guard against any form of stereotype that may lead to passing judgment on the culture without applying any form of cultural analysis. In this study, Kanyoro's feminist cultural hermeneutics has been used in three ways: Kanyoro (2002:4) postulates that, "feminist cultural hermeneutics is a tool which enables women's voices to be heard and that unless women's voices are heard, their oppression will continue through power imbalances". Phiri & Nadar (2006) agree with Oduyoye (2001) and Kanyoro (2002) that women's experiences stand as the cornerstone for women doing theology in most African communities. Further, Phiri & Nadar (2006) uphold feminist cultural hermeneutics for its current engagement with HIV & AIDS research within the Circle and its commitment to what they call "grassroots" women living in faith communities. Phiri (2006) argues that African women need to start to write their own stories that have for a long time been written by male African Theologians. To respond to Phiri's (2006) call, this study focused on the marginalization of women in leadership in TSAC which mainly affects women and seeks to bring these voices to the fore. This chapter argues that feminist cultural hermeneutics provide a platform for all women stakeholders in TSAC to have their voices heard.

Furthermore, this theory was helpful to this study particularly when analyzing the data obtained from the church's general secretary on the history and origin of TSAC. Kanyoro (2002:17) asserts that feminist cultural hermeneutics is an important theological tool of analysis because it takes

both culture and the gospel seriously. She further asserts that women's experience of the church comes with a contradiction between the sense of belonging and the silencing of women within the body of Christ. In the context of upholding leadership positions in the church, women opt to undergo oppressive practices secretly to protect the image of the church and culture even when it is done at the expense of their dignity and humanity. This study therefore engages in dialogue that will help these men and women understand what it means to be a church within the context of their culture. As will be shown later, men occupy leadership positions to uphold their cultural values. This is despite the consequences these practices have for women, hence, the need for a cultural analysis. Furthermore, in some cases, the Bible has also been used as a means for justifying oppressive cultural practices. Hence, feminist cultural hermeneutics is valuable as a tool for examining the Bible from a cultural perspective and for scrutinizing the multi-cultural layers embedded in biblical narratives.

Moreover, feminist cultural hermeneutics is also interested in how oppressive cultural practices can be transformed. Transformation in this case will mean doing away with the oppressive practices while retaining and affirming those practices that are life-giving. In this study, one aspect that we also had an interest in, is the church's teachings on girl child education. Feminist cultural hermeneutics contributed to the development of more gender-equitable teachings that could be incorporated into the education of both girls and boys. It does all of this while remaining critically faithful to African culture. It can be said that the use of feminist theories like feminist cultural hermeneutics acts as the key to African women's liberation. In this respect, this study aims at challenging TSAC to heed the silent screams of millions of women and young girls who suffer marginalization in leadership positions and oppression within the church in the name of culture - bearing in mind that women are very much concerned about church, but the church is not so concerned about women.

Methodology

A qualitative method is appropriate for this study because it involves studying a particular group of people. Babbie & Mouton (2002:11) accentuate that, the qualitative research method is the most suitable methodology

when one wants to investigate a deeper understanding of a given community. This study develops from empirical research that uses several data collection instruments that include focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and participant observation along with secondary sources from both published and unpublished sources. The use of the qualitative method in this study aims at gaining vision and discovering the depth, richness, and complexity of the selected teachings of TSAC on leadership status of women. The research was conducted in Tangwena where we had a chance to purposively interview many church members and the general secretary of the church. We managed to obtain information from them through their testimonies on the history and background of the church. Again, for those who were in leadership positions, we had an opportunity to ask them about their experiences in the church and how they perceive women's leadership.

Ethical consideration

This research followed the code of conduct of the research ethics as set by the KwaZulu-Natal University in line with the guidelines by Mouton (2001). The current study was subject to certain ethical issues as mentioned in the above statement; some participants submitted their written acceptance regarding their participation in the research by signing a briefing and consent form. Participants were not deceived or forced to participate. They were reassured at the beginning of the interviews that their participation in the research was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from it at any point and for any reason if they felt like doing so. Due to the assurance guaranteed to participants, all participants agreed to participate. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality of their identities as all information in the data was disseminated anonymously using pseudonyms in reporting the findings. All data collected and records belonging to the research were seen only by myself and my supervisor. The works of other people were acknowledged accordingly to avoid plagiarism.

As a researcher, I was sensitive to the possible impact of the research on the society through information dissemination, publication or otherwise. I promise to be ethically responsible to the people whom I work with. Thus, as a researcher, I appreciate that people have a right to confidentiality, including the right to participate in the interviews. The people had right not to be harassed in any way be it physically, emotionally, psychologically or in

other ways. Likewise, the personal identities of the participants were anonymous. This research will be of benefit to the participants and society at large because it raised awareness on how culture deprived women the opportunity to lead even in circumstances where they are capable.

History of Topia Sungano (TSAC)

There is not much literature that has been written about the historical background of Topia Sungano. This study relied heavily on the information from the general secretary of the church and other senior members of the church. The informants narrated the history as it is presented below, much of the information about the history and background of the church comes from the general secretary of the church who narrated the history and emergence of the church.

Topia Sungano was formed in 1956, as a breakaway church from the then African Methodist Episcopal church. The Chakonza family (Mr. Chakonza, Mrs Chakonza & Son) were discussing other prophets from Johane Marange in a maize field who practiced stepping on fire without getting any burns. During this discussion, the power of the Holy Spirit took Mrs Chakonza popularly known in the Church as mbuya Chakonza, into the fire three times before she disappeared whilst the husband and son were watching. It is believed that she went home and took her white headgear and went to a mountain. After her disappearance, the search in the house only revealed that a white piece of cloth was no longer at its usual place and could not be found. She claims she was instructed to spend 14 days in the mountain by the Holy Spirit and could see the search team, but she could not speak and later returned home after 7 days as her family was now using different means to search for her including consulting traditional healers. She told the family that she had been instructed to start a church which would put on white garments for men whilst women would put on white veils known as *girorias* (veils) and white garments as well with white belts. She also said that she had been told that they were not supposed to visit the hospitals and clinics (Interview with the general secretary of the Church, 17 February 2018).

He further elaborates that, a group led by Mbuya Chakonza rebelled against the prayer system of mainline churches which condemned the work of the Holy Spirit and went to the mountain with a small group of

congregants. Prophet Gora who was the bishop at the time of this interview also received the Holy Spirit. An interesting point to note from the general secretary was that prophet Gadza who was the provisional leader was denounced by the Holy Spirit in this mountain and they gave the leadership to Mr. Chakonza despite Mrs Chakonza being the founder of the church.

The narrative above is an indication of the influence of some African cultural practices on the oppression of women. Mbuya Chakonza was the founder of TSAC but because she was a woman, she was not permitted to lead the church. The use of an African feminist Lense in this research is ideally positioned to explain the patriarchal oppression of women during colonialism up to the present day and to analyze the statement uttered by the general secretary of the church that, “she could not lead the church because she was a woman”.

Discussion on the general secretary’s statement, “She could not lead the church because she was a woman.”

To unpack the above statement and further elaborate the meaning of the statement, I extracted much of the information from the interviews where informants were questioned on what influenced the church’s position on women’s leadership status in the church. According to the informants, the church believed that “when girls are educated, they abandon their parents and move away from the church’s tradition (Interview with Mr. C, 24 January 2018). Informants also revealed that when girls are educated, they become more consumerist, and materialist.

Another reason that emerged was that parents fear that if girls are educated, they move away from their African traditional culture preferring Western culture. According to Mr. X, one of the informants:

Western education brought with it the destruction of African culture. Not sending their children to school, was a sign of resistance to Westerners and missionaries. According to TSAC, sending children to school would be as good as delivering their children to the hands of enemies (Interview with G. Motsi, 20 February 2018).

The above sentiments reflect that TSAC is more concerned with preserving African culture rather than adopting Western perceptions of living. One informant from a focus group discussion further argued that:

African culture must harness the young through its teachings. A woman or a girl has only these parameters to live on, dress this way, move this way, should take note of the men who are above

her. No woman is above the men in terms of reasoning, ruling even at home, they are some of the duties reserved for girls, in this case women are not entitled to leadership positions (Interview from a focus discussion, 10 February 2018).

In line with the above sentiments, Lawal (2005:24) highlights that the African traditional concept of education is aimed at character development, growth of intent and physical skills, inculcation of respect for elders and leaders, understanding, appreciating, and promoting the cultural heritage of society among others. He further elucidates that Western education was received with mixed feelings in most places among African cultures and very few people were willing to send their children to school. Those who did not consider it wise to send the girl child to school did so because girls were regarded as property and dependents of their fathers and husbands. Adebis (2009) and Adetunji (2001) also argue that some parents felt that if girls acquired formal education and had privilege to work, they would surrender all their money to their husbands and not to their parents. Instead, girls were encouraged to acquire functional education which prepared them for motherhood. This might also be what influenced the TSAC's position on the status of women since TSAC was influenced by African traditional culture in formulating their teachings which seem not to promote women's leadership.

The African traditional education system is greatly patriarchal because it favors boys over girls due to the claim made from the interview that boys maintain the family lineage (Interview with P, 10 January 2018). Additional reasons as to why girls do not have adequate access to Western formal education in Africa include that many are required to stay at home to nurse relatives with children and help parents to do household chores such as fetching water, cooking, gathering firewood and washing clothes among others. The fact that their mothers were not educated is another reason that makes them feel that their daughters do not need education too. In Zimbabwe, child brides face early pregnancy, responsibilities to their children and in-laws. Relating to this, Mwangi, (2004) suggests that a combination of poverty, disease and backward cultural practices denied the girl-child her right to education. Even with the introduction of free primary education, girl's access to education remains a dream for many in Zimbabwe.

Oduyoye (2001) explains African traditional culture and education as full of language that enables the community to reduce the humanity of

women. In line with this explanation, Akintunde (1999), suggests that African culture has been a long tale of discrimination and injustice to women as there has not been equity in opportunity, dignity and power between men and women. She further states that in African culture women and girls are often regarded as part of men's property. Although Oduyoye (2001) and Akintunde (1999) focus on Yoruba women, their insights are relevant to this research because African traditional culture in Zimbabwe, specifically observed at TSAC follows the same pattern.

Failure to send the girl child to school by traditional culture leaves the girl child at a disadvantage and in a vulnerable position in terms of development in society. Girls bear the heaviest burden for household responsibilities, including the care for sick parents and siblings, and are the first ones to drop out of school whenever there are challenges experienced at home be it lack of school fees or any other things that need attention. In African culture, sending girls to Western formal education was not important because girls were seen as commodities for the family that were sold and would bring wealth to the family. The main destiny for a girl in an African traditional set-up is marriage (Siwila 2011). Marriage is highly valued and if a girl is not married, that is regarded as a shame to the family, hence most parents prefer to arrange marriages for their children when they are very young.

As a result of these struggles, African theologians such as Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2001) developed a theory where they seek to analyze African culture for its patriarchal nature. It promotes the oppression of the girl child that includes denying a girl's access to an education and marginalizing her from taking leadership positions in the church. In African cultures a girl is delivered from the hands of the father to the hands of the husband (Oduyoye 2001). There is no room for a girl to have freedom, she is always under the custodianship of men. The same also happens to women in TSAC, they have no rights to take leadership positions. Most of them are well indoctrinated from birth and have accepted the African cultural teachings as a norm and they are oppressed by men who always want to occupy front seats in the leadership of the church (Russell 2011).

One of the leaders from TSAC made the following remarks when explaining what influenced the position on women's education and leadership in TSAC:

The main reason is that our forefathers grew up in African patriarchal societies whose laws deprived women in general. Our elders

used to have a system that women should not go to school but should be prepared for marriage. The major reason was that if she was empowered when she got married the family to which she has been married would benefit more than her family which supported her through education hence it was better to educate and support the boy child as they believed their hopes would be fulfilled by the boy child of up keeping them in times of need. Education was regarded as an external foreign culture hence the first founders and leaders of churches believed that encouraging education was also endorsing colonialism. That's why many other churches do not even read the bible because it came through the hands of the white man. Leaders and founders of churches brought the African culture into the churches they founded hence education was a foreign initiative which could not be embraced easily. The fact that many early schools in Zimbabwe were founded by white colonialists being Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodists meant the blacks resisted going to those schools because they said they wanted to teach us their (white) culture and we would lose our local culture (Interview with P. Nyamaropa, 15 February 2018).

The above remarks from TSAC leaders, clearly explain why it was easy for the general secretary of TSAC to utter the statement, "*She could not lead a church as she was only a woman*" (Interview with Mr. P, 10 January 2018). Even though, *Mbuya Chakonza* (Chakonza's wife) was the founder of TSAC, to the general secretary everything was normal since the church had adopted some African cultural practices in its teachings. *Mbuya Chakonza* saw nothing wrong with her husband leading the church *she had a direct calling* from God to start and for her husband to be recognized as a bishop of the church. African culture has already indoctrinated the girl child that they should always play a subsidiary role to their male counterparts in general and their husbands in particular. This study has used African cultural feminist hermeneutics to analyze the patriarchal tendencies of African culture that have led to the oppression of women in terms of the marginalization of women in taking leadership positions in TSAC and being denied an equal opportunity to education with their male counterparts.

Findings of the research

This research has found that women in TSAC are marginalized when it comes to leadership positions and accessing Western formal education. The research revealed that this is because of the teachings of the African

cultural education system in general and Manyika culture in particular which seems to treat women as second-class citizens. The fact that TSAC borrowed much from the African culture made them marginalize women from occupying leadership positions because culture has taught that the best place for a woman to be is the home and women should always submit to their husbands. More so the research has found that although women are the majority members of TSAC they are mostly found where labour is needed and not where important decisions that affect them are made (Russell 1996). Women in TSAC do not attend annual conferences where the church's male leaders make the rules and regulations that govern the church in their day to day running.

Moreover, this research has found that TSAC does not promote girl child education through their teachings but rather encourages and prepares them for marriage. This has subjected women to a continuous cycle of poverty because when girls are not educated most of them will get married young and have poor sexual and reproductive health and rights. In most cases, they are married to older men who make all the decisions in the home. Because most girls are not educated to the extent of being able to support themselves, this has made them become more vulnerable since they will depend on their husbands for support and general upkeep for the rest of their lives. This condition makes it difficult for women to challenge their husbands and to take leadership positions in the church. The church is against Western formal education because it is afraid that when women are educated, they will begin to reject some of the teachings and practices of the church that seem to treat women as second-class citizens and that are patriarchal in nature from African culture. Again, it is believed that sending girl children to Western formal school is the same as delivering their children to the hands of the enemies since most of the schools were initially white owned.

Furthermore, the research has found that despite the general secretary's utterance that, *"she could not lead the church because she was only a woman", in reality the church and society accepted,* and no one is supposed to be offended because the church also emphasizes the use of the Bible that also urges women to be submissive to their husbands. Consequently, Mbuya Chakonza being the founder of TSAC, took leadership position of the church as something that was against the Bible and God himself, hence she allowed her husband to take the leadership position without being offended.

Conclusion

Women are marginalized in the name of culture and the missionary education systems that seem to deprive women and promote men, enabling them to take leadership positions in society and the church. This research has also argued that despite women being the majority members in TSAC, their roles are undermined by patriarchy since they are indoctrinated from birth that the best place for a woman is the home, hence this becomes a challenge for them to occupy the leadership positions in the church. Although awareness can be raised on the issue that both men and women are equal before God, this is not the case with the women of TSAC, which makes it taboo for a woman to take a leadership position, hence making most of them content with the status quo.

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14 Forced and Early Marriages

Intersecting gender based-Violence, religion and Child Marriages among the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC)

Angeline Mavis **Madongonda** & Enna Sukutai **Gudhlanga**

Abstract

Many religions are associated with the promotion of peace and protection of followers from any misdemeanors in the world. Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the scourges that challenge this view of religions. Coming from within any religious circle, the association of gender-based violence with religion is not only contradictory, and unacceptable but shocking. Yet, not many view this as the case when dealing with child marriages in the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC). All child or forced marriages are potentially a hub for sexual assault which is a constituent of gender-based violence. Resultant pregnancies and eventual birth exacerbate this. This paper therefore seeks to interrogate gender-based violence within this church. Girl children, by their gender, are potential victims of GBV and to unearth this, structured interviews were done with participants from the church- both adult and married male and female congregants. Participants were selected using the snowballing technique. This data-gathering method was chosen to cater for most of the targeted population which is largely illiterate and secretive about its activities. *Ubuntu* philosophy is used in a bid to explore this unethical behaviour of GBV through child and forced marriages among the Johanne Marange Apostolic sect. It is hoped that the findings from this study will go a long way in addressing GBV from the least expected source, the church.

Keywords: African Initiated Churches, Child marriages, religion, Gender-based violence, intimate partner violence

Introduction

The study focuses on Gender-based violence (GBV) which is also referred to as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), in stances where the perpetrator and victim are in an intimate relationship. Even though both men and

women as well as boys encounter GBV, this paper mainly focuses on the girl child whom the current researchers have seen as the main victim of GBV. We examine the prevalence of child marriages amongst members of the Johanne Marange African Apostolic church which is an African Initiated Church (AIC) and how they impact on the victims. We also strive to find out the prevalence of Sexual Violence as a form of Gender-based violence on girls who are given off and forced into child as well as forced marriages.

Background

Early child marriages in Zimbabwe have been a significant issue with numerous effects not just for the affected children with larger social and developmental implications. While progress has been made in recent years to address gender equity and the education of the girl child, there are social enclaves that appear to escape public scrutiny as they are covertly hidden by the banner of religion. Society has also tended to turn a blind eye or attempted to sugar-coat incidences of child marriages in Zimbabwe. This problem persists in certain areas of the country particularly where members of the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Churches (JMAACs) are dominant. The case of a young girl Anna Machaya who died in childbirth (Mujuru, 2022) may have made headlines, but it soon grew cold and unaccounted for with the fate of the supposed husband and perpetrator remaining unknown as well as that of the parents who facilitated the marriage. The experiences of this young girl child starting with the consummation of her marriage and the subsequent trauma suffered at childbirth point to gender-based violence. This concurs with Kidman's findings on gender-based violence and intimate partner violence which have revealed the following startling findings:

Globally, 9% of respondents were married before they turned 15; another 25% were married between the ages of 15 and 17. Past year physical and/or sexual IPV [Intimate Partner Violence] was higher among women who married as children (29%) compared with those who married as adults (20%)....All marriages under 18 carry heightened risks, and such consequences can be most pronounced for the youngest brides (those under 15) (Kidman, 2017:663).

The case of the 14-year-old girl Anna Machaya cited above is one pointer at the gross acts of sexual violence against children and her death was the shocking final demise of a child who was never allowed to reach her potential. What is also daunting is the fact that the people who tried to assist

in covering up the crime were her biological parents who attempted to hide their daughter's true age by presenting identification documents of her cousin (Mujuru, 2022). It is for this reason that in this paper, we argue that child marriages are a metaphor for the sexual violence that children are vulnerable to and the subsequent escalation of GBV cases in Zimbabwe. We assume that the violence that Anna Machaya experienced as she was ushered into marriage, followed her to the grave, having gone through traumatic sexual violence followed by a protracted grueling labour that resulted in her death. Apart from the physical impact on the young victims, Kidman (2017:662) has linked the violation of children not just to the physical abuse but to the "additional adverse... mental health outcomes". Mujuru (2022: n.p) admitted that the scourge of child marriages is endemic in the country with "33% of women and 4% of men aged between 20-49 reporting that they were married before reaching the adult age of 18, according to a 2019 survey by Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency."

A significant number of factors such as poverty, the patriarchal social set-up leading to gender inequality and inequity, lack of education, and some religio-cultural belief systems that foster harmful traditional practices, amongst others have been blamed for child marriages. Such inequalities have been exacerbated by world conditions such as of late COVID-19 (Chitando, Maseno and Tarusarira, 2023), war, and climate change among others. These have had dire consequences for the girl child (Kurebwa and Kurebwa, 2018) who continues to miss out on educational opportunities and subsequently, lack of employment opportunities and the development of the larger Zimbabwe. Most of all the girl children married off to older men tend to fall victim to domestic violence and have higher risks of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. The Zimbabwean government, along with various organisations and civil society groups have been trying to combat early child marriages and working on lasting solutions to this scourge. While progress has been made, concerted efforts from various stakeholders are still required to eliminate early child marriages in Zimbabwe. Continued investment in education, poverty reduction, and gender equality is essential to ensure the well-being and empowerment of girls and to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and discrimination.

Child marriages have often targeted teenage girls. These marriages are at times arranged by church leaders and parents without the consent or understanding of the young women involved. This makes child marriages

viewed to some extent as forced marriage as most of the girls involved are not agreeable and are not legally able to consent. What makes it worse is how they are usually thrust into the arms of elderly men whose socio-cultural practices and beliefs are beyond the comprehension of the minors. The church's belief system is a combination of elements of some traditional African beliefs and some sectors of Christianity that condone child marriages, practices that are justified by interpretations of local religious and cultural polygamous norms and the concept of *kuzvarira* (a transactional arranged marriage of an older man and a minor girl). The issue of child marriage in the Johanne Marange church is not without its challenges. The Church has its internal governance structures and operates relatively autonomously, making it difficult for external authorities to enforce laws combatting child marriages. The government has expressed concern over child marriage in the Johanne Marange Church but not much has been done and Biri (cited by Mujuru, 2022) has attributed this to politicians who protect the church to secure votes. Johanne Marange is one of the largest AICs, with over a million followers who can easily be swayed by church leaders and politicians to vote for a particular candidate. Thus, the government tends to turn a blind eye to the atrocities of child marriages perpetrated by the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church for fear of losing the much-needed votes. Half-hearted efforts, however, have been made to rectify child marriages through the legal marriage age (18 years), which makes it criminal for anyone to marry a child below that age. Furthermore, Zimbabwe has also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, which sets 18 years as the minimum age of marriage. In 1991, Zimbabwe also acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which requires signatories to ensure free and full consent to marriage by both parties involved. However, the implementation of these laws continues to be a challenge with overt child marriages happening particularly in AICs. This is compounded by the few known prosecutions where children have been known to openly marry.

Research Methods

This study uses the snowballing technique which is a non-probability sampling method commonly used in qualitative research. The Johanne Marange church is a closed community (Dudzai, Zvokuomba and Mboko,

2023), often guarding its activities jealously so much that open access to members regarding the sensitive issue of child marriage is a challenge and likely to cause problems. The researchers also wished to protect the identity of the respondents who were married off as children and likely suffered violence of first sexual and subsequent encounters as well as men who were perpetrators of the violence. The study purposively selected the Johanne Marange Apostolic Church as it is one of the largest apostolic churches in the country that has been subject to criticism regarding child marriages. A sample of 11 participants drawn from Zengeza in Chitungwiza were interviewed; seven women who married young and four men who married underage girls. Zengeza is a high-density suburb with a significant number of followers of the JMAAC. The chapter devised a coding system that represents the gender of the respondent, for example, Y1 refers to the first male respondent while X1 refers to the first female respondent.

Theoretical Framework: Ubuntu and Early Child Marriages

This study is informed by the *ubuntu* theoretical framework, which is premised on "humanity through recognising the humanity of others" (Samkange and Samkange, 1980) and creating a communal atmosphere that emphasizes "kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa" (Ramose, 1999:271). *Ubuntu* values strong cultural expectations that extended family and other community members care for one another in the spirit of oneness (Kalomo and Besthom, 2018). Within the theoretical framework of *ubuntu*, love and care for others is not restricted to blood relatives but can be extended to the clan, village as well as community. Thus, within the *ubuntu* cultural practice, families and communities embrace each other and share the bond of reciprocal love (Kalomo and Bestorm, 2018). *Ubuntu* is pertinent to this study, which hopes to bring to the fore the atrocities perpetrated against girl-children by their parents and society, the very people who are supposed to love and care for them and prevent them from getting into child marriages.

Mwinipeni (2018) avers that *Ubuntu* philosophy is at odds with modern society. What makes this philosophy suitable is how it frowns on injustice based on empathy and the collective responsibility of a community, a moral philosophy that should frown on child marriages guided by the

maxim 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' and upholding values such as "altruism, kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, respect and concern for others' (Letseka, 2012) what Ujomu & Bature (2018:180) refer to as "humane, compassionate and dignified approach to social living." Ngihbi & Elechi (2022) have aptly captured it when they say that each person's life is intertwined with that of others. Shona society, however, has always had its contradictions when dealing with issues to do with polygamy and child/and or forced marriages. The Shona proverb "*regai dzive shiri mazai haana muto*" (let the eggs hatch into birds the egg does not produce gravy) appears to generally emphasize maturation when used in the context of early marriages. It criticises them and emphasizes steering away from children allowing them to reach maturity before they can be given off in marriage. In the same vein, however, the proverb presents a woman as a commodity to be consumed. In the context of this paper, however, the message is the young should reach sexual maturation before they are forced into marriage.

While *Ubuntu* itself does not directly address early child marriages, its principles can be applied to address this issue. However, the philosophy has been selectively used to suit the whims of perpetrators of GBV and IPV. While AICs purport to uphold African value systems, this cannot be said of Ubuntu within such churches and JMAAC is one such example. Scholars such as Houshmand (2019) have lambasted the ambivalence of AICs which refuse to embrace other progressive statutes that combat GBV, opting to select aspects of Christianity and incorporate them into traditional culture, in this case, child marriages and polygamy. Their rigidity is often not to uphold positive values but to selective application of self-serving doctrines that subjugate and subordinate women. Chitando, Taringa & Mapuranga (2014:122) have observed that AICs were formed "to oppose colonial interpretations of Christianity.... to infuse indigenous beliefs and practices and ...formulate a peculiar African Christian identity." In the same vein, they should work towards eliminating oppressive tendencies of traditional value systems as well as those of church doctrine.

Eze cited by Houshmand (2019: n.p) underlines that *ubuntu* as an "ethical tradition grounded in a culture that is inherited from the ancestors" can still be dynamic and thus evolve to suit current situations. He further emphasizes that *ubuntu* should draw lessons from the past to guide the present as well as make sense of the future ... a philosophy of dialogue [which] can embrace differences. In other words, AICs need to address those masculinities which glorify violence and socialise them to resolve conflict

peacefully as well as accord girls and women the dignity and respect they deserve.

Ubuntu emphasizes empathy and compassion for others. Applying these principles to the context of early child marriages involves understanding the challenges faced by girls forced into such marriages and working towards creating a supportive and protective environment for them. In this paper, we argue that despite possessing areas of challenges that need adjustments, good practices drawn from *ubuntu* (Manyonganise, 2023) can still be useful in protecting girl children from child and forced marriages which are a form of GBV with grave consequences to the minor girls who are married off before maturity. We contend that if *ubuntu* is fully embraced, the Zimbabwean community can continue to excel in abolishing child marriages as well as preventing the resultant GBV that comes with child and forced marriages.

Intersecting Gender-based Violence, Religion and Child Marriages

The male gender is regarded as divinely superior and, hence, predisposed to dominate and underscore female subordination (Dudzai, Zvokuomba and Mboko, 2023). Among some of the practices in some AICs men are encouraged to be polygamous and as a result, marry as many wives as they deem possible. Thus, power imbalances work against the weaker part in a marriage union of this caliber. Early child marriage, thus, perpetuates and reinforces gender inequalities. These marriages are usually characterised by a significant power imbalance, with very young girls being married off to older men without their consent. This power imbalance sets the stage for potential abuse and GBV within the marriage. The younger the girl, the more her vulnerability; the girl's age and often limited education create a dependence on their husbands that consequently contributes to their vulnerability, making it difficult for them to protect themselves. This is in line with a study conducted by Kidman (2017) where she concurs that intimate partner violence was substantially higher among women who married as children as compared with those married as adults. Kurebwa & Kurebwa (2018:48) list some of the following as reasons for girls to submit to forced marriages, thus, accounting for the persistence of such occurrences:

A variety of reasons that include, poverty, protection of girls, fear of loss of virginity before marriage and related family honour, the provision of stability during unstable social periods, lack of education, and discriminatory customary and religious norms are suggested as significant factors in determining a girl's risk of becoming married as a child.

Consequently, once coerced into early marriages, GBV has significant health implications for young girls. They may experience physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and poor mental health outcomes. These results further the cycle of poverty and hinder their overall well-being.

While van Klinken & Chitando (2015) argue that gender continues to be conceptualised predominantly as referring to issues that concern women, it remains a fact that issues to do with the negative repercussions of gender relations also remain pitted against women. This is the case of gender-based violence. In this chapter, we argue that while gender-based violence reportage has largely been skewed, with older female married partners in Zimbabwe and the world over being the subject of reportage yet, the age of victims has tended to be younger than anticipated and this is possible if placed within the proper context of child marriages or forced marriages, most of which are executed away from the public eye within the secrecy of AICs. The oppressive church doctrine presides over such abuses making victims normalise and submit to the abuses and avoid reporting them to authorities. This means right from the beginning, the moment force is exerted on the victim to enter a marriage union with an older man and the 'union' is coerced, it involves violence to some extent. The consummation of the marriage itself is violent as young girls are violated before they are mature enough to comprehend the implications and effects of marriage on their well-being. While van Klinken & Chitando (2015) admit that their scholarship attempts to avoid the monolithic representation of male masculinities as the cause of high-risk behaviour and male sexual aggression and agitating for more responsible masculinities, the violent nature of forced marriages remains a topical issue that has eluded adequate attention. To add to this, the issue of sexual violence has largely been associated with HIV & AIDS with women who are often defenceless to the sexual whims of their male partners in general.

On a different note, the JMAAC's doctrine has been viewed as oppressive to all congregants irrespective of gender (Dudzai, Zvokuomba & Mboko, 2023). Followers of AICs have thus been subject to church doctrine that

does not leave any room for questioning the prevalence of some religious practices. Sibanda (cited by Chitando, Taringa & Mapuranga, 2014:124-125) states that among AICs:

... the Holy Spirit is used as an intimidating tool, instilling fear in members not to do certain acts as they are threatened with curses. The same Holy Spirit is used to validate child marriages as prophets would have been '*directed*' by the Holy Spirit to marry young girls. They also believe that girls should have only minimum schooling, and therefore, as soon as a girl reaches puberty they are married off. The lack of education often disempowers the girls. They do not question certain harmful practices in the church such as the practice of not taking children to health institutions.

This has resulted in followers of JMAAC not questioning early child marriages and gender-based violence although members, particularly the grievously affected – women and children. The linkages between early child marriages and GBV and their implications on the well-being and rights of women and girls are captured by Kidman (2017)

There are several potential reasons why child marriages may be characterized by greater violence. Women who marry as children are more likely to be uneducated, live in poverty, and subscribe to traditional gender norms. Child marriages are characterized by spousal age gaps, power imbalances, social isolation, and lack of female autonomy; all of the above are demonstrated risk factors for IPV and represent potential causal mechanisms. It may be, for example, that the same inequitable gender norms that give rise to child marriages also perpetuate violence. Men who marry very young girls may hold traditional masculine ideologies, and because of this be more likely to abuse their wives. Child brides are also often given away or sold by families that undervalue women. By the time they marry, young girls may have internalized harmful beliefs. They are more likely, for example, to believe that husbands can be justified in beating their wives – a belief that places them at higher risk for IPV (Kidman, 2017:635).

It is, thus, evident that child marriages have larger implications on the victims who are largely female.

Findings and discussion

Early child marriages in the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church

Findings from the interviews revealed the reasons behind members of the Johanne Marange Church marry underage girls and why the girls themselves submit to the glaring abuse. In all, 11 participants were interviewed- seven women who married young and four men who have married underage girls. Questions that were asked male participants sought to find out if they knew that they were committing a crime by marrying under-age girls and whether they were happy with arranged and polygamous marriages as well as if they used physical violence or force on their women. All agreed that the women they married were not children as they were now mature enough to handle marriage as well as bear children. One participant (Y1) said *“Isu hatitore vana vadiki semafungiro amunoita, kana achinge okwanisa kubata nekutakura nhumbu kusvika izvarwe atove munhu mukuru. Wese mukadzi anogeza uye aane mazamo atove kukwanisa kuro-orwa* (We do not take children as per your thinking, if a girl is capable of conceiving and carrying a baby to full term, she is old enough. Any woman who has started menstruating and has developed breasts is wife material). Upon further probing if the women they married young have had complications when giving birth, all except one said his wife had a stillbirth.

The male participants also agreed that arranged marriages were for the benefit of all involved. One male informant, Y2, said arranged marriages were fair as they helped to foster unity within the church. He said sometimes the church elders arrange the marriages and other times the parents of the women are involved and offer them in marriage. Participant Y3 revealed, *“Hapana chinoshamisa apa. Ukapiwa mukadzi unoramba here. Handiti zvinonzi kuwanda kwakanaka, kwakarambwa nemuroyi”* (There is nothing abnormal here. Is it not said that the more the better, only a witch would deny that). Although all the participants said there were no conflicts amongst men in the church, one woman revealed that the marriages were sources of conflict over women. She said the main source of conflict was wealth with the well-to-do members who have the advantage of having access to all the women and with the women stampeding to get married to them. On being asked whether they used violence or physical force, most of the men said they do not support domestic violence for fear of spilling blood. However, it was apparent that they did not want to entertain the question on violence and were evasive when asked if they used

violence on their women. One, however, openly said he did not use violence unless it was necessary thereby indirectly admitting that he used violence as a punitive measure. On the issue of consummation most of the men said they did not use force on their women. Participant Y4 said *“Tinoroora vana vari vasikana chaivo saka zvagara zvinonetsa pakutanga kwavari. Handichazivi kuti kana mava kuti violence munorevei.”* (We marry our young girls when they are still virgins hence the first time might appear violent since the first times are always difficult for them. I do not know what you mean when you say we use physical force). The men concurred that all girls likely experience this in their first encounters and, hence, it is not abnormal for them to feel that violence has been used.

On the issue of polygamy, participant Y3 said marrying women is sometimes directed by the Holy Spirit and so no one questions it. He said,

Zvinenge zvaonekwa pamweya kuti mukadzi anenge achitori wangu saka ini handingaitisane nharo nezvinhu zvemweya (The choice of woman is sometimes done on a spiritual level and as a man I don't dispute what the spirit says).

This participant agreed with the others that the use of physical force or violence is not good but stressed that with many wives it was a way of keeping them in line. If one wife becomes wayward and gets scot-free, then the rest would follow.

The findings also revealed that the ages of all the women who were interviewed ranged between 14 and 17. They all agreed that they were governed by the statutes of the church, and they grew up seeing similar marriages. However, despite having witnessed girls marrying as children all their lives (sometimes being forced to marry older men), most of the participants said it was an unfair practice. One (X1) had this to say,

Unenge une raki ukatowanikwa nemunhu asina kunyanyokura. Madhara madhara anoshusha kupfuura vanenge vakaita vechidiki. Imbofungai ukawanikwa nemudhara ane 60 years? Vanenge vatova Sekuru (You will be fortunate if you get married to a younger man. Older men are well known for being abusive. Imagine marrying an old man of 60. He is as good as your grandfather).

When asked if they were happy in their marriages most of the participants said they were not happy being in polygamous relationships and two participants specifically pointed out that when one is the youngest or junior wife at any given time, she was subject to abuse from everyone including the husband. Apart from the wifely duties, she is reduced to a household

slave often running errands for both husband and co-wives. This, according to the participants stemmed from being young, alienated, and lacking confidence compounded with the confusion of being a new addition to the family, with every member of the household taking advantage of this.

On the issue of consummation of the marriage most of the participants said there was physical violence. Participant X2 had this to say:

Ihhh kumbunyikidzwa hapana kuwirirana. Munhu unenge uchiri mwana anenge asati aane chinhu chaava kuziva. Saka nguva zhinji uri mudiki kudaro kunenge kuri kubatwa chibharo (Physical force is used there is no agreement. One would still be a child who does not know anything. So, most of the times when you are young it is rape).

Three of the participants (X1, X2 and X3) said their first encounter was rape. X1 had this to say regarding such a first encounter,

Mutemo wechechi unoti kana ukatobatwa zamu chairo unofanirwa kutoenda nemunhu anenge akubata. Wesi kana akumanikidza, wabatwa chibharo. Gore negore vasikana vanotariswa kumusan-gano saka zvichinge zvaitika saizvozvo wega unopindwa nekutya wotoenda pasina akuudza. (Church statutes stipulate that even when a man touches your breast, you are supposed to go [and get married to him]. It is even worse when he forces himself on you or rapes you. Each year girls have virginity tests, so once you sleep with a man you are filled with fear, and you have no choice but to elope).

Participants X2 and X3 had similar stories with X3 admitting,

Ini ndanga ndiri form 3 handina kumboplana zvekuroorwa. Muko-mana wangu akandibata ndichibva ndatoenda kumba kwavo nekuti ndizvo zvinotaura mutemo wechechi yedu (I was in Form 3 when I got married. My boyfriend forced himself on me and I decided to go with him to his home because that is what our church rules say).

In the case of Participant X3, it is apparent that at least she did not have to be married off to a total stranger and she added that it was not an isolated incident as girls fell in love and married people of their choice despite the arranged and forced marriages. However, the bottom line was most of the girls who married young had traumatic first encounters. Oliver Mtukudzi (2018) echoed the same sentiments when he sang the song

“*Haasati Aziva*” (She does not know anything yet) and castigated the practice stating that children would still be growing up and, hence, in the dark over adult issues such as marriage.

Participant X4 revealed another form of abuse where, apart from the physical and psychological battery she experiences from the marriage, the child bride is also subject to abuse from other senior wives and their children. She said,

Uri mukadzi mudiki unenge uri pasi pamaikuru kana vanamai-kuru-Unoita zvese zvavanenge vachida. Uri mudiki unenge utori muranda. Mwana anoororwa ari mudiki anogona kuswerera duty rekuberekeswa vana vemamwe madzimai, washeni nemabasa ese epamba. Zvinenge zvakatooma. (When you are the youngest wife, you usually are under the dominion of the senior wife or wives. A girl who is married as a child ends up as a childminder and is made to carry babies on her back daily as well as other chores around the home. It is hard).

Participant X5 said beatings were rare in the early days but one could be beaten over trivial things. She revealed,

Kana uri mudiki ndiwe waiitwa muenzaniso kune vamwe kana wakanganisa ende waibhurwa kunge mwana mudiki. Asi hazvina hazvo zera zvekurohwa izvi muwanano. Chero maiguru vanenge vasisadiwi vanogona kungorohwa. Kazhinji kacho kungoda kuratidza masimba avo vanababa ava. (When you were young, beatings were meant to set an example over the others, and you were severely beaten like a small child. There is no age limit to beatings though, even a senior wife is beaten because the man does not want her anymore. Most times the man wants to show their power).

This was also echoed by the other women with one (Participant X1) clarifying that the older one got, the less frequent beatings because one tended to defend oneself and fight back. Participant X4 concurred on the issue of the reasons behind the beatings,

Ndini ndaive wekutanga. Zvinhu zvakatanga kuchinja paakanga ava kutora vanamainini. Ndoopandakatanga kurohwa ipapo kunge nyoka yapinda mumba. Hanzi uri kuitira godo vanamainini. Kutorohwa neshamhu kana bhande kana maoko. Pamwe pachu unorohwa kunge mombe nechiwepu chaicho. (I was the first wife. Things started to change when my junior core wives joined me. That is when I started to be beaten like a snake which has entered the house. Our husband would say I was jealous of the junior

wives. At times I would be whipped, or he would use a belt as if he were punishing a child, in some instances, my husband would use bare hands to beat me. At times you are beaten like a yoked ox using an ox whip)

Another participant X6 had this to say,

Unoroverwa tunhu tudikidiki. Seni ndakamboroverwa kuti hausi kufarira matarisiro andinoita mainini vanga vaakuda kuroorwa. He said une shanje, pamwe pachu ndakanga ndabika zvavasina kufarira pamusangano. Hanzi ndakavanyadzisa. Vamwe varume vanenge vamanikidzwa kutora vakadzi vavanenge vasingadi ndosaka vachivashungurudza. (I was beaten over petty issues. I was beaten for showing disapproval over the younger woman he was supposed to marry. He accused me of being jealous. The other time I was beaten for not having prepared a good meal at a church convention. He said I had embarrassed him. Some men had been forced to marry women they did not love which is why they abuse them).

Participant X7 also revealed an interesting dimension,

Haurambi kunoorwa musangano. Ini pakangoita wirirano pakati pemurume wangu nababa- ndakazongonzi enda kumurume nababa ndikangobvuma. Murume wangu ane mabusiness saka ndakaona upenyu huchiratidza kuti hunotoita nani kana murume wacho aine chaainacho. Madzimai tese tinoita zvakasiyana-siyana maererano nekuti wakafunda kusvika papi. Kana wakamboenda kuchikoro zvinobatsira. (You do not refuse to marry in the church. For me it was an agreement between my husband and my father, and my father told me to go, and I agreed. My husband is a businessman, so I realised that I had better prospects of a comfortable life than marrying a man with nothing. All the women do something in the shops depending on the level of education you got).

GBV in general as well as SGBV are rampant amongst members of the JMAAC. The selected participants have admitted to experiencing GBV, IPV and SGBV.

It is important to note that child marriages are not limited to the JMAAC in Zimbabwe but in other African Initiated churches as well as in urban areas where well-to-do men sexually abuse young girls in need of economic gain and cohabit with them as their “small houses.” In this scenario, the man will be married but will take advantage of a young girl and rent a house for her, and sexually abuse her. This, therefore, means that

the abuse of young girls is more widespread than is speculated. Such marriages exist and still occur in many communities and across different AICs in the country. This means that efforts to combat child marriages require a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration between government, civil society, religious groups, and communities at large.

“Of Eloquent Silence and SGBV”: Agency and Championing Fight against SGBV

From the background of the treatment of women of the JMAAC, they are an abused lot. The treatment of women has been stocked by rampant inequalities across African communities. Such inequalities have largely been ignored with women bearing the brand of their effects (Chitando, Maseno and Tarusarira, 2023). It is for this reason that the works of Ezra Chitando are critical to ending gender inequalities and inequities. He has pointed out the rampant reportage in the media of GBV mainly as a weapon in war and conflict regions, yet the sexual component has often been left out (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2013), thus underlining the shocking silence that pervades the subject. Makulilo (2023) has observed the same silence on religion and inequalities in Tanzania. Some of the shocking revelations from key participants interviewed for this study are pointers to the reason behind scholars and civic society agitating and mobilising forces against GBV/IPV in general and SGBV in particular. In this chapter, we argue that the consummation of early child marriages should be viewed as acts of sexual violence, given the age and lack of consent of the children involved. It is for this reason that works of Chitando are of utmost value in propagating some rallying points in raising the voices that speak to and against GBV and IPV. In his introduction to the book aptly titled *Justice and not Silence: Churches Facing Sexual and Gender-based Violence*, Chitando & Chirongoma (2013) touches about sexual and gender-based violence and demonstrates that it requires urgent attention because of its lasting impact on the mental health of the girl child. It is one of the key issues that have been kept under wraps with children being violated daily. From the perspective of men, generally, SGBV is widespread due to men “expressing their power, control, and dominance over women” (Chitando, 2013:9). Most churches have tended to ignore SGBV, what Chitando & Chirongoma (2013) referred to as “eloquent silence” on matters that affect victims perennially, particularly those in AICs. The fact that this

is affecting large numbers of children is cause for intervention from the powers that be. Chitando and Chirongoma have observed that such churches conveniently ignore the subject of SGBV leaving affected men and women metaphorically bleeding with churches ironically being signatories of such violence rather than liberating (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2013).

In a bid to address this, Chitando & Chirongoma (2013) have pointed out that the humanity of women should go beyond mere 'verbal articulation' but be exhibited and ingrained in the church's practices. Chitando and Chirongoma raise pertinent questions regarding sexual matters in the church: –

Why do male church leaders seem to have limitless energy when it comes to debates on homosexuality, but they appear frozen when it comes to SGBV? Why is it that many of them are eloquent when it comes to challenging colonialism but are completely speechless when the issue of sexism comes up? (2013:6).

To show his solidarity and collaboration against abuses against women, Chitando in his works has shown his unflinching support of female gender scholars regarding re-examining the status of women in different religions in particular AICs (2013). The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians whose aim is to expose “how religion and culture have been abused to condemn women and children to premature deaths...” (Chitando, 2013:136), Chitando has strived to expose collusion between religion and culture in the abuse of women and children. Although in the cited volume, Chitando was speaking from the context of HIV & AIDS, the status of women and girl children has deteriorated further in the past 10 years with marked increases in cases of GBV and IPV. The COVID-19 pandemic has also been labelled as one of the causative factors. In support of *ubuntu*, Chitando, Taringa & Mapuranga (2014) have stated that “practices that threaten the well-being of women and children, such as child marriages and resistance to Western medicine, could be classified as running contrary to the spirit of *ubuntu*.”

Chitando has been at the forefront in his attempt to address early child marriages and gender-based violence, working with men's organizations such as Padare/Enkundleni (Men's Forum on Gender) (Chitando, 2007). This, however, requires a comprehensive approach and support across the national divide. This includes raising awareness about the negative impact of harmful religio-cultural practices that foster GBV, IPV and SGBV.

A comprehensive approach is needed to address early child marriage and gender-based violence. This includes raising awareness of the negative effects of these practices, promoting gender equality, ensuring access to quality education, providing support services for survivors, strengthening legal frameworks, and challenging harmful norms and practices.

The empowerment of girls and women is important to combat child marriages and gender-based violence. This includes providing educational opportunities, promoting their rights, promoting economic independence, and creating safe spaces for them to voice their concerns and seek support. From the interviews conducted it is apparent that girl children who are educated belong to a different class of women who are dignified and respected. Participant X1 stated that “*Kune madepartments nema class uko. Kana usina kuenda kuchikoro unobatwa sechikorobho and mumunda hau-budi.*” (There are different classes of women in the church. If you are not educated you are treated like a doormat, and you do not leave the fields). It is clear that girl empowerment through education is the key as evidence has shown that educated girls have a level of dignity that their uneducated counterparts lack. This also means the girl gets to marry when she is older and capable of making her own decisions.

Efforts to address early child marriages and gender-based violence should also take into consideration the broader socio-cultural, and economic factors that contribute to these challenges. Using *Ubuntu* philosophy may be a guiding factor that looks at the humanity of others and at the same time watching out for their security. By empowering girls and women, it becomes easier to challenge harmful norms, promote gender equality, and work towards a future in which child marriages and gender-based violence are eradicated.

At the same time churches that condone the preying on young girl children should be outlawed. Men have accused religio-cultural expectations that promulgate child marriages and GBV, but this is no excuse to stop breaking the cycle for the ultimate peace, welfare, and security of girl children. Sowa cited by Houshmand, (2019: n.p.) has this to say, “You do not have to be an evil man to benefit from a patriarchal system that holds women back, and you don’t have to be a vulnerable woman to be discriminated against within that system.” Chitando like these growing voices against GBV seeks to see an end to the gender injustices that have perennially weighed against women (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012). GBV is largely systemic and once the religio-cultural systems are eradicated cases of GBV begin to visibly go down.

Conclusion

The chapter has amply demonstrated that the Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC) provides a conducive atmosphere for the abuse of the girl-child and women under the guise of religious beliefs which cannot be questioned. It has further highlighted that the prevalence of child marriages and GBV is more widespread than meets the eye. This, thus, calls for immediate practical interventions to arrest this scourge. This may require the involvement of law enforcement agencies to ensure that child marriages and gender-based violence that are concealed in the churches are a priority in terms of protecting the girl child and women. While *Ubuntu* does not directly address early child marriages, its principles of empathy and compassion can be utilised to challenge harmful practices and promote a more inclusive and protective environment for children. By applying the values of *Ubuntu* philosophy, societies can work towards eliminating early child marriages and creating a future where all children can grow and thrive. *Ubuntu* becomes a social resource in handling the tragic circumstances surrounding child marriages and GBV. This begins at the family level and may be rolled out into educational institutions as well as the media. Such a change may be protracted requiring patience and perseverance but is worth the wait. Children cannot continue to die, there should be some practical measures that can prevent these harmful practices of forced and child marriages.

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15 African Masculinities, Sexual and Reproductive Health

The Case of AICs in Zimbabwe

Vengesai Chimininge

Abstract

Throughout the world, there are still strong social and cultural norms that perpetuate power imbalances between men and women. While men usually have more agency than the women in their lives, men's decisions and behaviours are also profoundly shaped by rigid social and cultural expectations related to masculinity. For this reason, there is an increasing amount of research output recognizing the impact of religion and culture on sexual and reproductive health-care utilization in Africa. Connell (1998), MenEngage (2016), Ezra Chitando & Susan Mbula Kilonzo (2018), Desi Dwi Prianti (2019) Mbah (2019), Chitando & Chirongoma (2012), Sokfa (2013) and many more highlighted that there is a growing realisation that masculinities are not uniform and that they are expressed in diverse and sometimes conflicting ways. It is hypothesized in this chapter that some religious beliefs and cultural practices in Africa can influence the gender disparities that can affect sexual and reproductive health care of a people. Considering this backdrop this chapter examines the influence of African masculinities in sexual and reproductive health care using the belief systems and practices in African Indigenous Churches in Zimbabwe. The paper pays particular attention to two dominant issues in traditional African sexuality such as marriage and family planning. Extensive published literature and interview discussions were used to gather data for this paper.

Keywords: African masculinity, reproductive health, African Indigenous Churches, sexuality, reproductive health, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Echoes on the effects of African masculinity on sexual and reproductive health in Africa continue to increase in number and intricacy. Scholars from the health fraternity, social sciences, humanities and theology have

expended considerable intellectual energy to understand the impact of African masculinity on sexual and reproductive health care. Using African Indigenous Churches as a case study, this chapter seeks to address the following questions: What is the impact of African masculinity on sexual and reproductive health care? Do African indigenous beliefs and practices on marriage and family planning promote or threaten sexual and reproductive health of the people of Zimbabwe? Can the interface between religion and masculinity be understood in a blanket way, or do scholars need to assess specific aspects of religion to determine their impact on sexual and reproductive health? These questions have generated a sizeable body of literature that has brought a definite shape to the study of African masculinities and their effects on sexual and reproductive health. This chapter, therefore, conceptualizes African masculinities and their impact on sexual and reproductive health among AIC members in Zimbabwe. Since AIC belief systems and practices are highly influenced by African traditional beliefs and practices, this paper pays particular attention to issues of marriage and family planning in relation to sexual and reproductive health care in Zimbabwe. The chapter argues that developments in African masculinity provide new insights into the discourse on religion and sexual and reproductive health in Africa. The chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section is a conceptualisation of sexual health and reproductive health. In the second section, the paper provides an overview of the literature on African masculinities. The third section explores the interface between African masculinity and sexual and reproductive health in Zimbabwe through the prism of AICs' belief systems and practices. Considering that African masculinities, as espoused in AICs and their impact to sexual and reproductive health, the paper concludes that AIC beliefs and practices should be transformed for inclusive transformation in the Zimbabwean society. Data for this chapter were largely gleaned from published literature and interview discussions.

Conceptualisation of Key Terms

For us to understand the impact of African masculinity on the sexual and reproductive health among members of AIC in Zimbabwe, we need to define key terms such as sexual health, reproductive health and African masculinities.

Sexual health defined

According to WHO (2006a) "Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled." However, it should be noted that sexual health cannot be defined, understood or made operational without a broad consideration of sexuality, which underlies important behaviours and outcomes related to sexual health. Thus, the working definition of sexuality is:

"...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors." (WHO, 2006a).

Reproductive Health: A Definition

The WHO report (2006a) quoted the Cairo definition of reproductive health which asserts that "Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes." This being the case, reproductive health is viewed as the constellation of methods, techniques and services that contribute to reproductive health and well-being by preventing and solving reproductive health problems. It also includes sexual health, the purpose of which is the enhancement of life and personal relations, and not merely counselling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases (WHO, 2006b).

Understanding African Masculinities

For us to understand the impact of African masculinities on sexual and reproductive health we need to understand the concept of masculinity in general and African masculinity in particular. According to Desi Dwi Prianti (2019) the subject of masculinities has long been absent from scholarly discussions of gender in many developing countries. But in the Western world, the concept has enjoyed considerable attention within gender studies. Of those who discuss the subject, most do so only in a contemporary context rather than linking it to sexual and reproductive health care utilisation. Therefore, to give more nuance to the study of African masculinities and its impact to the sexual and reproductive health in Zimbabwe, this section highlights some of the works published on this subject.

The proverbial wisdom has been that ‘all men are the same’ yet research has shown that there are different ways of being a man. Barker & Ricardo (2005b) argue that the versions of manhood in Africa are socially constructed; fluid over time and in different settings; and plural. For this reason, it should be noted that there is a general acceptance of the plural ‘masculinities’ ahead of the singular ‘masculinity’ in current scholarship. Masculinity, according to Connell (2005a), is defined as the activities and actions that men and women engage in to illustrate social gender roles, with its applicability manifesting in their bodies, culture, or personality. Connell posits four types of masculinities namely: hegemonic, complicit, subordinated, and marginalized these types are described more as positions in relation to one another than as personality.

The hegemonic position is the currently accepted male ideal within a particular culture at a particular time. Hegemonic masculinities are responsive to patriarchy's determinants and dimensions. Connell (2005b) recognizes that not all men fit into the hegemonic masculinity model, but they nevertheless benefit from the patriarchal model, which favours men in general by establishing women's subjugation.

Subordinate masculinity, according to Connell (2005a) is a form of masculinity in which a person lacks many of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity while also expressing qualities opposite to hegemonic masculinity. For example, it may involve acting in a feminine way, being overly emotional, or not being heterosexual.

Complicit masculinity refers to a man who admires or does not challenge hegemonic masculinity, even if he does not fit within the category (Connell, 2005b). Marginalized masculinities explore how men in precarious

positions in different countries and social contexts understand and experience their masculinities, focusing on men who are viewed as being marginal in a range of fields in society including the family, work, the media and school.

Given the four categories of masculinities as propounded by Connell (2005a), it should be noted that African masculinities are not uniform and monolithic, not generalizable to all men in Africa, and that masculine behaviours in Africa are not natural or unchanging suggesting the possible emergence of new (and less violent and less oppressive) ways of being masculine (Morrell & Ouzgane, 2005:8-9). Barker & Ricardo (2005b) have examined young men and the construction of masculinity in sub-Saharan Africa, with special focus on HIV & AIDS, conflict and violence. They counsel that, a gender analysis of young men must consider the plurality of masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa. For them, there is no typical young man in sub-Saharan Africa and no single version of manhood. There are numerous African masculinities, urban and rural and changing historically, including versions of manhood associated with war, or being warriors and others associated with farming or cattle herding. There are indigenous definitions and versions of manhood, defined by tribal and ethnic group practices, and newer versions of manhood shaped by Islam and Christianity, and by Western influences, including the global media (Barker & Ricardo, 2005a). This entails masculinities are malleable, and men are susceptible to change. For Morrell (2001:7), this reassures gender activists of the possibility of transforming masculinities.

According to Barker & Ricardo (2005b), African masculinities are fragile since they are constantly breaking down and new ones formed. This is why we hear religious and theological circles say, 'men are capable of being born again'. As a result, it is not surprising to see men who have been anti-women becoming their partners in struggle. This means that die-hard supporters of inequitable gender norms and values can become the most passionate defenders of religio-cultural resources in the emergence of liberating "more peaceful and harmonious masculinities" (Morrell, 2001:7).

Sokfa, Siwila & Settler (2013) are of the idea that contemporary discussions on masculinity in the face of gender-based violence and HIV & AIDS, religion and culture have often been abused by men to perpetrate (and perpetuate) gender-based violence and to have multiple sexual partners. Religious and cultural ideologies have reinforced hegemonic masculinities. These are masculinities that are widely perceived as the most

desirable and as having the most power in each society (Connell, 1995). Some men appeal to “ancestral traditions” or “sacred texts” to defend patriarchal privileges. Sokfa, Siwila & Settler (2013) recognize that masculinity has generally played an important role within faith communities and other religious structures and seeks to interrogate this interface. Cognisant of the role of religion and culture in discourses on masculinities and the HIV & AIDS pandemic, there is need to mobilize men in faith communities to become advocates of gender justice.

Chitando & Chirongoma (2012) reviewed an extensive literature about masculinities in Africa, and they observed that there is an appreciable increase in the literature addressing masculinities in Africa. For the duo, it has become clear to various stakeholders that the struggle against HIV & AIDS can become more effective by including men as partners. Thus, research and publications on masculinities may enable policy makers to design more effective HIV & AIDS programmes. It is therefore crucial for any individual or organization desiring to work with men in the present time of HIV & AIDS to become familiar with the latest material on masculinities (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012).

A decolonial psychologist and men and masculinities studies scholar, Kopano Ratele (2017), acknowledges that the production of masculinities involves some active participation by individual males referred to as agency. These males sometimes choose what kind of masculinity they perform within a particular socio-economic context or as a result of the images of specific masculinities they have been presented with. He concluded that in order to properly engage issues of masculinities in Africa, the connection between the social-psychological experience of being male and the socio-economic and political realities of Africa must be taken seriously. In this case Kopano Ratele (2017) added that masculinities are not only produced socially but psychologically as well.

Within the theological discourse on masculinities in Africa, the Zimbabwean scholar of religion, Ezra Chitando (2007, 2013) acknowledges the diversity of masculinities and also the hierarchy of masculinities with hegemonic masculinities being the most dominant and dangerous form which does not only dominate women but other men as well. Chitando & Chirongoma (2013) focus on the oppressiveness of masculinities towards women and children and often speak of dangerous masculinities with reference to men’s practices in more general terms. In his work, ‘Religion and masculinity in Africa: Opportunity for Africanization’ Chitando (2013), avers that dangerous masculinities thrive because of the privileged

position patriarchy afford men for the simple reason that they are males. According Sokfa, et al. (2013) behind Chitando's engagement with masculinities is a strong critique and intolerance towards patriarchy. He critiques the religious and cultural practices, as well as the employment of related resources to sustain patriarchy and the consequent dangerous masculinities, which have been socially constructed to place men and their desires over women and children (Sokfa, et al. 2013).

It should be acknowledged that Chitando's writings on African masculinities display an evident optimism about the ability of men to change, as evident in the fact that he frequently challenges them to do so and to adopt masculinities that are life-giving. However, this change for Chitando would not be complete unless it involves a complete rejection of patriarchy, and notions such as the delineating of duties associated with care to women and headship to men (MenEngage, 2016).

It should be acknowledged at this juncture that most of the publications on masculinities make references to men's high rating of having sexual intercourse as a key part to what it means to be a man. According to Simpson (2005:584) men feel they must, as boys, struggle among their peers to achieve manhood, and this routinely involved trials of physical strength, and for many, unprotected sex. Barker and Ricardo (2005:38) maintain that ideals of masculinity such as those which espouse male sexual needs as uncontrollable, multiple partners as evidence of sexual prowess, and dominance over women (physical and sexual), can place both young men and young women at high risk of HIV infection. The Southern Africa HIV & AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAFAIDS, 2021) and its partners have produced valuable material on men and HIV & AIDS in Southern Africa. The organization examined men's vulnerability to HIV & AIDS, drawing attention to the socialization of boys and men regarding their role in sex. It is in light of this backdrop where the next section of this chapter is going to examine the impact of African masculinities on the sexual and reproductive health among members of the AICs.

African Indigenous Churches, African Masculinities and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Africa

The impact of African masculinity on sexual and reproductive health on AIC members seems to be a neglected area. Gregson, Zhuwau, Anderson & Chandiwana (1999) examine the influence of religion on demographic

change in rural Zimbabwe and discovered that certain religious beliefs and practices encouraged people to have more children and hence promote population growth. Kambarami (2006) examined the issue of femininity, sexuality and culture: patriarchy and female subordination in Zimbabwe. For him, it is African cultural practices that are used to promote male supremacy and female inferiority. Maguranyanga (2011), Machingura (2011) and Musevenzi (2017) discovered that African independent Apostolic churches' doctrine of having a diet of wives is under threat due to views coming from pressure groups. It is important to note that these professionals pay little attention to the impact of African masculinities on the sexual and reproductive health in Zimbabwe. But scholars like Chitando (2007) examine how the efforts of Zimbabwean Pentecostals in producing responsible men in the time of HIV & AIDS and how their commendable effort is limited by their use of patriarchal ideas, language and frameworks, amongst other things. Chitando (2008) critically examined the issue of unsafe sexual practices perpetuated by men. He challenges men to adopt more humane practices and encouraged solidarity with women as something that both African Traditional Religions and Christianity have to offer, and which is a necessity for the transformation of masculinities in Africa. It is from the views and recommendations of Chitando and other scholars where this section examines the impact of African masculinities on sexual and reproductive health in Zimbabwe using the prisms of AICs.

AICs and Sexual and Reproductive Health

In this chapter, African Indigenous Churches is used to refer to those churches that have originated in Africa and are not dependent on any religious groups outside Africa for its funding, leadership and control. These are the African churches that have and retain an African ethos and whose theology has developed a distinctive flavour (Hayes 2005:1-2). Despite a variety of these churches in Zimbabwe, there are salient features and characteristics common to all. As a result, respondents from the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and Johane Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC) were purposively selected. Thus, these two churches were selected simply because they share very close beliefs and teachings pertaining to the status of men and women and their sexual and reproductive health rights. For Maguranyanga (2011:15), these two branches of AICs

are 'ultra-conservative' as their beliefs and practices towards marriage and family planning is concerned. Thus, the two emphasised more on the utilisation of African cultural traditions that allow the practice of polygamy and use of traditional methods of family planning. So, what follows is data presentation and discussion on the impact of African masculinities on sexual, and reproductive health in AICs as exhibited in their marriage systems and family planning practices. To establish this, the researcher sought responses from interviewees who are office bearers in the two selected AICs in Harare metropolitan province. For purposes of anonymity, these interviewees are given pseudo names in relation to their churches. Thus, respondents from Apostolic churches (JMAAC) are coded AC1 to AC5 while respondents from Zionist churches (ZCC) are coded ZC1- ZC5.

AICs and Marriage

Interviews conducted among office bearers in the JMAAC and ZCC churches indicated that monogamous and polygamous forms of marriages are commonly accepted in these churches. In almost all these churches polygamy is an acceptable and valid form of marriage and monogamy has been traditionally associated with people of lower social status. According to Interviewees AC1 and AC2 have claimed that the more wives a man has, the more children he is likely to have, and the more children, the greater the chances that the family will enjoy immortality. Interviewees AC3 and ZC5 are major proponents of polygamy and agreed in principle that to marry one wife is like being one-eyed, while having two wives can be compared to having two eyes, and therefore being capable of seeing far more. From these views, we can see that polygamy as one form of marriage which is rampant in AICs is a clear manifestation of the oppression of women. This study concurs with Chitando & Chirongoma (2012) who proposed that any aspect of African culture which keeps women in bondage or reinforces their inferiority must be challenged. In this case AIC 'Men Can, Should and Must Change' as proposed by Chitando (2013). Chitando has drawn our attention to the urgency and need for African men to challenge themselves and work for individual and social transformation in terms of gender relations.

There are also other forms of sexual unions or practices that are related to marriage in JMAAC and ZCC churches that are used to promote African masculinities. For instance, all the interviewees indicated that in their

churches arranged intimacy (*kupindira*) is used as a remedy for the problem of infertility. In line with this view, Mbiti (1969:105) conveys the importance of childbearing in African marriages. For him: "Marriage and childbearing are the medicines against death. While death continues to demolish life, marriage and childbearing keep ahead of it all the time." The Zionist office bearers interviewed for this paper quoted the story of Abraham and Hagar, which suggests the permissibility of polygamy in instances of barrenness. This view was also echoed by interviewee AC4 a member of the JMAAC who stated that "If a wife is barren, it is indeed her duty to give such a consent, and even to exhort the husband to take another companion as Sarah did of old." This view was echoed by interviewee ZC3 when he stated that a wife's infertility is a valid reason for her husband to seek another. From these two views above, one can see that polygamy is the "kindest" solution in the case of a wife who is infertile, because this is preferable to being expelled from the household and having to look for another husband. This is a clear sign that in AICs, the principal aim for marriage is to bear children. The interviewee ZC5 who is the ZCC office bearer married to two wives indicated that, "In our church, we do not just marry for personal fulfilment or for mutual pleasure of the spouses, but procreation is a duty to be fulfilled." To support the view that members of AICs marry for the purposes of procreation, a thirty-nine-year-old man who belongs to the JMAAC indicated that he is married to five wives and has nineteen children (Interviewee AC2). Another thirty-five-year-old member of the Zionist church is married to three wives and has sixteen children (Interviewee ZC2). Of interest, most Bishops and senior office bearers in the ZCC and JMAAC churches are married to more than five wives and have more than thirty children (Interviewee AC1 and ZC1). Most AIC members are of the belief that giving birth to many children guarantees eternal life. A traditional African man needs many children especially sons to ensure the survival of the lineage and to increase his power within the clan. For this reason, Mbiti (1969:133) argues that marriage and procreation amongst the African communities are a unity; without procreation, such marriage is incomplete.

In relation to the issue of polygamy, this study also discovered that the ZCC and JMAAC churches believe and accept other forms of marriage such as arranged marriage (*kuzvarira*), taking over brother's wife after his death (*kugara nhaka*) and child marriage (*kuroora vana vadiki*). All these forms of unions are used to promote African masculinities and hence un-

dermine the sexual and reproductive health care of the girl child. Superiority of men over women is also exhibited in the Zionist and Apostolic churches' attitude towards family planning methods.

AICs and Family planning

Family planning enhances efforts to improve family health, and this is done in two ways namely, traditional and modern/medical. Traditional methods of family planning include fertility awareness methods.¹ On the other side, modern family planning services include counselling and provision of contraceptive methods which include oral contraceptives, implants, injectable contraceptives, intrauterine devices (IUDs), condoms (male and female), emergency contraceptive pills, lactational amenorrhea method, basal body temperature method, among others (<http://jnfpb.org/why-traditional-methods-of-contraception-dont-always-work/>).

From the fieldwork conducted for this paper, it was discovered that the Zionist and Apostolic churches have problems with modern or medical methods of family planning. As a result, advocates of medical family planning methods sometimes clash with members of these churches. In this case some of the traditional beliefs, religious practices, and lack of male involvement have weakened modern family planning interventions. However, research by Goodburn et al. (1995), Adedibu (2018), Chikwature and Oyedele (2016), Gregson et al. (1999), Kenneth et al. (2016) and Tsara (2019) have confirmed high unmet needs for family planning in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of the number or percentage of married women in African Indigenous Churches who say they prefer to avoid a pregnancy but are not using any contraception method. Thus, interviewees from the Zionist and Apostolic churches indicated that their churches forbid sexual relations between a husband and wife during pregnancy as well as the time when a wife is nursing a child. Most of the women interviewees confirmed that once they become pregnant, they stop having sexual relationships with their husbands and resuming only after the baby is weaned. Instead of using the modern medical family planning methods, or waiting

¹ Basal Body Temperature method, Sympto-thermal method and Calendar-Rhythm method) and Withdrawal; <http://jnfpb.org/why-traditional-methods-of-contraception-dont-always-work/>.

for three years before resuming sexual relations, most Zionist and Apostolic men might then decide to venture into polygamous families. In some instances, the woman herself may suggest that her husband take another wife, as this may reduce the chance of him being unfaithful during such a long period of abstinence.

Female interviewees AC2 and AC5 from the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church expressed concerns about potential negative repercussions of contraceptives on their bodies. These female interviewees revealed that there are many rumours circulating in their churches about side effects of contraceptives. For them modern medical contraceptives cause gynaecological cancer, dangerous alteration of menses, and permanent unwanted sterilization. As a result, these women are hesitant to use modern medical methods of family planning (Interviewees AC2 and AC5). The male interviewees ZC1 and ZC3 in the ZCC also reported that there is a strongly held belief that women are born with a specific number of eggs, and that women must give birth to all of them, or risk being made ill by the eggs that remain in their bodies. These interviewees from the Zion Christian Church also expressed concern that modern medical family planning can produce children with birth defects.

One of the senior office bearers in the Zion Christian Church believes that modern medical methods of family planning have side effects. For him, “If you use the birth control pill you can give birth to either a child without fingers or toes, not fully developed, maybe they are just half. Maybe the head is twisted sideways, maybe s/he has no legs, maybe handicapped” (Interviewee ZC3).

Discussion and analysis

The above responses point to the fact that despite the church teachings that emphasize that their members should not go to hospital, church leaders are also now acknowledging that there are many more diseases now compared to the time the leaders formulated their church doctrines. Thus, going to hospital becomes a positive move towards improving the girl’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly during and after pregnancy for they will go for some check-ups for various sexual and reproductive health related issues. However, the church is still in a dilemma about whether it should fully grant its members permission to go to the hospital. As a way of evaluation, the AICs are embracing the teachings of

ACCZ. Though it is taking a long time, they will finally transform most of their teachings.

In a study of African Indigenous Churches and reproductive health, Tsara (2019) discovered that most of the AIC women testified that they had empowered themselves by finding ways to access modern medical family planning methods. For Tsara (2019) there is need for women empowerment in order to promote sexual and reproductive health care in AICs. This implies that there is a growing consensus that sexual health cannot be achieved and maintained without respect for, and protection of, certain human rights. So, from the research findings above on the impact of African masculinities on sexual and reproductive health care among members of the Zionist and Apostolic churches, we can deduce that to a greater extent, these churches violate human rights that are already recognized in international and regional human rights documents and other consensus documents and in national laws which are associated with the fulfilment of sexual health. In this case, these churches' belief systems and practices associated with marriage and family planning methods are not respecting, protecting and fulfilling women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Thus, rights to marry and to find a family and enter marriage with the free and full consent of the intending spouses, and to equality in and at the dissolution of marriage; the right to decide the number and spacing of one's children are in serious violation in Zionist and Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe. Hence there is need to educate members of the Zionist and Apostolic churches about sexual and reproductive health and rights and promote redemptive masculinity as proposed by Chitando & Chirongoma (2013). This is so because sexual rights protect all people's rights to fulfil and express their sexuality and enjoy sexual health, with due regard for the rights of others and within a framework of protection against discrimination." (WHO, 2006a, 2010). This is in line with MenEngage (2016) and Chitando's (2013) call to arms that, "Men Can, Should and Must Change."

Conclusion

Given the definitions and conceptualisation of sexual and reproductive health, African masculinities and the area of marriage and family planning, this paper concludes that African traditional beliefs and biblical views about men and women affect the sexual and reproductive health

care of the majority members of Zionist and Apostolic churches. Thus, most of the approved methods of marriage and sexual unions in most AICs place women in precarious positions. In this case, women are not given opportunities to choose their male partners, but the 'Holy Spirit' and 'tradition of the elders' are used to choose the girl child's husband and methods of family planning. Further, through the practice of polygamy, AIC women are denied a safe sex life. These women are not given the freedom to decide if, when and how they want to be involved in sexual activities. On a sad note, only men have the prerogative to decide whom they want to marry, when and how to do sex. Men are equated to bulls which do not resort to one wife. For this reason, this paper recommends that both men and women should have the right to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the international laws and statutes. Thus, the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant should be encouraged in AICs. This will reduce the dangers of hegemonic masculinities which are prevalent in the Apostolic and Zionist marriage systems and family planning measures.

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16 Gendered Contestations for Political Leadership

An Analysis of the Masculinization of Power in Zimbabwe's Main Political Parties 2014-2023

Tawanda Matutu

Abstract

While Zimbabwe is one of the countries that are striving towards gender mainstreaming, leadership of political parties is still engulfed in the tentacles of masculinism. This scenario, which is arguably an inheritance from the African traditional leadership styles, has been Africa's greatest undoing in the continent's attempts to attain gender parity. The cases of Joyce Mujuru, Grace Mugabe and Thokozani Khupe are a clear testimony. Mujuru's unceremonious ejection from the Zanu-PF presidium in 2014 after being accused of harbouring presidential ambitions, Grace Mugabe's disgraceful expulsion from the same party for accusations of state-capture, Thokozani Khupe's neutralization by Morgan Tsvangirayi through the appointment of two male vice presidents and her controversial loss of party presidency to Nelson Chamisa and later to Douglas Mwonozora are glaring examples of how gendered the Zimbabwean political space has been. The CCC has also operated with a male president, two male vice presidents and a peripheral female vice president. All these developments have led to the absence of a woman in the presidium of some of these political formations and where a woman is part of the presidium, her wings will be so clipped that she remains more of a ceremonial official. This chapter argues that the leadership trajectory of Zimbabwean political parties has taken a very pronounced patriarchal slant. It is an unwritten norm that when it comes to leadership of political parties, women should play second fiddle. This has reinforced the old patriarchal *stereotype* that women should be seen and not heard. Indeed, these three, once political heavyweights, are now only being seen, very little or nothing is being heard from them.

Keywords: masculinization, contestations, gendered, presidium, patriarchal

Introduction

The Zimbabwean political leadership trajectory since 2014 has been characterized by serious gender imbalances. Since the African traditional society has always been patriarchal; it can be argued that this exclusion of women from the political fraternity is a vestige of the traditional political discourse which arguably has roots in African Traditional Religion.

Since independence in 1980 glaring gender inequalities have been almost permanent features of Zimbabwe's presidium and cabinet. This has been demonstrated by the fact that no woman has held the position of president or prime minister since then. Male domination of the leadership of political parties and structure during Chimurenga II explains the lack of women at the apex of the post-colonial government. Just after independence, the government's Marxist-Leninist politics to build a post-independent state based on equality did not extend to gender equality. This was reflected by the presence of one minister (Joyce Mujuru) and one deputy minister (Victoria Chitepo) in the 1980 cabinet. However, for some feminists such as Everjoice Win (2004), Mujuru represented patriarchal interests and promoted femocracy. Contrary to her counterparts Dongo and Mahofa, Mujuru was accorded some sort of respectability, which she borrowed from her marriage to the late General Mujuru, so her presence in the male dominated political spaces should also be conceived in terms of her privileged identity. After the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) following a Global Political Agreement in September 2008, two women made it into the presidium, Joyce Mujuru (vice president) and Thokozani Khupe (deputy prime minister). However, the overall trajectory did not change as women were still significantly underrepresented.

The gender imbalances have existed despite the various international conventions that African states have appended their signatures to.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) articles 2 and 21 state that everyone has a right to partake in the government of his/her country without discrimination based on sex (United Nations, 2015). In the regional sphere, the SADC Gender Protocol in article 12, paragraph 1, calls for a 50% threshold of women in decision making positions (SADC, 2008). Locally, we have the 2013 Zimbabwean constitution which stipulates that woman should have equal opportunities as those of men in all spheres including in political participation (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). Despite the existence of these supportive instruments, Zimbabwe has

not fared well in advancing the participation of women in governance. The SADC Gender and Development Index highlights that Zimbabwe is at a 41% threshold of achieving set targets relating to the participation of women in governance. Furthermore, the SADC Citizen Score Card puts the Zimbabwean citizens' perceptions of their governments' commitment to gender in governance at the 61% threshold (Maphosa et al., 2015).

The political parties have opted to ignore all these conventions for political expedience. This has resulted in the marginalization of women in the leadership of political parties, an issue which according to justice theorists like John Rawls (1971) is an infringement on fairness. Rawls' conception of justice consists of two principles that he applies in his work *A Theory of Justice* (1971). The two principles are: "Each person should have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty to others" and "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and attached to positions and offices open to all" (Rawls, 1971). These are "the principles that rational and free persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamentals of the terms of their association" (Rawls, 1971). They are thus the guiding principles for social cooperation. They make citizens feel appreciated for who they are, as rational and free beings. Now is it correct to argue that these principles are tools for our understanding and our taking human rights seriously? The Rawlsian first principle is the principle of equal liberty. Rawls' argument is that all citizens ought to have as much liberty as possible. The basic liberties are political liberty such as the right to vote and run an office, freedom of speech and assembly, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, liberty to hold personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest (Rawls, 1971). To some extent, we can interpret the principle of equal liberty to mean that individuals have collective responsibility to each other for the protection of each other's liberty and dignity. Despite all these perspectives, women have never been very active political players in the history of Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, save for a few who rose to power on the patronage of some powerful men. The Zimbabwean political leadership arena has been a theater of gendered gymnastics. Traditionally, the political arena has been a male domain with women relegated to the kitchen.

Recent scholarship in gender studies has endeavoured to interrogate this imbalance. Scholars like Chitando (2012) and Manyonganise (2023) have

featured prominently in this regard. While Manyonganise (2023) largely views the current political arena as wholly unlevel for women participation, I maintain in this chapter that significant improvements have been made in terms of women participation at the lower levels, but a lot must be done with regards to the presidium. Men, still need to transform their masculinities to allow significant political participation by women through their incorporation into the presidium, not just as spectators, but decision makers. Chitando has gone to the extent of advocating for what he terms redemptive masculinities. He proposes that we embrace and employ the concept of redemptive masculinities as a way of identifying and characterizing masculinities that are life-giving in a world that has been ravaged by violence and the AIDS pandemic.

According to Kate Law (2020) many women believed that their participation in national liberation would be a precursor to a broader programme of cultural emancipation, yet as is clear now, governmental thinking in this period placed women as consumers and not producers of new nationalist culture. The sacking of Joyce Mujuru from ZANU-PF in 2014 marked the beginning of a well calculated supplanting of female political leadership in Zimbabwe. Ironically, in the Mujuru case, another woman was used to spearhead her dislodge arguably to pacify the discriminatory shenanigans. To elucidate the irony alluded to, the very woman who had been pivotal in the downfall of Mujuru later fell victim to the same political scheme by her former handlers. Thokozani Khupe, who had served the opposition MDC-T as its Vice President for quite some time had to unceremoniously vacate office, as the male dominated party leadership elbowed him to the dustbins of political history.

This chapter maintains the argument that the tale of these three female politicians was not in any way an accident of history. It was rather a well calculated and meticulously orchestrated move to get rid of female political leaders. Such a move as previously indicated, can be traced back to the patriarchal nature of the African society. The African society has deprived women of their citizenship rights and reduced them to subjects. This has not been healthy to both the oppressor and the oppressed, hence Chitando's advocacy for redemptive masculinities, that is, the need to develop masculinities that promote health and well-being for all (Chitando, 2012). For him, this distinguishes our longing for more accommodating and sensitive masculinities, as opposed to the current death-dealing masculinities (Chitando, 2012). It is important to note that this chapter acknowledges the developments that have been recorded so far regarding women

participation in politics in general. However, what has remained an issue of concern is the involvement of women in political leadership, especially, the leadership of political parties in Zimbabwe. This is why this chapter is limited to Joyce Mujuru, Grace Mugabe and Thokozani Khupe because they are the ones who have expressed keen interest in leading their respective political parties only to be frustrated by the gender barricade. The three female Zimbabwean politicians were close to assuming overall leadership of their political parties were frustrated and haunted out of reckoning because of the toxic masculinities that continue to be entertained in these political parties and in Zimbabwean politics in general.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative-textual analysis based on relevant existing works. This methodology involves reading and analyzing existing literature to ascertain what is essential. Hence, this chapter made an analysis of writings that address the issue of African masculinities. For this study, a specific kind of thematic analysis is employed, known as the thematic networks analysis as proposed by Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001).

Women Subordination in Africa: A Pre-colonial Vestige?

The pre-colonial conception of masculinity was premised on a man's ability to acquire material, social and political status. Holland (2005) posits that within the Shona family unit and society, the show of physical fecundity by men indicated a successful negotiation into adulthood and social worth. Underlining this is the concept that men were/are expected to fulfil certain culturally specified masculine duties. Greene (1999) sought to show how gender and ethnicity overlapped in ways that determined the course of social change among the Anlo, an ethnic group in Ghana in pre-colonial Africa. She argues that there were justifiable reasons why women particularly the young ones were subordinated by the men. These were centred on the religio-cultural as well as political transformations that occurred which in a way reconfigured the Anlo society. Parpart and Staudt (1988) present a mixed view of women's position in pre-colonial Africa. Focusing on governance, Parpart & Staudt (1988) argue that throughout

history, African women have had a different relationship to the State than have men. Manyonganise (2023) argue that these scholars observe that while women in certain classes and ethnic groups may have had greater access to the State, women have been underrepresented in African state affairs. Their analysis of African pre-colonial societies shows that a few women were awarded some power, which was mostly informal and not authoritative, as shall be seen in the case of all the political parties to be discussed. This leads them to conclude that “women in Africa have tended to exert power indirectly rather than directly through positions of authority”. Manyonganise (2023) maintains that African women were treated as second class citizens in pre-colonial Africa as there were indigenous cultural practices and beliefs which relegated women to marginalized positions even before colonialism. A critical analysis of gender relations in the colonial period tends to show that in most cases, the colonial administrators only reinforced what already existed particularly within the Zimbabwean context with special reference to the Shona. This trajectory has spilled into the current traditional leadership trends in Zimbabwe. According to the Herald, the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer of 2018 found that there were only six female chiefs and 15 female headpersons in the country out of a total of 272 and 452 respectively (The Herald, 14 March 2021).

Chitando & Chirongoma (2012) analysed the portrayal of men in Zimbabwean literature and observed that scholars trace the notion of political leaders as “fathers of the nation” and as heads of households. Manyonganise (2023) noted that gender can be understood to have been a social organizing tool even in African pre-colonial societies. Machakanja (2015) engaged with the status of women in the political spaces of pre-colonial Africa. In reference to women’s political position, she argues that “indigenous political systems represent a period of extensive political variation in the political systems of ethnic groups in Africa. She observes that women were conspicuous in high places. She, however, notes that indigenous African women played important roles in many African cultures, for example, as queen mothers, queen sisters, princesses, chiefs and holders of offices in towns and villages. She gives the examples of the Lovedu of Nigeria, the Nubian queens, daughters of Nubian kings who represented their dynastic interests in Southern Egypt. Women in Egypt are said to have enjoyed the same rights as men, though this is disputed by some scholars. However, for Machakanja, these examples dispel the no-

tion that African women were silent drudges who were subjected to bearing children, to the practice of female circumcision, and to accepting their husband's polygamous privileges unquestioningly (2015). Even in patrilineal societies, Machakanja argues that the sexual division of labour in indigenous agriculture gave women a great deal of power and formal authority. For her, women's labour made significant by the institution of bride wealth that accompanied marriage (2015). While Machakanja has attempted to dispel the notion of women subjugation in pre-colonial Africa, it remains a fact that women indeed occupied a very different social space from that of men. Various cultural beliefs and practices made it difficult for them to be at par with their male counterparts. For example, the marriage institution was practiced in such a way that the woman is somehow owned by the man. In Shona for example, *mukadzi anoroogwa uye murume anoroora* (Men marry while women get married). There is no parity in such a scenario, in fact, by "getting married" the woman tacitly consents to forfeiting a great deal of her rights. However, it cannot be ignored that in pre-colonial societies, African women did enjoy some leadership rights even though males were dominant. So, it can therefore be posited that what is happening in Zimbabwean politics is not simply a continuation of what was happening before colonization but rather a culmination of the intersection of pre-colonial patriarchy with colonial and even Christian forms of patriarchy.

Gendered Africa: A Tale of Four Female Politicians

Joice Mujuru

Since the attainment of Zimbabwean independence in 1980, Mujuru had emerged to be one of the most decorated woman ex-combatants in the country. Born in Mount Darwin, Mashonaland Central Province, she joined the liberation struggle in 1973 at the age of 18 and went on to receive military training in Zambia. She was married to Solomon Mujuru, which later gave her the political leverage to get where she got, beginning with her election as the secretary of the Women's League in 1979.

According to Manyonganise (2023) her position as the chairwoman of the league made her the second woman to sit in the Central Committee of ZANU PF in Mozambique together with Sheba Tavarwisa. The two

women made part of a 33-member Central Committee, and this, according to Manyonganise (2023) is a strong attestation to the claim that Zimbabwean political leadership has been marred by patriarchy. After independence, Mujuru became a cabinet minister, serving as Minister of Women's Affairs and Community Development. This made her the youngest minister in Robert Mugabe's inaugural cabinet. As a cabinet minister, she enacted laws that were pro-women such as LAMA of 1982 (Manyonganise, 2023). In 2004, arguably through the influence of her powerful husband, who in ZANU PF circles was widely viewed as the king maker, she was elevated to the post of Vice-President of ZANU PF and government until her political demise in 2014.

During her tenure in government, Mujuru displayed some unprecedented levels of acquiescence. She failed to live up to women's expectations. In fact, many women's organizations viewed her as a stooge whose appointment to the post was mere political expediency rather than any genuine desire to raise the political status of women in the country. These accusations were not unfounded. In 1998, at a Salvation Army women's meeting, Mujuru had rubbished calls for equality between men and women and labelled those lobbying for it as failures in life (Win 2004). Win argues that throughout her tenure in government, Mujuru had not spoken even once in favour of women. As such, Win views Mujuru as having fitted very well within patriarchy both in her party and government.

Besides the popular narrative that her husband was the influence behind her rise to power, Christiansen (2007) views Joice Mujuru's elevation to the position of Vice President as Mugabe's way of dealing with the succession issue which had constantly raised its ugly head in the party. At the same time, Mugabe also needed to pay attention to the restlessness that began to show in the Women's League on women's marginalization from top leadership of the party (Manyonganise, 2023). The basis of Christiansen's claim is that at a women's conference held in December 1999, the women's league had demanded that they be part of the presidium, failure of which they would boycott the ZANU PF congress (Manyonganise, 2023). The timing of Mujuru's appointment in 2004, just before the 2005 general election could also suggest that Mugabe felt the need to pacify women for fear of a possible *bhora musango* (a lingo referring to deliberately missing the target to avoid a win). Hence, Mujuru's elevation needs to be seen as Mugabe's way of pacifying the agitated women rather than a need to attain gender parity.

Unprecedentedly ironic is the fact that before her fall from grace, Mujuru was presented as a heroine who in 1974 had downed a British helicopter during combat, a narrative which was swiftly changed and vehemently rejected after her fall in 2014, confirming the view of history as the narrative by the ruling class. To kick-start her removal, it was alleged that Mujuru led a faction commonly referred to as 'Gamatox'. Manyonganise (2023) maintains that in 2014, when it became apparent that Mujuru was increasingly emerging the clear successor to Mugabe, a plot was hatched to thwart her. That is when various accusations were raised against her, including plotting to overthrow the President through witchcraft and corruption. Her rivals alleged that they had gathered overwhelming intelligence to this effect. However, Manyonganise (2023) claims when Mujuru's case is subjected to closer analysis, one will inevitably conclude that the major reason for all this was that she was a woman. Tendi (2016:208) has illuminated how the gendered nature of surveillance practices reinforces patriarchal national politics. Mugabe demanded to know why a woman (for that matter) wanted to succeed him. Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube (2015:129) argue that "the fact that the President said, "for that matter..." betrays all the efforts his government [had] made in an effort to bring about gender equality in political participation."

From Mugabe's perspective, it was inconceivable that a woman could ever imagine becoming a state president. Mugabe's sentiments are viewed by Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube as suggesting that women should not aspire to be leaders. For this reason, Manyonganise (2015) has taken Mugabe's statement to suggest that women are not human enough to warrant the highest office in the land. From a gendered perspective, the bastardisation of Mujuru's position has shown that a woman who dreams about becoming the president of Zimbabwe is dangerous to patriarchy and hence should be put in their rightful place, the political dustbin (Manyonganise, 2015). For Mugabe, Mujuru was not even qualified to be President as she was too simplistic. Consequently, she was subjected to verbal and emotional abuse and threats to harm her physically were also made. For her own safety, she absconded the ZANU PF Politburo meeting that was held before the December 2014 Congress and she was eventually fired from the Party. For Maphosa, Tshuma & Ncube (2015) "this signified the end of the ZANU PF career of a woman who epitomized women's fledgling political influence".

It is important to note that the demise of Joice Mujuru was spearheaded by other women, Grace Mugabe and Oppah Muchinguri. Grace Mugabe

was at the forefront though. This was used as an excuse by men in the various strata of social life and was seen as reinforcing the view that ‘a woman’s enemy is another woman’. What seemed to evade these men was that for any oppressive system to survive, it always recruits from the oppressed so that the oppressed become its mouthpiece. In other words, patriarchy was simply closing the door to any possibility of a woman leading the nation while hiding behind other women who were willing to be used as pawns in this political game (Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000). So, using a woman to attack another woman shielded the male politicians from accusations of gender intolerance and gender abuse. If the male politicians had attacked Joice directly, everyone could easily interpret that as gender discrimination and even sexual harassment.

Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000) makes a crucial observation that most women who made it to high political positions in ZANU PF were closely connected to male leaders in the party. Hence, Joice Mujuru’s ascendancy to leadership has been credited to her husband, Solomon Mujuru. Tendi (2020) has dubbed Solomon Mujuru as the kingmaker in ZANU PF. With Solomon Mujuru around, it had become obvious that Joice Mujuru would become the next President of Zimbabwe. Hence, to weaken her prospects, Solomon Mujuru was ‘eliminated’ in a mysterious fire. This left Joice Mujuru vulnerable politically. While this analysis may be viewed as problematic as it presents women with no patriarchal support as weak and powerless, it reflects the true nature of the political space in Zimbabwe. Joice’s political career was destroyed within days. Hence, to a large extent, her ouster eliminated the possibility of having a woman as a president of Zimbabwe.

Grace Mugabe

Grace Mugabe was born Grace Ntombizodwa Marufu on 23 July 1965 in Benoni, South Africa. She hailed from Chikomba district in Mashonaland East province of Zimbabwe. She was a secretary in the then president, Robert Mugabe’s office before she later became Mugabe’s secret mistress (BBC, 2017).

Grace Mugabe had until 2014, led a quiet private life, an aspect which accorded her the status of a mother figure. However, all hell broke loose in 2014 when she finally made the bold decision to enter the political fray, arguably to either manage the succession matrix or to be part of the succession figures. It is, therefore, largely thought that it was the old age of Mugabe that nudged her to enter politics (Manyonganise, 2023). Cassim (2014) argues that Grace entered politics with a bang and her entry was to

change the face and trajectory of Zimbabwean politics. When Grace entered politics, her first port of call was to attack the then Vice President Joice Mujuru in unprecedented scathing language. She accused Mujuru of a myriad of evil machinations ranging from practicing witchcraft to extortion via immorality. She was also accused of demanding 10% kickbacks from private companies. Based on these frivolous accusations, Mugabe sacked Mujuru together with other ZANU PF officials who were perceived to have been her sympathizers. Interestingly, Grace was subsequently nominated to be the ZANU PF's Women's League chairperson.

Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa replaced Mujuru as one of the vice presidents of both the party and government. However, it was not long before Grace Mugabe started to attack him as well during the much-hyped Youth Interface rallies. She started the 'Meet the People' rallies where she seized every moment to publicly undress Mnangagwa. Through the mantra 'Munhu Wese kuna Amai' (Everyone to the mother), she managed to capture the echelons of power in ZANU PF and portrayed herself as the most appropriate successor to the throne.

Biri (2020) analysed the above mantra and discovered that it, among other things, depicted a protest and a challenge to the existing political order that has been built on oppressive gender norms. Manyonganise (2020) views the slogan as a "quest to re-engage women in politics that had been disengaged by the ushering in of colonialism and a reconfiguration of motherhood never imagined in post-colonial Zimbabwe". Manyonganise (2023) further perceives the slogan as revealing the inadequacies of Grace Mugabe's leadership since she failed to come up with a political identity that is free from her being a mother. Her political identity was closely linked to that of her husband. Hence, people who were fed up with her husband could not accept her political bid for the presidency. However, there are challenges with the latter analysis because it seems to be oblivious of the political capital that Robert Mugabe had accorded Grace. Being the First Lady is a political resource, which every wife of a president would not hesitate to capitalize on. Hence, it was natural for Grace to climb on the shoulders of her husband.

Grace's political rivals had expected Mugabe to restrain his wife, but this did not materialize. In fact, Mugabe appeared to side with his wife thereby corroborating the widely held suspicion that he wanted to pave way for his wife to succeed him as the President of Zimbabwe. These suspicions, coupled with Grace's intensified attack on Mnangagwa, made it almost obvious that Grace was aimed for the party's presidency. Manyonganise (2023)

quotes Grace Mugabe as asking: “they say I want to be President. Why not? Am I not Zimbabwean?” Manyonganise analysed this question from a gender perspective and discovered that the question was loaded. For Manyonganise (2023), Grace’s question points to the *genderedness* of Zimbabwe’s political space:

Grace Mugabe casts a shadow on the restrictive perception of citizenship when it comes to women and political ... leadership. She in a way is rejecting such narrow definitions of citizenship, which are meant to contain women within prescribed spaces while denying them access in others. Grace Mugabe’s question is a call for Zimbabwe to rethink its conceptualization of citizenship when it comes to women’s political participation and leadership.

Hence, the unceremonious removal of Mugabe from power in 2017 was essentially meant to stop Grace from becoming the president of Zimbabwe. Scholars like Mudiwa (2020) even view ‘Operation Restore Legacy’ as suggesting not just an intervention in factional politics, but also a restoration of male leadership in the party. The legacy of having a male president was under threat from Grace Mugabe hence the need for a military operation to restore it. Indeed, the legacy was restored through the extermination of Grace Mugabe from the political scene and the re-introduction of Emmerson Mnangagwa onto the party and country’s presidency. Grace Mugabe was, therefore, victimized for becoming too ambitious for her gender.

As if the gender card was not enough, Grace was also viewed as lacking the intellectual capacity to be in such a position. Manyonganise (2023) observed that the pitting of women’s intellect against that of men is not something new. She adds that it has been used to sideline women in the Zimbabwean political space for too long. To reinforce her argument, Manyonganise (2023) refers to Simba Makoni’s sentiments about Grace Mugabe:

Makoni ... sees Grace’s entry into politics and her aspirations to become national president as belittling to motherhood as well as rescinding ‘decent’ womanhood. He is trying to take us back to the social constructions of who a good woman is: one who is passive, submissive, quiet, unambitious etc. By comparing Grace to Robert Mugabe, the two interviewees have succeeded in putting across the general sentiment that women should always live in men’s shadows when it comes to politics. While for Mugabe, Joice Mujuru was too unsophisticated, for Simba Makoni, Grace was stupid.

The above views summarize how the society views female leadership. The African society abhors women leadership with passion. In her description of Grace's fate, Biri (2020) argues that Grace's bragging was read as lacking decency and submission, virtues which the African society conceives as marks of motherhood. Biri (2020) further notes that the negative labels given to Grace are a sign of a society that is not ready for a challenge against patriarchy, and this confirmed that Zimbabwe is not ready for female leadership. She further posits that Grace Mugabe failed to show women's competence in political leadership.

Thokozani Khupe

Thokozani Khupe was born on 18 November 1963. She started her political activities in the labour movement before her election as the secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions' Women's Advisory Council. She became a member of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) at its inception in 1999. She served the party in various capacities including being the Member of Parliament (MP) for Makokoba constituency in Bulawayo. In 2005, she was elected the Deputy President of the MDC-T, a post which she retained in 2014. The formation of the Government of National Unity in 2009, saw her becoming one of the deputy Prime Ministers until 2013 when the formation was dissolved.

Khupe's political downfall started with her alleged fall-out with the then party president Morgan Tsvangirai. The alleged fall-out was triggered by the introduction of two other vice presidents, Nelson Chamisa, and Elias Mudzuri. This was interpreted as an attempt to neutralize Khupe's powers as well as to manage potential squabbles likely to emanate from Chamisa's loss to Douglas Mwonzora. Manyonganise (2023) argues that soon after Tsvangirai's death, despite Khupe being the rightful successor according to the MDC-T constitution, Chamisa wrestled the post from her. After Chamisa's ascendance to the helm of the party, leadership wrangles ravaged the party to the extent that at Morgan Tsvangirai's funeral wake in Buhera, Khupe was reportedly beaten by pro-Chamisa MDC-T youths. It is further alleged that these youths even attempted to burn the hut in which she had sought refuge.

So, Khupe's attempt to tread the male dominated ground almost cost her the supreme sacrifice – her life. However, she remained resolute and determined to claim what she believed to be rightly hers. The intermittent internecine fights inevitably culminated in a split that saw Khupe retain-

ing the MDC-T party while Chamisa led the MDC-Alliance. These, however, were mere formations of the same party. The stronger formation was seen through the 2018 general elections when Khupe put up a dismal performance while Chamisa put up a strong challenge to ZANU PF.

In a bid to forge a new political trajectory, Khupe chose to align herself with ZANU PF and thus she joined the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD), a platform put in place by ZANU PF where different presidential candidates that had contested in the 2018 elections would come together to dialogue on Zimbabwe's issues. To flex her political muscle and with the aid of the judiciary, she recalled MPs who were elected under the banner of the MDC Alliance claiming that they were members of her party. Her argument stemmed from the fact that the MPs had been seconded to the alliance by MDC-T. Manyonganise (2013) notes that questions were raised why she had contested as an MDC-T presidential candidate if her party was also a member of the alliance.

However, no sooner had she fully established herself as the president of the party than her close lieutenants, Douglas Mwonzora and Morgan Komichi had already plotted against her. It appears Khupe was just used to wrestling power from Chamisa only to hand it over to Mwonzora, a male member of the party. This scenario again serves to demonstrate how the African society is not prepared to have a female leader.

Manyonganise has this to say:

While she was basking in the glory of having weakened Chamisa and his party, Douglas Mwonzora was plotting to become the President of the party that she led. In December 2020, at an MDC-T congress, Douglas Mwonzora was 'voted' the President of the party. When Khupe realised how she had been cheated and protested the electoral process, she was beaten by Mwonzora's supporters. No one paid attention to her protests. She was later given the post of vice president of the MDC-T. In 2022, another conflict arose between Mwonzora and Khupe when Mwonzora decided to take away the MDC Alliance name from Chamisa in order to contest in the 26 March 2022 by-elections.

A lot of complications arose from the use of the name MDC-T and MDC-Alliance. The complications resulted in firings and counter firings between Mwonzora and Khupe. Manyonganise (2023) contends that:

By adopting the MDC Alliance name, Mwonzora was accused by Khupe of having fired himself from the MDC-T party. This conflict

resulted in the two firing each other from the party. Khupe, while still maintaining that she was the leader of the MDC-T party later announced that she was joining Chamisa's party (by then Chamisa had changed the name of his party to Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)). When she was finally recalled from Parliament by Mwonozora, she played the gender and ethnic card. For her, she was in this political predicament because she was not only a woman but a Ndebele as well. Throughout all her political struggles, she was branded a prostitute. After her expulsion from parliament, she embarked on a campaign, which she called the 'Beat the pot campaign'.

Her campaign was an attempt to depict the plight of women in politics. For her, all the three arms of government, that is, the executive, legislature and the judiciary had been twisted against women. Manyonganise (2023) observed that Khupe's use of metaphors of suffocation are indicative of how the political space in Zimbabwe does not provide women with comfortable spaces for participation.

Manyonganise (2023) did an in-depth analysis of how patriarchy championed Khupe's political demise and discovered that:

She was tricked by patriarchy in more ways than one. For example, when it became apparent that in the event of Morgan Tsvangirai's death, she was going to be the MDC-T acting president, Tsvangirai appointed two unelected vice presidents in disregard of the party's constitution. He possibly secretly anointed his preferred successor, judging by the letter which was produced after his death. Hence, the violence that she suffered soon after Tsvangirai's demise was resistance against her ascendancy to the highest office in the party. Despite her insistence on following the party's constitution, she lost the battle. As a woman, she lived in Tsvangirai's shadow for too long to the extent that she failed to read the genderedness of politics in Zimbabwe regardless of political affiliation. She was only important in so far as she could play that supportive role to Tsvangirai. Mwonozora and Hodzi (2021:6) attribute Chamisa's success to grabbing power from Khupe as a result of cunningness, skill and grand scheming. It points to the fact that Khupe lacked these, and her gender cannot be removed from this failure. In trying to exercise her agency, she fell victim to the whims of both ZANU PF and Douglas Mwonozora. ZANU PF warmed up to Khupe because it wanted to use her to destroy the MDC as a political brand. Khupe might have lacked the courage to go the distance

required by ZANU PF. Hence, it brought in Mwonozora. To a certain extent, Khupe validates the traditional notion that outside of patriarchal support, women cannot make it in politics. She failed to sculpt her own identity as a powerful woman in politics. What makes her case a complicated one is that she had recalled other women some of whom were Ndebele from parliament.

This is not the first time that the opposition party has split. It is only the first time when the split has involved a woman and the woman being found at the receiving end. When the party split in 2005, and probably because the protagonists were men, they were allowed to co-exist by Parliament. Now that one of the protagonists is a woman, this was taken as glaring evidence of discrimination against women. In this regard, Khupe felt that a male Speaker of Parliament chose to support another man in the fight between a woman and a man. Ironically, as Manyonganise (2023) observed, it was difficult for women to sympathize with Khupe or for the parliamentary women's caucus to speak on her behalf because she had also victimized fellow women. This resonates well with Miescher and Lindsay (2003) who observed that in many African societies it is possible to have "masculinities without men." They argue that there exist several expressions of masculinities by non-males. What it means is that masculinities go beyond men's bodies or physiology (manhood) to include masculine expressions by females. In this case, Khupe herself may be accused of masculinity. Her eventual rejoining of Chamisa's party could be clear admission that she values patriarchy and she seems to have applied the *if you cannot beat them, join them* maxim.

The Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC) and a Gendered Presidium: Is it Following Suit?

The Citizens Coalition for Change is a relatively new political party formed by Nelson Chamisa and his loyalists after losing the leadership of the MDC and consequently the MDC-Alliance to Khupe and eventually to Mwonozora. The party was established on 22 January 2022, and it has a president and three vices. In this presidium, only one of the co-vice presidents, Lynette Karenzi-Kore, is female. This already raises questions of gender equality in the new political formation. The other two vices, Tendai Biti and Welshman Ncube equally have a long history in the opposition

politics, having been key members of the opposition movement in its various formations.

Biti took part in the founding of the MDC in 1999 before he was elected Member of Parliament for the Harare East constituency in 2000. Biti was pivotal in the negotiations that culminated in the formation of the Government of National Unity where he then served as finance minister. Following the dissolution of the GNU and the party's defeat in the 2013 plebiscite, there were squabbles in the movement resulting in Biti falling out with Tsvangirai in 2014 and he was consequently expelled from the party. Together with other disaffected MDC-T members, he established his own political outfit, the MDC-Renewal and later changed to the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Biti later joined hands with his political nemesis in the MDC to form the MDC-Alliance.

The other male vice president of CCC, Welshman Ncube is a founding member of the Movement for Democratic Change. He served as the party's Secretary General before breaking away in 2005 to lead the Movement for Democratic Change–Ncube (MDC-N). Ncube was instrumental, in the Global Political Agreement negotiations that led to the formation of what was known as the Zimbabwean Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 where he was appointed as the Minister of Industry and Commerce. Ncube returned to mainstream opposition politics via the same route as that of Tendai Biti.

The only woman in the four-member presidium, Karenyi, joined the MDC at its formation in 1999 and became ward 16 Secretary in Mutare before her elevation to district secretary for Mutare North in 2000. She joined Mutare City Council as a councillor in 2003. She served in various other capacities including provincial secretary for Manicaland province in 2006 and National Organizing secretary for the Assembly of Women in 2007. In the 2008 general elections, she was elected Member of Parliament for Chimanimani West and in 2014 she rose to become the National Chairperson of the MDC-T Women's Assembly. She held this position until her elevation to become the Vice President of the MDC-Alliance in 2019.

An analysis of the biographies of Biti, Ncube and Karenyi reveals that the former two have not been very loyal members of Morgan Tsvangirai, on whose legacy the CCC is established, yet they have come to be more notable in the organization than Karenyi. This is an indication that in political leadership Zimbabweans, primarily, consider one's gender before other

qualities are considered. Although it may be argued that the inclusion of Biti and Ncube in the presidium is an attempt to balance the power matrix in the opposition, it remains apparent that gender dynamics are equally at play.

Towards Gender Equitability in the Zimbabwean Political Space

It has been maintained in this chapter that the exclusion of women in leadership roles in the main political parties in Zimbabwe is caused by patriarchy. This chapter has therefore reinforced Chitando's call for non-discriminative masculinities. It is a call upon society to revisit the dominant masculinities that Morrell (1998) refers to as hegemonic masculinities. Chitando's (2012) redemptive masculinities are a concept that has sought to free both men and women from the tentacles of patriarchy. Patriarchy has resulted in the marginalization of women in political leadership spaces. This can be achieved through a strong advocacy for gender balance in both public and private spheres. This is achievable especially since we have more women than men. Women need to be empowered to realize their full potential so that they develop the trust that is required in their fellow political leadership aspirants. On one hand, it seems women are not courageous enough to stand in solidarity with fellow women as they are oppressed by dominant hegemonic masculinities. On the other hand, it appears as if women are complicit in their own oppression and help perpetuate the oppression of fellow women. As a result, whenever an aspiring woman political leader faces a backlash from male counterparts, other women do not give her the much-needed moral support. When Mujuru was fired, no fellow woman had the courage to fight in her corner. In fact, a fellow woman, Grace Mugabe was used by men to spearhead Mujuru's downfall. The same applies to Grace Mugabe, when it was her turn to face the axe, her former colleagues in ZANU PF such as Oppah Muchinguri openly supported the move to have her expelled from the party. Hence, in most cases, women are their greatest undoing by supporting the downfall of their fellows.

Chitando (2012)'s notion of redemptive or life-giving masculinity is most probably best captured by his use of the term 'gender equitable'.

For Chitando, such men:

are respectful to women, show concern about the feelings and opinions of their sexual partners, and seek relationships based on equality and intimacy rather than on sexual conquest; Believe that men and women have equal rights; Assume, or share with their partners the responsibility for reproductive health and disease prevention issues; Are, or seek to be, involved domestic partners and fathers, who are responsible for at least some of the household chores and their children's care giving. Are opposed to violence against women in their intimate relationships. Are not homophobic.

Affirmative action can also go a long way in rectifying the gender disparities in the political arena. Affirmative action is one of the policies, which have had an impact on the involvement of previously marginalized groups. It has a direct impact on the recruitment, hiring and promotion of personnel in an organization. This is a set of public policies and initiatives designed to help eliminate past and present discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex, gender or national origin. In this chapter, focus has been on gender. Affirmative action is intended to promote equal opportunity. It can be instituted by government and political parties to ensure that marginalized groups within a society, such as women are included in political leadership. The justification for affirmative action is that it helps to compensate for past discrimination, persecution, or exploitation of women by their male counterparts due to hegemonic masculinities.

These calls take as a given the capacity of men to change and even their own involvement in bringing about this change in the ways gender relations are configured in society (John, Siwila & Settler, 2013). The calls are also based on the understanding that masculinities are not fixed or frozen, that men can be transformed, and that they are capable of "giving up" their patriarchal privileges (Chitando, 2012). His call to arms is that men must do so for the world to be a more gender equitable place. He, however, warns his readers against the "marginalization" of men in efforts to bring about gender justice, for him that would be counterproductive. In other words, he does not call for reverse discrimination, but he calls for a holistic approach that includes men and women working together as the sure path to gender justice.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwean political space seems to be highly masculinized to the extent that very little room has been left for women. While the participation of women is notable at the lower levels of political leadership, it is evident that all major parties in Zimbabwe have an unwritten norm against women. The three women politicians discussed in this chapter had their political leadership ambitions frustrated arguably based on their gender. It has also been noted that women are also their own undoing since they always rally behind male politicians at the expense of fellow women. But this can be attributed to socialization whereby women are nurtured to believe that leadership is for men. It has been noted that political parties, which are the key gateways for women's participation in national leadership, are the greatest perpetrators of obstruction. These parties have the tendency of replicating gender relations of male supremacy and female subordination. It has been noted in this chapter that party leadership is controlled by men, who in turn hinder women from reaching the top positions in party hierarchies where crucial decisions are made. The patriarchal nature of political parties inevitably makes women susceptible to active exclusion, discrimination, and often open hostility, despite the Rawlsian proposition that each person has the same and infeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all.

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17 Religion, Gender, and Health

Contemporary Zambian Women Strides in Promoting Healthy Living in the light of Annie Chikanji

Nelly Mwale

Abstract

Using the work of Annie Chikanji and her ‘*Ubuntu* learning hub’¹, the chapter explores the intersection of religion, gender, and health in Zambia in honour of Ezra Chitando’s scholarly contributions on the continent and beyond. The intent is to uphold Chitando’s scholarly work on strides to address patriarchy. Theoretically framed within African ecofeminist theory, the chapter draws on narrative research in which stories of Annie Chikanji and her *Ubuntu* learning hub on promoting healthy living are analysed. The chapter shows that Annie is promoting healthy living through offering herbal courses that retrieve indigenous knowledge for wellness, promoting natural methods of farming and reviving indigenous foods. By going against the dominant trends of farming and health practices, and adopting earth friendly and indigenous practices, Chikanji’s initiatives focus on addressing lifestyle diseases in the context of urban city life. The initiatives are further driven by her religiosity (centred on the love for God, appreciation of God’s gifts of creation and care for humanity); and her quest to retrieve and share indigenous knowledge on healthy living. The chapter argues that narratives such as Chikanji’s easily get overshadowed in the web of patriarchy, hence the need to document such initiatives for posterity. The chapter not only contributes to the broader field of religion, gender, and masculinities from the Zambian perspective but also showcases the strides of women in retrieving indigenous knowledge for the promotion of healthy living in the current century.

¹ *Ubuntu* Learning Hub is located around Kasisi area, in Chongwe district, Lusaka province and defines self as a community organization centred on imparting practical knowledge on the permaculture way of life. Permaculture, originally permanent agriculture is an innovative framework for creating sustainable ways of living centred on designing a system for ecological and sustainable living, integrating plants, animals, people, buildings, and communities.

Keywords: Religion, gender, healthy living, indigenous knowledge, African feminist, *Ubuntu* learning hub

Introduction

Although women have made strides to rise above patriarchy, scholarship continues to understudy the narratives of such women in different spheres. The common narrative remains that women are under the control of the powers that be. As shown by Rawat (2014), disempowerment of women is linked to the belief and practice of patriarchy which subjugates women at various levels (political, economic, social, and cultural). This is largely a social and ideological construct that imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society and serves to strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women. Patriarchy is not only a preserve of African societies but is present in many other cultures (Weitz, 2003). In Zambia, the subordination of women is compounded by the intersections of colonialism, culture, and socio-economic conditions, but not necessarily by patriarchy as commonly understood, because historically the majority of groups in Zambia are matrilineal (Lwatula, 2019). However, narratives of women who have risen above the legacy of women subordination by being pace setters in different spheres, including health and wellness are often overlooked. For example, in the fields of religion, gender, and health, the contributions of women remain obscured as the focus tends to be on the impact of religion on women's health (Sundararajan et al., 2019; Al-Mujtaba, et al., 2016). This chapter explores this intersection of religion, gender, and health in Zambia through the work of Annie Chikanji and her *Ubuntu* Learning Hub. The intent is to extend Ezra's Chitando's scholarly achievement in paying attention to narratives of women in society. For example, Chitando & Mateveke (2012) uncover the careers of two women to illustrate the challenges and successes that women in Zimbabwean music experience. The duo demonstrates that women contend with patriarchy and its construction of space and at the same time, they exercise their agency to negotiate these challenges. Similarly, women in the fields of religion, gender, and health have navigated patriarchal attributes to make a difference in society. Therefore, the chapter addresses the research question, 'how does Annie Chikanji's work at *Ubuntu* Learning Hub contribute to the promotion of healthy living in Zambia?

Annie Chikanji is Catholic. She is married to Walter Nyika. Having lost her parents at the tender age of 5, Chikanji grew up with her uncle who introduced her to the Catholic faith. During her secondary school days at Chikola Secondary School on Zambia's Copperbelt province, she met an international Catholic religious group of sisters, the Sacred Heart. Having observed the language challenges the sisters encountered in their outreach activities; Annie promised to join the sisterhood. She, thus, became the first Zambian to join the Sacred Heart sisters. She later did a preschool teaching study programme and left for South America in 1996 and later Ireland. She also had an opportunity to go to Uganda where she worked with young people in war torn camps.

Chikanji returned to Zambia from America in 2003, after having lived there for 20 years. For her final profession, she articulates:

I thought about it and said this Catholic life...people don't graduate... I asked the Pope a serious question, I said Pope, do you want to die here? I told him that I had decided to graduate from Catholic religious life: I needed to resign and allow others to take up the vocation. I said I can't die here; I have a lot to give as I am always serving others and that I will continue to serve my people. And within 3 days, I got the letter from the Pope (Personal interview, 2022).

Following her resignation from Catholic religious life, Chikanji did a lot of developmental work in Zambian communities. For example, prior to establishing *Ubuntu* Learning Hub, Chikanji worked as the Schools and Colleges of Permaculture Programme (RESCOPE) network's national coordinator in Zambia from 2018 until her resignation in 2021. The initiative to establish *Ubuntu* Learning hub came to fruition when Chikanji decided to focus on permaculture by way of creating a learning centre given that there was no practical centre where people would appreciate the permaculture way of life in Lusaka. The centre has a special option for young people, women and those living with disabilities. For example, young people are offered life skills and given opportunities to use their skills at the learning centre. Similarly, women are engaged in learning life skills. In the case of those living with disabilities, the learning centre infrastructure is built with them in mind in which case, making it an inclusive centre. Chikanji recalled that her inclusive approach to life was influenced by her uncle who could not use staircases after he survived a locomotive accident while working on the mines (Personal interview, 29 September 2022). The

centre is anchored on the permaculture of life and focusses on offering local practical solutions to ecological problems.

In this chapter I analyse how the *Ubuntu* Learning Hub promotes healthy living through herbal alternatives. I take a biographical approach to narrative research in order to bring to the fore how Chikanji has disrupted the waters of patriarchy or women subordination. The chapter unfolds by conceptualising religion, gender and health and providing a brief review of related literature and approach to theory before showing the ways in which Chikanji's narrative mirrors the intersection of religion, gender, and health.

Conceptualising Religion, Gender, and Health

Although the connectedness of religion, gender and health have been extensively defined, they are not without multiple meanings. In this chapter, the functional understanding of religion is used because the focus on religion is on what religion does for society as opposed to the substantive definition of religion which focuses on how religion is carried out (Rakodi, 2012:638). It is therefore acknowledged that religion produces socio-cultural systems through processes of domination, subordination, inclusion, and exclusion, all spiced with an aura of factuality (Stolz, 2001) and that it also has elements which can address gender and health. As conceptualised by Ter Haar & Busuttil (2005:2), religion can be distinguished through four components, namely, religious ideas (the 'content' of faith), religious practices (ritual behaviour), social organisation (the religious community), and religious or spiritual experiences (psychic attitudes). It is assumed that it was through these four components of religion that gender and health interacted through the narrative of Annie Chikanji.

The understanding of gender is informed by the conceptualisation of gender by the Zambia Gender Status Report (2021:12) which defines it as the socially constructed traits attributed to being female or male. These attributes involve the roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women by society. The attributes also include expected, allowed, valued, and accepted behaviour and conduct among men and women. Further, gender is interpreted as the roles, duties and responsibilities which are culturally or socially ascribed to males and females (Gender Equity and Equality Act 22, 2015:463).

There are numerous ways to intertwine gender and religion or to consider their interplay. For example, some approaches focus on questions regarding religious practices and beliefs, often understood in the sense of (historically grown) religious traditions such as Christianity or Islam. Other approaches are mainly interested in the identification of different gendered systems and constructions of masculinities and femininities to analyse the role of religious beliefs as a constitutive or challenging factor for different constructions of gender (Höpflinger et al., 2012). Additionally, certain approaches address gendered uses and subversions of religious categories, symbols and signs and merge works researching the relationships between men and women in the context of religion, often fighting for more equality between the social groups (Höpflinger et al., 2012). While these approaches share a common interest for the study of the interaction between gendered and religious experiences, the chapter pays attention to how women tap into religious beliefs and practices to foster health. This is because gender and religion are not simply parallels existing independently of each other but are mutually embedded within each other.

The chapter assumes that good health is the outcome of many factors. In the case of many African cultures, the concept of health relates to achieving a harmonious balance between the body and the mind and, importantly, between the individual and the community. Good health and disease are perceived in both individual and communal terms, on the assumption that what is good for the community is good for the individual and vice versa. The above notion of good health is aligned to the concept of *Ubuntu*, often understood as a deep-thinking and religious notion that describes an individual in light of his/her relationship with others. This implies that an individual's relationships with the entire community are considered central. *Ubuntu* has also been described as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Almond, 2005, 2006:6; Metz, 2009:103; Mandela, 2006; Tutu, 1999:34-35).

Theoretical lens

Theoretically, the chapter is framed within ecofeminist theory. Believed to have been coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her

book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* in 1974, ecofeminism describes movements and philosophies that link feminism with ecology (Mellor, 1997). According to Baker (2010), eco-feminism refers to a diverse range of women's environmental activities and aims for the liberation of women as women. It takes from the green movement² a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit, and oppress women (Fogle, 2012). Ecofeminism is interested in the particular and significant connections between women and nature and seeks to interpret their repression and exploitation in terms of the repression and exploitation of the environment. Women and nature are also united through their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society. Ecofeminists seem to agree that the domination of women and the domination of nature are fundamentally connected and that environmental efforts are, therefore, integral to the work of overcoming the oppression of women. Women and nature are closely tied together and their role in society is predicated towards a common goal which is to nurture, reproduce and recreate. This role is often ignored, neglected, and exploited in a patriarchal world. Hence the chapter pays attention to women's initiatives such as the initiatives of Annie Chikanji whose contributions must be celebrated. It must be foregrounded that women have been experts in their own right regarding holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes.

The chapter employs ecofeminism because ecofeminism is a theoretical link between feminists and environmentalists and emphasises the role of women in environmental protection (Hosseinnézhad, 2017). As such, it pays attention to women who are visible in local grassroots movements aimed at saving the environment and promoting healthy living. This affirms ecofeminism's stance that it is communities of women that are engaged in restoring and preservative work as demonstrated throughout history in different contexts (Kronlid, 2003; Muthuki, 2006; Siwila, 2014; Chirongoma, 2018). The ecofeminist lens is extended to health and wellness as seen in the work of Annie Chikanji which is informed by environmental concerns and demonstrates a direct connection to healthy living.

² It is a scientific, social, conservation, and political movement that forwards the concerns of environmentalists, that is, persons who see the integrity of the non-human world as worthy of preservation both for its own sake and for the sake of human survival.

Brief Review of Literature

The review of related literature is done in relation to how the interconnectedness of religion, gender and health has been studied in different contexts. Globally, studies on religion and health in general have tended to focus on how religious service attendance is strongly associated with lower mortality because of less depression, and lower likelihood of suicide. For example, Ironson & Kremer (2009) show that there was lower mortality among HIV patients who experienced religious transformation due to the use of religious coping in the face of illness. Similarly, Albuena et al. (2013) establish reduced depression incidence for those attending religious services.

Globally, studies have also shown that religion is concerned with health in relation to wholeness or well-being. For example, VanderWeele (2017) demonstrates that religious participation contributes to physical and mental health, and subjective well-being, through shaping behaviour, creating systems of meaning, altering one's outlook on life, building community and social support, supporting moral beliefs, and through an experience of the transcendent. As such, religious communities and persons promote health through caregiving, health-promotion interventions, spiritual care in medical and end-of-life settings, forgiveness interventions, and offering a form of meaningful communal participation. VanderWeele concludes that religious participation was an important determinant of health in that it was strongly associated, over time, with a variety of health outcomes, hence, the need to be included in the analyses of health, as is already common practice for other social determinants of health, race, gender, or income. VanderWeele's conclusions are important for extending the interplay of religion, gender, and health to individual narratives of women.

Other studies have focused on the role of religious institutions in health provision and demonstrate that religious groups and faith-based organizations often have as their mission some health-related goal. Linked to gender, religious groups also often provide material resources and infrastructure for hospitals, clinics, and medical missions. For example, Mwenda (2011) shows that in several African countries, it is estimated that faith-based organizations provide between 30% and 50% of health-related facilities. The link between religion, gender and health is also seen in the sphere of specific health challenges to which religious entities have responded through the provision of a moral message and advocacy (Morris, 1986; Tutu, 2000).

In selected African countries, the focus on religion, health and gender has been on women's rights. For example, Anna Chitando and Ezra Chitando (2022) have shown that the struggle for Zimbabwean women's full rights and dignity is ongoing. Through engaging the concepts of feminism and womanism, the duo showed how Zimbabwean women writers and Zimbabwean women theologians seek to uphold women's dignity and human rights, while questioning coloniality. This is through Zimbabwean women's writing and Zimbabwean women's theology which has covered women's economic empowerment, women's health, and women's leadership. The duo argues that the methodologies adopted by Zimbabwean women writers and theologians are centred on the well-being of Zimbabwean women as they shun patriarchal and colonial nomenclature and place emphasis on Zimbabwean women's autonomy and agency. This analysis demonstrates the strides of women in the sphere of writing and theology and compliments the understanding of how women through the example of Chikanji were turning the tables through the promotion of healthy living.

Religion, gender, and health are also linked through the roles and experiences of women during epidemics and pandemics. In the context of HIV & AIDS, Chitando & Togarasei (2008) bring in a gendered perspective in their call for a contextual reading of John 7:53-8:11. The duo argues that in the context of stigmatisation, there is need for a contextually relevant reading and exegesis of John 7:53-8:11 passage which provides valuable insights regarding de-stigmatisation. In relation to COVID-19 pandemic, scholars like Manyonganise (2023) link religion, gender, and health through her analysis of the role played by women in the utilisation of African Indigenous Medicine within the context of COVID-19. She demonstrates the ways in which women safeguard plants and trees whose leaves, roots and barks were considered effective in dealing with the disease in Zimbabwe. Manyonganise (2022) also explores how religion influenced experiences of women during the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. These studies were significant for showing the ways in which the pandemic became an avenue for remembering the sacred role of women in the promotion of good health.

Chirongoma & Chitando (2021) relate religion and gender to climate change and show the nexus between religion, gender, and climate change by foregrounding the experiences of women and girls affected by Cyclone Idai. The duo shows that 80% of the people who suffered the most during the disaster were women and children, and that the ecological crisis had

a gendered dimension. At the same time, women and girls comprised the bulk of the population heavily impacted by Cyclone Idai in Chimanmani and Chipinge and they were the ones who were in the forefront of mitigating the impact of devastation caused by this ecological catastrophe. Similar studies with a gender and ecological dimension in Zambia include Siwila (2014) who sought to trace the ecological footprints of our foremothers. In linking women with nature, Siwila argues that if eco-feminism was to be effective in responding to ecological issues, discourses around African women's ecological spirituality need to be retrieved and transformed for the liberation of both women and nature. Other studies include Mwale (2021) and Mwale (2022) in which the role of religion in the promotion of ecological well-being is shown from a Catholic perspective. These studies while linked to ecological wellness have ignored the close link between ecology and health.

Some studies have tended to dwell on health-seeking behaviours of women and the biblical interpretation of texts. For example, Gammelin (2023) examines health-seeking, healing practices, gender, and authority in a charismatic, locally founded church of the International Church for Healing and Glory (ICHG) in Mbeya, Tanzania and showed that the church was led by a male prophet, while membership remained predominantly female. Through the linkage of faith-healing and gender, Gammelin examined the perspectives of people who navigate the markets of healing who were mostly women. Others like Kangwa (2020) focus on the biblical interpretation of texts in their analysis of religion and gender using an African eco-feminist analysis of the Book of Job and shows how resistance against patriarchy and the principle of retribution shapes the theology of the Book (of Job). Kangwa argues that the reality of the current ecological crisis requires the development of biblical hermeneutics that is life-giving to both women and non-human nature and that traditional, patriarchal interpretations of the Book of Job have contributed to the subjugation of women and the natural world.

The foregoing selected studies while clearly pointing to the interconnectedness of religion, gender and health have paid little attention to detailed individual narratives of women who have made a difference to promote healthy living in a holistic manner. Therefore, the chapter seeks to consolidate these studies and contribute to the existing body of knowledge, the perspective that more can be learned from individual women accounts in their journey to foster healthy living through their exploitation of religious and gender resources.

Disrupting Waters of Women Subordination in Wellness

Chikanji's narrative manifests different ways in which she has disrupted the waters of women subordination through her *Ubuntu* Learning Hub. This is largely seen in the interlinked subthemes which include herbal courses offered, promoting natural methods of farming, and retrieving indigenous knowledge and women's roles as informed by her religious worldview and experiences.

Herbal courses offered

Chikanji fosters wellness through imparting knowledge on herbal remedies. This is through offering herbal courses. Topics covered included introduction of natural herbs, herbal worldview, practical herbal making of teas, ointments, oil and tinctures, management of community ailments, local healing plants, soap making, and herbal garden designs (13 September 2022, *Ubuntu* Learning Hub). Some of the participants who followed this course affirmed that the course gave them an opportunity to see that plants in their community were not ordinary but medicinal and that they were reminded that food is medicine, and that nature is full of plants for our wellbeing (Personal communication with Chikanji, 30 May 2023).

Offering herbal training was significant not only for raising awareness on how to deal with common community ailments such as malaria, diarrhoea, cancers, and many others, but also for addressing the new COVID-19 pandemic which affected women immensely. Thus, even at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, online herbal trainings were offered which contributed to the wellbeing of the people. Chikanji recalled that many women rushed to her farm which she calls *The Nature Book* to collect medicinal plants during the pandemic. Through this encounter, women were reminded of the forgotten traditional remedies for community ailments.

As concluded by Manyonganise (2023), the harvesting of the herbs became a gendered exercise during the pandemic as it was mostly women who went into the forests and bushes in both rural and urban centres to find the necessary herbs. Moreover, the learning of herbal plants during the pandemic was also gendered as the majority of participants in Chikanji's herbal course classes were women. Chikanji's experiences of having been affected by COVID-19, including the death of her uncle who

brought her up through COVID-19 made her include COVID-19 management in the course in order to share the good practices which had been learnt on how to integrate herbal remedies during the pandemic. Offering herbal training is also seen as a way of reconstructing the role of women in health as shown by Manyonganise (2023:3) that in precolonial Africa, women played critical roles in the health of their families as well as communities. Chikanji's offering of herbal courses also exemplifies the leadership role taken by women in ways which resonate with Chitando's (2023) analysis of African women's exercise of leadership. Additionally, Chikanji's focus on herbal remedies resonates with the ecofeminist view that sees women and nature being connected through the quest to nurture, reproduce and recreate. In this regard, the overall aim of sharing the herbal remedies had the ultimate goal of caring for nature and humanity.

Promoting Natural methods of farming

Growing food the natural way is also given prominence at *Ubuntu* Learning Hub. In this regard, knowledge of natural farming is shared through different avenues, including training workshops for the well-being of the environment and human beings. For example, during the training in Kitwe, knowledge on natural farming was shared.

Participants were reminded that just after harvesting, the land needed to be slashed, mulched and covered by anthill soils if that is locally available. *Bocashi*³ was introduced and animal liquid manures which were identified as ways of fertilising the soil. We also shared other fertilizers such as rabbit urine, fish, cow fermented and green manures. What is sustainable is for one to grow own fertilizer including through planting trees in the fields such as *Musangu* (*faidherbia albida*), *Lucerna*, *Tephrosia* and many others (Chikanji, 22 August 2022).

The use of local resources in farming, especially in making fertilisers could be seen as turning the tables of subordination and control especially in a context where dominant Western knowledge was perceived as important. For example, organic fertilisers were manufactured using local materials such as charcoal, dried grass or leaves, maize bran, ash, and rocks at *Ubuntu* Learning Hub before being distributed to the farmers.

³ Fermented organic material used as fertiliser.

This is in line with Farnworth & Hutchings' (2009) conclusion that women in organic farming are contributing to rewriting the paradigm of ecological wellness from a women's perspective as imprinted with life and spirituality. This went hand in hand with natural ways of keeping livestock. In this regard, Chikanji shared best practices. For example, the stems of the banana are pounded and added to the chicken feed. Knowledge on how to make antibiotics is also shared:

Just to share with my fellow farmers who need antibiotics for their animals and a dewormer. Here is the good news. Pawpaw leaves work wonders. Just chop them and blend them with water. Add brown sugar/molasses/bananas/ any sweet fruit. Bottle the liquid and keep in a cool place for three days for fermentation (Chikanji, 7 March 2022).

Ubuntu Learning Hub also promotes local seed, including using natural methods of preserving seeds as shared by participants in the seed coating training session:

Today we were coating popcorn and maize seed using minerals-ash, rock dust, then charcoal dust, termite soil, molasses, and water. Ash is used because it neutralises acid soils. Rock dust is rich in so many minerals such as zinc, which is needed for soil. Charcoal dust is a home for the bacteria.... We learnt the importance of protecting our good seed from diseases and that coating makes our seed to germinate 100%, therefore, giving us more yield. So, we coated with minerals (ash, rock dust, charcoal dust, anthill soil, water and molasses) (*Ubuntu* learning hub, 21 May 2022).

Local seed was not only grown but shared with others, with the understanding that seed comes back. This reflects the *Ubuntu* philosophical principle of sharing and caring for others. The initiative on the promotion of local seed is a way of reclaiming the varieties which had been abandoned in the wake of multinational seed companies. Seeds such as millet and sorghum are also promoted. This is significant because traditionally, many ethnic groups in Zambia use sorghum and finger millet as their staple food. As demonstrated by Chapota et al. (2016), maize in all its varieties has its origins in the Americas, specifically Mexico and was progressively brought to African shores from about 1500 onwards. At that time, millet and sorghum were the cereal staples of African populations. By the 1930s, maize which was often referred to as food for the Europeans became the food of choice for most Zambians by the time of independence in 1964 (McCann, 2001). Therefore, promoting millet and

sorghum is a way in which *Ubuntu* learning hub is addressing the colonial legacy.

The initiative in local seed could also be closely linked to the quest to fight the dominant powers in the promotion of seed from multinational companies at the expense of local indigenous seed. As observed by Farnworth and Hutchings (2009: 25), indigenous communities are being locked into relationships with monopoly driven multi-national seed companies that are forcing dependence on genetically modified seed and chemical fertilisers. As observed by Shiva (2000), the replacement of traditional crops with crops grown for the global markets – and more recently genetically modified crops – is undermining biodiversity, the relationship of indigenous peoples to that biodiversity, and thus the ability to maintain sustainable agricultural practices and retain and use indigenous knowledge, and by extension healthy lifestyles.

This involvement in ecological wellness through promoting the growing of food naturally suggests that the creation of the *Ubuntu* Learning Hub is a way of empowering communities through offering natural wellness education services and growing organic food. In a context where the liberation of the economy in the 1990s partly contributed to the environmental crisis by way of increased use of chemicals in the agricultural sector to increase yields, championing organic farming for the good of the environment and health is significant. For example, Sinyangwe et al. (2016) found an average of 98.6mg/kg of organophosphates⁴ for vegetables tested in Lusaka while the maximum residue limit (MRL) was .05mg/kg. Based on this, Sinyangwe et al concluded that locally grown vegetables from around Lusaka had higher than maximum acceptable limits which could have implications on human health as the cumulative effect of organophosphates in the human body had potential to cause long term health problems.

The natural ways of farming also contributed to the wellbeing of the environment. This is because *Ubuntu* Learning Hub grew in a context which had experienced climate change. Chikanji stated:

⁴ Organophosphates (OP) are chemical substances produced by the process of esterification between phosphoric acid and alcohol and are the main components of herbicides, pesticides, and insecticides. Acute or chronic exposure to OPs can produce varying toxicity levels in humans, animals, plants, and insects (Sinyangwe et al., 2016)

It never rains here; all the trees have been cut for charcoal. We only had one month of rain and literally three years of drought. So, we bought this land so that we bring its story back to the land of life. So, we do water harvesting by slowing, stopping, spreading, and storing the water using natural simple means such as making swells, planting trees and practicing syntropic farming (Personal Interview with Chikanji, September 2022).

As such, Chikanji emphasises that there is need to work more with nature than against nature by managing natural elements, and utilising available resources from a permaculture perspective in order to promote healthy living. The understanding was that good health was largely a by-product of one's environment. As stressed in the Catholic Social Teachings (Compendium of the social doctrine of the church, 2005), the goods of the earth should be used for the benefit of all, not exclusively from an economic perspective, but from a balanced social, cultural, and community standpoint. This concern to care for nature in order to promote the common good also resonates with the ecofeminist stance that emphasizes the interdependence of all life, humanity's role as part of the earth's ecosystem, and the non-hierarchical nature of a system in which all parts affect each other are emphasized to counteract relationships dominated by values of control and oppression (Baker, 2010). Chikanji's narrative extends the observation that religious traditions can make a positive contribution to climate change by influencing worldviews and actions of their adherents (Chitando et al., 2022).

Retrieving Indigenous knowledge and reclaiming lost role of women as custodians of knowledge

Chikanji retrieves indigenous knowledge in ways which reclaimed the lost role of women as custodians of knowledge in diverse ways. This is not only through going back to natural ways of farming and health, but also opting for women as marginalised groups in the community. Her passion is also for young people, including persons with disabilities:

I always uplift young people, their mothers, and children because young people understand any situation better, and if you want to bring any change, target the young people, they are change agents. The gap I see in young people is how they can be enabled to understand real issues and how to support themselves. For women, it is

because of vulnerability. When I see them, they have no control, so I usually teach them to be in control of the situation, not to depend on their husbands. For people with disabilities, I have been inspired by my own uncle (Personal interview with Chikanji, 2022).

Chikanji's option for marginalized groups especially women points to retrieving the inherent potential and skills in these groups and closely resonates with the observation by Rocheleau (1991), that the marginalization of indigenous women's skills, needs and knowledge in agriculture is directly related to the unequal power relations inherent within the ideologies of colonization, capitalism and globalization. Most importantly, Chikanji draws on her religiosity as a Catholic and the social teachings which opt for the poor and vulnerable. The principle of the option of the poor and vulnerable derives from the Gospel admonitions of Jesus to love one's neighbour and to be at the service of others (Komakoma, 2003).

Chikanji also recalls that she was motivated to do what she is doing because of her experiences with the Church which enabled her to reach out and serve the community with passion:

As a religious sister, I was also given groups to work with.... I have worked with different groups, as was the case in South America and Uganda where I tried to offer solutions to problematic situations (Personal interview with Chikanji, 2022).

Chikanji also reminds women of the traditional ways of preserving food and the value of common plants. For example, she actively promotes indigenous wild vegetables and plants by highlighting the value of these long-forgotten plants such as BlackJack (*Bidens Pilosa*) which happens to be one of Chikanji's favourite weeds. Often called *kanuka*, it is a common plant on farms and is often looked at as a weed. It has numerous health benefits for different diseases such as diabetes, respiratory conditions and lupus and is also believed to fight off bacterial and fungal infections (Personal communication with Chikanji, 22 September 2022).

Food is preserved by tapping into the traditional ways of drying food. Therefore, fruits, vegetables, herbs, and other foods are dried using solar dryers. Women are also taught to make simple solar dryers for value addition purposes:

We use local available materials. We teach how to dry in a simple solar dryer. A box, black plastic on the bottom, then covered with white plastic. We leave some space for outlet of vapour (Personal communication with Chikanji, 22 August 2022).

By retrieving indigenous values and practices of *Ubuntu* through a special option for women, *Ubuntu* Learning Hub demonstrates Chikanji's care for humanity and strides to uplift others, especially women whose work, interests and knowledge are often obscured. As emphasised in the Catholic Social Teachings (Compendium of the social doctrine of the church, 2005), all persons created in the image of God have inherent worth regardless of race, colour, or creed, and dignity is not earned but rather it is always a given right to be accorded to all persons in all circumstances. Chikanji's quest to impart knowledge and skills on traditional foods resonates with the assertion that women as custodians of indigenous food and their work must be seen as a fundamental duty to future generations. For example, Hosken (2013) observes that the stories shared by women from Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Benin in their own words of how they were actively working with their local communities, reviving seed diversity, and regaining their leadership role reflected how they saw their work as a duty to future generations and a responsibility that brought with it much joy. Ibnouf (2012) argues that women in rural Sudan employ a variety of methods based on Indigenous knowledge in the processing and preservation of agricultural and animal raw materials, wild food products to acquire alternative food sources, and to relieve the stress of seasonal food scarcity particularly during the shortage of rainfall or drought thereby achieve household food security.

From the foregoing, Chikanji's work which focuses on sharing knowledge for the promotion of good health is conveyed or carried out through different avenues such as onsite and virtual training workshops:

Farmers learn life skills as they spend time at *Ubuntu* Learning Hub. Sometimes they come and are given space to practice making *bocashi* at *Ubuntu* farm or *Ubuthu* reaches them where they are (Personal communication with Chikanji, 22 September 2022).

Ubuntu Learning Hub also offers learning opportunities to rural communities and other interested persons through workshops and online sessions.

We share what we know because knowledge is power. Every month we try to share on agro-ecology on different topics. As a small-scale farmer, I believe that we have a lot to share ... (Chikanji, 22 June 2022).

Chikanji's efforts to foster good health affirms the observation by Jiggins (1994) that the concern of some women for the health of the environment is closely connected to their perception as sustainers and nurturers of life, as embedded in their distinctive knowledge, demonstrated in their daily lives, experiences, interactions, and perceptions of reality. Ultimately, the interconnectedness of religion, gender, and health in Chikanji's narrative brings to the fore lessons on how a woman can contribute to the well-being of the earth and humanity. This affirms the assertion that despite being the most affected by the climate crisis, women are also at the forefront of mitigating the impact of devastation caused by the ecological crisis (Chirongoma and Chitando, 2021).

Conclusion

The chapter trailed the contributions of Annie Chikanji in the promotion of healthy living through her work at *Ubuntu* Learning Hub. The chapter concludes that Chikanji's offering of herbal courses to rural communities and other interested persons in the urban setting are ways of not only fighting the dominant legacy of women subordination but also an avenue for retrieving indigenous knowledge for wellness, natural methods of farming and indigenous foods. The chapter also concludes that Chikanji's adoption of earth friendly and indigenous practices in dealing with wellness in the context of both rural and urban life intersected religion, gender and health in constructive ways. Given that narratives of women such as Annie Chikanji's easily got overshadowed in the web of patriarchy, the chapter calls for the documentation of such grassroot initiatives for posterity in ways which affirm Ezra Chitando's strides to bring to the fore the narratives of women in his scholarship.

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18 HIV, Transactional Sex, and #Blessed in the Context of Neo-liberal Christianity

A Challenge to African Women's Theologies¹

Beverley Haddad

Abstract

There are at least 1300 new HIV infections amongst young women between the ages of 15 and 24 in South Africa each week. Research over the past two decades has shown that transactional sex with older men, traditionally known as “sugar daddies”, is a key driver in this vulnerability. These older men have more recently been termed “blessers” on social media sites with a community of young urban women, #Blessed, seeking lifestyles that embrace the commodified goods of neoliberal capitalism. The article discusses the notion of “transactional sex” and positions young women as both victim and agent in the South African context of unemployment and poverty. By naming these relationships #Blessed, young women choose to harness the tools of prosperity theology and link their desire for material wealth and consumer lifestyles with the unmediated power of God who intervenes. African women's theologies must, the article contends, address women's agency that does not destabilise the unequal gender relations of econo-patriarchy by engaging the intersections of economics, gender, and sexuality in the current South African context.

Keywords: HIV, transactional sex; #Blessed, “blesser” phenomenon, prosperity gospel, econo-patriarchy, African women's theologies

Introduction

The first publications by Ezra Chitando that I read were, *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS Vols 1 & 2* (Chitando 2007). These texts

¹ This essay is a revised version of an article that was first published in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (2018), ““Taking the Wanting Out of Waiting”: HIV, Transactional Sex, and #Blessed in the Context of Neo-liberal Christianity” 161, 5-17.

introduced me to a male colleague that was deeply embedded in the concerns I shared - HIV, gender, and the role of the church in contextual issues. So began a journey over a number of years in which we collaborated on numerous projects addressing HIV and the church. This was at a time when HIV & AIDS was ravaging our continent. In 2007, the Pan-African Conference of the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians invited a select few male theologians to the conference. Ezra Chitando was one of the invited delegates. My respect grew as I came to know him as a male colleague who was prepared, not only to address theological concerns shared by women theologians, but was also willing to challenge his male peers about their role and culpability in spreading the HIV virus and openly discuss the nature of destructive masculinities. This is evidenced in a number of publications he wrote or co-edited with women colleagues such as, *Troubled but Not Destroyed* (Chitando 2009); “Even When There Is No Rooster, the Morning Will Start”: Men, HIV, and African Theologies” (Chitando 2012), “Masculinities, Religion, and Sexualities” (Chitando 2020), *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion* (Chitando & Chirongoma 2012), *Justice Not Silence: Churches facing Sexual and Gender-based Violence* (Chitando & Chirongoma 2013), “‘Faithful Men of a Faithful God’? Masculinities in the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa” (Chitando & Biri 2013).

In honouring the activist and academic endeavours of Ezra Chitando, this essay addresses our shared concerns regarding the vulnerability and agency of women in the HIV context. While not attempting to address the issue of destructive masculinities directly, it highlights the way in which patriarchy is at the centre of the #Blessed movement in South Africa. The role of neo-liberal Christianity in enabling greater economic agency amongst women is explored but, as I suggest, it fosters a more destructive form of patriarchy and leads to greater HIV infections amongst young women rendering them even more vulnerable. As the COVID pandemic brought about even greater insecurity amongst women, so transactional sex has grown. While not exploring the #Blessed movement in the changed COVID environment, the article suggests that there is an even greater need to address issues of patriarchy, neo-liberal Christianity, and the need for appropriate women’s agency that is life affirming.

HIV, gender inequality, and #Blessed

UNAIDS (2022), in a report titled, “Dangerous Inequalities: World AIDS Day Report 2022”, has called the world’s attention to the reality that dangerous inequalities, including gender inequalities and destructive masculinities, are undermining the AIDS response of countries around the world, including sub-Saharan Africa. This reality is jeopardising health security across populations. The report indicates that adolescent girls and young women (aged 15 to 24 years) are three times more likely to acquire HIV than adolescent boys and young men of the same age group in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2022:17). “Every two minutes, an adolescent girl or young woman (aged 15 to 24 years) acquired HIV in 2021” (UNAIDS 2022:8). Although transmission of HIV among this group is the driving force of many national epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa, dedicated combination prevention programmes for adolescent girls and young women are operating in only 40% of high HIV incidence locations (UNAIDS 2022:17). A lack of policy reform and investment within and beyond the health sector continues to make it difficult for adolescent girls and young women to access essential HIV services (UNAIDS 2022:17).

The report also shows that “harmful masculinities” are discouraging men from seeking care (UNAIDS 2022:4). Men and boys are less likely to test for HIV, to initiate antiretroviral therapy, and to remain engaged in care, and are therefore dying of AIDS-related illnesses and many other diseases at higher rates than their female counterparts (UNAIDS 2022:21). Barriers to the uptake of services by men and boys include harmful gender norms such as equating illness with “weakness” and perceiving clinical settings as “female spaces” (UNAIDS 2022:21). “Gender norms about manhood that encourage men to take excessive risks and be overcontrolling further amplify the unequal power relations, fueling violence against women and girls in all their diversity” (UNAIDS 2022:21). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the need for gender-sensitive social protection systems in situations where women’s access to employment and financial resources is exacerbated (Peck 2021:1). When economic shocks or other emergencies increase the economic vulnerability of women, their vulnerability to HIV is also increased.

These gender concerns are particularly relevant to South Africa, the home to the largest HIV epidemic in the world with 8.45 million people living with the virus (Stats SA 2023). While anti-retroviral therapy has extended the lifespan of many South Africans with a decline of AIDS-related deaths

post-2006, the COVID-19 pandemic hampered access to and supply of these medicines (Stats SA 2023). Gender inequalities resulting in higher numbers of women than men being infected continues unabated. “In 2021... new infections in women were close to double that in men – 124 400 in women compared to 63 500 in men” (Louw 2022). While HIV incidence still seems to be declining in the general population, the rate of new infections remains high among young women aged 15-24 years. In September 2021, the Department of Basic Education reported that about 1 300 adolescent girls and young women were infected with HIV in South Africa every week (Macupe 2021). They account for the majority of new infections.

Elsewhere I have detailed the ongoing research over the last fifteen years showing that a prime driver fuelling these high rates of infection, is the fact that young women in this age group are having sex with older men (see Haddad 2021; West & Haddad 2016). Age disparate sex has been discussed extensively in social science literature for the past two decades, with a particular emphasis on “sugar daddy” relationships. However, the turn to the “blesser” phenomenon as a form of transactional sex is more recent. A trajectory of analytical work on this phenomenon has begun to be evident within the field of social science (see Thobejane 2017; Varjavandi 2017; Mampame 2018; Palfreman 2020; Singata 2020; Zawu 2020) and within the theological terrain (see West & Haddad 2016; Masenya 2017; Jonas 2019; Frieslaar & Masango 2021; Haddad 2021).

The term, “Blesser”, emerged in 2015 on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter when young women “claimed to be beneficiaries of a ‘blesser’ who has ‘blessed’ them with luxurious gifts” using the hashtag #Blessed (Varjavandi 2017; Garsd & Crossan 2017). By May 2016 an online service that links women with “blessers” was started by 35-year-old Ditshego (who chooses to remain anonymous) prompted by, he claims, the fact that “a 22-year-old was shamed on social media for dating an older businessman” (Makhoba 2016). High profile “blessers” themselves began to popularise their lifestyle through popular media such as television, most notably extremely wealthy Congolese, Serge Cabonge, who appeared in the documentary, “MTV Shuga: In Real Life” in June 2017 (Garsd & Crossan 2017). Cabonge “flaunts the fact that he’s a blesser – on TV, in newspapers and on social media” and openly declares that “he has ten or twelve girlfriends at a time”. Cabonge was one of the first to name the woman he “blesses”, a “blessee”, as well as the one to develop the idea that there are different levels of blessing (Garsd & Crossan 2017).

“Blessing” at Level 1 includes airtime and data, and as the levels increase, so does the amount of blessing, from clothes and luxurious goods (Level 2), to cars and iPads (Level 3), to overseas trips (Level 4). This idea that “blessers” offered “levels” of blessing is picked up on the BlesserFinder site with a post, “We are looking for blessers on all levels to appear in our reality TV show” (BlesserFinder 2016).

What is significant to this research is the question as to why a theological notion such as “blessing” has been popularised to symbolise financial and material blessing acquired through transactional sex. To my knowledge, no systematic work has been carried out on the subject despite the fact that the theological connotation of the “blessee”/ “blesser” relationship is obvious. Yet the church has been strangely silent on the matter. There has been little consternation in the public realm let alone prophetic witness and action by the church. Feminist African women scholars of religion and theology are not surprised. The church has shown little interest in addressing gender concerns within its own patriarchal practice and has been mostly quiet in the South African context of high rates of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and links between gender violence and HIV, an issue I addressed more than twenty years ago (Haddad 2002). Little has changed since then. The church remains one of the most patriarchal institutions in society with a reluctance to transform its structures to reflect gender inclusive leadership and practice (Pillay 2017; Chisale 2020). Wider society too continues to portray women as helpless and subservient while men are active agents. This is evident in the public “blesser-blessee” discourse. Elsewhere, I have argued that in order to address these relationships, there needs to be a much more nuanced understanding of the agentive nature of the actions of the women involved (Haddad 2021). Studies have increasingly highlighted the fact that the nature of transactional sex is contested. If theological discourse is to address the implications of the “blesser” phenomenon and the subsequent implications for the church’s involvement with the HIV epidemic, the contested nature of transactional sex must be explored and understood.

Transactional Sex Contested

Kirsten Stoebenau and her colleagues, in a study “Revisiting the Understanding of “Transactional Sex’ in sub-Saharan Africa: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature”, explore ways in which transactional sex has been

defined and understood over the past two decades (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016). Anthropological studies, they argue, reveal the role of sexual exchange in relationships from the pre-colonial period onwards, and in-depth studies have increasingly drawn attention to how gendered social and economic inequalities have structured sexual exchange, rather than focussing on “African sexuality”, the focus of earlier work on this debate (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:187). In attempting to synthesise the findings of studies, Stoebenau *et al.* (2016:188-191) have identified three broad paradigms: the vulnerable victim and sex for basic needs; the powerful agent and sex for social status; and sex and material expressions of love.

The “vulnerable victim and sex for basic needs” paradigm “stresses the importance of gendered poverty as constraining women’s options and forcing many to rely on transactional sex for their survival... [while emphasising] “women’s lack of power in intimate, heterosexual relationships and describes women as victims of men’s privileged status (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:189).”

Studies within the “sex for improved social status” paradigm critique the “vulnerable victim” approach to transactional sex. In this body of work, it is argued that transactional sex is “not limited to the destitute and the substance of exchange often extends beyond basic needs”, highlighting the agency of women in many instances who also use transactional sex to gain social status (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:189). Thus, transactional sex is not just to gain economic, but also social capital (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:189). It is “growing economic inequality and the increasing importance placed on the ownership of material goods for social mobility [that] motivate women’s engagement in transactional sex (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:190)”, proponents of this paradigm argue.

However, suggest Stoebenau *et al.* (2016:190), the above two paradigms “fail to address the extent to which transactions occur within emotionally intimate relationships”. Some studies, they argue, show how transactional sex is often “rooted in the gendered expectation that men provide material and financial support...[and] such provision is seen as being associated with, and/or deepening, emotional intimacy (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:191)”. This body of work is conceptualised as the “sex and material expression of love” paradigm.

Stoebenau *et al.* (2016) indicate that while these three broad paradigms are apparent in the literature, a closer analysis suggests that the boundaries of each are fluid. Therefore, they argue, “[t]he nuances and complexity

of transactional sexual relationships and the myriad motivations for its practice may be better represented as continua – of Deprivation, Agency and Instrumentality – rather than discrete paradigms (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:192”).

The work of Mark Hunter (2002; 2010) is crucial to this debate. Hunter conducted extensive ethnographic research over a number of years in Mandeni, Northern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa during a period when HIV was spreading rapidly in the area. The significance of this work is that it is conducted in a rural area within two types of housing, an established township and an informal settlement. Studies conducted in rural areas have tended to argue for “survival sex”, positioning young women as victims. Hunter (2002:100), however, shows that while the privileged economic position of men and the cultural masculine discourses that place a high value on men having multiple partnerships are both crucial to transactional sex, a third factor that needs to be recognised is the agency of young women in this community.

For Hunter (2002:100), “women approach transactional relations not as passive victims, but in order to access power and resources in ways that can both challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures.” “Women in the township invoke discourses of ‘rights’ to justify their freedom of movement, thus facilitating relations with men that include sugar daddies” who are able to provide consumption goods such as cell phones (Hunter 2002:100). He argues that with the rise of the urban economy in this area, marriage has become unaffordable and so men’s gifts to multiple women has become acceptable (Hunter 2002:108). This has led to a situation where “it is virtually taken for granted that sexual relationships will be cemented with gifts from men” (Hunter 2002:108). All too often, Hunter suggests, young men are ridiculed for proposing love (*shela*) when they have little material goods to offer (Hunter 2002:108). Women, it seems, see multiple boyfriends “as a means to gaining control of their lives, rather than simply acts of desperation” (Hunter 2002:112). But the two are linked.

While sex is essential to survival for “structurally marginalised” women, it “coexists with sex linked to consumption” (Hunter 2002:112). What is important in this patriarchal cultural context of material inequality and acceptance of men having multiple sexual partners, Hunter argues, is the fact that women actively choose (*qoma*) men and “rarely see themselves as ‘victims’” (2002:116). Studies throughout Southern Africa reveal how women assert agency in their transactional sexual relations. These studies

document how women describe their ability to extract resources from their male partners such as “milking the cow” (Mozambique), “de-tooth-ing” (Uganda), “skinning the goat” (Tanzania), “tearing open the pocket” (Madagascar), and “plucking the chicken” [*uyamcutha*] (South Africa) (Stoebenau *et al.* 2016:190).

It is this agency of young women and girls and their desire for consumer goods that leads to sex for consumption within contexts of survival. While “survival sex” hovers as part of their reality, access to consumer goods also brings social status amongst their peers. Deevia Bhana & Rob Pattman (2015) have carried out qualitative research amongst peri-urban high school students in Inanda, a township outside Durban, South Africa. They argue similarly that young girl’s aspirations for love are tied to their aspirations towards middle-class consumerism. “Fashion and desire for consumption sustain ideologies of sexuality that reinscribe patterns of [gender] inequality, but girls do so through their own agency, against the backdrop of poverty...” (Bhana & Pattman 2015:965).

Hunter’s (2010) later and more comprehensive work, further demonstrates the fluidity of the paradigms outlined above by Stoebenau *et al* (2016). Here he argues that while transactional sex is tied to the economic, political and gendered economy and involves women’s agency, it is also not devoid of love and intimacy. Bhana & Pattman (2015:962) argue similarly that research has downplayed the role of love in the aspirations of young people. For Bhana & Pattman (2015:962), while material conditions are important, they “jostle” with ideologies of love that are “complexly related to power and resources in ways that both challenge and reproduce gender inequalities”. Ideologies of love have longstanding cultural antecedents, including age disparate sexual relationships, as Leclerc-Madlala (2008) reminds us. She argues that in older accounts of courtship in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, South Africa, young girls are encouraged to seek out older men for greater marital stability and thus same age marital relationships are discouraged (Leclerc-Madlala 2008:S22). Furthermore, Leclerc-Madlala (2008:S23) argues, age disparate sex has always assumed a “reciprocal/transactional” element maintained by two interlinked enduring cultural prescriptions. “One prescribes for men to redistribute wealth on a scale appropriate to their standing and demonstrate love, commitment or appreciation for sex through material giving. The other prescribes for women to expect and receive a material compensation for sexual favours as a validation of their worth and as a sign of a partner’s love, commitment or appreciation (Leclerc-Madlala 2008:S23)”.

Given this, Brouard & Crewe (2012) suggest that with modernity taking hold in the post-*apartheid* context of economic inequality in South Africa, it is not surprising that younger women “will seek to imbue their relationships with older men with some form of material gain”. What the “blesser” phenomenon alerts us to, is the fact that this “material gain” is largely focused on the commodities of modern life. There is now a blurring between “survival needs” and the “need” for consumer goods. As early as 2003, Leclerc-Madlala (2003) argued that young urban women were representing in their discourse the “need” for designer clothes, cell phones, and being taken to beachfront hotels in a similar way to their need for food and shelter. She termed these the “new needs” of modernity.

Two decades later, young urban women have begun to see the gaining of these “new needs” – the commodities of modernity – as a “blessing” as they seek out one or more “blessers” who will provide these “needs”. The most obvious question raised by this reality and posed in the opening pages of this essay, relates to the use of the theological term “blessing” to symbolise financial and material blessing acquired through transactional sex.

Shifting Theological Terrain

While not attempting to undertake a hermeneutical exploration of the notion of “blessing” in the biblical text, suffice it to say for purposes of this paper, texts such as Genesis 12:2 illustrate that while there is a material dimension to God’s blessing, such blessing comes so that the individual *can be a blessing to others*. “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2). Blessing comes to the individual for the primary purpose of being able to reach out to other people with whom we are in relationship and so bless them. Material blessing from God is thus communal rather than individual. In prosperity theology, however, the antithesis holds true. Material blessing comes to the individual as a reward for faith and (in many cases) financial donations to individual leaders and churches. This form of blessing, emphasised in prosperity theology, is offered to the individual without responsibility to the wider community.

Prosperity theology emerged and was popularised in the United States of America from the 1950s onwards through the media of mass communication in which poverty was de-spiritualised and “mammon” re-signified into “financial blessing” (Heuser 2016). Heuser (2016:3) argues that the

rise of the prosperity gospel in large parts of Africa, including South Africa, from the 1970s-1990s tended to depend on the stature of individuals such as Benson Idahosa in Nigeria and Ray McCauley in South Africa. The increase in this teaching and the rise of mega-churches, particularly in large cities, continues unabated in post-*apartheid* South Africa where there has been “a sudden infusion of commodities, an explosion of new forms of wealth, and a simultaneous shrinking of the labor market” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:299). John and Jean Comaroff (2000:279) refer to this phenomenon in our neoliberal context as “millennium capitalism” which has a strong focus on consumption rather than production. With the demise of the stable labour market, this form of capitalism elicits both “hope and hopelessness” as the world becomes a place “simultaneously of possibility and impossibility” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:306). As the unemployed look on from the outside, prosperity theology “praises the immediacy of desire”, making material gain synonymous with the unmediated power of God. This impulse towards the accumulation of wealth represents an act of “sacral consumption” (Heuser 2016:4). This sacral consumption takes place in the context of neoliberalism where there is an erasure of family and community, a loss of human integrity, and growing commodification of persons and their bodies (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000:306).

Much of the popular literature on “blesser” relationships allude to the fact that the spiritual connotations are obvious. Stephan de Beer, in a popular piece in the *Mail and Guardian* during the early stages of the “blesser” phenomenon in 2016, stated that the similarities between the financial blessing of the prosperity gospel and the “blessing” enjoyed by women “blessees” was obvious. He suggested that “[i]n both cases relationships are reduced to transactions, in which integrity and morality are traded for instant blessing with success and gratification” (de Beer 2016). However, it is important to acknowledge that the trading of “integrity and morality” in the case of transactional sex is usually within a context of unemployment and survival. What is particularly significant in the “blesser/blessee” relationship, however, is the fact that survival sex for basic necessities has shifted into commodified sex for the instant gratification of the desire for luxury goods and opulent lifestyles, the “new needs” of modernity. The extent to which commodified sex – sex for consumption – has a direct link with the rise of the prosperity gospel requires further exploration but is beyond the scope of this essay.

In my early work during the 1990s, I argued that poor and marginalised women of faith adopted resistance strategies that were not necessarily overt in the public realm (Haddad 2000). These women were constantly under the surveillance of patriarchy, *apartheid*, and culture, yet despite this, they were agentive in their resistance. Their resistance, however, was covert and less obvious than overt feminist action in the public realm. I further argued that for these marginalised women, their faith in God – their blessing from God – came through their daily struggles for survival that enabled them to live day by day. Their working theologies of struggle were “theologies of survival” which were liberative in the sense that they were theologies of resistance as God “taught them to make a way where there was no way” (Williams 1993).

The women that participated in this work were middle aged, mothers and wives, and lived through times of extreme political violence in their community outside Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa during 1980s and early 1990s. Their theologies were forged in the dark days of *apartheid*. They would have had little experience of the globalised world and not yet been affected by neoliberalism that grew exponentially in South Africa during the mid-late 1990s. This early work did not explore the working theologies of younger women who were not yet married. Perhaps if it had, the notion of “survival” would have been less obvious in their expressions of faith, even though it was a part of their lived reality in the home. Since then, the work of Hunter (2002; 2010) and that of Leclerc-Madlala (2003; 2008) working with young women in KwaZulu-Natal, discussed above, demonstrates that literal “survival” for younger women remains a reality in post-*apartheid* South Africa. In many ways, literal survival is now even more pronounced given the havoc wreaked by the HIV epidemic in the province, the growing disparity between the rich and poor, and the shrinking labour market leading to high rates of unemployment that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployed young women observe the accumulation of wealth by a select few with despair and little hope that they too will benefit from the “explosion of new forms of wealth”. Given their situation, the increase in age disparate sex – young women having sex with older men – is understandable.

As the work of both Hunter and Leclerc-Madlala has shown, these relationships are often infused with the agency of the young women as they seek to take control of their lives through their sexual bodies. Their research has indicated how young rural women move beyond “survival sex” to using their bodies to obtain “the new needs of modernity” such as cell

phones and designer clothes. However, it seems that the agency of the #Blessed community of young urban women that has emerged more recently is exercised to seek a lifestyle that epitomises values of neoliberal capitalism in its extreme form. Young women of the #Blessed community have chosen to assert their agency with the explicit aim of satisfying their immediate desire for lifestyles of consumption. They choose to harness the potential of their commodified body to fulfil the immediacy of their desire and embrace patriarchal structures of inequality in order to gain these material ends. Employing a by-product of neoliberal capitalism, social media, they demonstrate a new form of sacral consumption that seems to embrace gender inequality and ignore potential vulnerability to HIV. By naming these relationships #Blessed, they choose to harness the tools of prosperity theology and link their desire for material wealth and consumer lifestyles with the unmediated power of a God who intervenes. In so doing, they cover their actions with spiritual sanction.

Ordinary women of faith in their struggle for survival during *apartheid* South Africa revered a God who “makes a way where there is no way”. The survival struggle depended on their relationships with, and responsibilities to, one another. Women looked after each other. In the post-*apartheid*, neo-liberal context of consumption, young urban #Blessed women rather look after themselves, as they seek to gratify their material desires. Theologies of survival, which in the past were acts of solidarity and resistance to forms of oppression, have given way to individual material gratification and been replaced with theologies of consumption. This new theological terrain poses particular challenges to African women’s theology.

#Blessed and African Women’s Theologies

African women’s theologies have been at the forefront of critiquing patriarchy, culture and the intersections of these systems in fuelling the HIV epidemic (Dube 2009). They have asserted women’s agency and called for solidarity from male theologians in formulating alternative masculinities in order to renew culture and mitigate HIV infection (Chitando & Chirongoma 2012). At the heart of this body of work lies three assumptions.²

² For a fuller argument of the discussion in this section and the following section, see Haddad (2021).

The first assumption focuses on the importance of egalitarian relationships with men that bring women dignity and respect. Mercy Oduyoye (1997) argues that language used to describe women both within tradition and society clearly indicates the oppression of women. She supports her arguments showing how the Bible has been interpreted, cultural proverbs and practices used, and laws implemented to subjugate women in church and society. Oduyoye (1997:188-207) continues by urging women to act and insist on their right to be in leadership in the church, to re-read the Bible through the lived experience of women, and doggedly ensure that women use self-affirming language at all times. This early work of Oduyoye has laid the foundations for the theologising of countless other African women theologians over the last three decades.

The second assumption is that women assert their agency to achieve this egalitarian goal. In so doing, they bring healing and wholeness to both women and men who are transformed through the process. A particular focus has been on addressing both gender-based violence and the HIV epidemic in bringing wholeness and healing. My own early work on the link between gender-based violence and the HIV epidemic was an attempt to call the church to address the intersections of patriarchy, culture and church practice to ensure the well-being of women (Haddad 2002). It was also a call to women to take greater responsibility for breaking the silence of their oppression, abuse, and disenfranchisement within the church. Since then, there have been a number of essays published that address the cultural practices that perpetrate violence against women and are often linked to HIV vulnerability, even amongst church women (Hinga *et al.* 2008; Ambasa-Shisana 2009; Owusu-Ansah 2016; Mombo & Joziassse 2022).

The third assumption, evident from the inception of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter referred to as the Circle), is that agency must be carried out in solidarity with other women as they build alternative egalitarian communities. Oduyoye (1997:198-202) has argued strongly that all resistance to oppression must be forged within bonds of sisterhood across the continent. Recognising divisions of race and class, she asserts that “oppressors and oppressed” exist between women themselves and Circle theologians need to always transcend/trans-act across these stratifications. The very notion of a “circle” is testimony to the agential work that must be carried out by women theologians in consultation and solidarity with one another.

However, the #Blessed community of young women calls into question these three assumptions. Their assertion of a particular form of agency does not seek to destabilise unequal gender relations, as I have already suggested. Their orientation is individualistic and opportunist and shows little concern for other women. Furthermore, as studies on “sugar daddy” relationships have ascertained, women feel that the benefits far outweigh the risks of HIV infection (Leclerc-Madlala 2008; Beauclair & Delva 2013). This seems to be the case for the #Blessed community, although this still needs to be corroborated through primary research. These women use their agency to find economic emancipation and adopt lifestyles that would otherwise be unattainable. Women’s agency is used to go beyond meeting their daily survival needs to encompass a lifestyle that demonstrates materialistic values of individualism through the commodification of their bodies.

This form of women’s agency continues to offer a new challenge for African women theologians. The #Blessed community of young women are agents, yet they embrace non-liberative ideology, practice and discourse, choosing not to unseat the dominant ideologies of hetero- and econo-patriarchy.³ African women theologians have yet to respond to this challenge with sustained analysis leading to liberative theologising that addresses the issues raised by the choices these young women make.⁴ For African women theologians to begin to address the challenge posed by a group of young women using agency over and against the values of the Circle, there needs to be an ideological and theoretical break with dominant ideologies, practices, and discourses, for true liberative theology to emerge (Mosala quoted in Maluleke 2000).

³ This term emerged in discussion with Gerald West as together we sought to find a phrase that would reflect aspects of ‘patriarchy as economic power’. Both of us have coined the term ‘econo-patriarchy’ in our work, riffing off the more familiar ‘hetero-patriarchy’ (Haddad 2021; see West’s essay in this volume).

⁴ There is also evidence that wealthy older women are embracing the “blesser” phenomenon as they themselves become “female blessers” or “sugar-mammas” to young men (Masenya 2017). These women add a further dimension to the complexity of women’s agency in the context of econo-patriarchy.

Econo-Patriarchy and African Women's Theologies

A survey of the Circle literature on women's agency demonstrates little emphasis on the economic dimensions of patriarchy and culture (Haddad 2021). There has been almost no engagement with the forces of globalization and its impact on women of Africa. The one exception is the Circle scholar Musa Dube (2000; 2006). She mounts a scathing critique of the forces of globalization and their impact on the poor and suggests that for former colonized nations, globalization is a "new form of imperialism" (Dube 2006:183). Dube (2006:181) argues that religions participate in globalization both as a force of collaboration and as a force of resistance. This assertion is premised on the fact that in the first instance Christianity colluded with the imperial forces indicating that Christian religious organisations are not exempt from the forces of globalization. Collusion with this second wave of imperialism is best expressed in the "selling of American Christian fundamentalism" where "young people in particular align themselves with the glamour...of the prosperity gospel" (Dube 2006:182). It is not insignificant that the #Blessed community of young women understand that their "blessing" comes through consumer sex which meets their individual material need and fulfils the "immediacy of desire" as argued above. These are the hallmarks of the prosperity gospel preached so prevalently in South Africa today.

On the other hand, says Dube (2006:181-182), there is also a resistance to imperial forces. During the colonial period, the emergence of African Independent Churches was a form of resistance where communities hold tightly to culture and tradition and rework colonial forms of Christianity into indigenous expressions. However, it could be argued that the #Blessed community demonstrates quite the opposite. Not only do these young women collude with the imperial forces of globalization and hetero/econo-patriarchy, but they use sex as their gateway to self-gratification. Of course, "sex" is notoriously taboo within most theologising, particularly within the African continent. Circle theologians have been slow to theologise sex even though it is central to HIV vulnerability, an important concern in their work for the past twenty years. While there has been a recognition that theologizing sex is necessary (Dube, 2009; Haddad, 2013), one of the few theologians to celebrate women's sexuality in her writings in a sustained way is Fulata Moyo (2004; 2005).

But there has been little intersection of sexuality with econo-patriarchy. The #Blessed community of young women poses new challenges to "the

re-discovery of agency” that Maluleke (2000) so whole-heartedly celebrated more than twenty years ago. Clearly, in contexts severely impacted by globalised neoliberal capitalism and where there are systems in place that perpetuate structural economic inequality, such as South African society, African women’s theologies cannot ignore these economic dimensions in their theological reflection. While African women’s theologies have made an enormous contribution over the past three decades in critiquing patriarchy and culture, systematic reflection on how globalised neoliberal capitalism intersects with these oppressive systems has been less forthcoming. In the South African context, our work has not had much to say about the prosperity gospel or its impact on the values and ideologies of young women. We have perhaps not been bold enough in speaking out against false prophets who commodify Christianity and thus provide a conduit for “sacral consumption”.

Conclusion

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there is even greater disparities between the rich and poor, higher rates of unemployment and poverty throughout sub-Saharan Africa, and ever-increasing numbers of HIV incidence in young women and girls. In a world order that celebrates commodified sex and hetero/ econo-patriarchy the challenge to African women theologians looms large where the #Blessed community of young women live in a globalized world of commodified sex. Here, women’s agency is evident, yet being co-opted by both hetero- and econo-patriarchy. Given the dearth of a sustained economic and sexual ethic in this body of work, responding to these new challenges requires a “break” with dominant ways of theologising culture, patriarchy and class.

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19 Music, Gender and Religion in Botswana

Culture Spears Traditional Group

Kenosi Molato & Musa Dube

Abstract

Music has a way of navigating through the complexities of life and brings healing to the realm that words cannot express. In African societies, there is a song for different occasions and events in life. There is a song for those who mourn for the lost ones. As such, music is perceived as a religion that encompasses African lives. Undergirding these songs is an image of African societies and their worldview. For it is through the music that one can glimpse the behaviour and norms of the society. This chapter therefore seeks to interrogate the traditional music of Botswana examining the concept of gender in the songs. The paper focuses specifically on the traditional group Culture Spears and examines its popular songs. The aim of the paper is to unravel some of the gender issues and concepts in these songs.

Introduction

Music in African society is perceived as a form of religion because it permeates everything that Africans do (Mbaegbu 2015:177). As such, there is always a sound of music at funerals, music made through singing and clapping of hands could be heard from afar when the women are working in the fields, there is always a song to accompany men when dig the graves of their beloved ones and music aids in the religious spaces whereby the ancestors are called upon to intervene in the affairs of the community (Mbaegbu 2015:177). At the heart of African culture, music functions as a resource that motivates Africans to face their maladies and to push through the storms (Oikelome 2019:185). Some of the popular songs are liberation songs that are common in African culture and demonstrate an outburst of liberation (Chitando 2007:334-347). Oikelome (2019:185) argues that music in African societies is a synthesis of different fabrics that constitute how music is composed. The manifestation of the music is not

only relegated to the lyrics of the song but more so in relation to the way the people dance. A person who is new to the African societies will always be staggered and surprised by the music which is always followed by dances in African festivals. Oikelome (2019:185) writes, “Dance is a type of art that generally involves movement of the body, often rhythmic and to music. It is performed in many cultures as a form of emotional expression, social interaction, or exercise, in a spiritual or performance setting, and is sometimes used to express ideas or tell a story.” The African traditional music is not only centered on dance but it is also didactic in that it is a medium by which the traditions of the culture are transferred from one generation to another (Nzewi 1999:35). It is in this sense that music is the window to the cultural norms of the society. Thus, it reveals significant concepts such as gender and patriarchy.

It is in this space that this chapter seeks to interrogate the relation between religion, gender, and music in African societies, especially in relation to Setswana traditional music. The chapter will primarily focus on Culture Spears, a Setswana traditional group interrogating the concepts of gender and music. The chapter starts by setting forth the history and the background of Setswana traditional music noting its popularity and the decline of this genre in the country. Secondly, the chapter will set the background of Culture Spears. The chapter will then interrogate three Cultures Spears's songs, examining the concept of gender. In the final section, the chapter will provide a concluding analysis.

History and Background of Traditional Music in Botswana

Elizabeth Wood's work on the history of Setswana music gives some insight into the Setswana culture and tradition. She notes that there is music for every occasion among the Batswana (Wood 1985). There's music for funerals and music when the men are plowing the fields. There are songs, which are dedicated to the inauguration of a chief, and a song for the young men when they go to the initiation schools. Setswana culture just like other African cultures has music as both a sense of entertainment and also as a source of connecting with the Ancestors. The songs are performed at different events or festivals such as *mantsho a ngwana* (when a baby's mother comes out of confinement), *Bogwera* and *Bojale* (initiation schools), during Christmas and New Year festivals, and political rallies (Nhlekisana 2007:35).

The diversity of Botswana communities entails that there are varieties of genres representing every ethnic group. This constitutes different genres that are windows to setswana music and reveals cultural issues that are taking place in every ethnic group in Botswana. However, due to Botswana gaining independence in 1966, some of the genres and traditional instruments were lost (Kekaletswe 2018). This is because the country became more urbanized in the sense that when people gravitated towards the cities, some of the traditional concepts and music were put aside for those that were popular at the time. Moreover, in terms of musical instruments, urbanization led to the fact that the skills of playing some local musical instruments were also lost as well (Kekaletswe 2018). The mining industry in South Africa also contributed to the declining and disappearance of the traditional music in Botswana in the sense that most of the Batswana men traveled to South Africa for work. And in those environments, they learned and acquired new music skills from other African countries and abandoned their traditional and local playing skills.

Thus, modernization and globalization played some roles in the decline of traditional music in Botswana from the perspective that this genre took a back seat on music' in the global stage. This came also with the disappearance of some of the traditional institutions which promoted this genre as they also began to decline in the country at large (Johnson 1973: 889). As the country began to be urbanised the community setting which demanded this kind of music began to be eroded as individualism began to take the central stage in setswana societies. The community style of singing was one of the crucial elements in Setswana traditional music. Kekaletswe (2018) writes, "Community singing is a core musical tradition in Botswana. Sometimes performed in age groups or along gender lines, community singing is either predominantly acapella or performed with minimal instrumental accompaniment. Drums and wind instruments such as whistles and *lepatata* (made from kudu horn) are occasionally used to add to the performance, particularly in the case of male groups." The central point of this music is what is called a "call" and "response". The call and response are made up of the leader of the song and the responders of the song (Kekaletswe 2018). In this way, the leader known as *Motlabeletsi* starts and leads the song. In the process, the responders will respond to his leading by picking up the lines that respond to the song, which the leader had begun begun. This style of call and response is more common in the rural traditional choir performance. This genre is encapsulated within a narrative style of singing. In this narrative style singers

imitate different kinds of activities such as hunting, wedding, the inauguration of the king, failed marriages, etc. (Kekaletswe 2018). The male aspect of the community style of singing is known as *dikoma*. This style of singing originates from the initiation school whereby men are taught how to hunt and fight their enemies. This style of singing therefore brings to the public what men are taught in the initiation schools. Women, on the other hand, sing *bojale* songs that also relate to their training in the initiation schools as well. Women's songs, as compared to men's songs, are feminine in the sense that theirs encapsulate some of the things that women encounter such as working in the fields during the harvest seasons and taking care of their families. Some of their songs also reveal some of the struggles that women face in society.

Besides the community style of singing, Setswana traditional music also has a soloist style of singing (Kekaletswe 2018). This soloist style of presentation is mostly performed at different events in the country such as at the kgotla gatherings, weddings and inauguration of the chiefs. Some of the popular soloists in the country are Stika Sola, Boruru Oageng, Lonaka Matlapeng, and Solly Sebotso. Most of these soloists use a guitar as their main instruments while others use a horn while others such as Ratsie Setlhako used a harp. In relation to the popular usage of a guitar among the soloists, Kekaletswe argues that a guitar is the cheapest instrument as compared to other instruments. Thus, most people are able to afford it. These performers were often the sought-after singers in the country based on the fact that their songs were mostly Setswana songs. Their songs captured and revealed some of the issues facing the majority of the population. As such, the masses would rally around these singers because their songs resonated with them... though setswana traditional music was popular in certain events in the country, however, it declined as the country developed. This is because the Western style of music became more popular in the country and people began to favour Western music. It was around 2006-2010 that Setswana traditional music began to be popular again (Mutsumi 2016). The Botswana Gazette reporter Lesego Mutsumi notes that the year 2006-2010 could be termed as Botswana traditional dance "golden years" in the sense that it was a time when the Botswana major traditional groups gained international recognition (Motsumi 2016). This genre was no longer under the shadow of Western music for it attracted the attention of international stages. It is the time in which groups like Culture Spears, Matsieng, machesa, and individual artists such as Shumba Ratshega came onto the scene and became popular

in Botswana and Southern Africa at large. Lesego Mutsumi argues that this was because this traditional music began to be commercialized at the time (2016). The commercialization of this music meant that the traditional music was no longer on the periphery but rather it came on the scene to compete both in the national and international stages. Writing about the sudden rise of this period, Lesego Mutsumi (2016) writes, “The sudden rise of the genre was a point in Botswana’s music history where almost everyone seemed to be in the mood for something genuinely local, and it was thought that this period would herald a new dawn for local music, especially traditional; that would continue to hold its own against music from anywhere in the world.” Mutsumi (2016) argues that it was the yearning for something local that contributed towards the rise of this genre that put this music both at the national and international levels. This entails that Setswana music was able to be represented and had a voice on the international stage. Thus, the music was able to contribute towards the international market with a genre that captures the worldview of Botswana at large. Consequently, music is the window of the culture; the international stage was now able to see the tradition of Botswana displayed through music.

However, this golden age of Setswana traditional music was short-lived in the sense that after 2010 there was a decline of Setswana traditional music in the country (Mutsumi 2016). There are many hypotheses stated as the cause of the decline of the genre of music after 2010. In an interview that was held by Sky News asking questions concerning the decline of the Setswana traditional genre, one of the participants Shumba Ratshega blamed the Botswana media for the decline and the lack of support (Mutsumi 2016). He notes, “Right now we don’t even have one program that focuses on traditional music. Our music is not played on radio stations and television; they give priority to other genres...they say they can’t play our music because it is vulgar and controversial! Songs can be censored and *pina ya setswana ga ena bosekelo*.” He notes that the media favours foreign music over Setswana traditional music. Ratshega argues that the media refuses to play their music because it is controversial and vulgar in the way in which it depicts things. As has already been stated, music is a window to the culture and society. Thus, the Setswana traditional music reveals the concepts of Botswana such as the hierarchical setting and gender insensitivity, which is common among Botswana communities. It is in the setting of the hierarchical structure that women are relegated to the bottom of the ladder while men are placed at the pinnacle

of the structure and everything revolves around them. Consequently, the current citizens of the country are enlightened to the ideas of gender thus when traditional music is played the people are now aware of the prevalence of this issue as such, they conclude that the setswana music has vulgar language is why some of the songs are prohibited from being played on the local radios. This therefore contributed to the decline and the downfall of Setswana traditional music.

Culture Spears cultural, traditional group

This Setswana traditional music group was founded in Botswana and its focus in its inception was Setswana traditional dance. Instead of a soloist style of singing, Culture Spears adopted the community style of singing with the emphasis of narrative presentation. Culture Spears songs always tell and narrate a story which is rooted in the setswana cultural concepts and values. Each song has a song leader and it is backed by other group members who respond to the leading of a song leader. The core leading figures of this group in its inception were Kabelo and Magedeline Lesolebe-Mogwe (Charma gal).¹ The rhythm was set on the tune of Sesarwa traditional style and the dance resembled the Sesarwa dance as well.² Culture spears songs were well known in Southern African, which could be heard across Southern African countries even in Central African countries as well. As compared to another Setswana traditional dance group such as the “*ditlholwana*”, Culture spear chose to incorporate modern instruments in its tunes. It became the well-known group in southern Africa when through their most popular song title *khulenyana*. It is through the music that the Setswana traditional music took a centre stage in the 21st century. In the sense that the music was not only played by beating traditional drums and clamping of hands but the music was given the modern-day instrumentality that were set on the rhythm of Setswana traditions. This shift made the culture spears to receive international recognition by becoming one of the first Setswana traditional groups to receive an award in South Africa.

¹ Botswana's Culture Spears break up? | A re di fefere le Tilo ngwana Rashaka (wordpress.com).

² This style is commonly known as a representative of Setswana traditional music.

Culture spears balances between the Setswana traditional and the Setswana lyrics, which open a window to Setswana cultural norms. The dance therefore reflected the interpretation of the rhythms of the song. Setswana traditional dance as expressed by the culture spears captured some of the thoughts, emotions and more so captured and reflected some of the narrative such as hunting. It is in some of the song such as *Khulenyane* that the dance expressed some of the actions of the song sets it in motion. It is in this area that culture spears became one of the leader groups in representing Setswana traditions and music. This genre therefore came from the periphery into the center stage of world music.

The leaders of the group were at the time Kabelo Mogwe and Magedeline Lesolebe-Mogwe (Chama gal) later on married. Some argue that it is the marriage of these leaders that led to the fall of the group in the sense that they later on divorced which led to friction and division within the group.³ Later on, Chama gal started her own band forsaking both the marriage and Culture spears. Even after the split of the group, it continued to produce some hit songs but it will never be compared with its initial stage whereby it dominated local music and even the international music.

In the next sections, this chapter will interrogate three of culture spears such as: 1) Khudu, 2) Tshedi Rine e kae, and finally 3) Mmapula. The chapter seeks to interrogate gender concepts, which motivate these songs.

Khudu by Culture Spears

This song is set to the tune of Setswana tune and Setswana traditional music with a rhythm derived from the Setswana cultural genre. Thus, it calls for Setswana traditional dance style as an interpretation through dancing style. In this way, the lyrics of the song are more hidden by the rhythm and the dancing style. Hence most of the Setswana song's lyrics are hidden by the Setswana idiom expression the listener might be moved by the tune of the song then miss the lyrics of the song and completely miss the message of the song. Consequently, those who argue that African music is not lyrically centered only examine the dancing in this style therefore are oblivious to the sophistication of the idiomatic expressions in Setswana genres.

³ Botswana's Culture Spears break up? | A re di fefere le Tilo ngwana Rashaka (wordpress.com).

The background of this song Khudu is a love story in an African Setswana traditional village. In the song, a young man is in love with a girl for he has fallen head over hills with her and he cannot help himself. However, the young do not have the guards to approach her, and more so he does not have the sophistication skill and language that will wear a girl to him. Thus, he relies on his trustworthy friend to assist him in his endeavor to win the girl's heart. The name of his friend is called *khudu* translated as a tortoise. The name tortoise depicts some form of slowness. One wonders whether the name *khudu* reflects the character of the young man who is in love with the girl or his friend. But based on the judgment of the character of the young man and *Khudu* in the song, the name reflects the character of a young who is in love but afraid of the lady rather than his friend *Khudu*.

The song brings an image and characters of Setswana folk myth in the way in which it is composed and written. In the Setswana folktales, the wisest animal is the rabbit thus if the writer of the song wanted to depict the sophistication of *Khudu's* friend he was supposed to have named him Mmutla meaning the rabbit rather than tortoise. This entails that Khudu's friend was so fearful of women that he had to send one of a slowest people to approach a girl on his behalf. Thus, he was a laughing stock to his peers even to his friend Khudu because he was not seen as a man enough for manhood in this sense is defined by the ability to approach women and to propose love to them. This depicts the gender insensitivity that comes from culture whereby women are seen as animals that can be pursued for fun and a man is defined by the ability to pursue them (women). Young boys are raised with this concept of pursuing and hunting them women for fun.

Khudu in the narration of the song acts as a sycophant. A sycophant is a person who takes advantage of another. Sycophant most of the time acts like he does not possess the ability to cause harm but will always catch the victim unaware of the danger that he brings. While *Khudu* plays as a sycophant in the content of the song, this might suggest that the young man who is in love overlooked *khudu* as the character of the tortoise suggests. The song implies in the beginning that *Khudu* was a trustworthy young man and loyal to his friend. Thus, the friendship between the young man and Khudu established some elements of loyalty and trustworthiness between the two of them. This is common in Setswana tradition, especially between the herd boys. There might be only two of them at the cattle post taking care of their parent's domestic animals. Their friendship has been

established that there was no one else to turn to. Thus, they were blood brothers who desired nothing else but good to one another. This implied that they were able to confidently share their secrets with one another and now the young man had the confidence of sharing with Khudu about the love he had for Rebabedi.

The young man who is in love or secretly loves Rebabedi sends his friend Khudu to the lady to speak on his behalf. However, instead of proposing and speaking for his friend to the lady (Rebabedi) in flowering terms, *Khudu* ends up pulling the character of his friend into the mud; Speaking ill about his friend to the girl. *Khudu* informed the lady that the man who sent him to propose to her on his behalf urinated in the blanket. This is the worst derogatory accusation in Setswana tradition. This entails that Khudu's friend has a strong sense of smell of urine and therefore he is unworthy to be in a relationship. Undergirding this derogatory is the idea that the lady might rather consider *khudu* himself rather than his friend (young man). *khudu* as a sycophant takes an advantage of his friend weakness of inability to speak for himself to a lady and at the end of the day *khudu* ends up winning the heart of the lady. Amid the drama of the song is the literary device that conveys the deception of the trusted friend. Though some might perceive this as the moral of the story the concept goes deeper than just betrayals in the sense that gender becomes the main issue in the song.

In the song, the young man requested feedback from *Khudu* because he had sent him to propose to the lady (Rebabedi) on his behalf. However, the young man realizes that his best friend *khudu* is avoiding him and keeping a distance between them. He realizes that *Khudu* has lied about him to the lady instead of speaking kindly on his behalf to her. As such, the young man now begins to notice that *khudu* is a deceiver. In the song, the young man starts to name *khudu*, "*noga e tlhogo pedi*" translated as Chilorhinophis carpanteri. This snake in Setswana tradition depicts the highest form of deception and trickery. The lyrics of the song repeat the line, "*wena Khudu ga ke go tshepe*" demonstrating that the young man no longer trust *Khudu* because of what *Khudu* has done is both to lie behind his back and dragging his name on the mud, especially to the woman whom he so dearly loves. At the core of this line is a fight over a lady. In some instances, these are some of the things that lead to gender-based violence and passion killing in the sense that the men might kill one another and also kill the lady because of a failed romance.

The song at its core is gender insensitive in that it is centered on a girl named, “*ReBabedi*” who is depicted as a person who could satisfy sexual pleasure. In this way, the patriarchal setting of Setswana tradition influences the song Khudu as it is charged by the masculinity that is depicted by dominating women for sexual pleasure. The line, “*Re babedi tisa kwano*”, explicitly unravels the sexual appetite. In this line, the singer literally requests for sexual encounter with the lady *Rebabedi*. This sexual line is hidden behind the literary masterpiece of Setswana idioms. The name *Re babedi* means, “We are only two now give me sex”. Hence the song is set on the dancing tune the listener might miss the underlying play of words and therefore concentrate on the rhythm. Underneath, the singer is calling forth the lady so that they might indulge in sexual activities. Allan Merriam argues that Music is crucial in the sense that it documents the norms of the culture. It is in this that when this song is interrogated it opens a window to Setswana culture concerning the role of women. Though there is an African renaissance in African societies that is trying to revitalize the African norms of life, this renaissance also brings along with the aspect of the marginalization of women in the 21st century.

Tshedi Ring e kae? Culture Spears

This song has a background of Setswana's traditional wedding and marriage. As the title of the song suggests, it is the “ring” that entails that the song's main point is about African marriage. The underlying factor is that this song shows the importance of marriage in the Setswana community especially to the parents who hand over their daughter to be married. It is therefore a desire of most parents in Setswana communities to hand over their daughter in marriage; for marriage gives them prestige in the community. The families that had daughters that were not married are often scorned in the community. Thus, the unmarried are called, “*Mahetlwa*” literally meaning those that have been passed by. As such, to avoid such scorn the family will try as much as possible to see that their daughters are married. It is commonly known in African culture that when the two couples get married it is not only the couples who are united by marriage but the families from those couples are introduced as family members as well (Resane, 2023). In the marriage ceremonies the two families are introduced to each other and the phrase, “We are now a family” is repeated. As long as the couple remains together the ties between the two families

become stronger and divorce wreck these families apart. Therefore, it is compulsory for the bride (Makoti) to endure all the hardships that she will face in her family no matter the circumstances. This is because the honor of her family is encapsulated in her not leaving her marriage no matter what might happen. She is compelled even to die no matter the abuse because of her family's honor.

In this song, Tshedi who is a character of a Bride is asked about the ring. She is being literally asked about her marriage by her parents. Writing to married women in southern Africa Mohatle notes, "The daughter-in-law is expected to wake up very early in the morning to do chores that will be acceptable in that family; otherwise, she will be subjected to different forms of abuse by the women living in the house and the neighbors where she is married." Moreover, the daughter-in-law is supposed to prove that she is truly a daughter-in-law by waking up in the morning to do some chores in the house (Resane 2023:4). This entails that a daughter-in-law does not only suffer abuse from her husband but more so also from the entire family in which she is supposed to prove herself as a real *Makoti*.

The song suggests that Tshedi has walked away from her marriage leaving her husband and the kids. Traditionally for the woman to leave her kids behind entails that she suffered from abuse in her marriage. However, instead of counseling her or talking to her to find out what has transpired in her marriage, the parents remind Tshedi that they took her to the in-laws and that *Lobola* was paid in full amount. Thus Resane (2023:2) writes, "When *bogadi* transaction is completed, the *makoti's* family gains a son while *mogwe's* family gains a daughter. *Makoti* becomes part of her husband's family, and this joining is carried out socio-religiously for the dead and the living to acknowledge, accept, and bless her." Thus, the parents are not concerned with the welfare of their daughter, but with their prestige and honour in the society. This shows that their daughter is perceived as a property that is used as a transaction for honour in the community rather than a human being who needs to be taken care of and who has human rights that need to be defended. The main question that is at the center of the song is where is your ring? This question is repeated as a chorus in the song to authenticate the brutality of working away from marriage. The brutality is that other family will scorn and laugh at them because their daughter has walked away from marriage. The question where is your ring? This becomes the primary question that Tshedi's parents are taunting her with. The implication is, "You don't have a home here anymore go back to your marriage".

At the beginning and the middle of the song the phrase, “*Ga dilwa di gatla marole*” which is literally interpreted as when the bulls fight in the kraal, they step on the calf is repeated again and again. The idiom in first glance sounds like it is out of place for the question is who is it referring to and who is suffering because of the fights? The implication is that the couples are referred to as the fighting bulls and that it is their families that are suffering from these fights. This entails that the family members were benefiting from this marriage. Consequently, when the marriage ceases to function the family members are also affected as well. This demonstrates that marriage is the pinnacle of the Setswana society. Resane (2023:2) argues that marriage is held in high esteem based on the fact that it contributes to the economy of the community. Resane (2021:33-42) again argues, “It is in many occasions, women who under strenuous circumstances, till the land, plant the crops, care for them until their full maturation ready for consumption.” It is in this light that the singers in this song state that they are now ashamed of the society and more so ashamed of their daughter who failed to endure the hardships of marriage. This means that according to them, she is not a woman enough for womanhood is defined by being able to stand against the abuses and hardships of marriage.

The song then turns towards the bridegroom informing him of his deeds of walking away from marriage. The song does not reveal the reason why he walked away from his marriage for in most cases it is only women who walk away from marriage because of abuses from their in-laws and their husbands. The bridegroom is asked where are your children? The children here refer to both his wife and kids. The line, “people will scorn and laugh at us” is repeated. This shows that marriage revolves around not on the couples but on the community especially around the in-laws because they benefit from these marriages. No wonder that even when the abuses are taking place, the victim is compelled to remain and endure the abuse for the sake of the community and their families. Rather than taking a gendered man-gendered (centred?) approach, which is popular in Setswana tradition the song then shifts towards the husband or the bridegroom. In most cases a woman is mostly blamed for the breaking of a marriage however this song recognizes something that is not popular in the community. For men are perceived as people who could do no wrong as compared to women and women are always blamed for the breaking of families. Steve Biko captures this concept in African society by stating “One of the most fundamental aspects of our culture is the importance

we attach to man. Ours has always been a man-centered society” (2000:26-30). Thus, the husband in the song is compelled to go back and resolve his family issues because his family and the community look at him with scorn as a man who has failed to take care of his family. It is the scorn and the shame of the society that makes the husband make a moral change and turn to his family to make things work. Underneath his behavior of causing havoc in his family, especially to his wife is the issue of infidelity and boyhood. Boyhood in the sense that he wanted to play out with other boys forfeiting his responsibility as a father in his house. Due to the scorning of the parents and the society as a man who failed to perform his duty, the man finally realizes and recognizes his mistake therefore he decides to go back to his wife. The underlying argument here is that the husband does not go back home because of his family but he goes back to take care of his family because the community was scorning him. Though the song presents an uncommon approach with regards to the issue of gender in the sense that the man is also held accountable for the breaking of marriage it still opens a window to the issues of what marriage is in Setswana communities.

Mmapula

The song *Mmapula* is named after a woman who is experiencing bad luck but more so that she is on the run, running away from abuses and the problems that she had encountered in her family. In the song, Mmapula is carrying along her daughter on her back running away from abuse. At its core, the song resembles a woman who is suffering and who is trying to run away from her troubles and misfortunes. As such, the song's main chorus is, “Mmapula is a woman who encounters some misfortunes”. Her misfortunes are the fact that she is divorced and she is running away from her troubles. In Setswana tradition, a woman is mostly blamed for the failure of marriage therefore in the song, it seems as if the Mmapula is encountering the same fate with no one coming to her rescue. Wherever Mmapula goes, people reject her and people are not willing to give her the assistance and help she needs. Women are always known as standing for the rights of other women however this is not so concerning Mmapula. This is because a woman who is divorced is seen as a shame as a result no one is willing to associate with her lest her misfortune contaminates them. So, they try as much as possible to stay away from her. In the

process, her misfortune reaches its peak whereby she is chased by men to rape her and her daughter. The scene therefore depicts one of the saddest things that women face in Botswana which is gender-based violence. At worst, the song unravels the sad state that most women encounter in Botswana. Hence, songs are the windows to a culture and a society this song depicts what a divorced woman faces in the country. In 2014, the rape rate in Botswana was 91.6 cases per 100,000 populations. In 2020 the Botswana Police recorded close to 2,7899 rape charges between January and November (Kuhlmann 2023). Writing concerning rape issues the University of Botswana social worker is noted saying, “GBV is spread through social and political conditions that undermine the ability of women and girls to escape from abuse. Culturally, when women report experiences of sexual harassment, the first questions are: Where was she? At what time? What was she wearing? Was she alone? All of this puts a responsibility on the individual woman for her safety, when really, these are broader social issues that need to change.” The underlying issue is that women are blamed for GBV in the sense that they are seen as the one who causes gender-based violence and the main culprits which are men are left out of the equation.

The song Mmapula encapsulates the above-mentioned brutality in that no one is willing to stand for Mmapula she listens to her story. She is blamed for her misfortune as the main and sole contributor to what has happened to her. The underlying assumption from a cultural perspective is that she has contributed to her misfortune therefore she needs to suffer for her actions. Consequently, Mmapula is unaccepted even by her own family because they assume that she carries bad luck with her wherever she goes.

Concluding Analysis

Music captures the memory and the traditions of the people. It is therefore a window to the cultural values of the society. This entails that the study of the lyrics of music is important in interrogating concepts such as gender. It is through the music of the culture that the ideology which shapes the culture is laid bare and used as a form of entertainment and also as a way of preserving those memories and ideas. In relation to the concept of gender, the interrogation of Setswana's traditional song unravels some of the oppression that women face in Setswana societies. To achieve the chapter's main goal which is to unravel the issues of gender in Setswana

traditional music, especially Culture spears cultural group music, this chapter therefore began by examining the history and the background of Setswana traditional music. Music in Setswana society permeates every aspect of the society. There is a song for everything, a song for weddings, a song for those who are mourning for their loved ones. What this chapter unravels in this section are the components that form Setswana traditional music such as soloists' style of singing and the community method of singing. Furthermore, though Setswana traditional music was at its peak from 2006 to 2010 this genre since then has declined. There are many hypotheses that have been used as the cause of this decline such as modernization and media. In the second section, the chapter presented the formation, history, and the decline of culture spear cultural groups. The chapter then analyzed three culture spears songs, which are khudu, Tshedi Ring e kae, and Mmapula. In the song Khudu, young men conflict a young lady whom they want to sleep with. The phrase "*Re babedi tisa kwano*" reveals the masculine society, which takes pride in abusing young girls through sex. These young men desire to consume girls these young girls with their sexual appetites. The song reveals the gender insensitivity that is common in Setswana communities whereby, women are reduced to sexual objects. The second song depicts the place of marriage in Setswana traditions. Tshedi has walked away from her marriage and instead of being counseled and advised wisely the family informed her that she brought shame into their family hence the family honour is tied into her staying in marriage even if she is abused. This song therefore reveals the abusive nature of which Batswana women suffer in traditional marriages. The chapter finishes with the song Mmapula. Mmapula also has encountered the same fate that Tshedi faced which is abuse in her marriage. To make matters worse, Mmapula is rejected by people even by women like her simply because she has been kicked out of her family, especially by her husband.

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20 Human Sexuality Conversations in Africa

An African Christian Women's Ethical and Missiological Perspective

Isabel Apawo Phiri

Abstract

This article is a response to the African church leaders' strong response against homosexuality without considering the weakness of their response in addressing issues of human sexuality in Africa in general. It begins by saluting Ezra Chitando for being one of the bold African theologians who have shown that homosexuality has been in Africa before Christianity. It traces how other African theologians have responded to the conversation on homosexuality in Africa. It uses the World Council of Churches 'Conversations on the Pilgrim Way Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality A Resource for Reflection and Action document', which was approved by the WCC Central Committee in February 2022 as a guide on how the churches can create safe spaces for broad conversations on human sexuality. It promotes an interdisciplinary approach to the conversation but leans more to Practical Pastoral care discipline. In conclusion, it argues forbearance to be the grounding spirituality for conversation on the pilgrimage way on matters of human sexuality so that the bond of unity is maintained throughout the conversation.

Keywords: Africa, African church leaders, African theologians, human sexuality, Pastoral care, World Council of Churches

Introduction

It gives me much pleasure to be part of a publication that is honouring Ezra Chitando, one of Africa's great scholars in the field of theology and religion of our times. My connection with Ezra Chitando goes back to the early 1990s when we interacted through the Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA). Chitando had contributed an article entitled 'What is in a Name? Naming Practices among

African Christians in Zimbabwe¹ I liked this article because it problematised the naming of children during the colonial period and also during the long struggle for freedom in what was then known as Southern Rhodesia. My interest in his publications increased when he sent me an article on religion and gender to publish in the then *Journal of Constructive Theology* hosted by the University of Natal (later, University of KwaZulu Natal). I liked the article very much and wondered what would make a male African theologian write so sensitively on the concerns of African women. Thank you, Ezra Chitando for broadening my mind to embrace male theologians to be in dialogue with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. HIV & AIDS became a central issue which brought African women theologians to dialogue with male African theologians. Since then, Chitando has published extensively on gender and human sexuality.

My relationship with Ezra Chitando went beyond dialogue through publications to becoming colleagues and co-authors at the World Council of Churches² (WCC). The nature of the work of the WCC- Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative and Advocacy (EHAIA) required the creation of safer spaces for research and intergenerational consultations on human sexuality. The work of the WCC Reference Group on Human Sexuality led to a document entitled: *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality A Resource for Reflection and Action*, which was approved by the WCC's Central Committee in February 2022. It also became a background document to the WCC ecumenical conversation with the same title at the WCC's 11th assembly which took place in Karlsruhe Germany 31 August to 8 September 2022.

¹ It was published in Fiedler, K., Gundani, P., & Mijoga, H., (ed) 1996/1997 *Theology Cooked in an African Pot*, ATISCA Bulletin nos. 5 & 6.

² A World Council of Churches is the broadest, most inclusive Christian organization in the world with 352 members who represent more than 560 million Christians in over 120 countries. Its membership consists of most of the world's Orthodox churches (Eastern and Oriental), as well as African Instituted, Anglican, Assyrian, Baptist, Evangelical, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian, Old-Catholic, Pentecostal, Reformed, United/Uniting and Free/Independent churches, Disciples of Christ and Friends (Quakers). All of them have diverse positions on human sexuality in the context where 'the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the WCC is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe' (WCC Constitution, Article III).

The aim of this chapter then is to highlight why the Conversations on the Pilgrim Way Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality A Resource for Reflection and Action document is important for the African scholars of theology and religion and churches in Africa. First, the chapter will provide a brief review of the responses of the African scholars of theology and religion and churches in Africa to human sexuality over deferent periods in the history of Christianity in Africa. Second, it will engage the WCC's proposal of creation of safer spaces for conversations on matters of human sexuality and lastly, it will chart the way forward for interdisciplinary approaches to conversations on human sexuality in Africa.

African Faith based Responses to Human Sexuality

In the Conversations on the Pilgrim Way Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality A Resource for Reflection and Action, the definition of human sexuality is rights based and faith based. From a Human Rights perspective, the World Health Organization (WHO) has defined sexuality in a manner that shows their inter-relatedness. It says:

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors.

From a faith-based perspective, the document also defines sexuality as part of God's good creation and is integral to human identity and integrity. It is considered a divine gift, intrinsically good, intended by God for humanity to celebrate this divine gift in life-giving, consensual, faithful, and loving relationships. In dealing with such an approach to sexuality, human persons can grow into the fullness of their humanity and divinity.³

³ Manoj Kurian, "Critical Analysis of Churches' Stand on Human Sexuality and a Way Forward," in R. Gaikward and T. Ninan, eds., *A Theological Reader on Human Sexuality and Gender Diversities: Envisioning Inclusivities* (CSA Kerk in Actie, NCCI, 2017), 152-168.

When it comes to the topic of homosexuality, which is one aspect of human sexuality, churches from Africa tend to break relationships with their 'mother churches' who have taken a stand to *either accept gay people as members, or as church leaders or take a stand to bless same sex unions*. The churches in Africa have rejected same sex relationships on the basis that it is unAfrican and unChristian. This has been echoed by African politicians in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda and Nigeria where they have maintained old British laws against homosexuality, which have already been repealed in modern day British laws. In fact, most of the African countries still have colonial laws against same sex unions. These decisions have generated publications coming from scholars of religion, theology and biblical studies in Africa and abroad who question the statements of religious and political leaders about homosexuality being unChristian and unAfrican. The section that follows is an example of some of the publications on sexuality in Africa.

The influence of the early and modern missionaries in shaping the discourse on human sexuality in Africa

Ezra Chitando has rightly argued that:

The theme of human sexuality has been a consistently problematic one since the arrival of the Christian faith in Africa. It has generated considerable debate, creativity and controversy. At stake has been whether churches in Africa have been realistic in their engagement with African understandings of human sexuality. Although the more recent debates over homosexuality threaten to dominate the discussion of it in Africa, it is only a fraction of the larger issue. Human sexuality has been an integral part of the story of African Christianity. Across different epochs and geographical contexts, churches have sought to address human sexuality in Africa (2016, 993).

Based on the quotation above, I attempt to categorise the human sexuality debate in African Christianity into four phases.

The first phase is during the early missionary and colonial period. In most parts of Africa this is during the 19th century missionary enterprise, when the gospel was brought to sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa and Angola are different because the gospel reached them in the 15th and 16th century. The writings of the missionaries from this period indicate that they did

not accept African ways of expressing sexuality and aimed to transform them to be like the West. One example is of initiation ceremonies for Chewa girls and women of Central Malawi. Although it did not involve any cutting of female sexual parts, it was banned by the missionaries of the various denominations who worked among the Chewa of Malawi. This resulted in resistance to the ban coming from the African Christian women because initiation ceremonies were viewed as platform for sexual education, which the Chewa valued very much. As a result, the missionaries negotiated a Christian version which was accepted by the Chewa churches among the Presbyterians, Anglicans, Catholics and Baptists (Phiri, 1997). Similar stories of resistance on issues that concern missionaries and African women are also recorded by Nyambura J Njoroge (2000), Esther Mombo (2002) and Rachel Nyagondwe-Fiedler (2005). What was at stake here was missionary definition of an African Christian woman which was resisted by the African women who wanted to define oneself through cultural appropriation.

The second phase is the post-colonial period when the discussion on human sexuality was framed within the African theological strand of inculturation /indigenization to achieve African selfhood and identity as both Christian and African. This was the period of regaining the African identity within the Christian faith by reclaiming African culture and African traditional religions added sources for theologising. Adriaan Van Klinken, & Masiwa Ragies Gunda (2012) have argued that it is the theologians of this phase who have influenced the current African church leaders on their views about what is African culture and what is acceptable Christian views about African sexuality. Examples given include the work of John Mbiti (1973 and 1990) and Laurent Magesa (1997, 2004, 2005). Their central argument is that in African culture and Christianity sex is for procreation. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1993) in 'A critique of Mbiti's view on love and marriage in Africa' has argued against this narrow understanding of sex in African culture and Christianity. She has criticized Mbiti's uncritical use of African culture and religions as tools for creating an African identity. This criticism applies to all the scholars who are in the same category with Mbiti. She has called for respect of the dignity of all God's people as God's creation. Oduyoye's appeal to cultural hermeneutics takes the conversation to the third phase.

The third phase is characterised by intersectional approach to resist racism, sexism and homophobia. One could say African women's theologies is another response from Africa to reject missionary definitions of what it

means to be truly African and Christian. What the African women theologians who are members of the Circle stand for and the tools they use for analysis is well articulated in the publications of Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) and Musimbi Kanyoro (2002). In “What’s in a Name? – Forging a Theoretical Framework for African Women’s Theologies” (2006), Phiri & Nadar have argued that:

Feminist cultural hermeneutics has therefore been used as a tool to analyse a variety of issues within African culture, including that of sexuality. Although sexuality has been widely engaged in feminist discourse in the West, it is usually discussed in the context of sexual orientation and reproductive rights. In contrast, amongst African women theologians, such issues are discussed in the context of rites of passage, including childbirth (women’s sexuality in the context of giving birth), menstruation (purity and impurity laws), circumcision (male and female), marriage (the patriarchal constraints within marriage and the different forms of marriage), and even death (practices such as widow-cleansing (2006:6).

An examination of the Circle’s first publication, *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa* (1992) shows a whole section with five articles that address African women and sexual practices, using a broad definition of human sexuality. The articles represent an African feminist critic of sexual practices in Africa by giving concrete examples from specific African cultures and African religions (including Christianity). Since then, the work of African women theologians avoids generalisation and shows an appreciation of diversity of peoples and their practices in Africa. After the 1989 Circle conference and especially because of choosing to take seriously the growing experience of HIV among African adolescents and African women, African women theologians, as individuals through masters’ dissertations, PhD theses, individual researched articles or books, have explored in more depth the issue of sexuality. The list of these publications is too numerous to list here.

Van Klinken & Gunda (2012:119) have pointed out that the work of African women theologians on “gender and sexuality are discussed in relation to the HIV & AIDS epidemic, and they have developed into progressive theologies of gender justice” but have not fully explored the issue of same sex relationships. While this is true, Van Klinken & Gunda in the same article have acknowledged that the Circle work is based on lived experiences of women which is prioritised. Therefore, some Circle members have highlighted that working on the non-medical determinates of HIV

has revealed that practises of same sex relationships in traditional Africa are more common than previously thought (Phiri & Nadar, 2009).

Musa Dube has paved the way by being explicit in inviting church leaders to be inclusive of sexual minorities in their sermons (2003). Esther Mombo (2006) has challenged the church to be inclusive of sexual minorities. These calls for inclusivity are based on research showing that it is not true that homosexuality is unAfrican. It is also an affirmation of the solidarity of all the excluded in the church and society. Justice of God is for all people: women, children, people living with disabilities, people living with HIV and sexual minorities. This leads to the next phase to which I now turn.

The fourth phase focuses on the influence of conservative and progressive Christianity from the States of America and Europe on African theologians, churches and governments. Kapya Kaoma's (2016) article on 'Unmasking the Colonial Silence: sexuality in Africa in the Post-Colonial Context' digs deep into this subject, where he argues that huge sums of money are invested in Africa by the conservative evangelicals to influence the African churches and politicians on the question of homosexuality. Following the example of the early missionaries, most of the money is invested in schools, seminaries and universities where formation of the African youth is done. At the time, Kaoma has pointed out that there is also influence coming from European and American politicians who withheld aid to some African countries who refuse to change their laws to accommodate the human rights of sexual minorities. This is supported by the research of van Klinken, Adriaan, & Gunda Masiwa Ragies, (2012:1), and van Klinken, Adriaan, & Chitando, Ezra. (2021:8). These scholars of religion, theology and the bible have rightly concluded that the issue of homosexuality in Africa has become a site of struggle in modern day missionary enterprise.

Desmond Tutu, from the Anglican Church in Southern Africa was the initial voice of a senior African church leader who drew from Black theology against racism and linked it with resistance against homophobia. This is well documented in his 1997 forward to (P. Germond & S. de Gruchy (eds.) publication. Nine articles in *Ecumenical Encounters with Desmond Tutu: Visions for Justice, Dignity and Peace* (2021) affirm his influence in the development of intersection of race, gender, and homosexuality discourse.

Tutu's thinking is echoed in the writing of other Anglican biblical and theological scholars like Gerald West, Beverley Haddad, Kapya Kaoma, and Masiwa Ragies Gunda. The PhD thesis of Gunda (2010) is the first one I am aware of which is completely focused on homosexuality from an African perspective. *The Bible and homosexuality in Zimbabwe: A socio-historical analysis of the political, cultural and Christian arguments in the homosexual public debate with special reference to the use of the Bible*. His boldness in writing this thesis has been at a cost with both the politicians and church leaders. Kaoma shares a similar story in his relationship with the Anglican church in Zambia. However, such experiences have not stopped the younger generation on focusing their research on homosexuality. I co supervised with Sarojini Nadar the master's dissertation of Lindiwe Mkasi (2013) on 'A Threat To Zulu Patriarchy And The Continuation Of Community: A Queer Analysis Of Same Sex Relationships Amongst Female Traditional Healers At Inanda And Kwangcolosi, KwaZulu-Natal'. Another youth researcher who followed the same tread is Ntobeko Dlamini, (2021). 'Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBTI+ Clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa'.

Conversations on the Pilgrim Way

The Busan assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) initiated the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in 2013. The assembly message extended the invitation to join the pilgrimage of justice and peace to the WCC fellowship, other churches, people of other faiths and people of God. In the document entitled, *"An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace"* (2014), being on a pilgrimage of justice and peace is described as participating in God's mission towards life.

Conversations on the Pilgrim Way is an invitation to engage in exploring together issues which lie at the heart of human living. The word conversation has a rich tapestry of meaning. Conversation is "the action of living or having one's being in or among others"; it is "the action of consorting with others: living together in an ethos of commerce, society, intimacy." It has been used to mean "sexual intimacy," and more commonly "the interchange of thought and words, familiar discourse or talk." (Conversations on the Pilgrim Way Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality A Resource for Reflection and Action (GEN PRO 03.1 Central Committee February 2022:8). Conversation is central to human

relationships. It enables individuals and communities to give thanks for the divine gifts of creation and life. It is also central to processes of reconciliation, as the expression and voicing of hurt and pain can begin the journey to healing and new life. Conversation enables individuals and communities to share and give at the deepest level and to bring to expression a commitment of bondedness, of living, having one's being in and among others.

For genuine conversations to happen, safe spaces of dialogue are needed. These are where one receives the other unconditionally, in the presence of God, with all their differences, gifts and joys, deficiencies, and strengths, as fellow sojourners in this life. Churches acknowledge that all fall short of the perfection of God, and do not merit God's grace. Hence, each person, as a child of God, is loved by God and sits around the same table, relating to others with humility and respect, recognizing mutual vulnerabilities and flaws. Because of these vulnerabilities and flaws, it is evident that there is no completely safe space – only safer spaces. “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Safer spaces of dialogue provide the opportunity for the discussion of issues of human sexuality, as a community, through bible studies, personal stories, and insights from tradition and contemporary understandings, so that the attitudes of many participants can be transformed and a more inclusive community formed, despite persistent differences of opinion.

The reference group on human sexuality drew from the mission identity of the WCC, whose foundations are rooted in the modern missionary enterprise of 1910. Over the years, the mission identity of the WCC has gone through transformation as it responds to the changing landscapes with its challenges and diverse contexts. In the context of ecumenical mission, *Conversations on the Pilgrim Way* builds on *Together Towards Life (TLL)*, with its emphasis on mission from the margins.

The reference group on human sexuality was also encouraged to use the Faith and Order study document *Moral Discernment in Churches*, which is a helpful tool to understand different approaches and mutual learning between churches from diverse confessional families as is the case with the WCC. The document on *Moral Discernment in Churches* argues that while there are different pathways that churches use to arrive at ethical and moral decisions, all churches base their discernment processes on the same sources: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience. A significant contribution of African theologians to the *Conversation on Pilgrim Way*,

document, is the inclusion of some indigenous wisdom traditions, bearing in mind the challenge that comes from African women theologies that we should only draw from life affirming for all humanity wisdom. Thus, it is worth listening to the African women theologians that all sources for moral discernment should include a critique from the perspective of the stigmatised and discriminated against because the same sources have been used to traumatise the people who are on the margins.

The example below demonstrates the importance of context in moral discernment.

In the case of human sexuality, for example, the various contexts of Christians affect how they respond to sexual ethics and norms. For instance, it is normal in Africa for a mother to breastfeed in public, but it is considered less acceptable in the global North. Similarly, an African man may marry more than two wives, but still oppose same-sex marriages. A Western Christian may accept same-sex marriage but oppose polygamy. The way moral discernment is contextual explains some of the disagreements associated with human sexuality in global Christianity. Morality is contextual in most cases (Conversation on the Pilgrim Way, 2022:19).

The above example also shows the importance of study to appreciate the dynamic nature of understanding culture. Culture should not be treated as static as interpretations shift as diverse cultures and religions encounter each other.

Conversations on the Pilgrim Way builds on years of conversations and advocacy at the WCC assembly on human sexuality since New Delhi WCC assembly in 1961 and the definition of human sexuality has been broad. Initially, the WCC response was to tackle a broad range of issues on human sexuality. The New Delhi Assembly, for example, indicated:

The churches have to discover what positions and actions to take in regard to sex relations before and after marriage; illegitimacy; in some cultures polygamy or concubinage as a social system sanctioned by law and customs; in some Western cultures short-term marriages, or liaisons, easy divorce; in all parts of the world mixed marriages (inter-faith, inter-confessional and inter-racial) with the diminishing of caste and class systems and of racial prejudice... All this, and much else, forces the churches to re-examine their teaching, preaching and pastoral care and their witness and service to society.

The Uppsala Assembly in 1968 continued addressing human sexuality by focusing on the debate on “birth control”, but continued to state:

Family patterns change in different social settings, and Christian marriage can find its expression in a variety of ways. We should write materials elaborating the problems of polygamy, marriage and celibacy, birth control, divorce, abortion and also of homosexuality to be made available for responsible study and action.

The broad approach to human sexuality by the WCC consultations and conferences continued up to the Canberra Assembly in 1991. Between Canberra and Harare (1998), more focus turned to sexual orientation as requested by some member churches of the WCC because in President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe’s speech of 1995, he openly referred to homosexuals as worse than dogs and pigs (Gunda, 2010:17). From Harare (1998) to Porto Alegre (2006), from Porto Alegre to Busan (2013) the conversation on human sexuality discussion was also greatly influenced by the sexuality surrounding HIV & AIDS and the human rights agenda of protecting the rights of every human being, which in religious language is the inherent dignity of all humanity.

Between Busan Assembly to Karlsruhe (2022) the definition of human sexuality followed the broad based one. Thus, while many issues are mentioned related to human sexuality, setting priorities is based on the signs of our times.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the African churches should refrain from a narrow definition of human sexuality. Church leaders marching against homosexuality while there is rampant unofficial polygamy and sexual violence against children, women and minorities in the churches and society makes a mockery of the message they espouse on these marches. *Conversation on Pilgrim Way* document encourages genuine and informed conversations on human sexuality that are broad and heal divisions within and with other churches. These conversations are not for WCC member churches only but for all churches. Creation of safe spaces where this conversation can happen in the churches in Africa is one step forward. The document explains how such safe spaces can be created.

The spirit in which the conversation happens in the safe spaces is equally important. Forbearance is critical as described in Ephesians 4:2, which says 'with all humility, and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.' Without taking that attitude, conversations cannot happen. The document also encourages that no matter our differences, we should not choose to separate ourselves from other churches or members of our own church. It is important to practise forbearance by staying together in love because Christ demands from the followers to remain united.

Finally, all churches are challenged to sharpen their approaches to issues in pastoral theology and counselling which might be answered in different ways. Most importantly they have to reflect an approach which implies careful listening and biblical and theological discernment by all concerned, since members of the church (and many people of good will) are wrestling with these issues and seek moral, ethical, and spiritual guidance from the churches.

The document has exposed that the field of pastoral theology is not equally advanced and developed yet within and between WCC member churches. This is true for Africa too. A detailed study on pastoral theology of human sexuality is needed to cover family life, human sexuality, and pastoral theology.

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Section D



Intersections: Religion, Gender and Society

21 Systemic Violence

Intersections of gender injustice, racism, sexuality and xenophobia

Masiwa R. Gunda

Abstract

Africa has been battling a myriad of injustices, some are externally originated and influenced, while others are internally originated and influenced. This chapter focuses on gender injustice, racism, sexuality and xenophobia, challenges that do not always attract the most attention especially in the face of persisting conflicts and poverty in Africa. Using an intersectional approach, this chapter acknowledges the role played by Ezra Chitando in drawing attention to the collective contributions of these challenges in increasing the vulnerability of women. The chapter demonstrates that based on the work of Chitando, whether intentionally or unintentionally, an intersectional approach is best suited to address the challenges that have contributed to avoidable deaths of women and men. The intersections have led to the failure to acknowledge the contributions of women to sustainable social transformation and to fragmented quests for diversity, inclusion and belonging for the most vulnerable groups in African societies. To mitigate against the power of intersections, this chapter calls African women theologians to embrace an intersectional approach to confront the intersecting marginalising forces, as well as to guard against inverted patriarchy in the African Women's quest for holistic liberation.

Keywords: Intersectionalities, racism, sexuality, gender, xenophobia

Introduction

Violence in all its manifestations continues to be an ever-present in discussions of many aspects of life on the African continent and African experiences on the continent and in the diaspora. One could speak of political, economic, climatic, religious, social, emotional, psychological or verbal violence and when violence permeates all spheres of life like this, it becomes normalized by the sheer force of its prevalence. Further, violence becomes embedded in policies, laws, norms, values and practices to the

point where it becomes not only structural but also effectively systemic. Systemic violence implies that violence has permeated the entire system, which refers to all the aspects of life including legal and policy frameworks and encompassing education, health, employment and other services. The post-colonial African States inherited and, in some cases, intensified systemic violence.

In order to fully understand and appreciate the workings of systemic violence, it is important also to interrogate the power of intersections and the intersections of power because these intersections have the effect of intensifying the manifestations of violence, which affects those caught up in the intersections more than those that lie outside of the intersections. While some people contend with political violence alone, and others contend with economic violence, their experiences of violence will be significantly different from those who find themselves trapped in the intersection of political and economic violence. Intersectionality can be a critical space of exploration and an instrument for analysing experiences that acknowledge the multiplicity of identities and positionality in different persons. In an attempt to spotlight the power of intersections, the 2017 Women's March proclaimed:

"We believe Gender Justice is Racial Justice is Economic Justice. We must create a society in which women—including Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, disabled women, Muslim women, lesbian queer and trans women—are free and able to care for and nurture their families, however they are formed, in safe and healthy environments free from structural impediments" (Al-Faham, Davis et Ernst 2019).

What these women did was highlight how intersectionality governs and impacts life in general, but especially the life of the most vulnerable groups in society. In the situation represented by the Women's March, it was clear that fighting gender injustice could not be divorced from the quests for other forms of justice because they all intersect thereby creating a grey area where some at-risk-groups could easily be invisibilised as experiences of elites are generalised as representative of all persons.

Ezra Chitando has been one of the most prolific African writers of the past three decades focusing on religion in Africa. With publications covering areas including the study of African Traditional Religions, African Theologies, Religion and Development, his greatest impact has been in the area of HIV & AIDS. His commitment to the eradication of HIV & AIDS made him realise how what was being presented as a medical challenge was

much more than that because the impact of HIV & AIDS was exposing various intersectionalities making the epidemic/pandemic an economic, political, social, religious, gendered and racial challenge over and above its obvious medical status. The epidemic was not only attacking infected bodies; it was attacking family livelihoods and even the right to life of both the infected and affected. Even without using intersectionality explicitly, Chitando was already a scholar committed to an intersectional approach to investigating, unpacking and analysing the impact of HIV & AIDS in Africa. His calls for all sectors and all ideologies to combine forces was also a commitment to intersectionality.

This chapter seeks to unpack how Chitando's works interfaces with the intersectionality of systemic violence, which has increased the vulnerability of women to various forms of violence, chief of which has been sexual and gender-based violence. The subject of violence in Africa is one that a chapter like this cannot engage exhaustively, therefore, in the following sections, this chapter flags some relevant aspects to illustrate the importance of appreciating intersectionality. This introduction is followed by a section seeking to articulate the reality and persistence of systemic violence in Africa and against People of African Descent (PAD) both on the continent and in the diaspora. This section is also followed by a section on intersectionality, seeking to shed light on its emergence and its import for this particular study and how it can be observed in Chitando's works. Two other sections focusing on the intersections of gender, racism, xenophobia and sexuality as well as the importance of an intersectional approach in the work of African women theologians are presented as well. This then leads us into the conclusion of this chapter.

Systemic Violence

If we are to understand systemic violence, it is important to begin by defining violence. Traditionally, violence is the intentional use of physical force to inflict injury and harm on human beings or damage to property. This understanding is sometimes used to cover psychological pressure, intense humiliation and intimidation (Van der Linden 2012). With violent conflicts raging in Sudan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and many other places across the continent and globe, it is true that "we live in a world where all too many people purposefully contribute to the harm of other human beings either by action or inaction"

(Grimsrud 2015). The question of violence is one that constantly finds space in religious circles and experiences – in most religions and in most Christian denominations, “violence is a constant threat in and to religious experience” (Alvis 2019, 213). The general and most propagated Christian faith is one in which God is presented as ‘the violent God of peace’ providing Christians with a template for ‘legitimate violence in the service of the peaceful violent God’, leading to the romanticized idea that religion, especially in Africa, is not dangerous or violent (Chitando & Tarusarira 2017). In these instances, violence is constantly presented as physical, visible and with an identifiable actor or perpetrator.

The problem with this understanding of violence is that it does leave some not so obvious forms of violence untouched. Most of the violence suffered by women and racialized communities would escape censure because of their lack of physical harm. Indeed, John Galtung was right to aver that if this were the exhaustive understanding of violence, then “[h]ighly unacceptable social orders would still be compatible with peace [where peace is seen as the absence of violence]. Hence, *an extended concept of violence is indispensable*” (Galtung 1969, 168). In seeking to make this extension to the meaning of violence, Galtung (1969, 168) writes:

“As a point of departure, let us say that violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations. But first some remarks about the use of the key words above, ‘actual’ and ‘potential’. Violence is here defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is. Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance.”

This definition of violence by Galtung is critically important in the context of analysing the work and contributions of Chitando to the cause of women in Africa and beyond. Groups of people have lived with the feeling and idea that they cannot thrive because of their physical and biological bodies since they have been influenced to believe that certain bodies are better – female and black bodies have often been presented as inadequate. Similarly, such groups have also been influenced to believe that their mental capacities are inadequate to make any meaningful interventions towards social transformation. These influences are critical in the creation of the gap between the full potential of women, PAD, foreigners and sex-

ual minorities and what they actually achieve because this violence inhibits them from ever realizing their potential. What this attest to, is the existence of overt and covert violence. In most cases, perpetrators of covert violence are quick to magnify overt violence in ways that make covert violence disappear.

Slavoj Žižek helps us in articulating the dichotomy of overt and covert violence when he observes, “when we think about violence we tend to think about criminal acts, acts of terror, civil unrest, and war”, that is, “violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent” (Žižek 2008, 1). The violence that can be linked to an actual person is one that is used to hide from the public gaze the covert violence. According to Žižek this subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two objective kinds of violence: “symbolic violence - violence embodied in language and its forms,” and “systemic violence - the often-catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (Žižek 2008, 1). These interventions by Žižek are so instructive for studies on violence, especially where religions are concerned. Religious language and ritual can be laden with violence and as the HIV epidemic was ravaging the African continent, religious language and ritual were so central in engendering another epidemic, that is, stigma (Chitando & Gunda 2007). However, in this chapter, we shall limit our analysis to systemic violence, which appears to be invisible as it is normalised by its powerful sponsors and beneficiaries (Žižek 2008).

When discussing the instances of covert violence, there are sometimes challenges with terminologies, is covert violence best captured by the use of structural, systemic or institutional violence? According to Vincenzo Ruggiero (Ruggiero 2019), “[s]ystemic violence refers to the harm people suffer from the social structure and the institutions sustaining and reproducing it. This type of violence prevents its victims from satisfying their basic needs and is an avoidable impairment of the fundamental means necessary for human existence.” This brings us back to the ‘actual’ and ‘potential’ capacity of persons in that systemic violence is that which undermines the potential and sometimes actively impedes the quest for the realization of the potential. According to Paula A. Braveman, et al. (2022, 172),

“Although systemic racism and structural racism are often used interchangeably, they have somewhat different emphases. Systemic racism emphasizes the involvement of whole systems, and often all systems - for example, political, legal, economic, health

care, school, and criminal justice systems - including the structures that uphold the systems. Structural racism emphasizes the role of the structures (laws, policies, institutional practices, and entrenched norms) that are the systems' scaffolding. Because systemic racism includes structural racism, for brevity we often use systemic racism to refer to both; at times we use both for emphasis. Institutional racism is sometimes used as a synonym for systemic or structural racism, as it captures the involvement of institutional systems and structures in race-based discrimination and oppression; it may also refer specifically to racism within a particular institution."

Similarly, according to Antonio Farfan-Vallespin & Matthew Bonick (2016),

"Recent political and social developments have witnessed an increase in the number of political statements considering that individuals of certain races or ethnic groups have lower moral qualities than members of the racial group of the speaker. Immigrants from other racial or ethnic groups are often declared to be generally dangerous and prone to criminality. Proponents of these views suggest, accordingly, that, since these entire groups are harmful for society, exceptional political measures targeted at these groups, often violating basic human rights, are justified in order to protect the rest of society from these groups."

While the above could be used to articulate 'symbolic violence', it is equally illustrative of the development of systemic, structural or institutional violence. Chitando did begin his prolific career by confronting aspects of symbolic violence manifesting in the manner Western scholars had studied and explained African Traditional Religions (Chitando 1997). What starts off as symbolic violence can quickly evolve into institutional, structural and eventually systemic violence.

Even though the above insights are drawn as specific to racism, the logic and framework works well with violence. Systemic violence includes both structural and institutional forms of violence. Chitando's call for multi-sectoral approaches to HIV & AIDS interventions, inviting religious leaders and believers to join hands with health practitioners, politicians, social workers and industry is in a way an acknowledgment of the systemic violence that was being experienced by those infected and affected by the epidemic. Similarly, in his works endorsing the contributions of African women theologians, Chitando bemoans the systemic violence that women have to contend with including violence in the family, society, politics,

faith communities, legal circles, social and economic spheres. In Chitando's words, "their voices are clearly heard. Refusing to keep quiet until church and society address African women's concerns, women theologians have been militant. They have called the church to account, charging that it has not accompanied women in their struggle against patriarchy" (Chitando 2009, 32). In short, African women theologians have been battling against 'systemic patriarchy' that often saw men from across different social structures coming together to impede the realization of the full potential of women in all spheres inside and outside the home. That various social structures combine forces to inflict violence on targeted groups brings us again to the subject of intersectionality, whether it be women, PAD, foreigners (in Africa, xenophobia or the intense fear and hatred of foreigners has been directed towards fellow black Africans, whether it be in Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya or Zimbabwe) or sexual minorities.

Intersectionality and Intersections

In the preceding section, we have seen how violence, when understood as the influence that inhibits or impedes the realization of an individual's or a specific group's potential, is both physical, psychological and more and is both overt and covert. The preceding section has also demonstrated how violence, especially the covert type, permeates all structures of a society to become systemic – violence becomes the norm as the inhibiting influences are present in politics, religion, education, economics, academia, family and the workplace. While some structures are more prone to overt violence, like in politics, and Africa has not been short of violent episodes during election cycles, some structures use the absence of overt violence to trivialize and negate the existence of covert violence. In this section, we want to focus our attention on intersectionality and intersections. "Originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality has gained popularity and is often discussed as a theory, methodology, paradigm, lens or framework. Many different definitions have been proposed, largely by academics and policymakers, and rarely by those most negatively impacted by it" (UNPRPD; UN Women 2022, 8). Following this analysis are Colfer, Basnett and Ihalainen (2018, 4) who write:

"Although people's multiple identities have been recognized and described in ethnographies over the years, Crenshaw's (1989) work was the first to expand on this observation and label its functioning

intersectionality. Crenshaw is a professor of law at the University of California, Los Angeles, and her professional emphasis is on civil rights in the United States, specifically feminist and antiracist policies. Her ideas on intersectionality emerged from a study of violence against black women in the United States. She found that generally efforts to combat racism there had focused on black men; and efforts to combat sexism had focused on white women; in both cases the most privileged of the marginalized within that category. These emphases rendered black women invisible. Her focus is specifically on the adverse impacts of a combination of marginalizing identities in interaction with related systems of oppression, domination or discrimination.”

The experiences of African American women, of which Crenshaw is one, is illustrative of experiences of various other marginalized groups around the world. Focusing on Africa, one could highlight ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, as among many marginalizing identities that can coalesce to intensify the discrimination and violence suffered by some people (as individuals or groups). Similarly, different social structures sometimes combine forces by upholding “social values and norms” that in essence are instruments of violence against targeted groups. Women pursuing a critical appraisal of patriarchy in Africa, among them African women theologians, have found politics and religion coming together to alienate them, sometimes even painting them as perpetrators of violence against the wellbeing of society at large. This systematic attack on women follows different paths, according to (Crenshaw 1991, 1241-1242),

“Over the last two decades, women have organized against the almost routine violence that shapes their lives. Drawing from the strength of shared experience, women have recognized that the political demands of millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated voices. This politicization in turn has transformed the way we understand violence against women. For example, battering and rape, once seen as private (family matters) and aberrational (errant sexual aggression), are now largely recognized as part of a broad-scale system of domination that affects women as a class. This process of recognizing as social and systemic what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual has also characterized the identity politics of African Americans, other people of color, and gays and lesbians, among others.”

In some ways, the above statement uncovers how systemic violence was hidden in plain sight, by apportioning blame to individuals and in some

instances labelling violence private; the structural, institutional and systemic dimensions of violence were made invisible. The search for solutions to violence, therefore, was directed towards the private and individual and the results were always the same, no respite was experienced because the real forces of violence remained beyond censure, as they were the norms, often understood as sacred. In an attempt to expose the systemic violence that African American women were experiencing, insights were developed to show that effectively, when it comes to violence against women and PAD, African American women did not exist, their experiences did not matter. Crenshaw (Article 8 1989, 139) writes:

“One of the very few Black women's studies books is entitled *All the Women Are White; All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*. I have chosen this title as a point of departure in my efforts to develop a Black feminist criticism because it sets forth a problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis.’ In this talk, I want to examine how this tendency is perpetuated by a single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law and that is also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics.”

The fragmented or compartmentalized approach to human experience, attempting to put experiences into silos that are exclusive of each other was identified as the greatest attack on vulnerable groups such as women of African descent in the United States of America's context. The same is true of various spheres of life in Africa, where sometimes, political experience is seen as exclusive of religious violence, where gender-based violence is seen as unrelated to economic and social justice. In the context of HIV & AIDS, the physical wasting away of black bodies as AIDS took over was seen as unrelated to religious teachings and gender norms prevalent in society. Chitando was one of those who embraced an intersectionality approach and framework to champion an impactful response to the HIV & AIDS epidemic in Africa. According to Hankivsky (2014, 2),

“Intersectionality promotes an understanding of human beings as shaped by the interaction of different social locations (e.g. ‘race’/ethnicity, indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, disability/ability, migration status, religion). These interactions occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (e.g. laws, policies, state governments and other political and economic unions, religious institutions, media). Through such processes, interdependent forms of privilege and oppression

shaped by colonialism, imperialism, racism, homophobia, ableism and patriarchy are created.”

In some ways, intersectionality emerges out of the intersections where seemingly mutually exclusive structures actually overlap, trapping some people in these intersections. The colonial – both political, economic, religious and social – structures have reinforced each other with some traditional structures to create powerful marginalizing forces that have created a “white class” of PAD with all the white privileges from colonial times accruing to this class. At the same time, these structures have been discreetly combining forces to deprive, impede and frustrate the full potential of other classes and groups of persons, among them, women and sexual minorities. Those trapped in the intersections of these structures become invisible as their most privileged group members’ experiences are used as representative of all, when in fact; the experiences from the intersections are not the same. The idea is that intersections and intersectionality is alive to internal diversities in presumably single groups, be they ethnic, gender or sexuality and its goal is to recover the reality of the experiences from the intersections and experiences borne out of intersectionality. According to Crenshaw (1991), there are three types of intersectionality – structural, political and representational. These types are critical lenses through which intersectionality can become a critical instrument in the quest for comprehensive justice in Africa.

Structural intersectionality emerges out of the interactions and interfacing that happens between and among different social structures, such as legal, policy and cultural. Crenshaw explains, “[i]ntersectional subordination need not be intentionally produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment” (Crenshaw 1991, 1249). In the case of African women theologians, someone could be coming from a culture in which “descent and respectable women” are those that are married and always acquiescing to men. This cultural norm makes silence golden for women. In such a situation, there might emerge a law that criminalises “soliciting for sex”, a law that seems to criminalise commercial sex workers. Such a law again places another burden on women, even if on paper it seems to target a particular group of women. However, the law leads to a policy that “discourages” women from walking alone at night. The combination of these structural prescriptions will create a combined force that could make it difficult or impossible for a professional woman to work late in the office because on her way

home, she could be arrested for “soliciting sex” (Poppendieck & Mavhunga 2012). Even though this intersectionality will not have been intentionally created, it will nonetheless increase the burden that women will have to carry in such a society.

Other than structural intersectionality, political intersectionality is yet another. All people are political insofar as they engage with the burdens placed on them by the various social structures in their society. Political intersectionality emerges out of the interaction of multiple facets of identity placing different demands on the one body of multiple identities – woman, African descent, theologian, lesbian or trans-. How is one to spread their energies? A similar situation can be detected when one considers the fight for independence from colonisation where one is – man, African descent, gay, trans-, ethnic minority. Which battle does one choose? According to Crenshaw (1991, 1252),

“The need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront. Indeed, their specific raced and gendered experiences, although intersectional, often define as well as confine the interests of the entire group. For example, racism as experienced by people of color who are of a particular gender –male - tends to determine the parameters of anti-racist strategies, just as sexism as experienced by women who are of a particular race – white - tends to ground the women's movement. The problem is not simply that both discourses fail women of color by not acknowledging the “additional” issue of race or of patriarchy but that the discourses are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism. Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms. This is because feminism and the anti-patriarchy movement have been spearheaded by white women's interests, whereas antiracism has focused on inequalities experienced by black men.”

Taking a cue from Crenshaw, it can be argued that the fight against colonialism, including the quest for religious independence by Christians in the post-colonial states were determined largely by interests of African men, with male experiences of colonialism being used as standard experiences for all Africans. Lost in this was the gendered dimension of colonisation and the cultural dimension of patriarchy, which meant that the

experiences of African women under colonisation were not exactly the same as those of men. Similarly, gay African men fought alongside their brothers against colonisation yet their own experiences of being gay were overshadowed by the heteronormativity shared by both colonisers and colonised African men.

Finally, we have to briefly highlight the contributions of representational intersectionality, which emerges out of the manner in which some groups are represented or misrepresented in their cultural construction. In this regard, representational intersectionality focuses on the populist narratives and stereotypes that are used as representative of either “ideal” or “rebellious” persons according to social expectations. Such narratives and stereotypes are especially lethal as they merge to create marginalizing forces against the targeted groups and individuals.

“But when one discourse fails to acknowledge the significance of the other, the power relations that each attempts to challenge are strengthened. For example, when feminists fail to acknowledge the role that race played in the public response to the rape of the Central Park jogger¹, feminism contributes to the forces that produce disproportionate punishment for Black men who rape white women, and when antiracists represent the case solely in terms of racial domination, they belittle the fact that women particularly, and all people generally, should be outraged by the gender violence the case represented. Perhaps the devaluation of women of color implicit here is linked to how women of color are represented in cultural imagery” (Crenshaw 1991, 1282).

African discourses have popularised and valorised the ideal African woman as one who is pliant, with loads of patience and endurance, without a breaking point. When African women theologians stand up to challenge and to demand that they be listened to; structures and systems conspire in various ways including stigmatisation, social exclusion and frustrating all efforts, no matter the good intentions. Valorised women are those that accept being invisible even when they are present. Those that

¹ The Central-Park-Jogger case also known as the Central Park Five case and after the convicted youths were eventually exonerated, The Exonerated Five case refers to the physical and sexual attack on a 29-year-old white female in Central Park in New York. The arrested youths were African-American and Latino, both racialized communities in the USA. Refer to Looking back at the 1989 Central Park jogger rape case that led to 5 teens' conviction, later vacated - ABC News (go.com) accessed on 19/05/2023.

seek to be visible will then be represented as marital failures, bad mothers, horrible role models to be quarantined from girls and other women and their words are not to be listened to and their advice not to be sought. Non-conforming women end up as social outcasts. While intersectionality emerged as a reaction to the invisibilisation of African American women in the critical appraisals of sexism and racism in the American society where the experiences of white women and black men were given precedence, the same could be true of experiences of African women.

Gender, Race, Sexuality and Ethnicity: the intersections

Pre-colonial African life cannot be described as having been perfect, but it had its positives and negatives, had its communally held conventions as well as those that were contested or were not spoken about. However, fundamental changes occurred with the racist enslavement of Africans that saw millions of Africans trafficked across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas and the Caribbean and some to Europe. The idea that one ethnic group was permanently meant to dominate and rule others simply because of their ethnic identity was now well established. This enslavement was subsequently followed by the colonisation of the majority of the African continent by Western European powers. While gender, ethnicity and to a certain extent sexuality were categories that were present obviously without these specific names, race was unknown. Contests among different ethnicities were based on circumstances, the group that had various factors aligning for them could rise to be the dominant group in a geographical area and this saw several kingdoms emerge, thrive and then fall, as new ones emerged (McDougal 2009). Dominance in pre-colonial times was fluid and by chance and luck whereas the enslavement period and colonisation brought with them the possibility of a permanent class of conquerors and a permanent class of the conquered. Initially, this separation was a “black and white” case, with white Europeans being the conquerors divinely ordained to rule and black Africans being the conquered, divinely ordained to be ruled by whites.² The main instruments for achieving this was the white supremacist ideology and the culture of whiteness

² Genesis 9 tells a story of drunkenness and etiquette and the power to curse. In the story a father, Noah feeling offended and violated by his son, Ham, decides to place a curse on Ham's son, Canaan. Ham's descendants were to be servants or slaves to their brothers. It was then suggested that Ham meant black or dark

that undergirded it. This ideology and culture, however, were imparted in all spheres of life that they became instruments not only for the self-understanding of Europeans, but they became the basis upon which Africans came to understand themselves as well. That means in post-colonial contexts the same ideology and culture have been internalized and are being deployed in post-white contexts.

Relations between men and women in pre-colonial times cannot be said to have been perfect, the intersection of these cultural and traditional practices with Christian influenced Western European ideas of gender relations had the effect of increasing the burden on African women. While African men owned land, the main means of production, African women had control of produce that came from the land giving them some economic leverage in their relationship with men, especially when they were married. The introduction of a cash economy with the advent of commercial farms and industries changed the dynamics. Africans were moved into communal reserves as they were moved away from fertile lands to pave way for the establishment of commercial farms and urban and industrial centres. The early days of this shift in the economies of Africa, saw men being targeted as employees who would earn cash and with many services now needing cash, including hut and cattle taxes. With women left in charge of tired land, their productivity went down thereby giving men more dominant roles than they had previously enjoyed and making women even more dependent on men than they had done previously. This structural intersectionality was worsening the situation of women. Even though African men were experiencing the impact of the racist structures, African women's experiences were fundamentally different from those of African men (Parpart et Staudt 1988).

On human sexuality, Africa like all other continents was predominantly heterosexual, even though this word is Western. The reality was that Africans valued procreation, because in most cases, families had to produce their own labour. Labour was critical for the pre-colonial African economies, the more labour a family could master the better their productivity. While rich families could afford to hire extra-hands, this was not common, most families had to produce their own labour in the form of children. Even though the majority of the people would directly and indirectly contribute to this social duty to grow the family, the idea of mutually exclusive

hence dark-skinned people or Africans were cursed and divinely obliged to be slaves and servants.

sexual identities was unknown or if known, was never spoken about. There is evidence of men having sex with other men without them understanding themselves as having a sexuality identity that precluded the obligation to grow the family or be socially obligated to be involved in heterosexual relationships for the purposes of having children. In some communities, there were practices that were meant to cover-up the failure of a man to have children, such as *kupindira*³ (to go in to a relative's wife) among some Shona communities in Zimbabwe. The idea of mutually exclusive sexuality identities appears to have emerged in post-colonial contexts but being dependent on colonial influences. This, however, must not be mistaken for the absence of sexual minorities in pre-colonial times; there is a lot of evidence to suggest otherwise. In polygamous situations and with extended families living together, there are suspicions of women sexually satisfying each other (Gunda 2010). The situation would have been worsened when men had to migrate to commercial farms and urban centres to take up jobs and where they would live for long periods during the year leaving women alone in the villages. In most cases, such women would not have understood themselves as having a sexuality identity that was exclusive of their heterosexual social obligations.

Following an intersectional approach, it is apparent that while gender, race/ethnicity and sexuality can and have been treated as mutually exclusive categories, they actually intersect in ways that empower and disempower some groups. With our focus tilting more on African women in general and African women theologians in particular, it is clear that these dimensions of their lives expose the structural, political and representational intersectionalities to the detriment of their wellbeing and their ability to realise their full potential. For starters, the colonial and post-colonial African states in which African women theologians begin to demand and assert their right to be visible already had in place laws, policies and norms

³ *Kupindira* was a practice in which a married couple could not have children and where the family of the man strongly suspected it was the man who was not able to impregnate his wife. In such cases, the family would ask a brother or another relative to have sexual relations with the wife in order to produce children for the man. The children would belong to the man and the relative was sworn to an oath of secrecy, never to divulge this to the man and the arrangement was kept between a few elders in the family. While the reason for not having children could have been infertility, there is a possibility that sexual orientation might have also been a reason.

that upheld the disempowerment of women. The multiple identity markers of African women also saw them torn apart as they fought for holistic recognition. Their loyalties were split between their gender, race/ethnicity and sexuality. They had to join hands with African men to overthrow the colonial yoke, yet they had to stand up to African men as they also sought to overthrow the patriarchal yoke and for some of them, they also had to contend with other women as they sought to relieve themselves of the heteronormative yoke. Even then, urban and rural women had diverse experiences inasmuch as professional women and homemakers also had different experiences. As noted above, the representation of women in colonial and post-colonial African states, relying on traditional, Christian and Western norms that had intersected in these communities created a further hurdle for women, especially those that dared stand up to the excesses of patriarchy. Chitando, in his analysis of the emergence of African theologies in colonial and post-colonial African states writes:

“It must be borne in mind that African nationalists and theologians have a lot in common. Firstly, both are the product of the mission school. Secondly, both had to fight institutional racism. While African nationalists were “seeking the political kingdom”, African theologians sought to ensure that blacks were fairly represented in church structures. Thirdly, African nationalists and African theologians shared common ideological ground. They were convinced that Africans were in no way inferior to Europeans and had the mandate to assert their autonomy. Fourthly, some of the publications of African nationalists, such as Jomo Kenyatta on ATRs, were adopted by African theologians. The search for “lost ancestral values” united African nationalists and African theologians” (Chitando 2009, 14).

What is instructive and possibly missing in this assessment by Chitando is the fact that African nationalists and theologians also shared something, that is, they were mostly men and the women who participated were not seen as autonomous beings whose experiences of colonisation and racism were compounded by their experiences of patriarchal injustice. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, churches were accused of not speaking out against the spike in domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. According to Mombo & Joziassie (2022, 2), “it appears that churches, through teaching, preaching, and counselling, contributed to this disaster. Through patriarchal structures, cultural and doctrinal teachings, violence against women and girls is perpetuated, silencing the voices of women.” The patriarchal nature of the church in Africa makes the experiences of

women different from those of men. The focus on racism, religious, economic, social and political domination had blurred the diversities that affected the experiences of different groups of Africans. To illustrate this point, we again listen to Crenshaw (1991, 1242), who writes:

“The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite - that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences. In the context of violence against women, this elision of difference in identity politics is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. Moreover, ignoring difference within groups contributes to tension among groups, another problem of identity politics that bears on efforts to politicize violence against women. Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices.”

While it is possible to speak of African women or African women theologians, it is critical to appreciate the intra-group diversities, such as, African lesbian women, African lesbian women theologians, African women homemakers or housewives. Their experiences are different at some specific points as they are caught up or trapped in some intersections of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, faith and so on. African churches have largely remained patriarchal, thereby making them both a refuge and an abattoir for women. Mombo & Joziassé (2022) write, “Why did churches and their leaders hardly speak out against the spike in domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic and why did they not adequately protect the most vulnerable? ... In particular, the churches’ failure to address the causes of GBV is highlighted in the present article, pointing to its rootedness in culture, a particular interpretation of Biblical texts, and the lack of training of clergy to address GBV.” These are echoes of Chitando’s observations on the strategic positionality of the church in tackling HIV & AIDS, especially in the early days of the epidemic. Then, the church was fuelling the rising stigma and discrimination based on theological rigidity, insensitivity to gender issues, and negative attitudes towards sexuality (Chitando 2007).

There can be no doubt as to the reality of intersectionality in the experiences of different people, and in particular in the experiences of African

women in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial communities and states. The intersectionality of these experiences is not simply between those of men and women but also between and among women themselves. Acknowledging intragroup diversities is critical for the realisation of the full potential of all women. The strength of African women theologians lies in their ability to acknowledge these intragroup diverse experiences so that as they fight against patriarchy, they are similarly guarding against elitism or inverted patriarchy becoming another marginalizing force among women.

An Intersectionality approach for sustainable transformation

Intersectionality refers to the interactions between several identity markers that can all be fractions of one whole identity, as well as the interactions of various social structures that influence the lives of people. The interactions of structures create in their wake a widespread situation of unmerited privileges and injustice. As eloquently put by Hankivsky (2014), “intersectionality conceptualizes social categories as interacting with and constituting one another to create unique social locations that vary according to time and place. These intersections and their effects are what matter in an intersectional analysis.” The power of intersectionality can best be challenged and undermined by an intersectionality approach to analysis and response. One of the critical interventions of African women theologians and by extension Chitando has been to realise that African theologies were in essence African masculine theologies (Chitando 2009, 31-32). At the heart of the emergence of African Women’s Theology must have been the invisibility of African women in the supposed theological discourses purporting to be African. According to Al-Faham et. al. (2019, 250-251),

“Central to understanding this discourse are concerns about implications: What processes or persons are rendered visible and/or invisible? Collins termed this intersectionality’s “definitional dilemma” of “defining the field neither so narrowly that it reflects the interests of any one segment nor so broadly that its very popularity causes it to lose meaning.” According to Collins, “[i]ntersectionality’s travels from social movements into the academy enable some dimensions of intersectionality to flourish, leaving others to languish, if not disappear.”

The invisibility of African women was not limited to theology or religious leadership; they were invisible in politics, in industry and economies, in education and various other spheres. Therein lies the dangers associated with too narrow or too wide delimitations of what intersectionality can or should embrace. The reality is that all these spheres of life influence the experiences of African women and unless they are taken into account, African women will fight in a fragmented manner, in which they might end up fighting against each other gifting victory to the marginalizing forces and structures that actually impede their ability to realize their full potential. In many instances, women in religion have considered themselves as mutually exclusive of women in politics or industry because the representation of women in politics and industry has been one that sees them as threats to the stability of the home. Only an intentional intersectional approach can create the necessary infrastructure to bridge the supposed differences between these aspects of womanhood in Africa. While politics, religion, industry and academia might appear separate and autonomous spheres, it is most likely that one woman is politically invested in all these spheres.

Other than identifying those that are invisible, as African women theologians did in their analysis of African theologies, an intersectional approach must also engender the skills to actually identify the experiences that are being used as standard or the norm. It is the creation or adoption of one experience as representative of all, irrespective of their positionality. The experiences of an educated, politically empowered African woman cannot be representative of the experiences of a woman living in rural areas, with no education, no political agency of their own and entirely dependent on handouts by political predators. In short, intersectionality must disrupt the idea of the norm. Crenshaw (Article 8 1989) articulates this point as follows;

“I argue that Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women,

the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating "women's experience" or "the Black experience" into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast."

Expanding on the insights above, it is not enough to disrupt the norm, in terms of the determinative experience that is being used as representative of African women's experiences, but intersectionality must seek to disrupt the framework of understanding and translating women's experiences in Africa. It is important to interrogate and question the persistence of racist ideologies in the frameworks that decides which female experience is to be prioritized and which experiences are to be invisibilised. The prioritization of experiences that conform to a Western European standard of ideal female experience is a challenge that African women will need to engage and grapple with.

An intersectional approach at the hands of African women theologians can play a critical dual function, which sees it performing an outward looking duty addressing the systemic violence that disproportionately affect African women more than it affects African men. This will not be enough, it will also need to be inward looking, the necessary instrument for self-introspection that allows for African women theologians to always critically engage with the diversities that exist among women in order to not end up with inverted patriarchy. African women theologians need not shy away from exposing structural intersectionality that goes beyond religion because their experiences are holistic, influenced by all structures that govern their lives. To this end, Chitando's (2009, 42-43) words become instructive:

"At the heart of African theology is the conviction that the church must respond to the actual, lived realities of African converts and communities. The existential needs of Africans must constitute the core business of the church."

This realisation is critical because at the heart of an intersectional approach is the desire to understand the actual experiences of individuals and groups, in our case, African women, sexual minorities as well as ethnic minorities. If injustice and discrimination are to be eliminated and equity achieved, then actual as opposed to representational experiences should be the basis of recasting the framework of thought and policy formulation. Policies and structures based on representational experiences are prone to making the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups disappear because such experiences are drawn from the privileged in each

group, the “white women and black men” type of disadvantaged persons. African women theologians are indeed a vulnerable and disadvantaged group, but their experiences as educated, professionally grounded African women mean their experiences, unless intentionally checked, can easily become representational and thereby working to overshadow other experiences by African women.

Conclusion

The strides that have been taken by African women theologians in the past three decades have been phenomenal, but the reality of life in Africa with the myriad of problems and challenges means a lot more still needs to be done. The major mistake of the nationalism era from the 1950s was its failure to acknowledge the possibility of multiple African experiences of the colonial era and its resort to using African male experiences, even at that, African educated male experiences as representational of the totality of African experience of colonisation. An intersectional approach would have assisted in the realisation of holistic decolonisation, justice and equity. Ezra Chitando’s main contribution to the women’s cause is that he has intentionally chosen to challenge the intersectionality that has privileged him as a man. He represents men that have come to the realisation that some of the things they feel entitled to, are unmerited privileges that are produced by the intersectionality of structures, institutions and systems.

The future of African women’s theologies lies in women theologians taking a leaf from the steps taken by Chitando, wherein insiders commit themselves to take a stand against injustice even if it means losing some of the privileges that we become accustomed to. The critical questions moving forward, for African women theologies could be: which structures are impeding women’s ability to realise their full potential? Whose experiences are being presented as representational of all women in our context? How can we politicize (mobilise women to create a movement whose voice will be heard far and wide) systemic violence without invisibilising some women in the process? Who is missing or invisible on the table of African women theologians? Three decades gone by, a lot has been achieved but more still needs to be done, including theologically confronting the widespread embrace of whiteness theoretically and physically by African women.

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

Rehoboam, Amnon, and Jezebel

Gerald O. West

Abstract

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

Introduction

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

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

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

The patriarchal system

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

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

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

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

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

The econo-patriarchal system

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

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

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

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

Sacred econo-patriarchy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Econo-patriarchy and/as violence

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 Kings 12:1-16

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Samuel 13:1-22

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 Kings 21:1-16

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

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

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

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

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

African econo-patriarchies

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

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

cultural ideas are associated with men; societal attention is focussed on men and boys; men have an obsession about control (Johnson 2014, 6-13). My argument is that given its systemic nature, there cannot be an 'acceptable' or "palatable" (Nadar 2009) form of econo-patriarchy. There was no acceptable or palatable form of apartheid (and there is no acceptable or palatable form of racism). The recent (2021) South African film, "*#WeAreDyingHere*" (Vermooten 2021), makes this terrifyingly clear. The war on black women's bodies perpetrated by patriarchy is portrayed using imagery from the apartheid war on black South Africans. Patriarchy, as Hunnicutt and Sarojini Nadar establish, is inherently violent. As my biblical examples demonstrate, econo-patriarchy is inherently violent. The question that emerges from this analysis is how we might understand notions of 'African masculinity' which are not dependent on any form of econo-patriarchy. There is hard work ahead of us. Two African biblical scholars provide guidelines for this task.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jodamus aptly summarises here the econo-patriarchal system and how it constructs masculinity. But what if, as Jodamus invites us to ask, we understand the death of Jesus as the death of econo-patriarchy? Here is an appropriately radical theology for a post-econo-patriarchal African church. Alongside the work of Nzimande and Jodamus, I have added further reflections on econo-patriarchy. My contributions, using three biblical texts, have emphasised the economic dimension. Patriarchy, these biblical texts demonstrate, is always implicated in male economic control; it is always econo-patriarchal. When men do not have the control they desire over the labour and resources of other men (Rehoboam), over women's bodies (Amnon), and over the land of subordinate men (Ahab), their masculinity is questioned and so threatened. The response is violence. The violence is activated, it should be noted, not by an individual but by a system. Masculinity is systemic. I have named this system as the econo-patriarchal system.

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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23 The Nursing Father's Breasts

Transgender Metaphoric in the New Testament and After-biblical Christianity¹

Joachim Kügler

Abstract

The article contributes some remarks on variations of God's masculinity that appear quite queer from a modern perspective. These variations partly can be found in sources belonging to the New Testament canon, while the majority of the sources are post-biblical writings belonging to Early Christian literature of the 2nd to 4th century CE. In both cases, the sources show a transfer of characteristics read as typically feminine to God respectively his Christ. Thus, these texts create a transgender concept of masculinity that might be of interest for modern discussions on gender and the transformation of gender roles. Yet, one must acknowledge that these imaginations of God are framed by a culture of Masculine Domination (Bourdieu 2001). Older examples from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East show, that the maternal characteristics attributed to masculine deities are not meant to feminize the respective deity but to make their power complete. Thus, these transgender imaginations of breastfeeding God/gods will only develop a liberating impact if they are de-framed and read beyond patriarchal patterns.

Keywords: New Testament, Church Fathers, trans, masculinity, breastfeeding, Gender Studies, Queer Theology, history of religions, Hebrew Bible, Ancient Near East, Greek-Roman antiquity.

¹ This chapter is an extended English version of my Farewell Lecture at the University of Bamberg, 19th July 2024. As Ezra could not attend, I thought it a nice compensation to dedicate this text to him.

Introduction

1. How can God be *trans*?

While my colleague and friend Ezra Chitando is an expert in analyzing African concepts of masculinity, I am not. Yet, I dare to contribute to his Festschrift some short remarks on variations of divine masculinity that appear – from a modern perspective – surprisingly queer. These variations partly can be found in sources belonging to the New Testament, while the majority of the sources are post-biblical writings belonging to Early Christian literature of the second to fourth century CE. In both cases, the sources show a transfer of characteristics read as typically feminine to God respectively his Christ. Thus, these texts create a transgender concept of masculinity that might be of interest for modern discussions on gender and the transformation of gender roles.

In mainstream Christian religion and theology, the adjective ‘trans’ is rather unusual in relation to God. For many Christians a trans person is not a person they would see positively, accept or at least tolerate. Some may even think that being trans is something evil, ‘unnatural,’ breaking the norms of the divine order of creation. Although I know about such attitudes, I nevertheless must insist that it is kind of ‘natural’ that God is trans! The theological reason is quite simple. God *transcends* all human categories – including categories of sex and gender. Already the Hebrew Bible clearly states that God is “god and not a human/man²” (Hos 11:9) and the later teaching of the Church puts that on a very general level, saying that the difference between God as creator and the creatures always is greater than any similarities between them.³ Therefore, one can conclude that even a correct statement about God is more inappropriate than appropriate. This divine quality of being beyond human categories, being ‘*totaliter aliter*’ (completely different) is perfectly expressed by the word ‘trans,’ even if some would regard that as a blasphemy. However, those who do so should ask themselves what they love more, the Biblical and

² The Hebrew „ish“ and the Greek “anthropos” (LXX) both can stand for “man” as well as for “human being” because the man patriarchally is seen as the full human person.

³ The crucial definition is given by the Lateran Council IV (1215 CE) teaching that “between creator and creature no similarity so great can be noted that not a greater difference is to be noted”. [My verbal English translation of: “inter creatorem et creaturam non potest tanta similitudo notari quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda,” (DH 806)].

Christian tradition of God's otherness or their own religious and cultural prejudices about God's 'straightness.'

2. Why is mother milk so important?

In pre-industrial times, breastfeeding is essential for the survival of the new-born – as it is with all mammals. It is dangerous for the baby if the mother is not able to give milk. Substitutes like animal milk or milk from a wet nurse are possible but they are neither without risk nor are they always available. With reference to Greek-Roman antiquity, Claude-Emmanuelle Centlivres Challet concludes:

If a Roman mother could not or would not breastfeed her child, the choice of the alternative(s) must have depended on the socio-cultural background of the family, on its medical beliefs and its cultural practices. While elite families might choose or decide to resort to a wet nurse, most non-elite families did not have that possibility. From a modern nutritional and medical point of view, if maternal milk was not available, the enrolment of a relative, a friend, or a wet nurse was the healthiest, safest option; but, in the last case at least, cross-contamination and neglect were potential threats, even if they proved less likely in the case of in-house wet nurses whose behaviour could be more closely monitored. Animal milk, either given via a baby bottle or suckled at the udder, was another, endangering, option, with damaging or even lethal consequences: the potential lack of hygiene of the handlers, bacterial contamination through the non-sterile containers and contents, and the specific chemical components of animal milk caused this practice to be an unhealthy alternative for feeding nurslings. (Centlivres Challet 2017: 902-903)

Additionally, most patriarchal societies see the semen of the father as the central part of begetting a child, while the mother is seen more as a 'container' sheltering, warming, and nourishing the offspring. Often, the specific cultural concepts compare the role of the mother to that of the soil, while the father is seen as the farmer sowing his seed.⁴ Consequently, these cultural systems have problems of understanding the physical relationship between mother and child. Therefore, many patrilinear societies see this relationship as being constituted by breastfeeding. The motherly milk-relationship may not be as important as the fatherly semen-relationship, but still, it is essential, not only for the survival of the baby but also

⁴ The recent publication of Clarissa Breu (2024) adds texts from Plato and Hellenistic Judaism to the well-known sources – esp. Aristotle's *De Generatione Animalium* (Lesky 1950) – for this concept.

for their status in society. The breastfeeding mother gives a product of her own body – so to say something of herself – to the suckling. Therefore, being breastfed by a wet nurse (in antiquity, often a slave having a child on her own) was a bit suspicious as she might have transferred her slave-character to the baby. The upper-class tried to minimize the risk by a bulge of physical and mental criteria that made a woman eligible for this important task.

Stavroula Constantinou and Aspasia Skouroumouni-Stavrinou sum up their research, saying:

According to our sources, the wet nurse, who mothers the elite infant, should be *sōphrōn*, so that her charge grows up according to the moral principles of its social class. At the same time, the wet nurse's low standing allows the matrona to assert power over her and to strengthen her own position as the infant's mother. Seen as a threat for the elite nursling, the wet nurse has to be placed from the outset under the control of her employers, even before her employment has begun. Soranos' chapter and those of other medical authors on the selection of the wet nurse, as well as "Myia's" Letter, illustrate in the most graphic way how Greco-Roman and early Byzantine elite families could excuse their total indifference to the wet nurse's situation and difficulties in order to satisfy both their children's and their own interests, needs, and aspirations. To rephrase Simone de Beauvoir's famous and much-quoted dictum, "one is not born, but rather becomes" a nursing woman, a statement that could be employed as a one-sentence summary of the wet nurse's socio-ideological position in Greco-Roman antiquity and early Byzantium as expressed in the examined sources. Our analysis has shown that the wet nurse was an essential category of the ancient and Byzantine institution of motherhood, in the framework of which she was treated as the elite mother's inferior Other and the nursling's most devoted servant. Despite the fact that in the examined period, there were also biological mothers who undertook to breastfeed and raise their own children, the socio-ideological treatment of wet nurses was quite distinctive, thus validating the separate examination of them that has been attempted here. (Constantinou & Skouroumouni-Stavrinou 2024: 86)

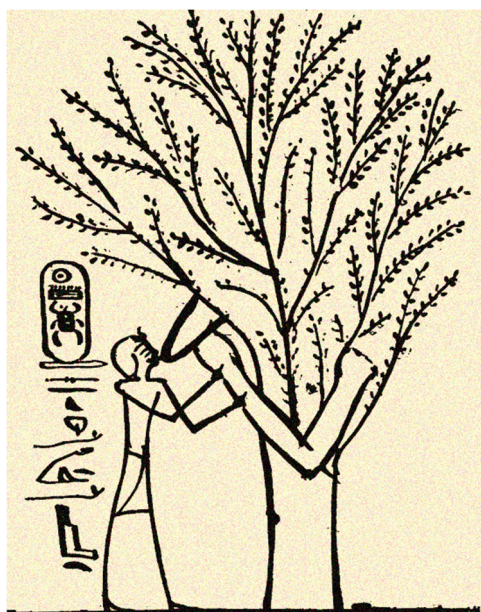
While ordinary mothers breastfeeding her child are almost invisible in Greek-roman art, the suckling scene is a predominant topic in the context of royal and imperial ideology. In this intersectional area of politics and religion, it was important to legitimate the autocratic power of the ruler by using – explicitly or not – the traditional category of the god-king. In displaying himself as a representative and agent of the divine power a common topic was the idea of the ruler as a "son of (a) god", who has been

begotten by a masculine deity (like Amun-Ra in old Egypt, Ammon in Alexander's time, and Jupiter or Apollo in Augustus' Rome). As this concept related the autocrat only with the masculine half of the divine world, it was of interest to claim the feminine half as his mothers. Therefore, the autocrats also displayed themselves as having been suckled by goddesses (like Hathor or Isis in old Egypt, the Hellenistic world and even the Roman Empire). Pictures and texts on monuments praise the ruler as having received divine breastmilk. Thus, he could be seen as a full member of the divine family. By the act of breastfeeding the ruler, the motherly goddesses gave their divine quality and power to him as their son. At the end of the day, the ruler was then not only filled with the power of (a) divine father(s) but also with the power of (a) divine mother(s). Out of the vast number of examples for the divine breastfeeding of the ruler that can be found in Ancient Egypt, Greek mythology and even Roman Imperial ideology (Kügler 2014: 110-114), I render here only three samples. One stands for the mainstream tradition, and the other two are selected as they are exceptional. The first source shows a topic that can be found from the first documents of Egyptian royal ideology up to Roman times: a motherly goddess breastfeeding the king (in this case King Sahure, ca. 2500 BCE).



⁵ King Sahure (5th dynasty) being suckled by a goddess, detail of a relief at Sahure's pyramid. Graphic JK, based on the edition of Borchardt 1910.1913.

The second source is about one thousand years younger than the first one and can be found in the tomb of King Thutmose III, the nephew and successor of Hatshepsut (both 18th dynasty). The painting shows a tree breastfeeding the King. This picture attests that Egyptian religious imagination is not bound to natural analogies. Although trees do not have breasts (or arms), the tree-goddess is no less a mother to the king than other goddesses are. As a mother of the king, she nurses him and shares her divine essence with him. Therefore, she must be depicted with a breast to suckle her son and bestow him with divine-royal power.

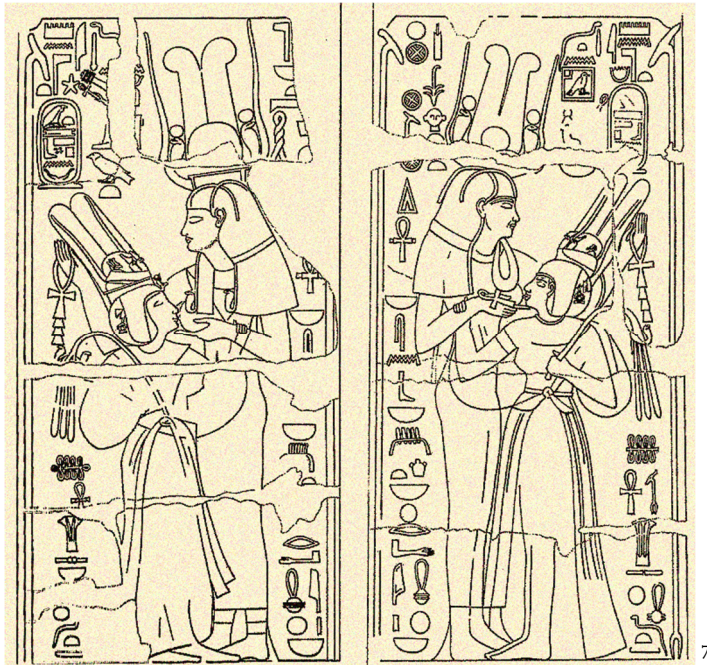


6

The third source is exceptional under gender aspects, as it shows a female ruler being suckled by two goddesses. The reliefs stem from the Osiris chapel of God's Wife Shepenupet I (23rd dynasty) at Karnak and surprise with showing a king-like ruler as a feminine figure. The older versions at

⁶ A goddess in tree-shape suckles the King, wall painting from the tomb of Thutmose III. Graphic JK. Another astonishing image with a breastfeeding cobra nourishing the king can be found at: <https://egypt-museum.com/pendant-of-tutankhamun-with-werethekau/> (achieved 14. Nov. 2024)

Deir El-Bahari, created for the female king Hatshepsut ignore the femininity of the ruler and show her in a completely masculine body (Kügler 2017: 111-142).



Instead, Shepenupet's feminine body and attire remain visible while being suckled with divine milk by two goddesses (Hathor and Semat-Weret) transferring her royal-divine power.

3. Why should men be interested in mothering?

If you believe that your God is the one and only, and if you imagine your God as a masculine being, you may get a specific religious problem. The woman is missing, and with her the aspects of femininity that is an important part of human life experience. Even societies structured along the guidelines of Masculine Domination cannot exist without this aspect of

⁷ Shepenupet being suckled by motherly goddesses. Pair of reliefs, Karnak. Computer graphic: JK. The graphic (joining two breastfeeding scenes) relies on Ayad 2009: 125.

human reality – no matter how much they might contempt women/femininity and privilege men/masculinity. The Hebrew Bible – I am referring again to the Book of Hosea – is dealing with that problem. Not only is God not a man, ‘he’ also shows certain characters (culturally defined as) typically feminine like having mercy, sheltering, comforting, and nourishing ‘his’ son Israel (Hos 11:3-4). If one looks closer, the characteristics attributed here to YHWH are not simply feminine ones; especially *motherly* attributes are mentioned. According to my understanding, this is not by incident. In cultural systems, which follow the principles of Masculine Domination, power is gendered as masculine and therefore, women accessing power have to gradually masculinize as the cases of the Egyptian King Hatshepsut, the female Christians in Pauline communities (Kügler 2023: 32-48), Margaret Thatcher, and many others are showing. The only exception in such systems is the powerful role of the mother, essential for the existence of the offspring. The ‘idealtypisch’ mother is attributed power in a very limited social area but her power is great⁸ and it is specifically feminine. Therefore, if powerful men want to complete their power, *maternal* power is attractive, while other feminine traits are not; they stand for the minor status of women. Masculine Domination may declare it shameful for a man to adopt roles and qualities defined as feminine (e.g. emotions, sexual desire, weakness, subordination, being made for penetration), but motherly attributes can be an exception – and breastfeeding clearly is such an exception. Giving life by one’s milk, constituting family relationship was seen as such a powerful act that it was highly interesting for men and gods.

Breastfeeding Fathers in the New Testament?

1. An uncertain case: Paul breastfeeding in 1. Cor 3:2?

In 1. Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul writes:

I gave you **milk** to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly.

⁸ If one needs a historical proof for this general statement, one may look at the important role of the King’s mother in ancient Egypt, Alexander’s mother Olympias in Greece, Augustus’ mother Atia in Rome, and Jesus’ mother Mary in Christian history.

For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?² (1. Cor 3:2-3 ^{NAS}).

The quite recent analysis of Esther Kobel (2021) sees Paul here not only as the giver of milk to the Christians at Corinth but as the source of the milk he mentions. In her view, we have here a metaphorical trans self-conception of Paul who sees himself in the female role of a mother (or wet nurse) breastfeeding her children. I am, however, rather sceptical about such a reading. The simple reason is the fact that the text never attributes special quality to the milk mentioned, although it is a metaphor of Paul's first teaching at Corinth. I would even admit, that Paul adopts the powerful role of a nourishing mother or wet nurse, but the trans aspect of this metaphoric speech is low. Here, the focus of the milk trope is neither on the milk as something special nor on the nourishing mother/nurse as producing the milk. Instead, the stress is completely on the status of the addressees. By receiving milk they are characterized as babies, not able to eat the food of adults. They are conceived as immature in faith, unable to lead a Christian life by themselves. They still are dependent on the Apostle, they have to be guided and criticized by Paul, whom they should respect and obey to. As in the many other cases in the Hellenistic-Roman literature, the milk-stable-food-opposition is an expression of hierarchy. Those, who are unable to eat solid food are helpless nurslings; in their dependency on parental care they are far away from the status of an self-determining adult. Kobel's argument that "Paul is not presented here as a father who is allowed to give a milk-bottle from time to time, but is actually perceived as a milk donor" (Kobel 2021: 253; English translation: JK), is not very convincing as Paul's characterization is not the intention of the text. Neither does he want to portray himself as mother/nursing nor does he characterize the milk given to the congregation. The intention is to tell the Christ-believers that they are not yet understanding Christian teaching fully as their behaviour still is that of "fleshly" pagans. Her reference to the interpretation of the Church fathers is irrelevant as these authors usually use 1. Peter 3 (see below) to read 1. Cor 3. Thus, one should stay with characterizing Paul's milk-text in 1. Cor 3 as an unclear case, where the powerful role of the mother/nurse is implied but not more. The actual focus of the text is stabilizing the hierarchical relationship between the Apostle – having his wisdom from the Lord himself and being experienced in how to be a follower of Christ – and the freshly converted Christians at Corinth whose behavior shows that they still need apostolic correction and guidance.

2. Another uncertain case: Heb 5:12-13

The anonymous author of the Letter to Hebrews is even more focusing on the addressees, when they reproaches them by writing:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (Heb 5:12-13 ^{NAS})

Although being already a somewhat older congregation – so to say, in the age of adults – the “Hebrews” fell back to the status of being immature and helpless, and need to be taught the basics of faith again. The “solid food” is identified in V 13 as the “word of righteousness” while the “milk” is identified as the basics of faith. Yet, there is no stress on the divine quality of the milk. The origin of the milk is not mentioned in any way; thus, there is no trans aspect detectable – even less than with Paul in 1. Cor 3.

This use of the milk trope is very similar to the work of Philo, the famous Jewish author from Alexandria, who compares the first steps in philosophical learning with drinking milk as a baby, while the full study of philosophy is then eating solid food. The student of philosophy is characterized as someone progressing from a childish status to that of a mature person (cf. Philo, Agr. 1:9; Congr. 1:19; Prob. 1:160). No trans aspect is implied in using this conventional metaphor. This is true also for the pagan texts using the opposition ‘milk vs. solid food’ (Kobel 2021: 251 incl. footnote 26).

3. A clear case: Christ/his church in 1. Peter 2:2-3

Rather different, however, is the situation in the first Letter of Peter, where the status of a suckling is not seen in a negative way, and special qualities are attributed to the milk. The (fictitious) apostolic author writes:

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the logos-related and unchanged milk,⁹ that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. (1.Pet 2:1-3)

Obviously, the milk is seen here as having divine qualities in itself. This milk is unaltered, unspoiled, pure, or original, and related to the divine

⁹ My own translation of τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα (1.Pet 2:2).

logos. The attribute *logikos* does not necessarily relate to the *logos* as a person (see John 1:1). It can also refer to the *logos* as the salvific word of the gospel, the (divine) reason, mind, idea, or wisdom. Anyway, this milk is a food with redemptive power as it strengthens and fosters growth towards salvation. Here, redemption is not seen as a specific point in the past of the believers but as a process which needs support by a special nourishment which helps to strengthen the addressees and helps them to overcome all the dangerous sinful things, which V 1 is talking about.

The question is, who is delivering this wonderful food? If one relates *logikon* primarily with the gospel, the church would be a good candidate for the role of the nourishing mother or wet nurse. For most of recent readers this understanding would not imply any transgender topic as today's Christians are used to the metaphorical understanding of the church as a spiritual mother. We should, however, be careful with backdating this idea to the time of the New Testament texts. The metaphorical gender of the church originally could be masculine also. As shows the Pauline idea of the church as 'body of Christ' (cf. Rom 12:5; 1.Cor 10:17; 12:13.27), early Christians could as well use a masculine gender metaphor for their church in understanding it as the masculine body of Jesus Christ. This would imply a transgender metaphoric as the masculine church would be understood as breastfeeding.

Of course, the transgender aspect is even clearer if we understand the milk's attribute *logikon* as referring to Christ, the divine *logos* in person. Admittedly, one might ask, if this transfer of meaning from John 1:1.14 and Revelation 19:13 to 1.Pet 2:2 is justified. Yet, the following verse supports this understanding. It remembers the addressees that they already *tasted* how gracious Lord Christ is. Using ἐγεύσασθε in 2:3 the text remains in the metaphorical field of eating and drinking. Thus, talking about 'tasting before', links the milk with the gracious Lord. By that, it is insinuated that the merciful Lord is the origin of the *logikon* milk. He is the origin of life, grace and redemption. He was that when the addressees initially came to believe in him and received salvation by that (and by baptism). Afterwards, he is also the source of the grace, which supports their growth and completion in faith. Christ's post-baptismal support for the Christians is expressed by the metaphor of maternal milk. Although the believers already may be adults they are supposed to behave *like* (ὡς) sucklings. Obviously there is nothing shameful implied in behaving that way, as the motherly authority is a divine one that stands above all. This inter-

pretation clearly implies a transgender metaphoric. The masculine redeemer acts as a mother breastfeeding his children. And even if we would prefer to see the church as the source of milk, the possibility is given that the milk metaphor implies a transgender aspect.

Breastfeeding Fathers in post-Biblical Literature

1. *Deus lactans* in the Odes of Solomon

The Christian collection of hymns called the **Odes of Solomon** (2nd to 3rd century CE), most explicitly uses the trope of a breastfeeding God (*Deus lactans*) several times. For example one reads in the eighth ode a speech of the creator:

And before they yet were,
I perceived (= designed) them.
And on their faces I set a seal.
I fashioned their members,
and my own **breasts** I prepared for them,
that they might drink **my holy milk** to live by it.
I was well pleased in them and I am not ashamed of them.
For they are my work and the power of my thoughts.
Who then will stand against my work,
or who is he who does not obey them?
I willed and formed mind and heart.
and they are mine. (Ode 8,15-20; cf. Lattke 2009:111)

Here, the feminine character of the metaphor seems clear. The creator-god is perceived as a mother, who, among other favors, gives her breasts to the creatures. By that she is nourishing them and transmits her own divine character to them: the milk is holy and gives life to the children. They are not only her creatures but also the output of her powerful ideas (8,18). That means, they are a power-medium of the creator's ideas and plans; they are her proxy. Like rulers the creatures can expect obedience from everybody, and nobody can withstand them. Thus, the sucklings truly are children of the creator, who insists on their dignity by saying: "they are mine" (8,20).

Yet, this reading is wrong in one specific way as it completely ignores the transgender aspect. While translations have no chance to identify the gender of the speaking "I", the original Syrian text indicates that the speaker is masculine (Lattke 2009: 112-113). Thus, we have here the imagination

of a *masculine* creator-god who has breasts filled with holy milk and is giving life to his creatures by breastfeeding like a mother. Some commentators found such a transgender figuration of God as highly inappropriate or even disgusting. However, Lattke (2009:122-123) rightly insists, that the ode simply uses the transgender tradition of the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Judaism (Kobel 2021: 244, footnote 2). The metaphor of milk as life-giving food vividly expresses that the 'I' is not only creator and redeemer but also a graceful nourisher and loving sustainer. The receiver of this milk are not only creatures. They are children of their motherly father and share in his divine power. Therefore, the believer can praise his heavenly father for his motherly sweetness and kindness:

¹ As the eyes of a son upon his father,
So my eyes, Lord, are always toward thee.

² Because with thee are **my sources of milk** and my delight.

(14,1-2; cf. Lattke 2009: 197)

Of course, the Odes of Solomon radicalize the biblical transgender imaginary by explicitly mentioning specific female attributes in a very bodily language. This is in contrast to the biblical texts which never speak about the milk-giving breasts of God. This body language is typical for the use of the breastfeeding trope in the Odes of Solomon. A quite impressive example can be found in Ode 19.

¹ A **cup of milk** was offered to me,
and I drank it in the sweetness of the Lord's kindness.

² The Son is the cup,
and he who was **milked**, the Father,
and [the one] who **milked** him, the Spirit of holiness.

³ Because his **breasts** were full
and it was not desirable that his **milk** should be poured out uselessly,

⁴ the Spirit of holiness opened his [= the Father's] **bosom**
and mixed the **milk** of the two **breasts** of the Father.

(Odes of Solomon 19:1-4; cf. Lattke 2009: 268)

The speaker of this ode is most probably a believer referring in V.1 to his coming to redemptive faith. Lattke (2009: 270) rules out any relation to a special ritual or sacramental tradition like e.g. celebrating Eucharist with milk. And indeed, linking the text with a too specific "Sitz im Leben" would be highly speculative, as we cannot figure out anymore if and how V.1 is alluding to any actual occurrence. From the text itself it is clear that getting a "cup of milk" is a metaphorical expression for finding salvation/being redeemed. We can conclude from the broader context that the

way to redemption is faith. And most probably we are right to say that coming to redemptive faith was manifested in the ritual of baptism. But how can we know if V.1 is alluding to a kind of baptismal ritual which was linked with getting a cup of milk? It seems much better to restrict the interpretation to what is clear from the text itself.

‘Drinking the milk’ is clearly a way to redemption as the cup means the Son. It is common to identify the container with its content. Thus one can conclude that the Son is the Father’s milk (and not only the container). This means that the believer, by drinking the cup of milk, is receiving the Son. As the Son is an emanation of the Father (coming out of the Father’s breast by activity of the Holy Spirit) the believer, by hosting the Son is hosting the Father also. Similar concepts can be found already in the Gospel of John (e.g. 17:23). While the Fourth Gospel, however, indicates the unity of Father and Son by the concept of begetting, this Ode 19:1-4 prefers an androgynous concept of the Father-Son-relation. The message, however, is more or less the same. The Son is not a creation of the Father – if so he would be part of the world – but is an emanation of God, flowing out from inside the Father. As the common concept of milk as transporting the essence of someone can be supposed as cultural background for the Odes of Solomon also, the believer by “drinking” the Son participates in the divine essence of the Father. The unity between Father, Son and believer is the most appropriate ‘use’ of the Father’s milk. If the Son is hosted by the believer, the milk of the Father is not “poured out uselessly” (V.3), but has found his true purpose.

Even if we follow Latke in excluding a direct connection between receiving a cup of milk and eucharist, we have to take in account that the text is imbedded in a context, where Christians celebrated the eucharist after baptism with milk. Two important texts should be mentioned, although they do not seem to imply any transgender aspect.

A text, called *Traditio apostolica* (around 200 CE, often attributed to Hippolyte of Rome) shows that clearly. It tells about the spending of baptism:

[After receiving the offerings from the deacons the bishop]
shall say thanks:
over the bread as the image of Christ’s body;
over the cup with mixed wine as the image of the blood
that was shed for all, who believe in him;
over the **mixture of milk and honey** to indicate
that the promise given to the Fathers,

which says about the land where milk and honey are flowing, is now fulfilled.

[...] If the presbyters are not enough to spend, the deacons also shall hold the cups. They should stand in proper order: first the one with the water; then, as second, the one with the **milk**; then the third with the wine.

[...] Everyone shall taste of each cup, one after the other.¹⁰

Around the same time, end of the second century CE, the North African theologian *Tertullian of Carthage* in one of his numerous works also mentions drinking milk after leaving the bath of baptism: "Having stepped out, we enjoy a mixture of **milk** and honey" (*Inde suscepti, lactis et mellis concordiam praegustamus*) (De Corona Militis 3,3).¹¹

2. Christ as the milk of the Father (Clement of Alexandria)

Clement, a Christian author writing in the 2nd and 3rd century CE develops a highly complicated milk theology full of metaphoric diversity. Especially in his work *The Instructor* (Pædagogus) he uses the milk metaphor abundantly and in many variations. It is never easy to follow the logic of Clement's metaphorical language. However, it is not the purpose of this article to explain his theology systematically. Instead, we only ask for the transgender aspect of his figurative language. In this respect, the most interesting concept is his interpretation of Christ as the divine milk of the Father. Like the Odes of Solomon he does not hesitate to speak of the Father's breasts and the Christians suckling on these breast. Here are some examples:

Just as the fulfillment of His Father's will was food for Christ, so, for us little ones who draw **milk** from the **breast**, that is, the Word of Heaven, it is Christ Himself who is our food. Again, the Greek word for 'seeking' also means 'craving,' implying that to little ones who seek the Word the craved-for **milk** is given from the Father's **breasts of love** for man. (Paed 1.46.1)

This is our nourishment, the **milk** flowing from the Father by which alone we little ones are fed. I mean the He, the 'well-beloved,' the Word, our provider, has saved mankind by shedding His blood for us. Therefore, we fly trustfully to the 'care-banishing breast' of God the Father; the breast that is the Word, who is the only one who can truly bestow on us the **milk of love**. (Paed 1.43)¹²

¹⁰ My translation of Geerlings 1991: 267.269.271.

¹¹ Source of the Latin text: https://www.tertullian.org/latin/de_corona.htm.

¹² Source of the English translation: Wood 1954.

Both texts show that Clement is not talking about any physical breasts. Although expressed in a very bodily language, the breastfeeding of the Father only is a metaphoric expression of certain aspects of God's character. These aspects of nourishing and caring culminate in the expression 'love'. It may be a bit confusing – and if one reads more of Clement's milk texts the confusion may even rise – that Christ is sometimes the milk of the father and sometimes the breasts of the father. However, if we remember of the rule that the container stands for its content, it is clearer what is the status of Christ: Like breastmilk he is coming out of the most inner of the Father, and gives something of the Father to humanity. As the divine essence of God is love (1. John 4:8.16), the milk transmits exactly this, love. This love is not just an idea but realizes itself in the son's giving himself. Clement's milk metaphoric is analogy to the Johannine love-theology. 1: John 4 says that God "sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. (4:10 ^{NAS}) and the Fourth Gospel says almost the same: „For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16 ^{NAS}). The Son's mission to bring the divine love is completed by giving his life (John 15:13). In rewriting this connection of love, death and salvation, Clement understands the flowing of divine love-milk, which is the son, as Christ's shedding the blood for salvation. As to the transgender aspect, one should say, that the transfer of motherly attributes like breasts and giving milk to God Father, is a way to stress that God's essence is perfect love and care. Remarkably, the unity and essential equality between Father and Son is not expressed by the manly metaphor of sperm/begetting but by the feminine metaphor of milk/breastfeeding.

3. *Christus lactans* at Ephraim the Syrian

The Syrian Church father **Ephraim** (306-373 CE) is a very good example for the use of the breastfeeding trope under the influence of the Nicene Creed (325 CE) and its stressing the double nature of Christ as true god and true human. Following this Christological teaching, Ephraim uses the milk metaphor in a double way (human milk vs divine milk) and knows to combine the two aspects in one and the same text. In his fourth *Hymn on the birth of Christ* he writes:

[Christ] „was the Highest and he drank Mary's milk,
while all creatures were drinking from his richness.
He is the living breast giving breath of life.
Out of his life the dead did drink and were revived.
/.../

While then he was drinking Mary's milk,
 he himself was breastfeeding the universe with life.
 /.../
 Out of the great treasure of all creation,
 Mary gave him all she gave him.
 She gave him milk out of what he created,
 She gave him food out of what he called into existence.
 He gave milk to Mary on behalf of his divine nature.
 He sucked it from her on behalf of his human nature.

(Ephraim, Nat. 4, 149-150.153.183-185)¹³

The link between Mary's milk and the human nature of Christ and that between Christ's milk and his divine nature becomes very clear if we put the specific expressions in a table:

Human	Divine
drank Mary's milk	was the Highest
	all creatures drinking from his richness
	living breast giving breath of life
	the dead did drink and were revived
drinking Mary's milk	breastfeeding the universe with life
Mary gave him	great treasure of all creation
She gave him milk	out of what he created
She gave him food	out of what he called into existence
He sucked it from her on behalf of his human nature	He gave milk to Mary on behalf of his divine nature

I think the human-divine opposition is more than obvious in this text. As Mary is no goddess but a human being, she is giving *human* milk to her baby as it does every average woman at that time. And by doing so, she gives proof to the human nature of her son. Christ is drinking the milk of his human mother and by being weak and helpless like a baby he proves his truly human nature. On the other side he also is of divine nature and as incarnated God, he is the one who gives to his mother all she can give him. On the divine level Mary cannot be the giving one. Just in the contrary, the divine Logos (= word, plan, concept, logic) functions as the motherly source of all life! He is God Son, mediator of creation (cf. John

¹³ My English translation is based on the German text of Beck 1959.

1:3-4), sustainer and spender of all natural goods. Ephraim therefore stresses that every human gift that Mary could give to her son derived from the divine creation power. In one single text the author uses two different aspects of the milk. In relation to Mary, he stresses the human nature of mother, milk and baby. But due to the double nature of Christ he can at the same time use the metaphor stressing the supreme divine quality of the milk which the son gives.

Under the aspect of gender, we can see here how the breastfeeding trope is used in twofold way. In relation to Mary breastfeeding her child constitutes the usual hierarchical relationship between powerful spender (mother) and helpless receiver (baby). In this case the suckling role of Jesus belongs to the self-humiliation of incarnation. In this context the breastmilk has no special quality. It is just the common food for a child. On the other side, the divine breastmilk of the eternal Son is by far more important than that of any human mother. It is the divine power of creation, sustaining the universe and redeeming humans – including reviving the dead. Ephraim, uses the divine breastfeeding as an expression of honor and power. In my view, his main interest is not to effeminate Christ. Instead, the function of characterizing the eternal God Son, a masculine divine person, as giving milk is to highlight his powerful status. In this text the status is even the highest possible as the milk of the divine Son is giving life to the whole creation and even can revive the dead. Mary's ability to breastfeed her son is completely dependent on his divine milk for all creatures. By that the powerful motherly status of Mary is deconstructed. She appears as a human tool of the divine creator in the great drama of redemption.

The Function of the Transgender Use of the Breastfeeding Trope

Finally, we have to ask, what was the function of all this metaphoric transgender speaking in the past and what could be its function today.

As for the past, older interpretations simply saw a longing for joining masculinity and femininity on the level of the divine. That may be correct in a way, but it definitely is not enough as one must not ignore that the ancient

sources usually do not join complete masculinity with complete femininity. Instead, they transfer specific aspects of femininity to persons¹⁴/deities that are read as masculine. The result is not really a fusion of two sexes/genders into one new reality. It is more an adoption of selected feminine characters by masculine persons. The adopted traits are limited to those aspects of the feminine gender that are associated with power. The trans aspects attributed to God and his Christ in Early Christian texts are deriving from motherhood, i.e. from the only powerful gender role attributed to women in cultural systems following the rules of Masculine Domination – at least the only one that did not result from women's masculinization. That is not only true for the Christian religion. It applies also to the mainstream ancient religions. As power is the nature of gods, we will not find the transfer of non-power feminine characters to masculine gods.¹⁵ If for example Zeus adopts a feminine aspect like giving birth (to Athena and Dionysus), he benefits from this transgender quality as it allows him to act for his children without being dependent on the motherly power of his jealous wife Hera.



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¹⁴ For the use of the breastfeeding topic in relation to powerful men cf. Kobel 2021: 244, footnote 2.

¹⁵ In this point, there is a difference between Christianity and other religions as there are some aspects of feminizing God and his Christ in the New Testament (and later Christendom). Not only powerful-motherly aspects are transferred to God and Christ but also other elements of feminine stereotypes like weakness and being helpless (Kügler 2023: 91-100).

¹⁶ Hera suckling Heracles. Etruscan bronze mirror (detail), 4th century BCE. Graphic JK based on Pirenne-Delforge, Pironti, Geuss 2022: 260, fig. 3.2.

The powerful status of mothering Hera can be clearly seen in the mythical tradition about her divine breastmilk. It is not only powerful enough to create the milky way, but Hera's milk is also necessary for Zeus' extra-marital children to progress from demi-gods to Olympian gods, and become full members of the family of true deities (Pirenne-Delforge, Pironti, Geuss 2022: 257-264; Pedrucci 2018: 343-352).

However, this power of making a god through breastfeeding, is nothing that Zeus ever adopts in Greek mythology. In this point, Greek tradition stays behind Christian imagination. Maybe the impulse of monotheism is crucial here. The lack of a feminine partner on the divine level may lead more directly to the transfer of motherly aspects to the one God.

For the Christian transgender theology it is quite clear, that the function of transferring maternal abilities to a masculine deity is the transfer of power. As far as I understand the sources, the intention is not a feminization of God or Christ. Therefore, characteristics seen as typically feminine like weakness, inability of controlling desires and emotions, helplessness and so on, are not transferred to him. Instead, God is characterized by the power of a mother in addition to that of a father. Therefore, if we talk of an Early Christian trans image of God, the attribute 'trans' signifies that God is seen as a power transcending human power not only by quantity but also by quality. The transgender imagination of a mothering father is making an additional difference between God and humanity. God's power is not bound to the human limitations of sex and gender.

The reconstruction of this historical function is one thing, the more interesting thing may be the function, which such a trans image of God might have today.

My first and very short answer is: This depends on us. Tradition is never binding us simply by itself. We can forget it or use it. And if we decide to use it, we can still decide how. Even the most traditionalist parts of the Church do not believe in the tradition as it was, but in the tradition they reconstruct for their use.¹⁷ Of course, in former times, the transgender tradition was even used to eliminate women from church power, although Christ was venerated as mother of the faithful. The spiritual Mother Christ gives mystical birth to the Church through the side-wound (John 19:34: "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side") and nourishes children

¹⁷ Consequently the anti-modern Pope Pius IX said: "The tradition am I". <https://www.publik-forum.de/publik-forum-14-2000/la-tradizione-sono-io-die-tradition-bin-ich> (achieved 18.11.2024).

with the own blood. Since ancient times, milk was understood as a variation of blood. Therefore, the church fathers had no problem with interpreting the eucharist as receiving divine milk from Christ. Consequently, medieval theology could associate milk and blood of Christ. Church art even portrayed Jesus in the attitude of the *Madonna lactans*.¹⁸ But such veneration of Jesus as a trans mother did not break up the system of Masculine Domination. It remained the general guideline for practice in church and state. Neither did transgender, or gender-ambiguous persons find much acceptance in Christian society, nor were women admitted to leading roles. Although women were embraced as virgin saints, leaders of monasteries, mystical authors, and more, their exclusion from ordination to the office of deacon, priest and bishop persisted. Instead of ordaining women (or transgender persons) to represent Christ as mother, the leading men in church were invited to develop a spirituality of maternity. Theologians like the crusade-preacher Bernard of Clairvaux tried to integrate the motherly aspects of Christ into masculine church-power (cf. Angenendt 1997: 141-143). Thus, the male church leader should function as father *and* mother on a spiritual *and* pastoral level. Although being only a man on the level of the personal body, the ideal church-leader becomes a complete human person by developing a religious body that unites femininity and masculinity. Therefore, the leading churchman is capable of representing the masculine as well as the feminine aspects of Christ. Consequently, there is no need for women (cf. Kügler 2023: 98). That is Bernards argument, and in its basic structure it remembers a bit of Joanne K. Rowlings and others being afraid that societies' embracing of trans persons might kill feminism – according to the motto: If there are men who also are or represent women you do not need 'real' women ... (<https://www.jkrowling.com/opinions/j-k-rowling-writes-about-her-reasons-for-speaking-out-on-sex-and-gender-issues/> [achieved 18.11.2024])

However, it is not necessary to grant such a power to the past with its 'Bernardian' argument for the exclusion of women from power in church and society. Instead, we could try to do new things with old traditions. For

¹⁸ John 19:34 mentions also blood and water coming out from the spear-wound. Middle Ages exegesis understood these elements as referring to the sacraments of the Church (eucharist and baptism) and declared the Church herself to be born out of Jesus's wound as his motherly womb. As Jesus nourishes the faithful with his blood (as Eucharistic wine) the side-wound functioned also as a maternal breast (Bynum 1992: 99-211).

example, we could liberate the New Testament and Early Christian tradition from its patriarchal context. If we would free biblical and post-biblical writings from the framework of Masculine Domination we could see that women (and femininity in general) cannot exclusively be defined by motherhood. Therefore, not only the maternal aspects of femininity are worth being cherished. Instead, the whole range of traits defined as ‘typically feminine’ can be questioned if and how they contribute to a fuller human life for *all* genders. The tradition of divine self-humiliation by incarnation, human weakness, suffering and dying can empower us to play with masculine and feminine stereotypes in a redemptive way. Finally, we even could use the old transgender images of God as an invitation to respect and honor trans people today – definitely not easy for many churches. However, if we believe in the fluid power of the Father’s milk all is possible. Surprising things might happen – Ezra knows that.

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24 Toxic Masculinity and Mental Health in Zimbabwe

A Social Ethics Perspective

Clemence Makamure

Abstract

Toxic masculinity compels men to use dominance, violence, and control to assert their power and superiority. Societies tell boys to “man up” when they feel upset or justifying abusive and inappropriate behavior with the phrase “boys will be boys.” Such calls from societies make boys and men aggressively compete and dominate others and encompasses the most problematic proclivities. This paper is set to implore the socio-cultural-ethical perspective in looking at the effects of toxic masculinity to the mental health of men in Zimbabwe. The paper shall disentangle the social effects of toxic masculinity like violence, drug-related crime, anti-social behaviors, drug overdoses, lack of accountability and suicides. The paper shall also try to unravel how stigma and societal pressures, make men to refrain from seeking mental health treatment. The paper argues that toxic masculinity does not allow males to fully express themselves and their emotional needs because people may view it as a sign of weakness or vulnerability. The Afrocentric theory shall be used to probe the social cultural ethical beliefs of the African on the character and nature of boys and men. Document analysis, interviews and personal observations shall be used to glean data in this paper.

Keywords: Masculinity, toxic masculinity, mental health, ethics, social ethics, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The agility to depict virility is the supreme assignment of every man and boy the world over. Both traditional and modern societies have come up with various expectations on what it means to be a man. As a result, the behavior that men and boys always assume is set out by the societal expectations. From traditional to modern societies, men have been thought to be unemotional, power-hungry, narcissistic, and violent (Baugher &

Gazmararian, 2015). Men have been labeled as protectors, breadwinners, leaders, being quick to anger, selfish, and aggressive. All these explain what it means to be a man today. Such beliefs based on unproven biases, pressure boys and men to try to measure up to them thereby ultimately harming themselves and others in the process. Toxic masculinity compels men to use dominance, violence, and control to assert their power and superiority. Societies tell boys to “man up” when they feel upset or justifying abusive and inappropriate behavior with the phrases like “boys will be boys.” (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015). Such calls make societies make boys and men aggressively compete and dominate others and encompasses the most problematic proclivities. This paper is set to implore the social cultural ethical perspective in looking at the effects of toxic masculinity to the mental health of men in Zimbabwe. The paper disentangles the social effects of toxic masculinity like violence, drug-related crime, anti-social behaviors, drug overdoses, lack of accountability and suicides. The paper also tries to unravel how stigma and societal pressures, make men to refrain from seeking mental health treatment. The paper argues that toxic masculinity does not allow males to fully express themselves and their emotional needs because people may view it as a sign of weakness or vulnerability. The Afrocentric theory was used to probe the social cultural ethical beliefs of the Africans on the character and nature of boys and men. Document analysis, interviews and personal observations were used to glean data in this paper. The paper begins by giving finer definitions of the term masculinity, toxic masculinity, and mental health before moving on to give a synopsis on the construction of gender in human communities. Secondly, the paper delves into the issue of toxic masculinity and its traits. The paper ends by giving the effects of toxic masculinity to men’s health and the corrective measures that could be taken to rectify the problem of toxic masculinity.

Research Methodology

This research adopted the qualitative research paradigm which quite neatly fits an investigation on socio-cultural ethics and behaviours that contribute to the construction of toxic masculinity in Zimbabwe. Chikungwa (2013:76) defined qualitative research as a method of achieving insights through discovering meanings, not through establishing causality, but through improving one’s comprehension of the whole. Polit

and Beck (2004) in Chikungwa (2013) said that qualitative research is a means of exploring depth, richness, and complexity inherent in the phenomenon. Creswell (2009) said that qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning groups or individuals give to a human or social problem. Merriam (2009) in Davis (2012) reiterated that qualitative research is usually used to permit individuals to tell their stories, and researchers use this method as they are interested to know how their subjects interpret their experiences, construct their words and form meaning from the experiences. Qualitative research seeks to explore the experience of others within the context of a specific topic, and it is not concerned with gathering statistics (Alaogun & Fatoki, 2009). This implies that qualitative research develops multiple perceptions to understand the complexity of the participants' reality and how meaning is constructed (Easterby et al., 2008).

The qualitative research paradigm was handy in situating the issue of toxic masculinity and mental health and it provided in-depth knowledge on meaningful insights about the construction of masculinity in societies in both the traditional and modern societies. It was also helpful in navigating the socio- cultural ethical perspectives in looking at the effects of toxic masculinity to the mental health of men in Zimbabwe. The qualitative research method was informative in unlocking the social effects of toxic masculinity and how such masculinities create stigma and societal pressures which make men to refrain from seeking mental health treatment. The freedom enabled by qualitative research methods allows for a relaxed interaction between the researcher and the participants, thereby allowing the participants to reveal more information. The qualitative research method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to find out how people in different contexts feel, think, behave, and express themselves in response to the issue of masculinity (Bellenger et al, 2011). On the same note, Bogdan and Taylor (1975), cited in Marable (2011:47), said that qualitative research produces descriptive data, that is, people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. Such data cannot be obtained when using other research designs that do not give time for the researcher to mingle with the participants. The method allowed the researcher to mix with the participants and understand how participants respond to questions and the meaning they give to some words and actions. Words and actions are very important in understanding what participants are saying, hence the qualitative research design was a plus in this study. According to Polkinghome (2005), qualitative research methods are useful in the

generation of categories for understanding human phenomenon, and the investigation of the interpretation and meaning that people give events they experience. The researcher had the opportunity to obtain feedback on the study's findings from participants since the qualitative research design is human centered. The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to source data and seek participants' opinions on findings about the issue of masculinity. The study comprised of twenty participants who were chosen from various areas in Zimbabwe which include Mbare, Budiro, Dzivarasekwa and Kadoma. These areas were selected on the basis of activities like farming, mining, and informal trading. The reason for such activities was that they are normally associated with hard working which in turn prompt the abuse of drugs to cope with the hard work. The selected participants were labelled A to T. The participants were selected using the snowball approach.

This research is anchored on the lenses of the Afrocentric theoretical framework which is also called Afrocentricity. The theory calls for the study and examination of phenomena from the standpoint of Africans as subjects rather than objects (Asante, 1998). The theory pleads for "collective consciousness" among African people (Asante 1998, 2007; Johnson 2001:408). The theory regards history, ethics, culture, and philosophy of African people as critical in shaping one's slant to reality and understanding of the world. The Afrocentric theory is helpful in exploring toxic masculinity in Zimbabwe and situating its effects to men's mental health in so far as it tries to understand life settings of the Africans and their way of socialisation. The Afrocentric theory is advantageous in this research because it can stand as "both a corrective and a critique" (Asante 2007:27) to the attitudes and actions of current and future generations pertaining to toxic masculinity and mental health. As a critique, the Afrocentric theory could challenge Africans to express their agency through seeking home-grown solutions tailored to the mental health needs and predicaments of the African continent at large. Afrocentricity challenges the male superiority complex which places men at the centre, whilst the legacy of women is marginalised. The theory is an attempt to "obliterate the mental, physical, cultural and economic dislocation of African people by thrusting Africans as centered, healthy human beings in the context of African thought" (Asante 2007:120).

Conceptual Analysis

As a way of trying to bring the main purpose of this research to the fore, there is need to come to terms with the meaning of the concepts like masculinity, toxic masculinity, and mental health.

Masculinity

The term masculinity, like any social concept, cannot be defined with exactitude. The term is multifaceted in so far as manhood as a practice is different across time, cultures, and individuals. The meaning of masculine as Kimmel (2000b) pointed out, vary from one society or culture to another over time. The term masculinity has its roots in many thousands of years ago, when early *homo sapiens* used strength, to exert dominance or take charge of a particular area or territory (Hoffman, 2001). During that time, the most successful male *homo sapiens* were those who could fight and hunt. In those times, aggression, ruthlessness, and physical strength constituted the most desirable characteristics (Hoffman, 2001). As history continued, these behaviours spelt how dominant male rulers were to gain power by conquering others. Masculinity is defined as a configuration of practices that are organized in relation to the structures of gender identities and relations (Connell, 1987). According to Good, Sherrod and Dillon, (2000), the term masculinity refers to the roles, behaviours and attributes seen as appropriate for boys and men in each society. In short, masculinity refers to society's expectations of males. Kimmel (2001) stated that masculinity refers to the social roles, behaviors, and meanings prescribed for men in any society at any time. This implies that every society has got its own expectations on males and such expectations define what it means to be a man or boy. Kimmel further defined masculinity as qualities and attributes regarded as characteristic of men. Connell (1995:115) identified four different types of masculinity which are hegemonic, subordinate, complacent and marginal. Masculinity is socially constructed from childhood. As a boy grows up particularly in African countries, he is told that "a man is a sheep; he does not cry," (Hossain et al., 2014). This means that he should be brave and resilient. As reiterated by one interviewee, African societies believe that "a man is a black iron" (Hossain et al., 2014). This means that he is physically strong. The African communities are replete with statements like "When a man has got hold of a female animal"—circumlocution for a girl or a woman "he does not let it go"; "a man is the sky, he covers what he has seen," i.e., he is secre-

tive; “a man hides his limp,” i.e., he does not show his weaknesses (Hossain et al., 2014). By implication these proverbs suggest that women, through whom men are defined, are timid, physically weak, and vulnerable, passive, and unreliable since they are not secretive.

Men fear to be labelled a woman. There is nothing more demeaning and contemptuous than portraying a man as a woman among the Africans (Berke and Zeichner, 2016). In African perspectives, a man can only become a man by not becoming a woman, who is fainthearted, powerless, emotional, and weak (Berke and Zeichner, 2016). From this analysis then it suffices to define masculinity as a gendered category or identity that feeds on the differences in what women and men within a particular culture can or cannot do (Berke and Zeichner, 2016). Masculinity can also be perceived as the sum of men’s socially fabricated and gendered characteristic practices at work, with their families, in their communities, in groups and institutions (Edley & Wetherell, 1995:95). Due to its association with culture, masculinity is averse to universalistic categorizations. Be that as it may, there are many masculinities as there are many cultures, classes, times and places, and their contours change over time (Morrell, 1998:607). The notion of masculinity is susceptible to power and this power aspect finds expression in what is called hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, according to Morrell (1998:609), is a form of masculinity that is dominant in society. As Morrell (1998:608) further suggests, hegemonic masculinity is renowned for its predilection for the oppression of women, as well as the subordination of other versions of masculinity, while bestowing power and privilege on men who embrace it.

Masculinity is a belief that there are some essential or natural features that characterises the categories of men and women. As Connell (2005) noted the same categories are attached to social and symbolic meanings, which are rooted in social structures and in cultural and religious ideologies of most communities. Chitando (2008:51) states that ‘while being male is a biological factor, the process of expressing manhood is informed by social, cultural, and religious factors. It is thus vital to mention that masculinities form a recurrent subject in the writings of Chitando. As a way of trying to deal with the dangers of masculinity, Chitando (2008) critically examined the issue of unsafe sexual practices perpetuated by men in some of his writings. He challenges men to adopt more humane practices and encouraged solidarity with women as something that both African Traditional Religions and Christianity have to offer, and which is a necessity for the transformation of masculinities in Africa. Other relevant

works include “Patriarchy and the Political Economy of the Biblical Culture” (2010) in which Chitando discussed the patriarchal culture that produced the Bible; how biblical resources and religion have been used to maintain patriarchy; and finally, how certain Bible passages can be used to reconstruct masculinities. These ideas were further developed in *Challenging Masculinities: Religious Studies, Men and HIV in Africa* (co-authored with S. Chirongoma, 2008); in the introduction to *Redemptive Masculinities* (co-edited with S. Chirongoma, 2012) and “Religion and Masculinities in Africa: Opportunity for Africanization” (2013) Chitando further interrogates the issue of masculinity. Rather, Chitando has analyzed masculinity in relation to a variety of issues. Some of these include sexuality, HIV & AIDS, violence, fatherhood, history, health, religion, culture, education, power, conflict, and violence, as well as issues relating to theory. So, “masculinities,” represents a broader and more abstract concept, they go beyond men’s bodies or physiology (manhood) to include masculine expressions by females. This means that masculinity is socially and psychologically constructed.

Toxic Masculinity

The term toxic masculinity has been gaining traction in the past few years. This term refers to the dominant form of masculinity wherein men use dominance, violence, and control to assert their power and superiority (Connell, 1995). The term points to a particular version of masculinity that is unhealthy for the men and boys who conform to it, and harmful for those around them. Toxic masculinity is represented by qualities such as violence, dominance, emotional illiteracy, sexual entitlement, and hostility to femininity (Sheppard, 2023). Curtis, (2019) clearly stated that in modern society, people often use the term toxic masculinity to describe exaggerated masculine traits that many cultures have widely accepted or glorified. This harmful concept of masculinity also places significant importance on ‘manliness’ based on strength, lack of emotion, self-sufficiency, dominance, and sexual virility. Connell (1995:116) stated that toxic masculinity refers to the notion that some people’s idea of “manliness” perpetuates domination, homophobia, and aggression. This shows that toxic masculinity involves cultural pressures for men to behave in a certain way that is likely to affect boys and men in some fashion. Toxic masculinity is a concept used to define unhealthy and often traditional characteristics or attributes associated with men (Curtis, 2019). Toxic mascu-

linity has also been defined as an attitude or set of social guidelines stereotypically associated with manliness that often have a negative impact on men, women, and society in general (Sheppard, 2023).

The term toxic masculinity has had many variations. In the works of Chitando, (2008, 2010) terms like transformative, liberating, and redemptive masculinities, are generally used as opposites to dangerous and harmful masculinities. For Chitando (2010) “transformative masculinities” refers to an undertaking to produce masculinities that can transform the world into a gender equitable one. “Liberating Masculinities” implies masculinities that are freeing subjects of patriarchy, and it is capable of freeing men from the negativity that characterises their behaviour (Chitando, 2008). The term “redemptive masculinities” is said to distinguish masculinities that promote or give life in the face of harsh conditions (Chitando, 2010). So, the meanings of these concepts overlap and in this research all the terminologies are understood as opposites to the phrase ‘toxic masculinity’.

Toxic masculinity thus refers to hegemonic masculinities which have projected men as having power over women and children. It is a social construction which poses men as more powerful than women (Messer, 2004:78). Rather, through social engineering, facilitated by religion and culture, men have been portrayed as leaders across various cultures and this presents us with toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity is thus a concept used to define unhealthy and often traditional characteristics or attributes associated with men. Men are often defined by outdated and unfounded stereotypes like being unemotional and power-hungry, being narcissistic and violent. All these create an unhealthy and unrealistic understanding of what it means to be a man today. Men resist help so as not to appear weak or to waste others’ time with “minor” issues (O’Brien et al., 2005). This was also expressed by most of the small-scale gold miners in Kadoma during interviews.

For many men, identifying with and fulfilling a breadwinner role is a crucial part of how they demonstrate their masculinity. For example, maintaining one’s role as a worker and breadwinner was an expressed goal of male workers in mining areas of Shurugwi, Kadoma and Kwekwe during the data collection period. The same was expressed by aging farm workers in local farming areas in Kadoma.

Mental Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2004) states that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. WHO (2004) also emphasizes that preserving and restoring mental health is crucial individually and at a community and society level. WHO (2004) intellectualizes mental health as a state of well-being where in the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community (World Health Organization, 2004). The Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention (2021) posited that mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. This shows that mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. Mental health also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. This infers that when one experiences mental health problems, one's thinking, mood, and behavior would be affected. Rather, it can be inferred from the definition that mental health is all about how people think, feel, and behave. WHO (2022) defined mental health as a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. This surmises that mental health is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Keyes (2014) identifies three components of mental health which are emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. For him, emotional well-being includes happiness, interest in life, and satisfaction; psychological well-being includes liking most parts of one's own personality, being good at managing the responsibilities of daily life, having good relationships with others, and being satisfied with one's own life. Social well-being, for Keyes, refers to positive functioning and involves having something to contribute to society, feeling part of a community (social integration), believing that society is becoming a better place for all people (social actualization), and that the way society works makes sense to them (social coherence) (Keyes, 2014).

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (Slade, Amering, Farkas et al., 2014). It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins indi-

vidual and collective human abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right which is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development (Slade, Amering, Farkas et al., 2014). According to Gross and Muñoz (1995), mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders and it exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes. This implies that mental health conditions go beyond mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities to include other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm. People with mental health conditions in most cases are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being.

There are various determinants of mental health such as emotional skills, substance use and genetics. Exposure to unfavourable social, economic, geopolitical, and environmental circumstances including poverty, violence, inequality, and environmental deprivation increases people's risk of experiencing mental health conditions. Even though mental health risks can manifest themselves at all stages of life, those that occur during developmentally sensitive periods, particularly early childhood, are predominantly detrimental. The way men and boys are socially constructed in African communities is one of the chief determinants of possible mental health in their lives (Keyes, 2014). The construction would create toxicity which would in turn affect the way men and boys behave and perceive life. Failure to neatly fit in the spectrum expected of a man or boy greatly affects the mental health and in most cases the detriments are sour.

So, as Lamers, Westerhof, Bohlmeijer, et al (2011) said, mental health is a dynamic state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with universal values of society. For them the basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles; and harmonious relationship between body and mind characterise imperative mechanisms of mental health which contribute, to varying degrees, to the state of internal equilibrium. Heinz & Kluge (2011) rightly said that the basic ability to function in social roles and to participate in meaningful social interactions is an important aspect of mental health and particularly contributes to resilience against distress.

Toxic Masculinity, social ethics, and mental health in Zimbabwe

Growing up in the cultural and ethical values of Zimbabwe entails assuming certain behavioural patterns which the various societies have prescribed and labelled as proper. Most communities in Zimbabwe, like any other African communities, have their own expectations when it comes to being male. There are basic traits that are expected from a boy as well as from men. Such cultural and ethical expectations spell out what it means to be male. At the same time there are basic traits that are expected to be exhibited by every girl and woman as they navigate the communities in their day-to-day life experiences (Keyes, 2014). Men have long been shown as strong, aggressive, and emotionally incompetent, tough, daring, heterosexual and dominant. The expectations of manhood are instilled at an early age, and they spell out the African social ethics. Directions like “man up,” “grow a pair,” “don’t be like a woman”, “be a real man” and “don’t cry” constitute the social ethics of the Africans and are ingrained in boys’ psyche, instilling a fear of looking weak or cowardly (Keyes, 2014). All these provide a characterization of what masculinity is expected to be. As a way of making sure that these attributes manifest in boys and men, they are enforced through socialisation, media, peers, and a host of other knowledge imparting models in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Resultantly, such social ethical values play an important role in influencing the behavioural pattern of many boys and men. In some instances, the different expectations for what being a man or boy entails can often leave someone feeling lost and confused about how they should act. In fact, a male who does not display enough of the set traits may fall short of being a ‘real man’ (Messer, 2004:79). Expectations of masculinity may come from parents, teachers, and peers through socialisation or social ethics. While the intent is usually without malice, these sentiments plant a seed of social misalignment. The men who genuinely internalize the idea of masculine expectations can face some troubling issues in life after failing to sustain the same expectations. Rather, failure to fit into the expectation box often creates isolation, frustration, and emotional toll in boys and men. In most cases it leads to suicide, violence, drug and substance abuse, depression, rejection, and self-denial.

The other aspect which creates toxic masculinity in Zimbabwe is sexual potency which is often associated with masculinity across various cultures. Men have been socialized to associate the state of manhood with

competence in sexual matters. Many men are “under social pressure to behave in a domineering and sexually aggressive way” (Walker, Reid, and Cornell, 2004:24). The “becoming” moment of most men is defined in terms of the first sexual encounter with a woman. Unfortunately, failure to prove and maintain sexual potency would make men to engage in acts like violence, rape, and sexual coercion. So, the link between masculinities and heterosexual performance is deep seated. Men’s failure to live up to the societal expectation of the “breadwinner” tag drives men to resort to violence; ‘drinking substances which get them to ‘sticking`, abuse of drugs and substances as well as participating in all sorts of ills as a way of brushing off the thinking about their failure.

According to Dolan (2011); Creighton & Oliffe (2010), men due to toxic masculinity are more likely than women to engage in risky activities, such as smoking, alcohol overuse and unsafe sexual practices. Berger et al., (2005; see also Addis & Mahalik, 2003) argued that toxic masculinity makes men to be less likely than women to engage in health seeking and health promotion behaviours. In the same vein, O’Brien et al. (2005) reveal that men are less likely to attend to serious health and body symptoms and more likely to believe that it is necessary to endure high degrees of pain and conceal mental health issues because of toxic masculinity.

Data presentation

There are various effects of toxic masculinity and in most cases, they affect the mental health of men and boys in Zimbabwe.

Need for control

Toxic masculinity encourages men to assert their power and dominance. We see this often in domestic relationships. Boys and Men believe that they should always have the final say in their relationship, and boys and men believe that they deserve to know where their girlfriends or wives are and who they spend time with always (Levant & Wilmer, 2011). During the interviews Participant C said that *ini semurume ndine mvumo yekuziva kwaswera musikana wangu kana mudzimai nekuti ndinogona kufunga kuti ndini ndoga paari iye aine zvikomba kunze* (As a man I have the right to know where my girlfriend or wife is because I may think that I am the only person in her life while she has other lovers beside me). Participant B said, it is the duty of a man to know where his wife is and who she

spends time with because women can easily be led astray by friends or boyfriends. A man is a man when he can control his wife said participant D. Participant D further said that *murume haafanirwi kupindwa muhomwe nemukadzi. Kana murume akangodheererwa chete mukadzi anohura ari pamba pako* (a man should not be overruled by a woman. Once the woman rules over a man, she will prostitute while at the homestead of the man). So, one of the detrimental effects of toxic masculinity is the eager and zeal to control women. Failure to perform up to this expectation would cause men and boys to be violent to their wives or girlfriends. The violence would be the last resort to force the woman to be under men's control.

Promiscuity

Toxic masculinity praises men for having multiple sexual partners while expressing disgust at women who do the same. In the interview, Participant A in Dzivarasekwa in Harare said *murume ibhuru uye bhuru rinonekwa nemavanga pamwe nekugona kutunga* (a man is bull and bull must be recognized by having scars as well as being aggressive). This implies that due to toxic masculinity, a man is a man when he has many lovers. In the same way, a bull may have multiple lovers, so is a man expected to behave in African communities. To show manhood, one must have many wives or lovers, and no one should ask why. Interviewee H said *murume asingahuri mukadzi* (a man who is not promiscuous is a woman). Interviewee M said *bhuru rinotunga rinoonekwa nemuvare* (an aggressive bull is seen by wounds). This suggests that to show his manhood, a man can even get sexually transmitted diseases and it is not a problem. This shows that toxic masculinity makes men to participate in promiscuous behaviour to prove their manliness. In turn, such behaviour would have dangerous effects on their mental health. They would feel obliged to prostitute and have many wives/sexual partners because the inclination to prove manhood is always a man's prime action.

Refusing to help with household duties

Toxic masculinity makes men and boys to reject roles traditionally considered "women's work." There is a strong belief in many communities in Zimbabwe that boys shouldn't be taught things like cooking, cleaning, and childcare. These duties are feminine in nature. Any man or boy seen doing these duties would be regarded as a woman. In some cases, men who do household chores are said to have been given love portions (*kudyiswa*). Toxic masculinity does not allow or tolerate *kudyiswa* (given love

portion). If a man is thought to have been given a love portion, they would try to find an antidote to make him vomit the portion for him to become a normal man. So, a normal man according to toxic masculinity, is one who does not help in household chores or childcare. When a baby is crying, they would say the mother should take care of the child. In Shona we have a statement which men normally say when a child is crying- *mwana haana mai here uyo* (does the child not have a mother). This further suggests that toxic masculinity has totally removed men from the household chores and childcare. This implies that the mental faculty of man has been greatly affected by the spells of social construction that men should not be involved in household chores and childcare. Anyone seen doing them is regarded to be mentally disturbed by the love portion.

Risk-taking

Taking risks and suppressing fear is another feature of toxic masculinity. As a result, men are more likely to abuse drugs, drive dangerously, gamble, and engage in violence. Boys and men are less likely to engage in a “helping behavior” – They cheer up when they witness bullying. When other men are fighting- even when animals fight men cheer up. When a man is beating up a woman, cheerful word like *rova hure iro, uraya kuti asakudherera, yaaa ajaira kutonga varume, rova* (beat the prostitute, kill her so that she will not disrespect men, they are used to overrule men at home) are pronounced. Men and boys take pride and cheer when they watch animals like bulls fighting. For them watching animals fighting is synonymous to men being able to swallow challenges and stand to the expectations of the African social ethical values of a man. Toxic masculinity causes men to be reckless with their behaviour, action and even language. Men feel they have the freedom to make sexual comments when a woman passes by, they think they are inclined to say vulgar words amidst women even at work. When men fail to live up to the expectations of what being a man is, they may start abusing drugs and substances. During my visits to the drug abuse ‘bases’ in Mbare and Budiro in Harare, the drug abusers (Interviewees E-M) echoed the same sentiments that, *kuti ukan-gamwe nhamo dzeupenyu unobva wangomwa zvinodhaka wobva wasticker* (becoming unconscious) *zvako* (For a man to forget the hardships of life, you just must take drugs and then you become unconscious). The phenomenon of “sticking” is becoming so rampant among the youths today in Zimbabwe. This has been attributed to failures to make ends meet in

the harsh economic conditions in the country. To opiate the harsh conditions the youths spent more time under drugs. They have even created the so-called 'bases' where they recruit many other youngsters and influence them to abuse drugs and substance. At the 'bases' there is also sexual abuse and violence, and they spend most of the time quarrelling and fighting. They do not bathe, and the surroundings are dirty. This exposes men and youths to health hazards. The interviewees at the camp in Budiriro said *pano ndopamusha pedu, tikarova mogo redu toswera takasticker kana nzara hatiinzwi* (this camp is our home, once we take drugs, we become unconscious, and we will not even feel hungry since we will be under the influence of drugs). Participant N further said that *ndikaenda kumba ndonetswa kuti enda unotsvaga basa, vanofunga kuti ndoriwana kupi* (when I go home, I will be told to go and find employment, where do they think I will get it). In the drug 'bases' manhood is seen in being able to take more toxic substances and drugs. They call this 'dry bonding'. The phrase was taken from the field of construction where it means building without mortar. In their language at the 'base' it means taking strong stuff or drugs without diluting them. Men and boys are more likely to dress unprofessionally than women and girls because of the risk-taking behaviour of men and boys caused by toxic masculinity.

Sexual aggression toward women

Men who have been influenced by toxic masculinity are more likely to believe they are entitled to women's bodies, leading to sexual comments and harassment toward women and a higher likelihood of believing rape myths (Kiss et al., 2015). Men think they are free to loudly comment on the dressing, structure, or shape of a woman. When a woman or girl passes by and is wearing a mini skirt, men and boys feel free to shout words like *hure* (prostitute), *ende une gumbo wena* (you have nice legs), *hona gumbo iro* (see how nice her legs are). Such inclinations are a result of toxic masculinity which has spelt out that men have freedom of speech, expression, and language.

Stoicism

A cornerstone idea of toxic masculinity is that showing emotion is weak and feminine. Men are expected to be mentally and physically tough without breaking. Boys and men encourage each other or the self to "man up" or "power through pain" (Assante, 2007). When a man realises that his woman has been unfaithful, he is likely to commit a crime for example,

killing himself, the woman, or the partner etc. Such an act shows manhood. They brave up when in a tough situation due to toxic masculinity.

Violence

Toxic masculinity encourages men to use aggression and violence to assert their dominance and masculinity. Men can use violence to get respect. In early childhood, violence and aggression are used to express emotions and distress (Levant and Wilmer, 2011). As males grow up, aggression shifts to asserting power over another, particularly when masculinity is threatened (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001). Masculine ideals, such as the restriction of emotional expression and the pressure to conform to expectations of dominance and aggression, heighten the potential for boys and men to engage in acts of violence like bullying, assault, and physical and verbal aggression (Feder, Levant, & Dean, 2010).

As Berke et al. (2016) puts it, aggression can result when a man or a boy experiences stress stemming from self-perceived failure to live up to masculine or social ethics expectations or when they maintain normative masculine expectations. The resultant experience of discrepancy and dysfunction in men and boys is the expression of negative venerated characteristics of masculinity, such as violence toward others (Pleck, 1995; Richmond & Levant, 2003). Males who are involved in intimate partner violence (IPV), clearly show a prime example of dysfunction, and reflects the feelings of distress they experience in situations that threaten their idealized masculine identity (Baughner & Gazmararian, 2015). Understanding the connection between negative social ethics, toxic masculinity and violence clearly shows that there is need to retool the concept of social ethics to ensure males' mental health is addressed (Dworkin, Treves-Kagan & Lippman, 2013).

Glorification of Unhealthy Habits

The other effect of toxic masculinity and social ethics in Zimbabwe is the glorification of unhealthy habits. This glorification brings the conception that "self-care is for women" and men should treat their bodies like machines by skimping on sleep, working out even when they're injured, and pushing themselves to work beyond their physical limits to provide food on the table. Toxic masculinity discourages men from seeing doctors and seeking medication early when they are sick (Kimmel, 2000b). Toxic masculinity may also stress that it's inappropriate for men to talk about their feelings. Avoiding conversations about problems or emotions has often

evoked feelings of isolation and loneliness in men and in the process affecting their mental health. The moment men actively avoid vulnerability, act on homophobic beliefs, ignore personal traumas, or exhibit prejudice behaviours against women, many larger societal problems come into play. So, masculinity becomes fragile through its rigidity. When masculinity fails to hold the panoply of gender expressions, sexual cultural orientations, or feminine strength intrinsic to any society, it will lash out, or risk crumbling under the weight of its own culturally constituted expectations (Abramsky et al., 2011). Men are perceived as more violent than women. Most violent criminal offenses are committed by men. As mental health experts always say, every behaviour is connected to a need, men often become violent to protect their vulnerability. The impact of toxic masculinity is far-reaching. It can lead to more violence against women, as men may feel entitled or validated in their abusive behavior. Unhealthy masculinity is also incredibly detrimental to men. Men who display traits of toxic masculinity are more likely to experience isolation, poor health, and unhappiness.

Inability to Express Vulnerability

Unfortunately, many men aren't taught how to be vulnerable, how to overcome trauma, or how to embrace every aspect of themselves (American Psychological Association, 2018). Society often puts pressure on men to "be men" in the traditional sense, rather than simply be human. For men, vulnerability is often neglected, dismissed, or combated. When men push down emotions, ignore feelings, or dismiss their feminine traits, their mental health will suffer.

Drug and Substance Abuse

Activities like smoking and drinking are associated with men. They are leaders of drug abuse 'bases' today. When men realise that they have failed to live to the expected standards of being a man, they may start abusing drugs to pacify the thinking about the failure. Some of the failures men fear include: failure to excel in education; failure to secure employment; failure to secure a firm relationship etc. These were expressions of most 'base' members in Budiriro during data gathering.

A desire to demonstrate self-reliance may also influence men's request for and acceptance of assistance in relation to their health and safety needs. Williams indicates that men are less likely to comply with medical treatments (Williams, 2003) while Courtney argues that men resist medical attention as a display of "toughness" and self-reliance (Courtenay,

2000). Similarly, Charles and Walters argue that dominant norms of masculinity influence men's perceptions regarding their health, risk surveillance and medical management strategies (Charles & Walters, 2008). During the face-to-face interviews with some men in Highfields in Harare it was highlighted that men are tough and can endure pain hence they should almost always man up. To help them become more of men, they abuse drugs and substances.

From what has been submitted so far in this research, toxic masculinity from a social ethics perspective can affect the mental health of a man who does not meet the expected 'phantom' masculinity claims but feels pressure to do so. Traditionally, the pursuit of mental health treatment by men has received minimal support. Expectations of strength or stoic expression may prevent men from reaching out to a mental health professional when they need it. Men and boys forced to cling to these traits often experience adverse effects and may face mental problems, such as:

Depression – Failure to fit into the masculinity toolbox causes boys and men to experience a constant low mood and loss of interest in activities and events that they previously enjoyed (anhedonia) (Hoffman, Borders, & Hattie, 2000). They can feel prolonged periods of sadness or extreme sadness. The Mbare drug 'base' has many boys and men in this category. At times they go for days without food while under the influence of drugs.

Poor social function – Boys and men who are affected by toxic masculinity and are involved in drug and substance abuse would become antisocial (Barker, Ricardo, & Nascimento, 2007). In most cases, they withdraw from the mainline society and form what they call 'bases.' Here they spend most of the time smoking and abusing drugs and substance. Their ability to socialise with others would be totally extinguished. They would be seeming to be lifeless (sticking) most of the time.

Stress – Toxic masculinity may also lead to stress as one fails to meet the standard expectations of being masculine. Too much stress would in turn lead the boys and men to be involved in crimes, abuse of drugs and at times they become violent.

Ways of Combating Toxic Masculinity and Mental Health

There is need for modern society to sludge towards breaking the stigmas that perpetuate toxic masculinity. Other possible ways include recognizing that masculine ideals of the past are not permanent and infallible, seek out opportunities to help and heal, advocate for change and helping to create a more inclusive society by supporting women. Teach and model accurate gender roles and responsibilities; lead our families and communities effectively; creating marketing campaigns to change social and cultural norms around masculinity; educating parents on the damage that physical punishment and humiliation techniques do to kids; educating parents on the importance of creating safe and nurturing environments; educating parents on the importance of teaching kids to regulate their emotions and promoting healthy relationships that are free of abuse and violence.

Since toxic masculinity has a great effect to the mental health of the males in Zimbabwe, there is need to combat mental health problems. According to Assante (2007), the best possible way would be to get professional help when need is necessary, connecting with others, staying positive, getting physically active, helping others, getting enough sleep. The other ways include deepening the value given to mental health by individuals, communities and governments; and matching that value with commitment and engagement, reshape the physical, social and economic characteristics of environments in homes, schools, workplaces and the wider community so as to better protect mental health and prevent mental health conditions; and strengthen mental health care so that the full spectrum of mental health needs is met through engaging with boys and men on the dangers of toxic masculinity.

Conclusion

The idea of becoming man enough has been and is still the main goal of every boy child from birth. A sheer hearing of the phrase 'man up' has helped much to exert pressure on boys and men to act in certain ways which may be detrimental in their lives. The zeal to portray virility has made men to embrace toxic masculinity and this has had major effects to the mental and physical health of men. Men in both traditional and modern societies have often been defined by unfounded stereotypes, which create unhealthy and unrealistic characteristics and behaviours. Men have

been thought to be unemotional, power-hungry, narcissistic, and violent (World Health Organization, 2017). Men have been dubbed as protectors, breadwinners, leaders, being quick to anger, selfish, and aggressive. All these explain what it means to be a man today. Such beliefs based on unproven stereotypes, pressure boys and men to try to measure up to them thereby ultimately harming themselves and others in the process. Toxic masculinity compels men to use coercion, force, violence, and control to assert their power and superiority. Societies tell boys to “man up” when they feel upset or justifying abusive and inappropriate behavior with the phrase “boys will be boys.” The assumption of toxic masculinities often leads boys and men to engage in such activities like drug and substance abuse, overworking to prove that they are strong, becoming violent and abusive to their female counterparts. Other effects of toxic masculinity include depression, being anti-social, stress and many others. Toxic masculinity is seen through homophobia, craving for unwarranted control over others, promiscuity, risk taking and failure to uphold household chores. All these have had a great impact on men’s mental health. Hence, there is a close relationship between toxic masculinity and mental health.

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25 Triumphalist-futurity theologies in Africa

An essay in honour of Ezra Chitando

Julius Gathogo

Abstract

Triumphalist-futurity theologies in the twenty-first century cannot be viewed simply as American prosperity theologies of success and self-esteem, as the former goes beyond the concerns of the latter. Rather, they address the African agenda from an all-embracing perspective, a phenomenon that cuts across denominational divides. Seen as one of the leading African voices, Professor Ezra Chitando comes out as the proverbial Giraffe that is able to see far and caution the other bona fide members of the 'jungle' to escape the emerging 'fires' and keep hope buzzing with a triumphalist futurity in mind. In this treatise, I argue that despite the lack of 'confession', Chitando is within the paradigm of triumphalist-futurity perspective, as he addresses the African agenda with great urgency and confidence. A review of Chitando's works will demonstrate that the twenty-first century trajectory in theo-social discourses is hypothetically bending towards triumphalist-futurity motif. Is this an Afro-optimism trend that is informing the current trends, and is this the 'ideal' hour for this? Do they have the capacity to act contextually and eventually deliver the promise? Methodologically, this write-up does not focus on Chitando as a person, rather, it strives to survey the various trends that agree with his overall motif in order to understand triumphalist-futurity theologies in Africa.

Keywords: Ezra Chitando, Triumphant theologies, trends in African theologies

Introduction

Besides his gallant efforts to reconstruct masculinity, Chitando comes out strongly in other themes that demonstrate the African agenda of the twenty-first century, which revolves around futurity and triumphalism. In using the terms 'futurity and triumphalism', I am referring to the quality and prospects of Africa striving to remake itself; as in the case of the Psalmist (68:31) who looked forward to an "Ethiopia [Africa that would]

soon stretch forth her hands unto God” and usher in a better world. This agenda of remaking Africa, as seen in African scholarship, is consciously journeyed from a holistic perspective, a phenomenon that admits and identifies the challenges and prospects of the region. It means that African scholars in religion and theology, and other disciplines, are indicatively striving to convert African challenges into opportunities that will remake a better world. Within the triumphalist-futurity motif of remaking Africa, Chitando’s works addresses diverse concerns, ranging from history, culture, music, theology, to the phenomenology(ies) of religion. His role as a theology consultant with the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA), of the World Council of Churches (WCC), is another major step in promoting the African agenda and its diverse concerns, that includes pandemics. Certainly, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) scare has demonstrated the magnitude of pandemics as serious concerns that will always need well-read and passionate consultants like Chitando (Gathogo, 2022a). Among the themes that are well captured in his works are: Women and leadership, Gospel music, pandemics and hope for Africa, religion and development, theology and religion in times of crisis, religion and inequality in Africa, value of African indigenous resources, sustainable development in Africa, health rights and religion, politics and music, religion and climate change, transformative masculinities, and Coronavirus in Africa (Chitando, 2023). Chitando (2023) also addresses the themes of sexuality and religion, ecology of human rights, human diversity in the face of HIV, Ubuntu theology, race and sexuality, Christianity and queer film, religion and security, healing and reconciliation, bible and gender troubles in Africa, Zimbabwe-African religions, Africanizing the discourses on homosexuality, multiplying in African initiated churches, theology of fruitfulness, Pentecostalism and masculinities, methodology in the study of religion, and reconstruction and identity among others (Chitando, 2023). Chitando has also authored and co-edited books on: *Redemptive masculinities* (2012), *Troubled but not destroyed* (2009), *Acting in Hope* (2007a), *Living with hope* (2007b), *Singing culture: A Study of Gospel music in Zimbabwe* (2002), *Politics and religion* (2020a), and *Religion and development in Africa* (2020b), among other futuristic themes. In all these works, he expresses his faith in overcoming Africa’s inherent challenges. Hence, like most of his contemporaries, he addresses the African agenda from a triumphalist-futurity perspective.

In Chitando's *Living with hope* (2007b) and *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV and AIDS* (2007a), he expresses his conviction that Africa will overcome the worst pandemic in human history. This promise will be delivered, as churches appreciate the significance of working with men as critical partners in addressing troubled masculinities. Can men use their masculinities in a manner that will help in erasing HIV & AIDS rather than worsen the situation? This afro-optimist approach is also reiterated in his other publications as in the case of his research article on: "A new man for a new era? Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, masculinities and HIV pandemic" (Chitando, 2007c). In this, he promotes his futuristic and/or triumphant approach when he strongly argues that mitigating factors such as patriarchy, demeaning ideologies against women – including stereotypes, poor language use, idiomatic and general references will give way to usher in promising and a healthy society. In his book chapter on "Religious Ethics, HIV and AIDS and Masculinities in Southern Africa," Chitando (2008) encourages men's solidarity with women as the panacea for transformation of troubling masculinities that threatens our co-existence. This he does by methodologically drawing from both the African indigenous religion and the Christian faith, a phenomenon where a dialogical approach is utilized in their bid to transform a given society.

An examination of the overall themes inherent in Chitando's (2023) works reveal that his approach is futuristic, hopeful, realistic, urgent, and sometimes radical. He views the envisaged change as necessarily demanding a radical approach, a phenomenon that is certainly triumphalist futurity in motif. This idea of radical approaches in African scholarship has been in the African market, albeit in different perspectives, since the early 1970s. For in as early as 1972, Samuel Gakuhi Kibicho (1932-2012) successfully demonstrated that "there is radical continuity in African religion even when it interacts with the Christian faith" (Gathogo, 2017:118). Chitando's (2023) uniqueness and originality however is in his emphasis on radical change in our handling of diverse concerns, as in the case of masculinity; and indeed, the radical deconstruction of masculinity in order to usher in a more progressive society. Another recurrent theme in Chitando's (2023) works is in reference to his belief that Africanization holds a future for better religio-cultural systems in Africa. This makes him an outstanding believer in African resources as critical raw materials for Christianity and general survival, just as John Mbiti (1969) saw it earlier. Chitando however goes beyond this with his triumphalist-futurity motif

that appears more urgent than in Mbiti's (1969) case. A reading of Chitando works, in some areas, especially in his passionate bid to deconstruct masculinity and usher in gender justice for societal health, makes him a 'radical reformer' of our times. It is like Chitando (2023) is telling his readers: "Look here fellow African scholars! Our house is on fire. Our masculinities are set on the wrong premise. Let us swing into action and change it today, we cannot afford to wait. Things are bad but transforming troubling masculinities will repair the damage now." This applies in most of his thematic write-ups. The urgency to fix the myriad of problems facing Africa are clearly enumerated in his works; a phenomenon that is largely seen in African scholarship in the twenty-first century.

In Chitando's (2023) works, Africa will overcome her present challenges; and is not at crossroads; neither is it suffering from ideological bankruptcy. In Chitando's (2023) view, Africa is not under confusion nor has it lost her direction. A major turning point for Africa is thus sounded in Chitando's works. Jesse Mugambi (1995:161) appears to express this triumphalist-futurity perspective when he noted thus:

In Africa today, we are in great need of hope. Despite all the very demoralizing and frustrating propaganda, we need to affirm that tomorrow need not be like yesterday. Today, in faith we can commit ourselves to work for a better tomorrow, knowing that with God nothing is impossible. ... We are witnessing events in Africa and elsewhere which we dared not anticipate only a few years ago. We dare affirm that since the God we worship is the creator and the director of all human history, tomorrow need not be like yesterday. In God's plan, there is nothing special about being powerful or being powerless. The most powerful can lose their power, and the powerless can be empowered by God's will. But this is possible only if love and hope are continually cemented by faith.

As with other scholars of religion and theology in Africa, Chitando (2023) begins by identifying the problem and/or spotting out the background of the problem. In learning from his works, Africa's triumphalist-futurity theologies begin by boldly accepting contextual needs and concerns (Gathogo, 2018; Mugambi, 1995), and subsequently employs local resources in their bid to address identifiable gaping holes. Mugambi (1995:160) pinpoints the African challenges when he states thus:

Africa today is portrayed in all the mass communication media in the whole world as a continent which is in deep crises, crises from which we are told, it cannot recover. It is faced with a food deficit;

it is the [hungriest] continent in the world. It is faced with a debt crisis; next to South America it is the most indebted continent. It has the highest level of illiteracy in the world and half of the world's refugees are Africans. Yet Africa is also portrayed as the most religious continent in the world. ... Is this religiosity authentic and genuine, or is it superstition arising from despair? ... Hope is a psychological necessity for the healthy maintenance of human community and individuality. Without hope, life cannot be sustained. Hope makes all the difference.

Beyond Africa, Martin Luther King Jr., (quoted in Gathogo, 2001:90), the African American Civil Rights leader of the 1960s, expressed his triumphalist-futurity approach to the black concerns of the time when he said, thus:

I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere [Africa inclusive] can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits. I believe what self-centred men [and women] have torn down, other centred men [and women] can build up. I still believe that one day humankind will bow before the altars of God and be crowned triumphant over war and bloodshed, and nonviolent redemptive good will proclaim the rule of the land. 'And the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and every man shall sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid' [Mic. 4:4]. I still believe we shall overcome.

Futurity and triumphalism as socio-ecclesial concepts have been in Africa since 1888 when the Rev. Dr. Mojola Agbedi (1860-1917) defected from the American Baptist Church. Out of his afro-optimist conviction, he immediately founded his Native Baptist Church (now the First Baptist Church) in Lagos, Nigeria, which then appeared like an impossible mission (Gathogo, 2022b). By 1914 however, his church had more than twice as many adherents as the European missionary-dominated church that he had defected from. Born as David Brown Vincent on 10 April 1860 in Western Nigeria, he had great faith in African resources as the panacea for the African woes (Gathogo, 2022b). As early as the late 1800s, he was a great believer in the so-called Ethiopian prophecy and/or Ethiopianism which is rooted in Psalm 68:31 (which says, "Princes shall come forth out of Egypt; Ethiopia [Africa] shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God"). In a nutshell, Ethiopianism advocated for an Afro-centric Christianity which prioritizes the African agenda holistically. This embrace of African culture, and the quest for an African agenda, drove him to change his

name from David Brown Vincent to Mojola Agbedi in the 1880s (Gathogo, 2001:75-76). Chitando's (2023) work is in continuum with the above trajectories.

Singing from one hymn book?

As noted in Isabel Phiri & Julius Gathogo (2010:1), Africa in the 21st century “appears to be theologically singing out of one hymn book despite their varied melodies,” which expresses plurality as God's economy for the world. Additionally, with analogous “concerns for all African theologies (African Women's Theology, African Theology, Black Theology, Theology of Reconstruction), Africa is set to rebuild its many walls without further theological balkanization or fragmentation” (Phiri & Gathogo, 2010:10-11) and indeed triumphalist-futurity as the driving motif are visible in their respective articulations. Further,

African theologians in the twenty-first century have all united to address the common challenges that the continent is grappling with. These concerns include HIV and AIDS, xenophobia, gender injustice, tribalism, poverty, moral regeneration, corruption, re-emerging forms of dictatorship, and global warming among others (Phiri & Gathogo, 2010:10-11).

Certainly, Africa in the twenty-first century is characterized by triumphalist-futurity theologies that strive to contextually and effectively deliver the promise, despite heresies seen among some oral theologies. In the case of African Women's theologies, their triumphant goal of deconstructing patriarchy in order to build a two-winged society of men and women is a triumphant agenda (Phiri 2004). Similarly, the goal of reconstruction theology is to deconstruct afro-pessimism and usher in Afro-optimism that will be critical in Africa's quest to rebuild the many broken walls. These broken bulwarks are visible as in the cases of ethnic and xenophobic walls, economic meltdown, gender disparities, and theological marginalization, among others. Seen from this perspective, these triumphalist-futurity agendas are specific, achievable, measurable and relevant (Farisani, 2003; Gathogo, 2008a). In sociology, an agent is an individual who engages with the social structure. Hence in seeking to deconstruct the superstructure of patriarchy, for instance, African women theologians are engaging pa-

triarchy as a social construct rather than as a biologically determined phenomenon (Phiri, 2004). This means that the battle must be won by appreciating the triumphalist-futuristic agenda of postcolonial Africa.

In turn, triumphalist-futurity theologies seek to go beyond the pains that are evident in African historiographies (refer to slavery, conquests, negative portrayals and labelling, betrayals, colonialism, neocolonialism) in order to usher in a fulfilled society that is exultant across the various life domains (Farisani, 2003; Phiri, 2004; Gathogo, 2008a). It endeavors to usher in an all-rounded society that puts emphasis on our common humanity and shared prosperity among other pursuits. The emphasis on Ubuntu (humane and caring) theologies in the last part of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century is a clear pointer to this (Gathogo, 2008b). Further, Pentecostalization and secularization of ecclesiastical discourses, irrespective of denominational orientation, could be informed by the quest for futurity and the resultant triumphalism in the vicissitude of life. David Bosch captures the historical reality of shifting paradigms when he says:

Small wonder that, particularly in the nineteenth century, the adjective poor was increasingly used to qualify the noun heathen...The patent needs of the poor heathen became one of the strongest arguments in favour of mission. The glory of God as missionary motive had first been superseded by the emphasis on his love. Now there was yet another shift in motivation – from the depth of God's love to the depth of fallen humanity's pitiable state. Love has deteriorated into patronizing charity (cited in Küng and Tracy, 1989:12).

Seen from this perspective, the victory of the cross, and the passion of Christ in overcoming the odds becomes a critical inspiration in the triumphant-futurity theologies. St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 27 that everything will be put under Christ resonates with the Psalmist's (24:1) words that the earth is the LORD's and everything else in the world, including people who live in it. This means that the supremacy of God over creation must be stamped in our daily discourses triumphantly. In acknowledging the triumph of the Cross of Christ, our understanding of the broadness of the kingdom of God over earthly rulers, cosmos, aesthetics, politics, economics, kinship, ethics, and our religious affiliations becomes evident.

Another notable observation is that Africa of the twenty-first century is largely characterized by the calls for relevant theologies, reconstruction,

new curriculum, better infrastructures, better education systems, better teaching and assessments, better economies, and better health facilities and administration. It is also characterized by focus on rejuvenated political and social systems, new approaches to environmental preservation, triumphant ecclesiology, and above all triumphant theologies that are geared towards problem solving (Phiri & Gathogo, 2010:10-11). In turn, triumphant theology refers to a broad phrase that incorporates the diverse African theological agendas of the twenty-first century; and this includes the concern for prosperity, poverty, ecology, reconstruction, gender justice, education, theological revisionism, indigenous wealth, terrorism, afro-Pentecostalism, and moral-ethical challenges among other concerns. To an extent, triumphalist-futurity theologies in post-colonial Africa are Christological in the sense that they acknowledge the triumph of the Cross of Christ, the future hope as seen in the act of resurrection, as the real starting point. And as St. Paul says on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:14ff:

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

In other words, the triumph of the cross, and the passion of Christ in overcoming the odds becomes a critical inspiration in the triumphalist-futurity theologies.

Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem

Africa's triumphalist-futurity theologies may draw some inspiration from the triumphal entry of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on what Christians know today as Palm Sunday. It took place on a Sunday before the crucifixion (John 12:1, 12). Indeed, the story of the triumphant entry is one of the few incidents in the life of Jesus which appears in both the Fourth Gospel (John 12:12-29) and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-40). Christians celebrate Palm Sunday as a recollection of this momentous occasion. As triumphalist-futurity theologies in the twenty-first century seek to overcome Afro-pessimism that has existed in tropical Africa and as their respective scholars get overwhelmed when addressing the myriad of problems befogging the tropical Africa, Jesus's twin acts of the triumphal entry to the city of Jerusalem and the act of resurrection are the key selling points. As a theological motif, triumphalist-futurity perspective goes beyond the diverse paradigms noted earlier, as the African agenda is addressed more urgently and/or optimistically, or is it radically as Chitando (2023) implies? Put differently, while theologies of liberation in Africa insist on the urgency of liberation; and while feminist theologies insist on the need to dismantle the superstructure of patriarchy, triumphalist-futurity theologies go beyond one specific agenda and addresses the broader mission of the church in Africa. In other words, triumphalist-futurity theologies take the context as the determinant scope for theology. It is the context that determines the method and area of research, as the agenda embedded in triumphalist-futurity motif is more urgent and 'radical' (Chitando, 2008). As such, triumphalist-futurity theologians do not seek to be experts in specific areas such as the New Testament, Old Testament, Pauline theology, Johannine literature, gender theology and so on; but rather, context and/or societal needs dictates the theological trajectory. Seen in this way, triumphalist-futurity theologies can be historical, and oral historical. They can also be in the form of storytelling, case studies, individual research, and can also be in the form of reflection on critical continental 'generalities' that affects the mission of Christ in Africa.

In line with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem amidst tensions and threats (Matthew 21:1-17), triumphalist-futurity theologies are treatises of courage. This courage is exemplified in the way they confront contextual concerns such as societal morality, violence, reconstruction, liberation, food security, gender justice, education, African historiographies, Afro-

Pentecostalism, HIV & AIDS, ecology, cosmos, reconciliation, culture, politics, economics, and race equation among other concerns.

Through exegesis, we draw several lessons regarding Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem as recorded in both the Fourth Gospel (John 12:12-29) and the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:29-40). First, courage is the norm of theologizing and not an option. One cannot theologize aptly if the inner courage is lacking; and to theologize means going beyond words by swimming into the broad oceans of ideas and practice. Hence Jesus himself was courageous. As a matter of fact, his three years of action-oriented ministry were punctuated by tensions that obtained, and which did not blur the vision of remaking the world for the better. These tensions mounted as a result of his methodology that ushered in unique teachings that differed significantly with those of the Jewish teachers of the law. His teachings were contextually sensitive, triumphalist-futuristic, eschatological (a hybrid of realized and unrealized eschatology), and intellectually stimulating. Jesus's theological trajectory was largely revolutionary and transformative, as opposed to the transactional approaches of the Pharisees, Scribes, Sadducees, and the teachers of the law, among other groups. Such methodological considerations put him in direct confrontation with the status quo.

Equally, Jesus's miraculous healings on the Sabbath, his communing with sinners, and his other unorthodox theo-social activities further helped in building more tensions and confrontations with the religious leaders in Jerusalem (Gathogo, 2015). In the nature of things, his triumphal entry was the match that pulled the trigger that eventually led to his crucifixion, death, and the more triumphal resurrection. In other words, his triumphant entry was a grand match to the proverbial Lion's Den, a phenomenon that required courage of purpose. Certainly, critiques would wonder whether this was genuine courage or miscalculation altogether. As in the case of Aristotle (Gathogo, 2018), Jesus demonstrated that a courageous person does not fear the most fearful, harmful things of which death is the greatest.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 3.6, Aristotle noted that courage is the virtue, which is the mean state with regard to fear, and to a lesser extent, confidence. In light of this, Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem during the daytime which was riskier, rather than coming under the dark of the night; hence more discrete. He could have come, lodge in the city, and eventually curb the tension and anger of the religious leaders. Nevertheless, his courage would not have allowed it in any other way. As he entered the city, he could

see and hear people shouting: "Praise God for the Son of David! Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God in highest heaven!" (Matthew 21:8-9). As he made this triumphant entry, some of the people were walking ahead of him; others walked behind him; and were excitedly appreciating his earthly mission. As they advanced, they were met by a fresh crowd pouring forth from Jerusalem. Of the latter, St. John (12:12-29) records that they came out with Palm branches in their hands, as if to salute a King with the symbols of his triumph (compare Revelation 7:9). In a courageous defiance to the Pharisees who wanted him to rebuke his highly spirited multitude, Jesus responded: "If they keep quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers!" (Luke 19:40). This courage gave him confidence to acknowledge the praise of the people. Comparatively, the courageous aspect in the triumphalist-futurity theologies gives it confidence to address our contemporary concerns. Hence Christological inspiration is a critical factor in the progression of triumphalist-futurity theologies.

A second major lesson that we can draw from Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, for triumphalist-futurity theologies in Africa of the 21st century, is the fact that he appealed to the inner person, the heart. Considering that the horse was a symbol of a warrior ready for battle, Jesus contrasted this by demonstrating that some methodologies had lost fashion, and an appeal to the heart rather than the might was the vogue. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, 3:16, noted: "I pray that out of the riches of His glory, he may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being." He develops the theme of the inner person as opposed to the physical person further in Romans 7: 22 when he says thus: "For in my inner being, I delight in God's Law." In learning from the Christological appeal to the heart, service to creation becomes a critical area.

Afro-Pentecostalism

Perhaps, emphasis on triumphalist-futurity theological trajectory is more visible in Afro-Pentecostalism than in the so-called missionary churches and their theologians. In my view, the money and wealth factor are major items that makes afro-Pentecostalism theology, which is triumphalist-futuristic in motif, distinct from the 'conventional' African theologies. Characteristically, their teaching on giving is more elaborate than in the case

of the mainline churches (read Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists etc). Their emphasis is that giving, especially tithing is a sure way of getting one's socio-spiritual breakthrough. This breakthrough can be in the form of healing, finance, marital or promotion in the working places and other favours from God. Biblical verses, such as Malachi 2, are elaborately expounded to build the case for life breakthroughs.

In particular, the triumphalist-futurity theology of the Redeemed Gospel Church (RGC) on matters regarding money, wealth, and general prosperity is well defined. A case in point is Bishop Wilfred Lai, its Secretary General, and pioneer Kenya televangelists. He noted their church's position on matters regarding prosperity, thus:

You were created to succeed in everything... The Word of God does not allow you to be sick. God never intended you to be sick... You should never continue the way you are; where you are today is not where you should be. I refuse to be a pastor of people that are going nowhere, of sick people. I refuse to pastor you when you are sickly, that's not where you belong. I refuse to be a pastor of poor people (shouted twice) ...Jesus came for the poor, but didn't come to leave the poor [more] poor. He came to get the poor out of poverty (Lai cited in Gathogo, 2011:147).

Characteristically, these Pentecostal churches are exuberant in their mode of worship – a phenomenon which is spiced by lively dancing, sophisticated music gadgets with melodies akin to contemporary 'secular' music. The mode of delivering sermons is such that the pulpit is avoided or removed from the church altogether. The poignant and/or alluring preacher in his or her 'tailor-made' sermon appeals to the psychological as well as the material needs of the assembly. Due to his or her beguiling presentation, the preacher holds the audience captive for more than an hour. In appealing to vulnerable people in search of fulfilment in their lives, the emphasis on "God doing a new thing in our lives" (Gathogo, 2022d:1) is clearly evident in Afro-Pentecostalism. This is clearly addressed by Philip Jenkins (2002:128) who cites Richard Shaull thus: "in Pentecostalism, poor and broken people discover that what they read in the Gospels is happening now in their midst."

In view of this, the Pentecostal approach reflects basic principles of market capitalism – a phenomenon that is driven by demand of popular consumerism. In this model, what sells best is produced, packaged, and supplied. Being associated with America's self-esteem and prosperity theologies without an African touch smack of weakness on their part, as their

alien tag has, at times, worked against them. An authentic African theology, as in the case of Chitando (2023), need not appear like a foreign tune that is called out by the one who meets the costs for it. A theology whose focus is on material well-being stands on a crossroad as a myriad of challenges in tropical Africa are beyond material poverty. Interestingly, Gideon Githiga (2023), in his book: *Ethnocracy as the pitfall of democracy in Kenya*, argues strongly that the main challenge in Africa is not poverty but ethnocracy. Ethnocracy is seen as the tendency for leaders to favour their own kinship in running the government and in the redistribution of material resources, a phenomenon that breeds protests, general discontentment, poverty, quests for democracy, and at worst, violence. Githiga (2023:311) ends his book thus: “the fight against ethnocratic leadership is the third liberation which all the stakeholder groups must be part of.” In working out a triumphalist-futurity theology of Afro-Pentecostalism, an appreciation of the root cause of poverty of both laity and the clergy is a critical step forward.

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies will always insist on traditional methods of theologizing and/or engaging academia, namely specialization. They will view triumphalist-futurity theologians as scholars who provide mixed bag of theologies rather than appreciating specialty in designated areas in academia as the way to go. Such critiques will easily tend to ignore the fact that John Mbiti graduated with a PhD in New Testament (in 1960s) only to discover that his many years of studies abroad and his academic discourses were risking irrelevance if he did not address himself to the African context and its futuristic concerns (Gathogo, 2022c). He wrote generic books such *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), *Prayers for African Religion* (1975a), *Introduction to African Religion* (1975b) among others in order to address the context. Besides that, Mbiti’s academic prowess would have nosedived or faded altogether if he failed to honour the context and situation in theologizing. John Mbiti then founded African theology and especially the inculturation strand and became an authority (Gathogo, 2022c).

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies will always insist on traditional methods of theologizing and/or engaging academia, namely strict

insistence on the area of specialty rather than multidisciplinary perspectives of the twenty-first century. Chitando (2023) reaches out to the world of scholarship from a multidisciplinary perspective. Critiques may find triumphalist-futurity theologians as providing a non-specialist approach to theology, with some non-trained ‘readers of the Bible’ insisting on ‘deliverance’ as the key. On that account, they can be accused of lacking theological discipline.

Critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies will need to recall that Thomas Aquinas was dismissed as a modernist by traditionalist (Augustinian) theologians. He was later ‘understood and his theology became universally acceptable.’ As Hans Küng remarks:

[Aquinas] was recalled from Paris by his own Dominican Order, eventually subjected to a formal condemnation as a representative of a ‘new theology’ by the competent ecclesiastical authorities in Paris and Oxford, but then given protection by his Order. It was only just before the outbreak of the Reformation that his *Summa Theologiae* won acceptance outside his Order: the first commentary on the whole *Summa* was that of Cardinal Cajetan, classical interpreter of Aquinas and opponent of Luther; and it was only Francisco de Vittoria, Father of Spanish scholasticism, who in 1526 introduced the Thomistic *Summa* as a textbook at the University of Salamanca; Louvain followed later with two professorships in Aquinas’ theology and seven-year courses on the *Summa theologiae*. Up to the present century (1924) 90 commentaries on the whole *Summa* had been published and 218 on its first part (Küng cited in Küng & Tracy, 1989:12).

In dealing with the critiques of new approaches, methodologies, or ideologies, it is critically important to always take into account the words of Thomas Kuhn, the father of the paradigm shifts:

The invention of other new theories regularly, and appropriately, evokes the same response (i.e., resistance) from some of the specialists on whose area of special competence they impinge. For these men (sic) the new theory implies a change in the rules governing the prior practice of normal science (Kuhn, 1962:7).

Again, the idea of triumphant theologies, a phenomenon where our theological research is geared towards problem-solving, and is contextually sensitive, needs a global appeal as learning has to be sourced across the oceans. Ubuntu (humane and reaching out to others) philosophy is certainly the major concept that drives Africa to learn from the world, just as

the obvious reciprocity is based. Further, as noted in Hans Küng, ideas start from somewhere or someone, after which it reaches out to the rest of the larger community. Küng states:

Not only in theology, but in natural science, a new model at first has only a few and generally younger advocates: Copernicus was 34 when he worked out the heliocentric system. Newton, the founder of classical physics, formulated the law of gravity when he was 23. Lavoisier, founder of modern chemistry, was 26 when he deposited with the secretary of the Académie Française his famous sealed testimony expressing his doubts about the dominant phlogiston theory. Einstein presented the special theory of relativity at the age of 26. Among theologians: Origen, the first scholar in Christendom to undertake methodical research, at the age of 18 took over successfully the Christian education work among intellectuals in Alexandria, which had been neglected after Clement's departure. Augustine was 32 at the time of his 'last' conversion and Aquinas was not yet 30 when he began in Paris his commentary on the sentences in the spirit of Aristotle. Luther was 34 when he published his theses on indulgences (Küng in Küng & Tracy, 1989:26).

Generally, African theologies and African philosophies have been dismissed in some quarters as non-existent, yet it is ironically said that Africa is the cradle of humanity. Isn't this a contradiction? To argue on the catholicity of theology, as opposed to context as a starting point in theology, is an error that has ruled the global market for some time. As noted in Gathogo (2008b:44),

[This] takes us back to our introductory definition In other words, is there any philosophy in the concept of *Ubuntu*? Can we talk of 'African philosophy'? Are Africans capable of philosophizing quite in the same way as we talk of Greek philosophy or Indian philosophy or Chinese or even European philosophy? Is the traditional African mind capable of philosophizing [and/or thinking theologically]? ...This debate however started over 200 years ago when the renowned German idealist, G.F. Hegel (1770-1831), in his famous *Philosophy of History* ignored Africa, as he [wrongly] argued that Africans were incapable of philosophizing [and/or thinking through issues of concern]. [However] there is no tenable logical basis for his polemical position, which denied [indigenous] Africans, philosophy, culture, history or even religion.

Further, if triumphalism is naively taken to mean the tendency to celebrate in a proud manner that is insensitive to 'others' then it can be seen as anti-Ubuntu (humane and sensitive to others' welfare). Nonetheless, triumphalist-futurity theologies are not about celebration for 'achievements so far made' but about theological discourses where future hope of overcoming odds in Africa is the key. Its futuristic dimensions implies that Africa, and its scholarship, is not celebrating the present but looking forward to a triumphant future.

Conclusion

The chapter set out to celebrate Chitando as a theo-socio-philosophical think tank in modern day Africa and a scholar who has contributed immensely in triumphalist-futurity theologies of Africa. By triumphalist it means that these are hopeful theologies that strive to address myriad of missiological themes and concerns so as to build and rebuild Africa. 'Futurity' refers to the vision of a better day ahead. In other words, Chitando, like other key theologians, tackles African concerns and/or the African agenda with confidence (triumphantly) for a better future. Likewise, Mugambi (1995:160) has insisted that Africa, despite its negative portrayal by mainstream media, needs to focus on a theology of hope. More than ever before Africa must focus on her future as "hope makes all the difference" (Mugambi, 1995:160). With Chitando handling critical themes such as troubled masculinities, troubled but not yet destroyed Africa, patriarchal challenges, HIV & AIDS, the COVID-19 pandemic, insecurity, race relations, and bad politics among others from the triumphalist-futurity perspective, he becomes a major source of reference in a continent that is caught between a rock and a hard place. Nevertheless, critiques of triumphalist-futurity theologies of Africa may view them as merely hopeful without a candid plan of addressing the myriad of African challenges, noted above. There is the danger of being seen as employing "prosperity gospel" a phenomenon where we blindly embrace the "feel good" experience that lacks genuine relationship with God and contextual realities. As noted above, Chitando comes out as a realistic theologian and/or scholar of religion and history who propounds the African agenda with clarity, intellect, and from a well-informed position, hence he can be relied upon. His pan-African agenda is worth celebrating.

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26 Rallying Africa (especially African men) for HIV response

A bird's eye view of the theological work of Ezra Chitando on HIV & AIDS

Love more Togarasei

Abstract

That Africa has been hardest hit by the HIV pandemic is beyond doubt or debate. What Africa has done in response still needs documentation and analysis. Although AIDS related deaths have decreased significantly since the introduction of anti-retroviral therapy and its free roll out by many African governments, the pandemic remains a cause for concern and worthy of attention. HIV remains a serious health and developmental challenge. What role has Africa played over the past more than 30 years of living with HIV & AIDS? This is the question this chapter attempts to address by focusing on the work of one African man, Ezra Chitando, of the World Council of Churches and the University of Zimbabwe. Specifically, the chapter considers how, through socially engaged scholarship, he has rallied African biblical scholars, theologians, philosophers, religious studies scholars, and all other stakeholders (especially focusing on men) to respond to HIV.

Introduction

In the mid to late 1980s and while reeling under its usual problems of poverty, war, ethnic tensions, lack of clean drinking water, poor health services etc, Africa was struck by the most devastating pandemic, perhaps the worst known in history: HIV & AIDS. The words of Festus Mogae, the third post-independence President of Botswana (1998-2008), at the 2001 United Nations General Assembly, although referring to the Botswana context then, best capture the impact of this pandemic, “We are threatened with extinction... People are dying in chillingly high numbers. It is a crisis of the first magnitude” (Mogae, 2021). What Mogae said about Botswana was very true of most of the countries in sub-Saharan and particularly Southern Africa. In most of these countries, in the 1990s and early

2000s, HIV incidence rates stood at an average 20% and HIV & AIDS related complications contributed about a third of all deaths.¹ With this impact, despite the limited resources, Africa had to make urgent responses. One thing that HIV taught people was that life is not compartmentalized. HIV knew neither medical doctor, professor, bricklayer, economist nor farmer. All were infected and affected in the same manner; all were killed by it in the same manner. This non-discriminatory nature of HIV & AIDS taught humanity to mobilize against the pandemic in non-discriminatory ways. The word ‘multi-sectoral’ was employed in calling all to respond to HIV & AIDS. In its National Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS (2003-2009), the Botswana Government, for example, declared HIV & AIDS a national emergency committing itself to, “... an aggressive, comprehensive and expanded *multi-sectoral* (emphasis mine) and multi-level response to fight the epidemic and to curb its impact on society (Republic of Botswana, undated:11). The multi-sectoral approach was an acknowledgement that AIDS affects people from all sectors of life and that all are therefore invited to respond. Though a medical problem, in effect, the pandemic had social, economic, gender, religious and other accompanying and debilitating effects. Men, women, and children were called to respond. Medical doctors, traditional doctors, teachers, and farmers were called to respond. One man who responded to the duty called by HIV & AIDS was Ezra Chitando of the World Council of Churches and the University of Zimbabwe, to whom we focus our attention in this chapter. Chitando made a theological response that has continued to this day. Between 2003 and 2017, he published 10 books, 8 book chapters, 17 refereed journal articles and other monographs on HIV & AIDS.² He has conducted several workshops and presented numerous papers at conferences all over the world. Work on HIV has taken him all over the world to such countries as Botswana, Ethiopia, Canada, Mexico, Togo, Denmark, Sweden, etc. Using his publications as sources of data, this chapter gives a bird’s eye view of the works of Ezra Chitando on HIV & AIDS. Specifically, I focus on how he has rallied all, but especially men, to respond to HIV. I look at the strengths and possibly weaknesses of his call for an African response to

¹ In 2000 UNAIDS reported, “In seven countries, all in the southern cone of the continent (of Africa), at least one adult in five is living with the virus. In Botswana, a shocking 35.8% of adults are now infected with HIV, while in South Africa, 19.9% are infected, up from 12.9% just two years ago” (UNAIDS Report, 2000:9).

² We refer to a number of these publications in this paper.

HIV. An interpretive approach using thematic analysis is utilized. Data for this chapter is mainly derived from Chitando's publications between 2003 and 2017 when he focused much of his publications on HIV & AIDS. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I look at Chitando's call to the HIV & AIDS ministry. This is followed by a general bird's eye view of the themes addressed by Chitando in his works on HIV & AIDS. The third section then focuses specially on his call for transformative masculinities as a positive response to HIV & AIDS. The fourth section evaluates the call for transformative masculinities before a conclusion is offered to wrap up the chapter.

Ezra Chitando's call³ to HIV & AIDS ministry

I shall avoid considering Chitando's early life and history here. It could be a worthy cause for there is a possibility that this shaped his engagement with HIV & AIDS, gender and gender-based violence in his later life. I leave this out here since space does not permit. Be that as it may, it is important, however, to mention that Chitando holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree earned in 2002 from the University of Zimbabwe in the field of the study of religion. The title of his thesis is: *The appropriation of African Traditional Religions in African Theology: a phenomenological investigation* (Chitando, 2002). It is important to note that by the time Chitando completed his doctoral degree in 2002, he had already published significantly but in the field of the study of religion. For example, his first publication, a journal article published in 1997, was about Western approaches to the study of religion in Africa (Chitando, 1997). Other articles that followed were mainly on the phenomenology of religion.⁴ One can tell even in these early works, an inclination towards engaged scholarship and an interest in issues of the socially and politically marginalized. For example, in his third work published in 1998, Chitando had already

³ I use the term 'call' here not with its religious connotations but simply to mean involved. Musa Dube (personal communication), however, believes Chitando's involvement deserves to be called a 'call' (even in the religious sense of the term) considering the passion, commitment and scale of his work on HIV and AIDS response in Africa that is comparable to that of biblical prophets.

⁴ For example, E. Chitando, "Phenomenological Approach to the Study of Religion in Africa: a critical appraisal", *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 11:2 (1997), 1-21.

started self-introspection. A specialist in the discipline of the Phenomenology of Religion, he began asking whether this discipline was liberative or oppressive in the Zimbabwean context (Chitando, 1998). With this interest in issues of liberation and social engagement, Chitando was unlikely to avoid getting involved in the most pressing problem of his generation. Musa Dube, a contemporary of Ezra Chitando and herself a trail-blazer on HIV & AIDS scholarship in Africa, tells us how difficult it was for one not to self-introspect during this age. She writes:

As I went about with business as usual, teaching the Synoptic Gospels from a feminist, narrative, historical or redactional criticism and the like, there came a point that this academic approach began to become artificial and strange even on my tongue. I began to ask myself: why am I talking about historical contexts of Jesus, redactional criticism, narrative and all this stuff and skirting the main issue in this context and the gospels; namely sickness and healing. I began to ask myself a question, which every student also had in mind; namely, if Jesus can heal this much, why can't Jesus heal us of HIV/AIDS in our nation and the world? (Dube, 2002).

It appears Ezra Chitando also started asking the same questions as he went about teaching Phenomenology of Religion. Thus in 2002, he began paying attention to the subject of HIV & AIDS in an article entitled, *AIDS education curriculum for theological colleges in Zimbabwe: an exploratory essay* (Chitando, 2002). This article came, thanks to the work of Musa Dube who helped organize the first HIV and theological education workshop in Zimbabwe at Harare Theological College early in 2002. Musa Dube was then the WCC theological consultant for the programme, Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa (later Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy) (EHAIA) for Anglophone Africa, a position that Chitando would soon inherit a year later. Chitando himself was the Local Organizing Committee chairperson for this HIV and theological education workshop. Much of the HIV & AIDS work by Ezra Chitando was published after he had assumed the position of Theology Consultant for the EHAIA.⁵ Once he accepted the call to HIV ministry, Chitando exerted

⁵ E. Chitando (personal communication) associates his 'call' with the 2003 Writers Workshop at Mokolodi (Botswana) that resulted in the publication of the book, *Africa Praying* (M.W. Dube *Africa Praying*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003) and the debates and influences of some of the writers, for example, Musa Dube, Isabel A. Phiri, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke, Gideon

much of his academic efforts to HIV & AIDS work. Of the 24 books he authored, edited or co-edited between 2003 and 2017, 14 addressed the subject of HIV & AIDS and/or sexuality. Of the 115 refereed journal articles and book chapters, 26 addressed the subject of HIV & AIDS and/or sexuality.⁶ But what HIV & AIDS themes did he address?

Themes addressed by Chitando in his works on HIV & AIDS

Generally, responses to HIV & AIDS have been in the call for prevention, counseling and testing, treatment and care and support of the infected and affected. In promoting these responses, scholars and activists have addressed socio-political, economic, cultural, gender and other issues that have tended to stand in the way of fighting HIV & AIDS.⁷ Chitando addressed these and other themes we attend to in this section.

Call to mainstream HIV & AIDS in theological education

From his very first article on HIV & AIDS, Chitando's major contribution was to call people in religion to respond to the pandemic. He mainly addressed two religious institutions: theological training institutions and the church as an institution in Zimbabwe (Chitando, 2002). In 2004, Chitando took the call beyond Zimbabwe, now calling theological institutions in Africa to wake up and respond to the reality of HIV & AIDS. He identified challenges faced by theological institutions to mainstreaming HIV & AIDS education, suggesting measures to overcome them (Chitando, 2004). For Chitando, theological training institutions were strategic partners in HIV & AIDS response as they trained tomorrow's church and community leaders. In his own words, "...graduates of African theological institutions (should) become effective agents of change in the time of HIV" (Chitando, 2008:6). Calling all theological institutions to engage HIV & AIDS, Chitando believed that education should prepare learners

Byamugisha, Sarojini Nadar, who all became champions of theology/religious studies and HIV.

⁶ See references to most of these works in this paper. Most of the papers can also be found online by searching Ezra Chitando's name.

⁷ See, for example L. Togarasei, S. Mmolai & F. Nkomazana (eds.), 2011. *The Faith Sector and HIV/AIDS in Botswana: responses and challenges*, New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

to address the existential needs of their societies. With this objective in mind, Chitando mobilized African theologians to contribute chapters towards a book he would edit on mainstreaming HIV & AIDS in theological education (Chitando, 2008). This book, which can be seen as a sequel to Dube's *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, looked at the experiences of mainstreaming HIV & AIDS as well as exploring new approaches for mainstreaming HIV & AIDS into the curriculum. This call for mainstreaming HIV & AIDS into the curriculum saw several institutions in Africa not only introducing courses on HIV & AIDS but in some cases such as at St Pauls' University in Kenya, introduction of programmes on theology and HIV & AIDS.

Calling the church to act

When it comes to the church, Chitando's contribution was twofold. He addressed the church membership and the church leadership. We shall explore his address of the church membership first and then the church leadership later. In the book entitled *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 1* (Chitando, 2007a), Chitando makes theoretical explorations on the role of the African church in its response to HIV & AIDS. He begins with an overview of the church in Africa as a strategic partner in HIV & AIDS responses. A legacy of compassion, a pool of volunteers, highly motivated workers, an abiding presence in the community, credibility, membership from diverse professional backgrounds and prayer and spirituality are identified as strategic attributes of the church that make it potentially an effective partner in HIV & AIDS responses. Having noted this, Chitando remains aware of the many factors that have weakened the African church in its HIV response. It is these factors that he addressed in most of his writings as he rallied the church to a positive HIV & AIDS response. These factors include stigma and discrimination, theological rigidity, insensitivity to gender issues, negative attitudes towards sexuality, external dependency and limited experience in fundraising, monitoring, and evaluation (Chitando, 2007a). Continuing with his theoretical explorations, Chitando argues that the church should be an inclusive rather than an exclusive community. It should come up with theologies of life, theologies of hope and theologies of compassion all based on African cultural resources and philosophies such as *ubuntu/unhu/botho* (Chitando, 2007a).

Having made theoretical explorations on how the church should respond to HIV & AIDS in Africa, in *Acting in Hope: African Churches and*

HIV/AIDS 2 (2007b), Chitando looks at practical steps that the church should take to respond to HIV & AIDS. His major argument in this book is that culture should be addressed carefully for positive HIV & AIDS response. He then suggests practical steps the church should take in dealing with vulnerable groups of people such as women, children, and people with disabilities. He also suggests ways of engaging men and improving theological education for HIV & AIDS responses. Chitando's works call the church to be "AIDS competent" (Parry, 2008).

As I have mentioned above, despite addressing church membership, Chitando also devoted much attention to addressing church leadership about issues of HIV & AIDS. He calls church leaders to avoid stigmatizing sermons (Chitando, 2007c), to challenge cultural and biblical teachings that seem to drive HIV & AIDS and to be accountable to members. Chitando writes, "The greatest sermon that African church leaders could possibly preach on HIV & AIDS is by living lives that are beyond reproach, especially in issues relating to sex" (Chitando, 2007b:47). Although Chitando addresses church leaders in congregations, much of his effort is on church leaders in theological training institutions, both the trainers and the trainees. A number of his articles challenge theological institutions to mainstream HIV & AIDS into their curricula (Chitando, 2008), provide methods of integrating HIV & AIDS into the curricula (Togarasei and Chitando, 2008) and identifies areas to undertake research on religion/theology and HIV & AIDS (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2008). For him, churches can only become AIDS competent if the leadership is well trained and convinced that HIV & AIDS response is part of the mission of the church in Africa.

Calling all African religions to respond

Although much of his work addressed the Christian religion, Chitando also took seriously the fact that religion in Africa is more than just Christianity. Besides Christianity, he gives particular attention to African Traditional Religion (ATR). He also addresses Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions at home in Africa. In his article, *Disclosing Layers of Secrecy: Studying African Indigenous Religions in Contexts of HIV and AIDS* (Chitando, 2008) for example, Chitando finds ATR contributing to the devastating impact of HIV & AIDS. Elsewhere he also finds ATR contributing to gender-based violence and HIV & AIDS. (Chitando, 2007d). Although upholding African culture and identity, Chitando calls for cultural transformation in the context of HIV & AIDS. He calls upon scholars of

ATR, for example, to be ‘engaged scholars’ who teach ATR in a way that challenges certain beliefs and practices that promote the spread of HIV & AIDS.

Call for gender equity

Another theme addressed by Chitando is that of gender in the context of HIV & AIDS. Chitando has strongly challenged African societies to introspect and do away with practices that make women vulnerable to HIV & AIDS. Chitando speaks strongly for women and qualifies to be called a ‘feminist scholar’. He writes, “AIDS had the face of a young African woman... Patriarchy... leaves African women gasping for breath” (Chitando, 2007a:6). Under gender, he mainly addressed issues of masculinity and HIV & AIDS that we discuss separately below. As we will see in our discussion of his call for transformative masculinities below, Chitando largely believes that Africa can achieve gender equity if men change. He therefore suggests the use of all church and society platforms to achieve gender justice. Boys need to be caught young, the pulpit needs to be used to transform men, “youth, men’s and women’s groups should also be sensitized to the need to develop new attitudes towards manhood...,” (Chitando, 2007b:47), men need to be brought to church or to be reached with the gospel of gender equity in football grounds, are all messages that see men as the obstacles to gender justice.

Calling all to respond

Although trained as a scholar of religion, Chitando’s work has traversed his area of specialization. Like a soldier in battle who uses every available instrument to win the war, Chitando has sought to address Africans from all walks of life to use their different positions to respond to HIV & AIDS. He has called media practitioners, teachers, government officials, international aid agents and many more to respond to the challenge of HIV & AIDS. For example, concerning government officials, Chitando & Chirongoma write, “As Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers and Presidents, men have the responsibility of ensuring that adequate resources are directed towards the epidemic” (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2008:64).

Rallying African scholars to respond with a pen

Thus far, we have focused on the themes that Chitando has addressed in his response to HIV & AIDS. We need to add, however, that despite addressing these themes, Chitando has also rallied many African scholars

to address issues of HIV & AIDS. He has not only done that by challenging them in seminars and conferences but by mentoring many through co-publication. Chitando has co-edited books, co-authored articles, and/or in the process, mentored several upcoming and now established African scholars. The list is too long to exhaust but includes such scholars as Nothando Hadebe, Rosina Gabaitse, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Sophia Chirongoma, Lovemore Togarasei, Peter Nickles, Gideon Byamugisha, John Raja, Charles Klagba, Adriaan van Klinken, Anna Chitando, Angeline Madongonda, Lilly Phiri, Molly Manyonganise, Francis Machingura, Chamamah Kaunda and others.⁸ Most of these have become key contributors to and authorities in the discourse on African theology/religious studies and HIV & AIDS.⁹

The call for transformative masculinities

In the introduction to the book, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 2*, Chitando observes, “The HIV epidemic forces African churches to conduct a patient and critical evaluation of African cultures, particularly issues relating to gender and sexuality” (Chitando, 2007b:1). Although Chitando addressed issues of gender generally for HIV & AIDS response as we have outlined above, he has paid close attention to issues of masculinity. In fact, his work on masculinities in contexts of HIV & AIDS is groundbreaking.¹⁰ This explains my decision to discuss this matter separately in this work.

Chitando’s call for transformative masculinities runs through most of his writings on HIV & AIDS and gender. His starting point for calling for transformative masculinities is that men have been privileged in religions

⁸ Space does not allow references to his co-publications but see, Chitando, E. & S. Chirongoma (eds.). *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012. Other examples are cited elsewhere in this paper.

⁹ For example, E. Chitando and Nothando Hadebe (eds.). *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2009.

¹⁰ For example, S.F. John, L.C. Siwila & F. Settler (““Men can, should and must change!”: an analysis of Ezra Chitando’s writings on African masculinities,” *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 19:2, 155-157) describe Chitando as, “a pioneer and one of the scholars in the emerging field of religion and masculinities in Africa...,” 156.

and societies in general (Chitando, 2007a:7). Below I cite at length numerous quotations that show his strong belief that men have power and are privileged:

In most Africa cultures, patriarchy privileges men and relegates women and children to the periphery. (Chitando, 2007b:45).

Men are predominantly the doers/perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence as a result of the privileges bestowed upon them by religion, culture and the economic system (Wanjiru and Chitando, 2013).

Men have been pampered to believe that their egos must be massaged, and that they must always have things their own way (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2008:59).

The biological fact of being male places men in privileged positions (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:6).

For Chitando, this privileged position of men has created what has come to be called ‘dangerous masculinities’ (Hlatywayo, 2012) as men have used the power privilege in ways that have put women, children, and men themselves in danger of contracting HIV and dying from AIDS. Chitando, taking a leaf from studies on gender in general, argues that since gender (in this case masculinity) is socially constructed, it can be transformed into more useful forms in the context of HIV & AIDS. He takes it upon himself therefore to call for transformation of and indeed to transform dangerous masculinities. His first article on masculinities and HIV & AIDS focused on how Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches have challenged men to adopt masculinities that promote life, peace and well-being for women, children, and other men (Chitando, 2007c). Though praising Pentecostal men, Chitando calls men to do more than just caring, loving and providing for their families. He calls Pentecostal churches to encourage men to undergo HIV testing, to care for the infected and to further challenge patriarchy. For Chitando, men are the key drivers of the HIV & AIDS pandemic. By the time he began addressing men, he felt that enough attention was not being given to men as key players in HIV & AIDS response. He wrote, “We need to dwell on this theme (masculinity and HIV), as it is frequently glossed over in publications (secular or religious) on HIV in Africa” (Chitando, 2007b:40). Chitando finds African men as having an insatiable appetite for sex. He therefore addresses, among others, issues of rape, multiple concurrent sexual partnerships

practiced in the form of 'small houses', polygamy, and prostitution (Chitando, 2007b:40-45). Coupled by the cultural expectations for men to be in control, these issues result in men being the major drivers of the HIV epidemic.

Sexual and gender-based violence is another theme that Chitando addresses in relation to men and HIV in Africa (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2013). Chitando believes men are the major perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence. He argues that this is due to the privileges bestowed upon men by culture, religion and the economic systems (Wanjiru and Chitando, 2013). Having observed the negative contribution of men to HIV, Chitando calls men to partner with women and to forego those privileges that drive HIV & AIDS. He particularly calls men to be loving, caring and 'soft' (Chitando, 2007b:40). He identifies the church as a key agent in creating transformed masculinities. Thus, instead of using love potions that 'softened' men, he praises Pentecostal discourses on men that identify Jesus as the supreme men 'softener'. Chitando finds the church and religion in general better placed to play the role of transforming dangerous masculinities because, after all, he says, they are responsible for their production. He elucidates that contemporary hegemonic masculinities in Africa are a hybrid of indigenous and Western masculinities (Chitando, 2012). He therefore calls for the interrogation of indigenous, Christian and Islamic traditions in transforming masculinities for HIV & AIDS response.

Evaluation of the works

Above, we have documented how Chitando has responded to HIV & AIDS. He has done this by employing socially engaged scholarship. This is quite commendable considering that for a long time African academics have just been imitators and consumers of methods, theories and themes developed in the Western world. Chitando's work on HIV & AIDS, together with that of other scholars who have addressed this topic or other contemporary African issues, has shown the need for Africanizing the African university. He has shown the relevance of studying theology and religion in African contexts by dealing with a specific existential issue-HIV & AIDS. Chitando has shown that in contexts of Africa, one cannot afford to be simply an arm-chair scholar who is not involved in the struggles of his/her immediate community. Teaching and learning should

fully engage the economic, political, social, religious and health realities of the teacher, the learner and the community.

There is so much to applaud Chitando for and his works speak volumes about his achievements. I will therefore not belabor these positive contributions. Rather, I want to take this opportunity to make a few additional observations and contributions to his work, contributions I believe will help especially in engaging men not only on the issue of responses to HIV & AIDS, but for their day-to-day relations with women and children. To start with, I find Chitando overstating men's power¹¹ in some instances. This overstating of men's power has, in my opinion, in the past resulted in less attention being given to the needs of the boy child and men in general in gender discourses. No doubt, gender issues at some point became synonymous with women's issues while, in fact, gender studies should focus on both men and women. Yes, patriarchy gives men power and privilege, but our African societies are changing. Slowly, thanks to legislations and the effort of people like Chitando, women are gaining power and influence, especially in the public domain. Although still a far cry from our expectations, women are entering domains that used to be dominated exclusively by men.¹² Women's access to education has also resulted in a significant number of women occupying high profile jobs resulting in their economic empowerment. But, throughout his works, Chitando does not address this fact, understandably so as he focuses not on developmental issues for boys but rather on toxic and oppressive masculinities. We believe this development requires attention in contexts of HIV & AIDS as studies elsewhere have shown that when women get empowered at the expense of men, some men engage in some form of 'subterfuge' either through violence or engaging in extramarital sex to diminish the woman and bring her to 'her place' (Barker, 2005).

It is sometimes not clear what Chitando means by 'men's power' as certain powers he attributes to men today no longer rest in individuals but

¹¹ From the sum total of its use in his writings, Chitando understands power as the privilege to make decisions, to control and to rule over. We proceed with this understanding of power.

¹² For example, Africa leads the world when it comes to women's participation and representation in politics. Women make up 61% of Rwanda's parliament, Namibia (46%), South Africa (43%), and Senegal (42%) (Staley School of Leadership Studies, "Women's empowerment in Africa", 13 August 2021).

institutions.¹³ Modern laws on marriage, inheritance, children's rights etc, have significantly taken power that men traditionally had to institutions. Men's acts of violence over women, although still unacceptably higher especially in rural areas in the case of Zimbabwe, are limited by laws.¹⁴ This is the reality especially for urban men. Chitando does not quite address this as he focuses more on the traditional men than the modern men.¹⁵ With laws against marital rape,¹⁶ for example, it is difficult for some modern men to believe Chitando when he says men decide when, how and where sex should take place. My experience as a local pastor in Harare (Zimbabwe) some years ago, taught me that, due to legislations on marital rape, some married women dictate when, where and how sex should take place. Some men were complaining that their wives were 'starving' them of sex.

Further, nowadays not all men wield a lot of power even in their families. The empowerment of women (admittedly, a minority) through international and domestic policies has left some men, especially unemployed and poor men, with little to no power. Financial power these days sometimes determines who has power in the family especially when it comes to making financial decisions. While some men still want to decide how their wives' incomes should be used on the basis that there are the heads of the families, some economically empowered women resist this. This results in less economically empowered and unemployed men feeling powerless in their families. In their studies in Namibia, G. Baker and C. Ricardo (2005) found out that unemployed men generally felt powerless before their economically empowered wives. As pointed out above, such men may engage in acts that are meant to subterfuge women resulting in

¹³ One may argue that these institutions are dominated by men, but as statistics on women participation in politics, for example, show, women are slowly but surely penetrating these institutions.

¹⁴ For example, the Zimbabwe Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] (Act 14/2006) of 2006. Although this act has been found wanting especially in rural areas (E. Konyana, Domestic Violence Legislation in Zimbabwe: Probing into the security of women in rural areas, 2018, DOI:10.18820/9781928314431/22), the act has reduced the powers of men over women especially in urban areas.

¹⁵ By saying this I am not dismissing Chitando's work. Reviewers of this chapter felt that I was dismissive of Chitando's work. Let me take this opportunity to qualify that by raising these issues I do not mean that Chitando's work is shortsighted. Rather, I simply mean that work dealing with issues I enumerate here should exist alongside Chitando's work.

¹⁶ E.g. Sexual Offences Act of Zimbabwe, Act8/2001 of 2001.

the family being exposed to HIV & AIDS. Chitando's work tends to overlook this aspect as he underlines men's power over women.

Although his writings acknowledge that there is no single manhood, Chitando has tended to highlight one type of African masculinities when it comes to HIV & AIDS thereby painting all African men with one brush. As he admits in his works not related to HIV & AIDS, there are various types of masculinities in Africa as it is in the world (Chitando, 2023). I believe this position needs to be revised for a more meaningful engagement of men in the fight against HIV & AIDS.

Proposed way forward: men, power and HIV & AIDS

Above I discussed how Chitando addressed men for HIV & AIDS response. I noted that he mainly approached the subject by exposing men's weaknesses, especially through patriarchal privilege. In this section I propose that over and above that, we need to look holistically on the subject of masculinity, if we are to help men play more positive roles in HIV & AIDS response. We begin by questioning the whole idea of male power and propose that it should be interrogated to make men realize that real power lies in working closely with and not lording themselves over women, children and other men. This is because, in my opinion, male power (which R. W. Connell (1995) calls patriarchal dividend), comes with a lot of burden. I am happy that beginning with his 2016 article, Chitando has begun to question his attribution of power to men- all men. How I wish this were his position even as he addressed men and HIV & AIDS. He writes, "Being a man is not always about enjoying the privileges that come with masculinity, it is also about the burden that men carry by virtue of being men" (Chitando, 2016). Using the Karanga (a Shona dialect) construction of masculinity, Chitando is aware that real manhood is a heavy burden for men. With real manhood characterized by a strong and attractive physique, the ability to protect and provide for the family, he correctly concludes that few men achieve this status. Using examples from some 'lamentations songs' by specific Zimbabwean musicians, Chitando shows that masculinity is less about power but more about the burden of manhood in contemporary times. He, however, does not discuss the implications of this understanding of manhood for HIV & AIDS response. In my opinion, this burden of masculinity needs to be addressed as it may lead some men to take actions that expose them to HIV & AIDS when they do

not meet the dictates of hegemonic masculinities or even as a way of demonstrating hegemonic masculinities.¹⁷ Alcoholism, drug abuse and promiscuity are some of the behaviours associated with men who fail to meet hegemonic masculinity attributes.

Chitando correctly observes that masculinity is a social construction. One would therefore expect him to address the role of women in the construction and transformation of dangerous masculinities. But he tends to leave out women. History has taught us that men and women need to cooperate for gender equity. It is counterproductive to focus on the ills of one gender without analyzing the contribution of the other. This was the initial weakness of feminism in the early days of HIV & AIDS as focus was mainly on the wrongs that men did without meaningfully engaging men. In correcting this, Chitando seems to have gone to the other extreme by removing women completely from the construction of manhood. I believe women play a great role in the construction of our future men. As mothers, they raise them, nurture them, and teach them what men ought and ought not to do. I am aware though that these teachings are patriarchally informed through centuries of women's subjugation. However, instead of just lambasting men, we need to call women to resist these traditional ways of raising men and to take advantage of their nurturing nature to raise up responsible men. Women need to strongly engage in the process of transforming dangerous masculinities.

I want to end my evaluation of Chitando's view of men in his call for HIV & AIDS response by focusing on his major argument that men have power. This is a common statement which, together with Warren Farrell (1993), I would want to consider as a myth. The saying that behind a successful man is a strong woman, speaks to my conviction that men tend to have public power, but real power lies with women in their lives. The common saying among Zimbabwe men that when a man says they want to sleep over an idea they are going to consult their wife, tends to be more realistic than sarcastic. In addition, Farrell (1993) has questioned what 'power' is in relation to male power. Chitando, in his latest article referenced above, appears to question the nature of male power. Is it genuinely a form of power, or rather a burden? This inquiry aligns with similar reflections by Farrell, prompting us to explore this issue further alongside

¹⁷ See: R. Hinojosa (Doing Hegemony: Military, Men and Constructing a Hegemonic Masculinity, <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1802.179>, accessed 18 February 2023).

both scholars. Farrell (1993:40) says (and I agree with him) that societies have defined male power as “(man) feeling obligated to earn money someone else (woman) spends while we (men) die sooner.” Surely, this cannot be called power. In other contexts, such dynamics would be considered a form of slavery. Within the framework of HIV & AIDS responses, it is crucial for scholars and activists to engage men in recognizing that their current understanding of power is misguided. True power lies not in dominating women, children, and marginalized men, but in fostering collaborative relationships with them.

Conclusion

In the article, *Equipped and Ready to Serve? : Transforming Theology and Religious Studies in Africa*,” (2010) Chitando asks the question that many of us teaching theology and religious studies have become familiar with, “What can one do with theology and religious studies? This is a question our students and others interested in the discipline always ask. Chitando has answered this question by suggesting the transformation of our teaching of theology and religion in a theoretical way to engaging issues that affect Africa. This is exactly what Chitando has done for the greater part of his academic life. He has called Africa to respond to HIV & AIDS using religion and theology. This chapter has therefore reviewed Ezra Chitando’s works on HIV & AIDS. Paying particular attention to his call for transformative masculinities, we have established the strengths of his calls and areas that need further reflection. There is no doubt that Chitando’s HIV & AIDS work has shown the relevance of teaching theology and religion not only for HIV & AIDS response but for engaging with existential issues affecting Africa. In a situation where our governments are asking us what our disciplines bring to the fiscus, the onus is upon us to prove, as Chitando has done by rallying all to respond to HIV & AIDS, that sponsoring the teaching of theology, religion and philosophy remains relevant even under belt-tightening national budgets.

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27 When the community ceases to be a sanctuary

An Ethical and Theological reflection of the challenges facing families with children living with Albinism in South Africa

Zandile Ngubane & Beatrice Okyere-Manu

Abstract

Ezra Chitando, a renowned scholar and theologian, has been concerned with the plight of the poor, vulnerable minority groups in African society. Several of his scholarly publications have been dedicated to exposing this plight and challenging the church and the community to work towards responding to it. Chitando's dream is to see that justice is granted to the vulnerable. One such vulnerable group in most African communities, that deserves justice and equal opportunities are people living with Albinism and their families, particularly mothers. They face many ethical, religious, and cultural challenges. Many within local communities perceive albinos as sub-humans and a special ingredient for self-enrichment concoctions. In light of this, the chapter presents analysis of 12 interviews with mothers and children living with albinism in order to understand their lived realities and experiences. Through the lens of the ethical theory of consequentialism, it emerged that many people living with albinism feel they have no right to life, they are not of the same worth and dignity as their peers, they are an endangered species as they are hunted by those seeking self-enrichment muthi. Therefore Chitando's call and advocacy for vulnerable groups must be extended to people living with Albinism.

Keywords: Albinism, Consequentialism, Church, Myths, People living with Albinism

Introduction

In almost all societies, there are some marginalized people. Among the poor and vulnerable groups in most African communities are people living with Albinism. According to Caradee Wright (2015:27), albinism is an inherited genetic disorder that affects individuals due to the absence of melanin. Elvis Imafidon also describes albinism as a condition affecting

living things, whether animals or plants, resulting from a lack of normal pigmentation. He continues that People with albinism appear to be visibly different from others of their kind (2017:9). In his book *African Philosophy and the Otherness of Albinism*, he explains that the lack of knowledge about this disorder has resulted in the community finding justification for the pigmentation. Consequently, this has led to misconceptions, myths, superstitions, and wrong beliefs about this disorder. There are several beliefs about the disorder, some of which contradict themselves. Some of these include the belief that people with albinism bring bad luck, while others believe that they can be used as a means of acquiring wealth. As a result, People with albinism are an outcast in the communities within most of the African communities. It is difficult for people to accept what is different from the usual. Hence, PWA is referred to as “it” or perceived as the “other”. Imafindon (2017; 2018). Several scholars have written about the different beliefs associated with albinism. For example, Bradbury-Jones (2018:8) conducted a study to discover people’s perceptions of albinism. This study interviewed an equal number of people who are living with albinism and without albinism. Some of the people in this study shared that they were taught to believe that when someone who is HIV & AIDS positive has sexual intercourse with a person living with albinism they will be cured of the virus (2018:8).

There are different forms of Albinism, and Abeshi et al. (2017:81) and Wright et al. (2015:27) affirm that the prevalent form of albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa is Melanosomal transmembrane protein or OCA2. This type of albinism is characterized by lightly pigmented hair, skin, eyelashes, and eyebrows. The lack of melanin affects one (1) in four thousand (4000) people in Sub-Saharan Africa, Salewi (2011:01); Ross (2015:01), suggesting that they are a minimal group of people in most African communities. However, there are about seven different types of albinism.¹

¹ A comprehensive description and explanation of the various types is found in (NOAH 2014; et al., Abeshi 2017 and Wright et al. 2015). Tyrosinases related Albinism is commonly called OCA1. It is a result of a genetic shortcoming in an enzyme called tyrosinase. This kind of condition is divided into two subtypes OCA1a and OCA1b, which leads to white hair that may darken to blond, yellow or somewhat orange or light brown hair. This includes slightly more pigment in the skin. OCA2 albinism, is Protein genetic albinism. It is as a result of a genetic defect in the protein that helps the tyrosinase enzyme to function. This type is of Albinism is commonly found in Sud-Saharan Africa. OCA3 is a mild subtype and is characterised by reddish hair and It has an estimated prevalence of 18,500 in Africa. It is rarely seen in other populations.

Martin Nelwan (2018:01) posits that each type varies by the type of genetics that need to meet or be absent in the parents to produce a certain kind of albinism. As has been noted, of all the seven, the most common type in Sub-Saharan Africa is OCA2 (Abeshi et al. 2017:81).

An individual's chromosomes must carry the trait for this condition to be present. This implies that individuals with albinism typically inherit traits from both parents (mother and father), who often have normal pigmentation. For there to be an Albino child, both are regarded as carriers of the albinism trait because they each possess a recessive gene for the condition. However, they may not exhibit the condition themselves. When both parents carry the albinism gene, each pregnancy has a one in four chance of having a child with albinism. This mode of inheritance is called "autosomal recessive" inheritance (Noah 2014:4).

As a minority group, children living with Albinism face several challenges because they differ from other children. Being a person living with Albinism, Elvis Imafidon affirms this by saying that "broadly construed, albinism is socially and culturally representation (represented?) as an unwelcome abnormality or difference, much the same way as other forms of disability are negatively designated in African tradition" (2018:19). He further explains that "Africans are unable to cope with, and, unwilling to accept anything different or unusual from status quo" (Imafidon 2018:165). His experiences underscore that traditional African people have a negative attitude toward unfamiliar things or something different from the norm. People living with Albinism are perceived as ghosts, so the children and their families are unsafe in their communities. They are discriminated against and constantly live in a state of fear. Salewi (2011) and Mswela (2017) have argued that individuals with albinism and their families are

The street name for this type of albinism is ginger. Individuals with OCA4 are usually recognized in the first year of life and generally have some hair pigment with the colour ranging from silvery white to pale gold. The colour of the hair may darken with age but does not vary significantly from childhood. This condition is as a result of a genetic defect in the SLC45A2 protein that helps the tyrosinase enzyme to function. People with OCA4 make a minimal amount of melanin pigment similar to people with OCA2.

The identification of Type OCA5-OCA7 in humans occurred in 2012 and 2013, revealing mutations in three more underlying genes. With the growing availability of gene testing and the increasing identification of individuals affected by these forms of albinism, a comprehensive spectrum of physical traits will be acknowledged, possibly intersecting with other established types of OCA.

subjected to violence and attacks based on misunderstandings about their condition. They cannot lead ordinary lives and are often afraid to integrate into their communities.

With this background, the current chapter interrogates the experiences of ten families headed by women in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Informed by the ethical theory of consequentialism and the experiences of ten families, the chapter affirms the humanity of the people living with Albinism and argues that they deserve the justice that Ezra Chitando seeks for the poor and minority in our communities. The justice that people living with Albinism require condemns the fear, stigmatization, and discrimination against families with children living with Albinism. It challenges the religious and cultural leaders of the communities to take the issues surrounding people living with Albinism seriously. The chapter is divided into four sections; first is the introduction, then the methodology employed in the study. This is followed by a discussion of the ethical and theological reflections on the challenges faced by people living with Albinism, followed by a conclusion.

Methodology

The chapter uses a narrative method to present the stories of ten families from Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg in South Africa over 12 months. These sites were selected based on the recommendation from the Albinism Society in South Africa. The study employed qualitative data collection methods using in-depth interviews. Four families were interviewed in Pietermaritzburg and six in Johannesburg. An interesting observation was that women headed all the families interviewed. The women in the study are either divorced or neglected by their husbands or the father of their children. Of the ten women who participated, only three have formal education up to grade 10 and work as domestic workers. Seven of the women are unemployed. The authors spent about four months engaging with these women this allowed ample time to establish rapport and foster trust-based working relationships. A research guide comprising open-ended questions aimed at delving into the narratives and experiences of the family heads was used. By adopting a narrative approach, we align with the perspective of African feminist theologians, who emphasize the importance of providing African women a platform to share their stories. Oduyoye and Kanyoro (1992:1) aptly assert, "African

women theologians have come to realize that as long as men and foreign researchers remain the authorities on culture, rituals, and religion, African women will continue to be spoken of as if they were dead." Therefore, the narrative approach enabled the study participants to express their experiences openly. To protect their identities, pseudonyms were used. Due to the nature of the study, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the KwaZulu-Natal ethical committee, and the Albinism Society of South Africa (ASSA) supplied a social worker and a counselor.² Participants were randomly selected because consent was voluntary since this interview was sensitive. Some participants volunteered to be part of the study through a radio interview by one of the writers of this chapter. Others were approached by ASSA and social media. The sensitivity of the research informed this selection choice and meant that everyone participating did not feel obligated to participate. The data was analysed using content analysis which according to Marriette Bengtsson, is a process where "data are presented in words and in themes, which makes it possible to draw some interpretation of the result (2016:10). Therefore, the next section presents the experiences of the study participants in themes.

Mothers face discrimination from the local community

One important challenge that came out of our interview was the issue of societal exclusion. Alvis Imafidon explains why people with albinism are not accepted or seen as part of the community. He illustrates how the misconception about this disorder has resulted in stigmas and myths associated with albinism. He also emphasizes the community's language towards people with albinism and avows that this results from the community's lack of understanding of this condition. He asserts that "knowledge about albinism in African traditional and modern societies is damaged with systematic ignorance and falsehood that continue to serve as a veil that hinders the actual facts about albinism" (Imafidon 2018:71). He further explains that people living with albinism are seen as a threat to harmony. They are also perceived as harmful beings (Imafidon 2018:81). This assertion emerged strongly in the interview. For instance

² This was a very difficult interview because of the trauma attached to it and also especially because one of the interviewees had to drop out because their child was killed.

Nombuso, a 32-year-old mother, affirmed the discrimination and marginalization from the community by saying that.

I don't want to be seen with my son in the community. It is difficult for me to allow my child to play with his peers in the community. It was hard for me to accept who he was. I am still learning too. At first, I was scared even to breastfeed my baby. I told my mother I had run out of milk and the best substitute would be best. I could not even look at him in the eye. I did not want to have any connection with the baby; my thoughts were that what if I bonded with him, connected to him, and lost him? I was afraid that he would disappear. We grew up believing that PWAs disappear into thin air or become animals. So, I did not want any attachments to him because he could disappear anytime. However, my mother was different and loved my child so much that she referred to him as a blessing, yet the entire family and I were convinced he was a curse. My mother would take him to the clinic, and I would remain home in anticipation. I remember one day, they spent the whole day at the clinic; the only thoughts in my mind were that they had been kidnapped on the way.

Families of Albinos live in fear

All the families interviewed mentioned that the key challenge they face is fear. This is centred on what might happen to them and their children. The problem of fear is confirmed by the 2013 reports by “The Same Sun.” It recorded that over the years, there have been an increasing amount of reported violent cases of albinism, and this has resulted in some families of people living with albinism leaving their homesteads in search of safe places because they are afraid of being attacked. They mentioned the fear of abduction and rape as their primary fear. For example, Lindiwe, a 50-year-old woman, said:

If I can tell you half of what I have been through because of my child, you would cry; sometimes, my child would not go to school for months because now and again, PWA has become a target, and many attacks are reported. For the first two years, my child was hidden, people knew there was a child in their area, but they did not see him until he started walking. When children started walking, no one can control them; I left my community because I feared people's thoughts. After all, the blame is pinned on the mothers. Most importantly, I fear what people could do to my child.

Busisiwe 48, Queen 40, and Dora 50 reiterated similar concerns. They fear for their daughters' lives. They stated that they fear the possibility of their daughters being raped. They reminded us of the myth that if one has sexual intercourse with PWA, one will be healed of HIV/AIDs. This has made them vulnerable and targets of rape. According to the UTSS organization, over the years, there have been an increased number of people living with Albinism who have reported rape cases (UTSS:2017). Zama maintained that "a mother with a child living with albinism needs to be extra vigilant about the child's whereabouts and places they visit to prevent them from falling victim to rape." Bila et al. (2015:02), in a similar vein, add that people living with albinism get raped often because people think that sleeping with a person with albinism cures one's HIV & AIDS infection. In addition to the above, Barker et al. (2010:172) and Machoko (2013:319) also confirm that people with albinism are attacked and raped because they are used to cure others of HIV & AIDS, diabetes, and cancer. This is as a result of the belief that PWA are supernatural or have supernatural powers.

Another form of concern shared by the interviewees is the fear of murder. They all mentioned that they live in constant fear because they do not know when they will hear that their children have been murdered. Recently, ritual murder has been widespread in most traditional communities. The murder has been in the form of human sacrifice practiced by some African tribes (Munthali 2005:29). There are strong indications of human body parts being used as ingredients in traditional medicine because they believe it will make strong *muthi*. It involves the removal of the required body parts from the victim while the person is still alive (Labuschagne 2014:191-206). Makhosazane, a 40-year mother, said that:

My biggest fear is receiving a phone call one day reporting the passing away of my child, especially in a brutal way. I am from the North of Kwazulu-Natal, and we all know that people in that area perceive our children as a means of enriching greedy people. In the past, people have been breaking into our homes to take the child away from us. Luckily for us, she was not around but had visited a relative in the rural area. I have been in and out to various traditional healers for protection. They give us portions so that one could be invisible to the attackers. If you look at him today, he has strings around his waistline. I am a mother; no one wants to see their child being killed, let alone with some of the body parts missing. I will give all I have to see him live another day.

PWAs are killed, and their body parts are used as potions to make “Umuthi”. Thus, they are seen as means to acquire to an end, which is usually to make the other succeed in life. This was evident in one of the cases of the mother who was initially a participant in this study; however, had to pull out after the brutal murder of her child in early 2023. The child was four years old and was found near a riverbank with some of his body parts missing. It was later discovered that a sangoma instructed hitmen to kill the child and take some of the body parts so that his practice could flourish. The deceased child’s mother said, “No mother deserves to see their child like that. I do not see myself recovering from that. They sacrificed my 4-year-old so that a greedy man could become better?”

In February 2018, the 13-year-old Gabisile Shabane was abducted from her home. The 13-year-old Gabisile living with albinism. She was found almost a month after being missing. Her body was found in a shallow grave with some parts missing. It was later discovered that a sangoma sent the 28-year-old man arrested for her murder³ to get body parts of any albino to make the 28-year-old man’s business flourish (ANA, 2018:1). Salewi 2011:10, has confirmed that PWAs constitute a vulnerable segment of society, they face the looming risk of extinction due to unabated killings rooted in the belief that elixirs derived from their body parts bestow luck, wealth, and prosperity without consequences.

Mothers face abandonment by their husbands

As mentioned earlier, all the participants were either divorced or abandoned. Thembi, a 44-year-old mother from the North of KwaZulu-Natal, narrated her experiences since she gave birth to a child with albinism.

When my child was born, my husband and her family ordered me to leave my marital home because they believed the ancestors cursed me. They rained insults and called me all sorts of names, including a prostitute. They asked me to pack my belongings and leave the house. they mentioned that they had consulted a witch doctor (a sangoma) who had advised them. I had to relocate when my child was 10 to a place closer to the city center in the Eastern part of the province. The father of my child never looked at me the same. He always said that one day, he would kill me and this child of mine

³ A sangoma is the name for a traditional healer.

because it was clear that I had another relationship. After all, they have never seen something like “this” in his family. He thought I had an affair. He never looked at my son the same way he looked at his siblings (my other children). Every time he was drunk, he would come home and start shouting at how I cheated and brought “this” to his family. He called him “Ichilo,” which means a forbidden thing or thing that he curses. I was never comfortable with leaving my boy with him. If I had to attend to something in town, I would carry him on my back, cover him with a blanket, and take him to my mother’s house, about 5 kilometers away.

All the women mentioned that they had been accused of having an affair with white men or a tokoloshe⁴ and that the women were punished for sleeping with the white man, and the child was the god’s way of exposing them. This same sentiment that a black woman sleeping with a white man will result in the birth of a child living with Albinism was reiterated by Barker et al. (2010:172). These sentiments by the communities reveal issues of ignorance and lack of trust for these women.

PWAs’ rights are compromised

The rights of PWAs are compromised; all the participants reiterated this. For instance Thandeka, a 47-year mother, asserted that she has many fears because no one recognizes her child’s rights. She says she knows the child’s life will be taken away from her anytime. She added, “I don’t think the education department is doing anything to cater to PWA. My child has visual impairments due to the pigmented eye, and adding an irregular educational system lessens the chances of him being able to at least complete school because he cannot see the chalkboard”.

Another participant narrated a story of her uncle saying:

My uncle could not complete his education because he could not see clearly”. My greatest fear is that I have been formally employed, and this is because I could not complete my high school education. I fear the same for my child. I know the struggles of being unemployed. I know employers will not give him a chance, so I have prayed that God gives my son wisdom and persistence in all he does. The government should have a class in all the schools to cater

⁴ Generally, a tokoloshe is an animal used for Witchcrafts, which is usually sent to do evil to others.

to visually impaired learners. This will allow our children to be better people in the future. I am poor, and if something were to happen to me, I do not know what the future could hold for her child. I hardly see PWAs working in professional jobs, and the ones that you do see are because they came from well-off homes and were taken to private or semi-private schools. Where does this leave us? I am worried because one is nothing in life without education.

Joyful 40 years' mother also said that:

There are no working opportunities for PWA in this country. I fear that my child needs more working opportunities compared to other children. Besides the challenges that she is already faced with, she also needs to fight to get a better future. Every mother dream of seeing her children graduate and making something for their lives. I have anxiety about the unknown. I am taking my child to a private school for a better learning experience and to ensure she can attend university. I worry if my child will be able to be a doctor. Her dream is to become a Doctor, I sometimes look out to see if I find any Doctors living with albinism, and thus far, I have not seen any. What does this mean for my daughter? Does this mean that she could never be one?

The above narratives are difficult realities of discrimination, violence, and even death. This was one of the most difficult interviews. The social worker and counselor were always there to engage with the families before, during, and even afterward. People often broke down in tears and were there to take over and counsel the interviewees. They just want their stories to be out there so people can share their predicament and change their attitude towards them. The major issues raised concern life and well-being. It also foregrounds the important need for African communities to understand the plight of PWAs. This is where stakeholders, particularly the Christian community, become important, particularly its ministry to all the marginalized and dehumanized and its prophetic voice on behalf of these women and their families whose voices are not heard within the communities. In this light, the next section proceeds to reflect on the ethical and theological implications of the challenges facing PWAs.

Ethical and theological reflections on the challenges faced by people living with Albinism

So far, the article has exposed major aspects of our socio-cultural beliefs that, until recently, have remained in the private realm. The first is our perception and understanding of people who are living with the condition of Albinism. Second is our sociocultural responses. These issues have yet to be fairly addressed sustainably, particularly in our religious circles. The vulnerability, discrimination, fear, and death of many people living with Albinism have forced these issues into the public agenda. However, many still face these challenges, as the participants' stories above have alluded to. The magnitude of the problem suggests the involvement of all stakeholders in the African communities, such as the governments, medical officers, chiefs, indunas, community leaders, and religious leaders, particularly churches, pay attention to the plight of women with children and family members living with Albinism. It seems that, as a church, we have been ill-equipped to deal with the moral complexities of sociocultural issues of this nature. Even though June 13th has been declared internationally as Albinism awareness, South Africa has chosen the month of September to observe National Awareness Month. People's attitudes towards PWAs have remained the same. The legacy of fear, secrecy, and taboo surrounding some beliefs and practices in the African culture has resulted in this crisis. Having interacted with the families of PWAs, we are convinced that the appropriate response to this crisis is for stakeholders in the community and the society at large to actively work towards a redemptive community and embrace those living with this condition. This is where the church is called upon to lead the discussions and deliberations. The Church's ethical and theological approach must first include the voices of families and the people living with the condition. Their experience should inform the course of action because, as noted above, they feel alienated from the community because of the socio-cultural constraints that frame their realities. Therefore, the ethical approach should deconstruct the myths and perceptions around families with people living with Albinism that influence their realities. Only when these myths and perceptions have been deconstructed will responding in any way to the challenges be a reality. In addition to deconstructing the myths, beliefs, and perceptions, the approach must help us reconstruct liberative narratives that enhance their humanity and dignity.

The many challenges they go through in the African communities call for a consequentialist approach to ethics which questions the right and wrong actions based on the consequence of the action itself. Brown (1995:41) says that “no act is to be judged as good or bad in itself, but its wrongness or goodness is dependent on the consequences of the action”. Thus, what determines right or wrong action depends on the consequences of the action. Looking at the consequences of the attitude and the actions of the communities towards families living with PWAs, through the lens of the ethical theory of consequentialism, the following issues emerge; the ignorance of our understanding of the condition of Albinism, justifying wrong actions in the name of culture, and undermining the rights and dignity of families particularly women living with children living with Albinism. The community’s attitude towards them is a moral and social injustice issue. However, like most community stakeholders, the church has remained silent about their plight. This neglect is what has informed the current chapter. This is because the consequential approach portrays God as the God of love, justice, and the voice to the voiceless, and the church is called upon to emulate. It calls for the church to be inclusive and to promote the dignity and humanity of the vulnerable, and in this case, families, particularly women with children living with Albinism.

Based on the narratives presented in this chapter, it is pertinent that the church pays attention to the plight of these women with children and family members living with Albinism so that they can be accepted, empowered, and equipped to live in their communities and have greater choices and not to be discriminated and judged. Being judgemental creates a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’; we have noted that PWAs are viewed as “non-humans and ghosts” while those who are not are viewed as “humans.” The church should find ways of becoming the agent of change and transformation of the religio-cultural myths that expose PWAs to murder, abuse, and discrimination. Additionally, the church should create a safe space for families. In such a space, children living with Albinism should be free from any form of stigma to help them rediscover who they are in the face of their creator.

The fact that women are blamed and divorced for having children with Albinism suggests gender injustice in most African communities. Fighting against these injustices ought to be on the agenda of all congregations since the church is located even in the remotest part of Africa, where these myths and perceptions are prominent. Dominant masculini-

ties that perpetuate these myths and beliefs must be exposed and deconstructed. In responding to issues of gender inequalities in the African context, Ezra Chitando (2007:47) believes that the church needs to use the pulpit to challenge gender injustices due to dominant masculinity. He mentioned, "Sermons that challenge men to embrace gender justice must be preached with clarity and compassion." In addition, he challenges the church to reach out to men in the places where they gather for leisure to engage with them on these serious issues; he challenges the church to be more open to new approaches to this kind of ministry (2007:47).

Another issue from the interview is the need for more knowledge surrounding Albinism; most African people are unaware of what albinism truly is (Masanja et al. 2014). We believe the church could join forces with the community leaders and the government to implement awareness campaigns to pass down knowledge about albinism. This can be done in community halls and churches. These campaigns must be led by mothers of children living with albinism. The church must extend its ministry to include traditional healers like sangomas. This is because they need to be taught that albinism is skin pigmentation and that nothing is magical about them. The issues about using the body parts of people with albinism start with the traditional healers and sangomas because they are the ones that send people to the community to attack people living with albinism. Referring to the story of Gabisile narrated above, it was reported that a traditional healer advised the man who killed the Gabisile Shabane to get the body parts of a person living with albinism so that he could flourish. As a result, sangomas must be educated about the condition because they greatly influence the killings and attacks of people living with Albinism. If the Church truly dedicates itself to comprehensive ministry, it would be imperative for the Church to establish a forum where open dialogues could occur between mothers of PWAs. The objective of these discussions would be to collaboratively devise practical remedies for dispelling the myths, beliefs, and misconceptions surrounding PWAs. Undertaking this approach would signify an understanding that mere identification of a moral quandary is insufficient without the concurrent provision of viable solutions, as articulated by Chirongoma (2006).

Another area of ministry is in the counseling of mothers because of their children's conditions. Once mothers are fully aware of the nature of the disorder, it is important that the family also gets knowledge about it because sometimes a mother might happen to understand the disorder.

Still, the families cannot support the child because they see him/her, for example, as a “curse”.

For the church to carry out these tasks, bold prophetic leadership must speak out and bring God’s liberation and life to PWAs.

Conclusion

This study was conducted in two cities, Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg, respectively, with ten female-headed families living with albinism. It came out that the Lack of knowledge about this condition is the key reason why people with albinism suffer from social exclusion and live in constant fear of discrimination, abduction, rape, and murder. Even in their graves, their remains are exhumed for rituals. The stories of these women challenge the church to respond to the plight of PWAs. Most people see them as non-human objects for self-enrichment.

Considering this, the study has proposed a need for awareness campaigns to educate the community about this disorder. This is because the misconceptions about the disorder have led to myths and superstitions and the infringement and violation of the rights of people with albinism. The study challenges the church as an institution in most communities and calls for action. It needs to take the plight of PWAs seriously and be willing to advocate on their behalf.

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28 Becoming ‘members of a new race’

Redefining Rastafari Alternative African Masculinities in Zimbabwe

Fortune *Sibanda*

Abstract

Often identified as a minority new religious movement (NRM) in society, Rastafari has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and underplayed in scholarship as compared to other religious traditions. This chapter seeks to critically engage selected works of Ezra Chitando in the context of Rastafari perspectives on gender, health and human sexuality in Zimbabwe against the backdrop of the ‘one love’ principle in the movement. The study posits that Rastafari presents an ambivalent case on issues of gender, climate change, health and human sexuality. The study grappled with the question: Is there a disparity between Rastafari philosophy and practice of ‘one love’ pertaining to gender, climate change, health and human sexuality? The research used Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework and a combination of a critical review of published works and documentary analysis of print and electronic media for data collection. The study established that on the one hand, Rastafari is making a steady progress towards promoting gender equality by carving Alternative African Masculinities in the family and the public sphere. On the other hand, the challenges that remain pertain to Rastafari views on human sexuality and sexual and reproductive health. In particular, the anti-homosexuality stance and skepticism towards the use of contraceptives, catapult the ambivalence of the sacred in Rastafari. The study concludes that just as the works of Chitando seek to ensure that ‘all may live’ by any means necessary, promoting transformative African Masculinities would be the best way forward for Rastafarians to ‘become members of a new race’, thereby reliving the legacy of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 21st century Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Alternative African Masculinities, Gender, Health, Human sexuality, Rastafari, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The paradoxes associated with religion are well documented in scholarship with the conclusion that it is ambivalent (see for example, Davie 1990; Beckford 1998; Diener et al., 2011). Appleby (2000) neatly captures this sense of paradox as “the ambivalence of the sacred”. The ambivalent effects of religion in the social, economic, political and human rights arenas have resulted in complex contextual realities and variations in society (Carrette 2014). Indeed, religion is a double-edged sword that can be a boon or bane depending on a variety of perspectives reflecting differences of gender, race, class, sexuality, among other variables. Within religions, there is a dichotomy of hatred and dehumanization, on the one hand, and love and humanization, on the other hand, which are as old as religion itself (Schweiker 2023). A typical case of hatred can be instanced by the biblical story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, where out of jealous Cain murdered Abel, because his sacrifice was not accepted as his brother’s. Cain refused to be his “brother’s keeper”, which could have been a loving and humanizing role consistent with a moral universe that promoted social justice and human flourishing. The ‘sightings and sorrows of religion’ (Schweiker 2023) show religious hypocrisy. For instance, the Judeo-Christian declaration of equality between sexes on the pretext that all were born in the image of God or the Pauline injunction that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28) or the Rastafarian principle of ‘One Love’, hardly match the treatment of women in many of these religious traditions and within the global social realities where patriarchy was predominant (Schweiker 2023). The United Nations Development Programme (2023) reported that almost nine in ten people around the world have “a basic bias against women”. Religion is implicated in these toxic and unbalanced relations. The need to interrogate and reverse this lopsided picture, which has kept women subjugated to the horrific alliance of religion, culture and patriarchy, is a clarion call evident in the majority of Ezra Chitando’s works and the element of applied theology for human flourishing. This chapter seeks to critically engage selected works of Ezra Chitando, which I contextualise within Rastafari perspectives on gender, health and human sexuality in Zimbabwe against the backdrop of the ‘one love’ principle in the movement. Often identified as a minority new religious movement (NRM) in society, Rastafari has been misunderstood, misinterpreted and underplayed in scholarship as compared to other religious traditions (Afari 2007; Sibanda 2017). The study posits that Rastafari pre-

sents an ambivalent case on issues of gender, reproductive health and human sexuality. The study grappled with the question: Is there a disparity between Rastafari philosophy and practice of 'one love' pertaining to gender, health and human sexuality? The study established that on the one hand, Rastafari is making a steady progress towards promoting gender equality by carving Alternative African Masculinities in the family and the public sphere. On the other hand, the challenges that remain pertain to Rastafari views on human sexuality and the sexual and reproductive health. In particular, the anti-homosexuality stance and skepticism towards the use of contraceptives, catapult 'the ambivalence of the sacred' in Rastafari. The study concludes that just as the works of Chitando seek to ensure that 'all may live' by any means necessary, promoting transformative African Masculinities would be the best way forward for Rastafarians to "become members of a new race", thereby reliving the legacy of His Imperial Majesty (H.I.M.) Emperor Haile Selassie I in 21st century Zimbabwe. We now turn to the theoretical framework and research methodology that guided the study.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The research used Afrocentricity as a theoretical framework and a qualitative research methodology. Among the key proponents of the Afrocentric theory are Molefi Kete Asante, Ama Mazama, and Maulana Karenga. Afrocentricity examines phenomena through the lens of Africans as subjects rather than objects of study (Asante 1998, 2007). Therefore, Afrocentricity is a locus for cultural, ethnic, social and religious identity of the African people through which they come face to face with reality and the understanding of the world. On this basis, Afrocentricity helps to open new doors to African heritage and rediscovery of African culture. It promotes the agency of Africans and challenges white 'racial superiority' that placed Western culture at the centre whilst African heritages were peripheralised (Asante 2007; Coltri 2015).

Also, known as Africology, Afrocentricity "employs a radical and progressive African perspective or Afrocentric interpretation which regards African people and non-African people to establish a new vision of Africa that will transform the way we think of science, history, religion, fashion, architecture, music, and ethics" (Coltri 2015:117). In addition, Coltri (2015:119) cites Asante asserting that "Afrocentricity is a social, cultural

and spiritual practice for people who want to determine or re-build the self of the person and of the community, giving dignity with new African – ‘black’ criteria and perceptions.” The lessons that emerge from Afrocentricity fit well into Rastafari experiences. Rastafari is a pan-African movement built around the thesis of Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity is helpful to the study as it gives agency and evokes a process of transformation and self-determination to the marginalized and oppressed groups in society as well as their views on issues of human sexuality, masculinity, gender and health. On this basis, Afrocentricity can be useful to understand Ezra Chitando’s works on transformative African masculinities, the call for gender balance and liberating theologies against the backdrop of Rastafari views on gender relations, human sexuality and the sexual and reproductive health issues, which trigger ‘the ambivalence of the sacred’ in the movement. The chapter employed a qualitative research methodology that combined a critical review of Ezra Chitando’s selected published works. In other words, through an in-depth analysis of Chitando’s key scholarly publications that address the intersection of religion, HIV & AIDS, and alternative masculinities in Africa, the study brings his contribution to the fore. In addition, through a documentary analysis of selected scholarly articles, books, and book chapters authored by Ezra Chitando, the chapter extracted significant themes, arguments, and insights.

Understanding Rastafari, Philosophy of One Love and Existential Realities

This section provides an overview of Rastafari, the philosophy of ‘One Love’ and their existential realities in the context of this study. To avoid repetition, I take advantage of the fact that I have explored this kind of Rastafari background in my earlier works some of which will be referred to in this section. As a religion of Jamaican origin, Rastafari sticks out as one of the most significant new religious movements to emerge in the last century, which has influenced the world in varied ways. In this way, Rastafarians often claim that they have been grossly misunderstood, misrepresented, stigmatized, discriminated and misused in various contexts (Afari 2007; Sibanda 2017). The main factors attributed to the evolution of Rastafari include the three ideological pillars of Garveyism, Pan-Africanism and Ethiopianism. Marcus Garvey inspired Rastafari through the

“Back to Africa” movement prophetic messages on the coming of a redeemer black leader, which was fulfilled through the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I as the Negus of Ethiopia on 2 November 1930 (Sibanda 2017:413; Sibanda 2022:217). Among the central beliefs of Rastafari is the divinity of Haile Selassie I, whom they regard as the head creator and black messiah, Jah Rastafari.

As Rastafari spread across the world, partly through reggae music and other forms of art and culture, the adherents regarded themselves as a “Movement of Jah People” (Edmonds 2012:6). Indeed, the Rastafari movement adopted the personal name of Haile Selassie I, which is ‘Ras Tafari’. The Rastafarians were united by a common cause of resistance to ‘Babylon’ systems, which refer to the unjust and hegemonic structures of the Westerners as well as any forms of *downpression* (oppression), whether black or white. This would create a system that respected the philosophies described through an alliteration of related concepts such ‘One Love’, ‘One Earth’, ‘One Aim’, ‘One Heart’, ‘One Destiny’ and ‘One God/JAH’ (Sibanda 2016:192). Though these concepts are closely related and feed into each other, the study is mainly interested in the philosophy of ‘One Love’ and to critique it in the context of Ezra Chitando’s works and the self-understanding of Rastafarians as a Movement of Jah People. The philosophy of ‘One Love’ in Rastafari is best illustrated by the famous Speech of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie I to the United Nations in 1963, which I quote at length, where he said:

We must become something we have never been and for which our education and experience and environment have ill-prepared us. We must become bigger than we have ever been: more courageous, greater in spirit, larger in outlook. We must become members of a new race, overcoming petty prejudice, owing our ultimate allegiance not to nations but to our fellowmen within the human community (Selassie 1963).

The above quotation is a quest for a transformed humanity that defies the widespread experiences of racism, unjustified wars, gender-based violence and all that is toxic to human relatedness and human rights. Haile Selassie encouraged all the people to express ‘One Love’ by becoming “members of a new race” (see also, Manning n.d.), which is a caption that I adopt in the title of this chapter. The advice is foundational and prophetic as it can be applied towards the promotion of peace, love, harmony, gender equality, social justice and human rights in contemporary times. At the time when the speech was delivered, what was sticking out were the

racial innuendoes perpetrated by the Western nations on the prevalently weaker nations, including those in Africa. Picking up the stitches from the legacy of Haile Selassie I, Bob Marley, who was declared as “the most influential musician of the second half of the century” (Steffens 2000:60), and whom Rastas accept as a prophet, used reggae music to spread the message of love, peace, unity and togetherness. The lyrics of Marley’s song entitled “War” (1976) were based on the “War” Speech of H.I.M. delivered at the UN General Assembly, where Selassie appealed for transformation to become “members of a new race”, which would create a new global family that promoted healthy human relationships.

The “War” song in Rastafari understanding implies that it is necessary to fight for basic human rights and declare war everywhere oppressive “Babylon” systems are manifest as they believed that good would triumph over evil (Hagerman 2012). Therefore, reggae music is a narrative that denounces oppression and identifies with the oppressed and the pauperised. More significant to the understanding of Rastafari philosophy of ‘One Love’ from Marley is the album, “One Love” (1977), which was declared by the BBC as a “Song of the Millennium” (Steffens 2000). Marley’s “One Love” song is central to Rastafari call for peace, social justice, one love and one heart (Sibanda 2023a), which dovetails with Selassie’s exhortation to become “members of a new race” across the gender, class and racial divides. This implies that Rastafari can serve as a resource for resisting inequality, marginalization and exploitation.

The question of gender justice is one area that has attracted criticism against the predominant Rastafari masculine existential reality. Some researchers noted women’s subordination amidst liberation theology as characteristic to the movement (see Lake 1998). In addition, it is said that the biblical teachings, particularly the Levitical codes, were utilized to explain an ideology of female impurity during the menstrual cycle (Edmonds 2012:95). On the whole, this resulted in the exclusion and marginalization of women Rastas from some rituals and social interactions. However, despite the alleged reality of gender inequality that Rastafarians are faced with in their lived religion, it is important to explore how the Kingmen strive to uphold the dignity of their Queens on the basis of an Afrocentric model they term the “Omega Balance”. In Rastafari circles, Selassie I and Empress Menen are also known as “King Alpha” and “Queen Omega”, respectively (Sibanda 2023b:10). These titles are significant in understanding the Rastafari perceptions on gender relations, which can propel women agency in the movement. The ‘Omega balance’

is a critical way of also re-imagining the restoration the Kemetic principle of MAAT within the Rastafari movement. In other words, the 'Omega balance' expresses the gender equity relationship of HIM Emperor Hail Selassie I and his wife Empress Menen Asfaw who got married in July 1911. Following a golden wedding anniversary in 1961, the two were only separated by the untimely death of Empress Menen in 1962, but the Rastas believe that this marriage was a union of hearts and souls, which constantly reminded them of true love on this planet. This resonates with the "One Love" philosophy, which can transform the Rastafari gender relations in Zimbabwe. For instance, from documentary analysis of the messages shared in some Rastafari social media groups a standard greeting goes as follows: "Greetings in the name of HIM Emperor Hail Selassie I and Empress Menen – One perfect balance. Peace, Love and Inity to all." From the same platform one Rasta Elder posted the statement that further entrenched the hope for balancing the scales in the Rastafari movement, thus: "A man is not above a woman and a woman is not above a man. Our ancestors dealt with balance." Though it would be misleading to consider Rastafari as a homogenous group on the issue of gender relations, it can be asserted that it is an organic movement that can transform toxic masculinities.

Despite this positive and promising orientation, other paradoxes and criticisms leveled against Rastafari include their perceptions on sexual and reproductive health and human sexuality. In exploring issues of sexual and reproductive health, it is vital to situate the Rastafari community perceptions within the global, continental and national experiences to some diseases such as HIV & AIDS. This will pave way for invoking Ezra Chitando's alternative masculinities doctrine to be covered in the forthcoming sections of the study. The general statistics on how sub-Saharan Africa has been impacted by HIV & AIDS is well known (see for example, UNAIDS 2023), but what is lacking is its effects on Rastafarians in Zimbabwe. One reason why the statistics are scarce is because Rastafari tend to regard issues of access to facilities on sexual and reproductive health as an individual choice. However, as a movement of resistance to "Babylon" systems, Rastas are generally suspicious of the use of Western contraceptive methods for family planning such as Jadelle (levonorgestral implants), family planning tablets and even condoms. This is because on one hand, some of these methods have side effects that upsets the natural body functions, whilst on the other hand, it goes against God's plan for humanity to be fruitful and multiply. What emerges from the study is that

some members of the Rastafari communities have been infected and affected by the effects of HIV & AIDS pandemic in Zimbabwe. In addition, some members have also succumbed to the deadly disease, partly because they never opted to undergo HIV & AIDS Counselling and Testing, which could also lead to adoption of antiretroviral therapy. Thus, the Rastafari ideology that promotes suspicion of Western medical interventions is detrimental to human flourishing and has the potential of increasing the risk of spreading HIV & AIDS in Zimbabwe.

Finally, the existential realities of Rastas are also manifest through their views on human sexuality. The heterosexual stance is the most dominant position on the basis of Afrocentricity. In this way, anti-homosexuality is the main principle followed in the Rastafari movement in Zimbabwe. This is regarded as a theology of exclusion that perpetrates 'petty prejudice' and douses the 'One Love' principle that Rastas advocate. From documentary analysis on ideal human sexual relations posted on one of the Rastafari social media groups, one message was captured as follows: "Yes I, King and Queen ... the balance. No King and King, nor Queen and Queen ... No sodomite ... even the lie-ble [Bible] burns the buttybwai inna Sodom and Gomorrah." Through non-violent actions, Rastafari communities in Zimbabwe perpetrated 'structural violence' in the context of same sex relations, thereby promoting hegemonic masculinities and existential inequalities on the basis of queer sexual identities. This is useful in providing a closer analysis in the light of the works of Ezra Chitando, to which we now turn.

Ezra Chitando: An Eminent Academic of the 21st Century

This section provides an overview of the background of Ezra Chitando focusing on a brief history of how I came to know him, before delving into some of the themes, which pre-occupy his works. Ezra Chitando is a distinguished and brilliant but an unassuming African scholar renowned for his works, which mainly focus on method and theory in the study of religion, theology, gender studies, HIV/AIDS studies, African masculinities, religion and development. Educated in Zimbabwe from primary, secondary and tertiary institution level, Chitando was well grounded to the extent that upon the completion of his Master of Arts degree in Religious Studies he was recruited by the then Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy of the University of Zimbabwe as a Lecturer, ahead of his

peers. It was during these years when he was a Lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe that I had the privilege of being one of his students when I was doing a Special Honours programme in 1996. I can testify that his skyrocketing brilliance during lectures was later to bear fruit since I was inspired by his approach. I still remember that through the topic on New Religious Movements under Studies in World Religions, I came to appreciate research on marginalized communities such as Rastafari. Rastafari is a research area, which I later pursued under his mentorship for my DPhil programme at the University of Zimbabwe. Indeed, from among a cohort of countless students that passed through his hands as one who was “Equipped and ready to serve” (Chitando 2010) I can testify that Ezra Chitando was our ‘Gamaliel’, then and now as he continues to churn out socially-engaged scholarship on different cutting-edge themes.

Well before Chitando had risen through the ranks to be a Professor of Religious Studies in the areas of History and Phenomenology of Religion, it was clear from his earliest publications in the aspects of method and theory that he was closely following the footsteps of some of his mentors such as James L. Cox. Apparently, during his stint at the University of Zimbabwe, Cox popularized the application of the phenomenology of religion in the study of religion, a legacy which Chitando managed to uphold through his works. Besides breaking new ground as a prolific writer and a lecturer whose sessions were appetizing to one and all, Chitando was and is still actively involved in a number of academic and ecumenical bodies. As such, Chitando’s influence goes beyond the four walls of the classroom to the engagement of communities particularly through his former portfolio as a Theology Consultant on HIV & AIDS and a regional coordinator for southern Africa for the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA). In addition, because of his works on applied theology on HIV & AIDS, Chitando has had close partnership and active participation with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle), where he has collaborated to produce extensive literature on health, gender and development.

The importance of the collaboration of EHAIA and the Circle to the career of Ezra Chitando cannot be minimized. In the words of Chitando (2008:114) EHAIA “recognized the strategic importance of the Circle to African theology. Consequently, it has formed a viable partnership with the Circle. EHAIA and the Circle have collaborated in organizing workshops, conferences and publications.” All these are platforms that Chitando utilized effectively as an academic and theology consultant at

EHAIA by ensuring the mainstreaming of HIV and gender issues in theological education in Africa. As a deliberate move, both EHAIA and the Circle sought to promote the active and meaningful participation of women at conferences, workshops and seminars, which they organized as a way of engendering African theology (Chitando 2008:115). In other words, through collaborations of EHAIA and the Circle, there was greater openness on themes regarding sex and sexuality, which affected many African women who had greater vulnerability to the HIV pandemic. This was part of a long academic and community engagement that coloured his scholarly works. Tackling the intricate relationship between religion, HIV & AIDS, and alternative masculinities in Africa emerged as crucial subjects of Chitando's contributions to the academy. As will be explored in greater detail, in the next section, it can be argued that his research straddles across the multifaceted dynamics of methodological matters in the study of religion, religious beliefs, practices, human sexuality, development and gender identities in relation to the spread and management of HIV & AIDS across the continent.

Selected Themes from the Works of Ezra Chitando

Building up on the foregoing, this section proceeds to explore selected themes from Chitando's works in order to uncover key insights and contributions to the broader discourse on religion. The selected themes include gender-based violence, human sexuality, reproductive health, and African Masculinities in the African context. It can be argued that all these themes have a common link to the problems created by African Masculinities. Therefore, by examining his research, publications, and academic engagements through these themes, this sheds light on the innovative perspectives Chitando has brought to religious studies and how these insights have shaped the discourse in this discipline. The problem of gender-based violence has been tackled in various works. One of these works is a co-edited volume entitled: *Justice not Silence: Churches Facing Sexual and Gender-based Violence* (2013), where Ezra Chitando pointed out that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was a widespread and debilitating theological challenge that bedeviled churches and contributed to the spread of HIV & AIDS in contemporary society. The argument posited is that on the whole, men would be "expressing their power, control and dominance" (Chitando & Chirongoma 2013:9). In that way, gender-based

violence seems to be taken as a right by the perpetrators who are mainly men. The church and theological institutions are challenged to respond to SGBV in a liberating way to enforce justice and not to remain silent. Women were noted to be in the majority of victims of SGBV as compared to the male counterparts because it is largely anchored on the structures of patriarchy, which results in the cultural, sexual and the economic vulnerability of women (Pillay 2009). Therefore, for Chitando (2008:174), it is a “public secret” that poverty fuels the spread of HIV & AIDS in Africa and exacerbates women’s chances to be exposed not only to the disease but to SGBV from which they suffer in silence and secrecy.

In addition to the above, Chitando refuses to condone any form of violence across the gender divide. In a related work against SGBV, presented during a campaign on 16 days of activism against GBV, Chitando (2018) asseverates that “we cannot baptise violence.” Chitando’s observation was that religion was complicit in perpetrating SGBV, such that instead of pointing fingers to ‘bad people out there’, the ‘sacred canopy’ of religion had not done enough to prevent women from experiencing violence. In other words, it was urgent for the church and people of other religious and non-religious orientation to urgently address SGBV, whereby men would shun abusing sacred texts to justify and downplay violence against women. Through EHAIA and the Circle, Chitando further highlights the need for churches to uphold justice and women’s health in the face of SGBV and HIV (Chitando & Chirongoma 2013:10). This supports the idea that women are human and deserve equal rights and human rights, which must go beyond lip service and be reflected through the churches’ praxis and advocacy. Chitando’s work with particular reference to SGBV in the context of religion, shows his advocacy on the urgency of challenging “all the forces and processes that diminish health and well-being” (Chitando & Chirongoma 2013:11), especially among women and children. All in all, Chitando is candid on matters of SGBV and depicts religion in ambivalence as ‘dangerous’ and also ‘liberating’ to society.

Related to the above theme on SGBV, Chitando also contributed on the theme of human sexuality. In some of his works, Chitando traces the hostilities rendered to sexual minorities, including same-sex relationships and lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ). Challenging churches/religions to set their priorities right in promoting human flourishing, Chitando asks: “Why do male church leaders seem to have limitless energy when it comes to debates on homosexuality, but ap-

pear frozen when it comes to confronting SGBV?” (Chitando & Chirongoma 2013:10). This becomes a misplaced priority in his view. In another co-edited study on *Public religion, homophobia and the politics of homosexuality in Africa*, in which I also contributed a chapter, Chitando exposes the manifestation of political and state-sponsored homophobia on the African continent (van Klinken and Chitando 2016). The main challenge was the fact that Africa has been described as the most homophobic and most religious continent on Earth, but paradoxically religion and culture were registered as complicit, alongside political leaders, to the anti-homosexuality policies and actions. On this basis, Chitando contributes to the debate on the intersection of religion, homophobia and the politics of homosexuality in Africa from different perspectives and contexts, which are debates with implications on human rights violations. It is further observed that there are different understandings of sexuality, personhood, human rights and how ‘public religion’ and (homo)sexual politics interact (van Klinken and Chitando 2016:5,6). In this way, Chitando delved into the controversies over sexual orientation as something that is partly inspired by religious actors and beliefs to the detriment of sexual minority rights.

The issues of health, healing and well-being are tackled from various angles in the works of Chitando. One of the themes which was selected is that of reproductive health, which is explored here in the context of HIV & AIDS. Although HIV & AIDS are sometimes described as an “equal opportunity disease” (see Pillay 2009:103), the socio-cultural, economic and sexual vulnerability of many women and girls were behind the factors that increased the infection rate among women. Due to social, economic, cultural and spiritual factors, some women and girls cannot negotiate for safer sexual practices such as using condoms to avoid unplanned pregnancies or prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). Different religions have conspired to deny African women their health (Chitando 2008:172). Indeed, in some cultures and communities, women do not have control over their bodies and in turn cannot make responsible decisions and choices in their reproductive health. There is systematic structural violence and layers of secrecy surrounding women’s reproductive health that increased the vulnerability to HIV infection (Chitando 2008:173). Thus, a radical approach is required to stem the tide of the AIDS pandemic in the face of secrecy.

The theme of men and masculinities is another critical area of research that has held sway in the works of Chitando. The main challenge was that

religious and cultural ideologies have been used to promote toxic, dangerous and hegemonic masculinities in relation to gender and HIV & AIDS (Chitando & Chirongoma 2012:3). There are diverse forms of masculinities, which are socially constructed. In other words, masculinities are not fixed but malleable, fluid and dynamic. According to Van Klinken and Chitando (2015) the fact that masculinities are socially constructed, they can be deconstructed and transformed. On this basis, Chitando refers to the possibility of tapping from the agency of men in order to produce liberating and redemptive masculinities to downplay the “crises of masculinity.” It was established that in the African context, men have become targets for change since they were regarded as part of the problem and a solution towards addressing questions of masculinity in the context of religion and HIV. Apparently, religion was seen as a double-edged sword in relation to masculinities, gender-based violence and HIV & AIDS (Van Klinken and Chitando 2015). Chitando also refers to the problem that arises in the context of same-sex relations, which are a religious taboo and have attracted discrimination and violence as alternative human sexualities. Due to homophobia, homosexuality is a reality which has been affected by “four deadly Ss: silence, secrecy, shame and stigmatization” (Chitando & Chirongoma 2012:14), with implications on human rights and public health concerns, particularly in the context of HIV & AIDS interventions. Chitando’s involvement with EHAIA advances the need for involving the local churches to transform masculinities in the context of HIV & AIDS. Thus, there is a clarion call in the works of Chitando to urgently engage men and utilize their agency in order to reconfigure to factory settings and transform their intolerant masculinities to liberating alternative African masculinities.

Becoming ‘Members of a New Race’: Juxtaposing the Works of Ezra Chitando and Rastafari Perspectives in Zimbabwe

In order to appreciate the contribution of Ezra Chitando to the development of scholarship in the discipline of Religious Studies, this section juxtaposes the selected works of Chitando and Rastafari perspectives on sexual and gender-based violence, reproductive health, human sexuality, HIV & AIDS and masculinities in Zimbabwe. As has been alluded to in earlier sections of this chapter, Rastafari is a Pan-Africanist movement

built around the legacy and philosophy of 'One Love', which is best illustrated by the famous Speech of His Imperial Majesty at the United Nations General Assembly in 1963, where he, *inter alia*, urged people to "become members of a new race". The words of Selassie are foundational to the need to break down barriers anchored on religious and cultural ideologies that have been used to promote racial segregation, gender inequalities, homophobia and hegemonic masculinities. Therefore, the popular 'One Love' principle among Rastafari communities is a fertile ground for nurturing alternative African masculinities and agency to evoke a process of transformation in the gender relations and issues of human sexuality. Juxtaposing the Rastafari views on gender relations, human sexuality and the sexual and reproductive health issues, with Ezra Chitando's works trigger interesting dimensions that would show 'the ambivalence of the sacred' in the movement.

First, the call for gender balance and liberating theologies in Chitando's works can be a basis of comparison with the Rastafari experiences against the backdrop of 'becoming members of a new race'. Although the principle of 'One Love' is a persuasive, pervasive and persistent watch phrase in Rastafari, it can be argued that it is both liberating and oppressive at the same time. To a certain extent Rastafari can be regarded as 'an oppressive and gendered movement' to the detriment of its women counterparts (Sibanda 2023b). The gender stereotypes in the movement manifest through the role and status of women, subordination in marriage and spiritual matters, which evoke questions of gender justice and liberating masculinities, where words must be matched with action, particularly on the basis of the principle of 'One Love'. Apparently, biblical texts are used to support Rastafari gender standpoints and to give the Kingman leeway to express his patriarchal authority as head of the family. With this set up of gender imbalance, Rastawomen find it difficult to assert themselves in sexual relationships as they are weakened by male power. In previous research, I observed that "the use of contraceptives such as condoms and family planning tablets was discouraged as a Western ploy to suppress the growth of the black populace. This exposed the Rastawomen to the risk of contracting HIV and to have a lot of children, which earned them the superficial tag of an ideal Mother from Rastamen" (Sibanda 2023b:8). In addition, the same study established that "the ability to bear many children for the Kingman has not spared some of the women Rastas from abuses such as gender-based violence, neglect and lack of respect as an equal

partner” (Sibanda 2023b:8). Therefore, the Rastamen need to be reconfigured to exercise love, respect and care to the Rastafari women to match the vision of HIM Emperor Haile Selassie, whom they regard as a role model of gender balance in his relationship with Empress Menen. In turn, this echoes the works of Ezra Chitando that seek to enforce liberating and transformative masculinities in society in the context of SGBV and HIV & AIDS.

Another source of criticisms levelled against Rastafari is anchored on their homophobic attacks towards same-sex relations, which are churned out through music and other communication avenues. As noted in some of my writings, Rastafarians openly declared a “war” against what they regarded as evil, including same-sex relations. Using an Afrocentric standpoint, they claim that ‘real men’ would not condone homosexuality, which is ‘un-African’, ‘unnatural’, ‘unrighteous’ and ‘evil’ imposed by the Western ‘Babylon’ systems to confuse and stall the population growth of Africans. In fact, JAH created male and female for procreation and must replenish the earth (See, Sibanda 2016; Sibanda 2021:137; Sibanda 2023a). They further assert that the body is a temple of the Most-High which must be kept pure and holy and homosexuality is a form of ‘witchcraft’ because it is counterproductive. It can be argued that Rastafari masculinities are intolerant to alternative sexualities through ‘structural violence’. The Rastafari position on homosexuality is incompatible with the advice of H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie I of shunning ‘petty prejudices’ and becoming members of a new race. In the context of HIV & AIDS, Chitando laments the dangers of “theological rigidity”, which is a driver and co-determinant of the epidemic arguing that the church must contend with the reality that “vulnerability to HIV infection goes far beyond individual morality” (Chitando 2007:24). The most vulnerable to HIV infection are those on the margins of society including women, men who have sex with men, children, among others. Behaving as if same-sex relations are non-existent has detrimental effects on public health concerns, including the spread of HIV & AIDS (Van Klinken and Chitando 2015). Because of the fear of reprimand, stigma and discrimination one cannot rule out the possibility of Rasta lesbians and gays operating in the closet (Sibanda 2021:138), dampened by silence, secrecy and shame, which creates a time-bomb of a health crisis in the context of the spread of HIV & AIDS. Lack of condom use and a low level of HIV testing are lingering loopholes exacerbated by toxic masculinities in some faith communities in Africa (Van

Klinken and Chitando 2015), and Rastafarians can be evaluated in the same light.

Despite the foregoing gloomy picture that surrounds the Rastafari African masculinities, it is detrimental to throw out the baby with the bathwater. There is a lot of potential that can be developed from the Rastafari principle of 'One Love'. This can be a source of hope for the Rastafari communities to be advocates of gender justice. Following the example of the 'Omega balance', which mirrors the gender-equitable relationship between H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie I and Empress Menen, it can be argued that Rastamen can readily customize and transform their aggressive masculinities to the extent of shunning gender-based violence by supporting, sharing and promoting sexual and reproductive health patterns that are life-giving with their partners. For instance, the playing of drums in Nyahbinghi Rastafari is a gendered practice only confined to Kingmen or Empresses in the menopause. As confirmed by one of the Empresses in Zimbabwe, "the playing of drums before menopause by women was detrimental to the fertility and reproductive health of women, which was critical in Rastafari" (Sibanda 2023b:9). Thus, the rule on the playing of drums in the *trod* was a progressive reproductive health precaution, which Rasta women acknowledged and appreciated. In addition, Rastafarians can utilize reggae music with its "universal message of one love" to promote the liberating masculinities and attain Selassie's vision to "become members of a new race". The works of Chitando encourage men to be liberated from patriarchy as a constructive step towards attaining gender justice through accompaniment and solidarity to show love and acceptance of the marginalized.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of Chitando's intellectual journey, his individual and collaborative works with fellow scholars, and the lasting influence of his work on the study of religion in the contemporary world. As one of the leading African male scholars of religion, he addressed diverse themes, which were juxtaposed to the Rastafari perspectives on alternative African masculinities. By analyzing Chitando's insights, into diverse themes, the chapter demonstrated how religion shapes gender identities, influences HIV & AIDS outcomes, and offers potential avenues for addressing health disparities in the African

context. In addition, Rastafari has the potential to enforce liberating masculinities through unlearning “petty prejudice” that stultified gender justice, increased SGBV and increased the risk of spreading HIV & AIDS pandemic. Since the gender stereotypes and ‘theological rigidity’ was not God-given, but socially constructed in Rastafari, it was possible to deconstruct and transform the aggressive masculinities to “become members of a new race” in order to promote human flourishing. The principle of ‘One Love’ is a life-affirming attribute that needs to be fully exploited to address the existential realities and challenges. Through this principle, the Rastas would arguably begin to read the Bible in a liberating way, which reconfigures aggressive masculinities to create alternative African masculinities. By the same token, the writings of Chitando seek to produce men who are responsible in order to ensure that ‘all may live’ by any means necessary. Promoting transformative African Masculinities is critical for Rastafarians to balance the scales and “become members of a new race”, thereby reliving the legacy of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 21st century Zimbabwe. I conclude by evoking the caption of Sokfa John, Lilian Siwila and Federico Settler (2013) that says “Men Can, Should and Must Change!” The socially constructed masculinities are malleable to the extent that I-consciousness among Rastamen can produce liberating masculinities, the ‘Omega balance’ and the promotion of human flourishing and justice for all.

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29 The Nexus between Religion, Gender, and Peace Building in Zimbabwe

Francis Machingura & Matthew Mare

Abstract

The intersections between religion, gender and peace building are apparent in Zimbabwe. Hence, the three interlinked concepts' influence on each other when it comes to how people interact with their environment is obvious. Religion influences gender relations as well as wealth generation in Zimbabwe. It is notable and unfortunate that gender equality is still a topical issue in Zimbabwe. Whilst gender is a broad concept this study zeroes in on the discussion on the nexus between religion, gender and peace building. Christianity in particular falling far short when it comes to gender sensitivity, empowerment and peace building even though there are notable efforts to attain the same. Zimbabwe is still a patriarchal society whose spaces (private and public) are undoubtedly gendered. Religion and culture in Zimbabwe are both a negative and positive contributor to gender equality, inclusivity, and peace building. It also influences peace, wealth creation, equality and equity. Such discussions are worth examining with a view of making religion contribute positively to gender and peace building. Ultimately in light of UN Resolution 1325, any peace building efforts in Zimbabwe cannot succeed without a vehement consideration of gender issues and the position of religion in society. While females in Zimbabwe are fighting to break free from the claws of patriarchy, they however continue to face an equal measure if not greater force of resistance and violence from religion and culture in whose foundation we find patriarchy being heavily entrenched. Such a status quo warrants negative forces against peace building efforts in which religious and cultural perceptions of gender are not only challenged but transformed. The above forms the essence of this chapter's discussion. The study formulated X Model theory to try and find a solution to the identified problem since there is no theory that has yet collaborated gender, peacebuilding and religion in the Zimbabwean context.

Keywords: Peace building, women, patriarchy, religion, nexus

Introduction

In the 21st century, the issue of women's involvement in peace building remains topical and a front-page item globally. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 of 2000 is an important document which formally recognizes the role of women in peace building initiatives. Pertinently, UNSCR 1325 left an academic notch regarding the intersection between religion, gender, and peace building. The importance of religion and its role in gender and peace building has been overlooked in most of the discourses. Researchers, scholars, political analysts, and politicians tend to focus much on gender and peace building excluding the role and influence of religion in those areas. Religion defines and characterises how people socialise thereby defining the environment that people live in. We cannot talk of peace without looking at the place of religion in gender and peace building discourses. To achieve this important goal, the nexus between religion, gender and peace building has triggered academic debates and interests. The 2022 Census report of 2022 stated that, women are quantitatively above 52% of the entire population, and are failing to use their quantitative advantage to enforce behaviour change (Zimbabwe 2022 Population and Housing Census Report, Volume 1, 2022). Gender is socially constructed hence it can equally be deconstructed through engaging in academic discourse where topics such as the nexus between religion, gender and peace building are systematically articulated. The nexus aspect looks at the web, interaction, synergy, relationship, and interdependence between and among the three variables. The topic comes at the backdrop where it already assumes that there is lack of or there is dependability of religion, gender, and peace building and that, the gendered negative force on religion impedes women from being active agents of peace building. This is not to overlook the notable efforts being done in the religious sphere where some Christian denominations and religions are beginning to try and reform their religious belief systems to be gender sensitive.

The pre, during and post independent African states have institutionalized patriarchy. African Traditional Religion, hereinafter ATR, has also been found wanting or playing accomplice in the entrenchment of patriarchy. When Christianity came with its patriarchal values to Zimbabwe, it easily linked up. Thus, colonisation maintained the patriarchal status quo, hence women remained not emancipated. Women do not have access to development because of gender discrimination. To date, in most churches

women are not emancipated and yet religion is considered the fourth estate. It is religion that, should monitor and make the government account for its actions. Hence, the call for gender revolution within the religious sphere to enable women in religion access to development and regain a voice. The right to self-determination being a topical issue.

The major problem with the colonial states is that, they left a colonial legacy of both the state and the religion that do not recognise women. The purported colonial policies of assimilation seem not to have yielded any significant impact especially with regard to gender issues and the role of women in peace building. According to Ranger (1995) Zimbabwe's greatest threat is the colonial legacy. A comparison between Britain and Zimbabwe as its colony clearly show that, there is stark divergent values system and yet Britain governed Zimbabwe for hundred years. The colonial government did nothing to challenge patriarchy despite the fact that the colonisers who were their former colonies realised the devastating effects of patriachism and now advocating for a gender-blind environment where gender is now a choice that a natural phenomenon. Whilst those who brought patriarchy to African made this important realisation, Africa continues to perpetuate this archaic colonial legacy. Chitando (2002) believe that, the AICs were against the colonial authority and advocated for the emancipation of the black people from the colonial religious bondage. It is unfortunate that, upon attaining independence the AICs are now colonizers and they continue to suppress women especially the girl child.

According to Phimister (1988), the colonial states missed the opportunity to transform their colonies in respect to gender issues. It was unwise to wait to be booted out before starting to advocate for women's recognition from outside when it had over hundred years in power though as a colony. The colonial government would have done much to outlaw patriarchy and reform religion to ensure it is gender sensitive. According to Mutua (2016) discussed how the colonial authorities sought to suppress AICs by viewing them as a threat to their control. In addition, Bhebhe (1999) the Rhodesian government restricted the activities of AICs who view them as a threat to their control. The colonial government institutionalised patriarchy in Zimbabwe hence Zimbabwe is being affected by a colonial legacy. The state is now struggling to reform the AICs to make them gender sensitive despite the fact that women were among the founders of the AICs and Mai Chaza of Guta RaJehova is a classic example (Chavhunduka, 1997). Infact in the post-colonial Zimbabwe, both the AICs and Western mainline churches became one in how they view gender issues. Thus, the

Western mainline churches and the AICs remain patriarchal to date, with a clear-cut gender disparity between a nun and a priest, for example (Machingura, 2005). The religious sphere has never considered women with gender-just lenses despite operating in a global world where issues of gender underwent major transformations.

The issue of the intersection between religion, gender and peace building is a recent discourse at the instigation of rise in feminism and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. According to Okechi (2011), the UNSCR1325 made it clear that, no more peace building strategy that is without women at the centre. The UNSCR 1325 was promulgated after several success stories where women involvement in peace initiatives yielded sustainable peace. The role played by women during the Gacaca peace process in Rwanda clearly demonstrated that, given a chance, women are capable leaders and peace negotiators against the popular patriarchal belief that, women are incapable human beings (Amata, 2017). In order for any peace building process to be recognized by the United Nations post the UNSCR 1325 it must have women at the centre, hence the nexus between religion, gender and peace building becomes imperative academic discourse that leads to the sustainable peace and development. Developmentalists are of the opinion that, peace and being gender sensitive are the cornerstones of the development agenda (Ogbobu, 2019; Williamson, 2020). Thus, they ascribe underdevelopment to patriarchal tenets hence the question regarding gender, religion and peace is central. Peace is an important ingredient for sustainable growth in any society and Zimbabwe is not an exception. The agenda pushes for religion to play a positive role towards gender and peace building. Thus, roping religion to be an active agent of gender and development.

Central to peace building is the full involvement and equal participation of women in conflict resolution and subsequent peace building. To achieve this goal, religion has been identified as one of the impediments to gender equality and as a result, women in religion are being hampered from peace building processes or initiatives. The Security Council adopted resolution (S/RES/1325) on women, peace and security on 31 October 2000 (UNSC, 2000) (Ogbobu, 2019). The resolution reaffirms the important role played by women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the mainte-

nance and promotion of peace and security. Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts (CSW, 2004). It also calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. The resolution provides several important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and the entities of the United Nations system.

According to Chitando (2017) religion can play a key role in both gender and peace building. Religion is a way of life which determines and shapes behaviour as well as the worldviews of people. Whilst the UNSCR1325 states that, women be given a central role to play; religion can become an obstacle to women's inclusion. The meaningful involvement of women in peace building may be determined by the nexus between religion and gender, for example, in most AICs a woman has no right to stand before men and address them on whatever discourse (Mouton, 2019). The same is with Islam and Judaism where Leviticus 15 verse 20 restrict and control women in the public sphere. The religious sphere is thus not gender-blind hence negative peace usually exists due to women exclusion from the mainstream economy.

X Model

The X model is a theory mooted by this study, since there is no theory in Zimbabwe that has yet looked into the nexus between religion, gender, and peacebuilding. The X represent the unknown facts that, there is a nexus between religion, gender and peace building after the contemporary studied identified the untapped talent that women possess. The theory derives its mandate from the UNSCR 1325 which affirmed the role of women in gender and peacebuilding. The theory looks at religion as the fourth estate in Zimbabwe to foster peacebuilding and gender issues. There are latent and direct violence cases in the religious sphere in Zimbabwe. These latent and direct violence theological cases emanate from the conflicting and diverge theological standpoints. There are both latent and direct violence cases in Anglican, AICs mainly Masowe, Paul Mwa-zha, Anglican, Catholic church, African Faith Mission (AFM), Methodist church and in the secular world among other. These issues need to be addressed and women based on the UNSCR 1325 scientific study findings

noted that, women play a key role in peace building and for years this talent remained untapped.

According to John Galtung (1996) in any society crisis has three stages namely, pre, during and post conflict phases. In the pre-crisis phase is where the efforts are meant to prevent the conflict from manifesting as direct violence. This is done by identifying the latent issues and addressing all the frozen conflicts in the society. Women play a key role in identifying all the threats to the society's insecurity because they are usually most affected by any form conflict due to their central role in the society. All the conflicts in both the church and the secular world in Zimbabwe points to unresolved grievances at the pre-conflict stages. According to Ndlovu (2020) the women can play an important role in terms of providing early warning, mechanism to respond the salient issues and peace building in order to help the society to retain its pre-crisis stage. In the crisis phase women assumes the role of peace negotiators in order to de-escalate the conflict. Women are the most qualified to play this role effectively because they are the worst affected by the devastating effects of war and women in religion are grounded in peace teachings by the churches. The post conflict where peace building is located, women intervene to restore the relations of the warring parties to be where it was before the conflict (Gudyanga, 2017). The X model demand that women be meaningfully included in the three phases of the conflict if peace building is set to be a lived reality.

According to Bratton (2017) Zimbabwe is one such country that is highly polarised with the majority of citizens experiencing a surge mentality, violence, rural societies are marginalisation and women are not fully included and recognised in term of decision making. We are dealing with Africa where women under patriarchal bondage with limited hope for full and meaningful inclusion of women in peace, religion and gender issues. The UNSCR of 2022 stated that, the world might perhaps require additional 286 years for women to be full recognised and this is a sad digression from the vision 2030 it has previously set (Burton, 2020). This means the efforts to empower women continues to hit a snag as gender issues require a deep analysis and early warning mechanisms to try and account for the variables that might work against the full attainment of women inclusion in the nexus between religion, Gender, and Peace Building in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular.

It is a fact that as long as religion and gender issues fail to be gender sensitive the UNSCR 1325 will remain a hoax in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. The problem with religion in the modern society is that, it has mastered the art of supporting the status quo forcing the government to turn a blind eye on how women in religion can play a key role in peace education. Women naturally play a central role when it comes to socialisation and peace education is one of the major tools of fostering behaviour change in any society. Karl Marx defined religion as an opium of the people having noted how power the sector is in behaviour change and women in religion if empowered by removing the gender obstacles can be the major source of peace building (Carver, 2018). People have a natural respect for their religion more than they have allegiance to their own government and Zimbabwe with more than 85 percent being Christians and the majority of the congregants being women, there is greater opportunity to make use of these women to transform the society. The colonizers even felt the power of religion and hence their decision to destroy this key social fabric that John Mbiti (1997) stated that, Africans are notoriously religious. Thus, Africans cannot be easily moved from their religious standpoint hence the need to look at the nexus between religion, gender and peace building.

This study concurs with the advocates of the insider mediation concept where the societies affected must be given a fair platform to dialogue their problems with a view to find a shared goal on how best to resolve their problem. The idea is to ensure that religion empowers women so that they are able to be useful in peace building initiatives. Their participation in the Gacaca in Rwanda clearly demonstrated their capability as peace builders. This forces a shift in how women are viewed and placed in terms of peace building and the UNSCR 1325 has its roots in Africa having noted that, African women are endowed with a key attribute of peace building (Ticker, 2019). The women's capabilities to be strategic peace builders emanate from the fact that, they are disempowered by patriarchy and religion resulting in them having limited access to development and being given little space in peacebuilding initiatives. Whilst the UNSCR 1325 pushes for women to take up active role in peace building it failed to come up with strategies on how to tame their key barrier that is religion and gender. Religion and gender continue to undermine such efforts and there is no religion in Zimbabwe that fully recognised women as equals to men.

The theory acknowledges that women as mothers they have aspects that can be exploited towards peacebuilding and gender. Religious feminism can be an important step towards ensuring that, religion is gender sensitive and play an important role towards peacebuilding initiatives. Religion has platforms which can be exploited to push for sustainable peace. In Christianity women have Thursdays known as *china* in Shona where women gather to discuss issues affecting them. Thus, in religion there are provisions for women empowerment even though the absoluteness of the empowerment is the bone of contention by scholarship. These isolated facts identified confirm the intersection that exists between religion, gender, and peace building.

The X factor model looks at the nexus between peacebuilding, religion, and gender sensitivity as intertwined in ways that demand both men and women should play various complementary roles. This model pushes for religion to take a leading role as the guarantor of peace building and gender initiatives. The nexus between the three variables seeks to empower women to regain their lost position to patriarchy. The position seeks to ensure that women in the religious spheres are empowered, as they play various gender and peace building initiatives. Despite women being denied equal opportunity, the aunties in their inferior social roles in ATR play a major conflict resolution role within the family set ups. It is painstaking to note that, all major domestic family conflicts are usually resolved by the patriarchy and only petty family situations are the ones referred to women. The theory seeks to recover lost history where powerful women emerged from the purely patriarchal society and defied the odds. Mbuya Nehanda was a stateswoman, peace mediator and custodian of African values, an indication that women are capable peacebuilders if given equal opportunity and support. The same applies to the king's wife whose roles were those of mediators and peace builders. In day-to-day life, mothers are centres of socialisation hence the Shona idiom *musha mukadzi* meaning a family is given its character by the woman. Whilst these important attributes are there at traditional level, the role of indigenous knowledge systems has not been institutionalised.

The theory also posits that, religion in its current state in Zimbabwe is antithesis to UNSCR 1325 which demands full empowerment and participation of women. The churches in Zimbabwe do not have peace education in their theologies and neither did Section 60 of the Constitution talks of women's roles in religion. Section 60 of the constitution is the only legal provision in the Constitution which talks of religion in Zimbabwe.

The failure by this section of the Constitution to talk of the nexus between gender, religion and peace building shows that, there is no political and statutory will to implement the provisions of the UNSCR 1325. The UNSCR 1325 clearly states that, demand that states must domesticate the provisions contained in the Resolution 1325. The oversight by both the UNSCR 1325 and Section 60 of the Constitution is an antithesis to full exploitation of the potential women have as peace educators and peace builders.

The theory is against the discrimination, objectification, economic inequality, gender role and stereotypes in pursuit of equality for men and women. Generally, most religions block and hinder women from full participation in peace building initiatives. In the context of Zimbabwe, the state has the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) whose mandate is to address all forms of violence and to foster peace building wherein the UNSCR 1325 and the Constitution are the primary documents that direct how the process must be done. However, since its formation in 2013 it has been speaking on behalf of women without their full and meaningful inclusion. In addition, women in religion have not been meaningfully involved by the NPRC and this means the state failed to realise the important nexus between religion, gender and peace building. The NPRC's failure to adopt a holistic approach, is against the UNSCR 1325 which is demanding that there can be no peace building initiative without women's involvement. This position puts religion as one of the components that need to be reformed since its theologies and practices are hinged on extreme patriarchy.

The theory emphasizes cooperation and respect for women inclusion over hierarchy (Aqleem, 2020). Thus, to provide women with ethical identities and spiritual positions that create spaces for women to practice their own agency and forms of power. The viewpoint opined that, religion is a positive source of motivation and mobilisation in struggles for gender equality and non-discrimination. Women as active agents of change, play a key role in peace building initiatives. Participation of women in peace building initiatives increases equality, expands human choices, eliminates gender stratification, promotes sexual freedom and ends sexual violence. In Pentecostal churches, women can assume important religious positions like preaching, teaching, and missionary roles. Women raise and teach children, maintain a Godly household, and maintain social groups in church (Mason, 2016). Thus, women must be allowed positions of power. The theory calls for gender sensitivity and inclusivity in Zimbabwe and

inter alia. In conjecture viewpoint women are generally the majority hence they can bring meaningful change in terms of peacebuilding and fostering gender inclusivity.

In a perspective brought forward by Mare in his thesis, women are at times their own oppressors and the study cited how nuns are trained in the Roman Catholic church (Mare, 2020). The study noted with concern the level of abuse (emotional and physical), deceit, conspiracy theories, hate, tribal and racial speech in the formation houses. A lot of nuns have withdrawn and some commit suicide as a result of the abuse by fellow senior nuns in the formation houses. In the same vein, the study also cited Johanne Marange Apostolic church, where older women are conduits to child marriages and other nefarious oppressive tenets to fellow women. In this result the call for gender sensitivity, peacebuilding and religion must be looked at in a holistic manner. All forms of barrier to women must be eradicated regardless of cause to enable full participation of women.

Gender and Religion

Religion had never been systematically studied before the 19th century's age of reasoning and was full of dogma. One of the dogmas is that men and women are not equal and as such a woman enjoys limited rights. Prior to that religion was sacrosanct hence it was heresy to subject religion to systematic study. The failure to study religion systematically has resulted in its theologies immune to academic interrogation. It is in the recent years when researchers began to re-read the bible using the gender-blind lenses (Mohanty, 2013). The Bible stories which denigrate women and exalt men shaped Christian theology. Theology became patriarchal and the catholic doctrine of papal infallibility also became a stumbling block. Martin Luther wrote his 95-thesis challenging the catholic dogma with limited success because churches are unwilling to adjust their theological standpoint (Wenger, 2015). Church dogmas are since a cause of concern since the era of Martin Luther. To this contemporary world in the Catholic Church the Pope is infallible and openly advances patriarchy resulting in a priest being more important than a despite the fact that, both have same sacrament of celibacy. The available peace building platform in the Catholic church, the Catholic Commission on Justice and Peace (CCJP) lack gender balance in its composition. The important wing in the

Catholic church is failing to advocate for the full recognition of women as equal partners and to include the dimension in its rank and file to allow women to play an active role in peace building.

To date, women in religion remain oppressed and this is not to overlook the attempts by some churches to recognise women as not only equals but also as having a key role in peacebuilding and gender issues. The papal bull, known as the 1962 Vatican II made an important stride towards recognising black women to be nuns and catechists but has not been much useful in making them advocates of peace building initiatives (Okolo, 2017). Since 1962 there has not been any significant shift towards women inclusion in peace building despite the global call for realignment of policies and theologies towards gender sensitive theologies. To note, the Catholic Church has a special wing, the Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace (CCJP) to foster peacebuilding and women's rights (Gioia, 2017). Unfortunately, structurally, there are few if any women in its structures as the organ is clogged with Catholic priests and bishops. This clearly demonstrates that, whilst women have an important role to play in religion and peacebuilding, patriarchy remains a structural barrier.

The debris of colonisation continues to affect women's participation in peacebuilding and religion (Oduyeye). When patriarchal Christianity came to Africa through colonisation, instead of removing elements that undermined women, unfortunately it coexisted with the African Traditional Religion whose belief systems to some extents were patriarchally centred (Dube, 2018). Unfortunately, to date their involvement remains limited due to patriarchal resistance to change. This research advocates for continuous shedding off of oppressive elements which used to and continue to undermine women's rights. The aim is to enhance women participation in religion, peacebuilding and gender in line with contemporary efforts to uplift women by eradicating all forms of barriers.

The complex and complicated subject matter is whether religion is relevant to gender and peace building initiatives. There are scholars who strongly believe that religion is relevant to the nexus between the two variables and there are radical ones who see no evidence of correlation. The answer to the subject matter depends on the academic lenses one is putting on. In the past no women would become a chief but in Zimbabwe we do not have women as chiefs who are the drivers of peace, equality and religious values in their areas of jurisdiction. Religion shapes character hence it promotes the character of peace where both women and men play a significant role.

Religion is a way of life, and it is socially constructed and that of patriarchal Africa was socially constructed by the colonizers (Tamez, 2017). The roles given to men and women in religion are socially constructed. The feminists have noted with concern that, women in religion are oppressed and grossly disempowered. Women do not have independent life hence their life and role in the society is patriarchally defined and determined. Religion has become one of the traditional oppressors of women and has been inhibiting them from full participation to include their roles as peacekeepers. The UNR 1325 saw it fit to demand that women be fully empowered and be included in any peace building initiative (Taylor, 2018).

The nexus between religion, gender and peace building is not linear. Women in religion require to be emancipated from religious patriarchal dominance and suppression. According to Rakoczy (2004), women in religion are experiencing a lot of violence. This scholarly position insinuates that, issues of gender and peace building are needed in religion if there is going to be any transformation. This also means that religion has not been useful in fostering gender sensitivity towards peace building initiatives. The religious feminism and contextual theology endeavours to ensure that religion is gender sensitive as well as an important variable to peace building. Religion in its current state is too toxic due to high levels of systemic patriarchy. The nexus between religion and gender in Africa is an anti-thesis to the participation of women in peace building initiatives. The radical feminists apportion blame on men for their dwindling role in peace building initiatives. The insights from radical feminists are important towards transforming religion to be for the women and subsequently enhance and empower women participation in all spheres of life.

Meanwhile, there are several ways in which religion and culture can contribute to the empowerment of women in peace building missions. The question is whether religion is for women or not. The research seeks to ensure that, women play key roles in conflict resolution as aunties, sisters, and mothers in day to day lives of the people. The research also seeks to magnify the role of women at household level. Women as mothers, socialise and resolve conflicts within and among their children and extended families. The research also seeks to remove barriers that inhibit meaningful involvement of women in peacebuilding. An example of a patriarchal practice is where women are excluded in family meetings known as *dare*.

Gender gives roles between men and women and gender stereotypes confine women to the household level. Women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding initiatives continue to be hampered by patriarchy.

Scholars reiterated a gendered approach to peace building and conflict resolution (Speake, 2013). People possess unique set of attributes and experiences during and post conflict hence women concerns are better articulated by women themselves. This includes transforming the religious sphere to be gender sensitive and inclusive so that religion can promote women participation in peace building. Peace building must start and be promoted in the religions themselves. This peace building role by women can be both at formal and informal level. The interaction between key variables religion, gender and peace building determines power dynamics and structural inequalities. Women are instrumental in bringing about sustainable peace than confining them to being mothers and caregivers (Puechguirbal, 2010:177). Denying women access to peace building will perpetuate violence, conflict, and the impoverishment of women. Peace building acknowledges the importance of identifying and building structures which militates against war (Barnett, et al., 2007:37). Gendered peace building approach addresses the root causes of conflicts in families and society. Gender, religion, and conflicts are not exclusive of each other.

Gender and religion remain intimately intertwined towards shaping social, political, and economic order leaving women in the discourse on religion, gender and peace building. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1985:12) argues that most religions degrade women, and this makes it difficult for their emancipation. Nancy Ammerman (1987) bemoaned that most women are being confined to the household sphere. Thus, whilst women in religion are expected to play a central role in peace building, they are being disempowered by religions that is patriarchal.

According to Kimberly Crenshaw (1992), religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred things which are all social constructs. The scholar went on to introduce the concept of intersexuality between gender with other social identities. This position by Kimberly Crenshaw affirms the sociological view point that gender and religious beliefs are social constructs which are amenable to change through deconstruction and reconstruction. The impetus is now with the religious sphere to be gender sensitive and ensure that there is meaningful involvement of women in peacebuilding.

Religion contributes to the heartbeat of society. It is part of the moral fibre and conscience of society. Religion plays a critical role in bringing peace, love, hope, and faith. Of note, the UNC demand for strategies on the status and empowerment of women in building faith and gender. Religion exerts a tremendous influence on women's and men's identity, behaviour, and beliefs. If women are not invited and employed in peace building initiatives; their importance in developing communities and the nation at large remains unnoticed. Pratt & Richter-Devroe (2011:490) demand for equal participation in peace processes growing. There is a unanimous call for the participation of women in religion, civic organisation, and government. The participation includes taking up leadership positions or decisions.

Religious gender-mainstreaming is an important step towards increasing women's involvement and empowerment. This calls for a genuine transformative gendered approach to peace building and conflict resolution (Onslow & Schoofs, 2010). Meanwhile, religion continues to marginalize women, and fails to promote them to high levels of leadership (Rehn and Johnson, 2002:66). If institutions called of God or associated with the divine leave women out; it creates a crisis. The religious deep-rooted gender inequality is an impediment to women's participation in peace building efforts. This reduces the number of women in peacekeeping efforts. The limited number of women in peace building politics and government goes beyond the religious sphere and in 2008 only about 2% of military personnel in UN peace keeping forces were female (Bertolazzi, 2010:6). Religion influences gender and peace building discourses. If religious spaces are opened to women; it will increase their role in peace-making participation. Development and wealth creation can only happen where peace is and religion has a role to play.

Women and Peace Building

Women are usually victims of religious alienation of women hence they are unable to make meaningful change in the society. In the 21st century, there have been a growing number of scholars and activists who are re-examining religious doctrines and laws by advocating for women's participation in the interpretation of religious doctrines that fuel the alienation of certain people as a result of gender, economic status, sexuality, political affiliation, and disability. In line with this thinking, religious women who

have been adversely affected by patriarchy must be given equal opportunity in peacebuilding and advancement of gender equality and equity.

The primary goal of most initiatives is to ensure that women in religion become an integral voice in the social justice discourses that promote gender equality (Bertolazzi, 2010:6). This creates a conducive environment for religious women to engage in various facets of gender equality and peace building work. New empowering methods of interpretation of religious beliefs and practices support the equality of people as well as meaningful involvement of women in peace building. Collaborative efforts, dialogue and opportunities must be created for women from the various religious spheres to participate in the peace building efforts.

The study recognises that its focus is Zimbabwe, but it cannot be discussed in isolation from events around the globe. The modern world is a global village as states live in a family of nations and regulated by the international law. The study having noted that the subject matter is global since the findings are generalisable, efforts by this study are to push for additional protocol to the UNSCR 1325. The UNSCR 1325 committed the fallacy of bundling, and yet women in various spheres of life have unique experiences towards gender, religion and peacebuilding. The UNSCR 1325 must recognise the nexus that exists between religion, gender, and peace building efforts where women of faith are supported and empowered to participate in peace building initiatives. Currently, the UNSC has not been explicit regarding meaningful involvement of women of faith in peace building initiatives. This study advocates for specific protocol to the existing UNSCR 1325 which would specifically look at religious women and how they contribute to peacebuilding and gender issues. The UN must open the playing field to accommodate and recognise the efforts by religious women in that respect. This involves tailor made training on women of faith, open space for them to speak at United Nations level and render any other relevant support that uplift the women of faith towards peacebuilding and gender.

Jaji writes on integrating women's roles in all peace building initiatives and socialisation (Jaji, 2018). Women's normative and active roles in raising children can be capitalised so that peace becomes part of children's values (Fidan and Bui, 2016). The values instilled in the private sphere would complement peace building in the public sphere. Women in Church also play a central role in socialisation hence similarly the gen-

dered dimension of religion can equally enhance the peace building efforts. This shows that women have unique attributes which can be exploited to foster peace building in any family and society.

Nexus between Religion, Gender, and Peace Building

At the core of women's empowerment is the issue of gender balance. Gender relates to roles that society give to men and women. The society, to which religion is part of, is socially constructed and as such it can be deconstructed as the society is moving towards empowering women in all spheres of life. There are gender constructions in religious sphere which are patriarchally centred. Most religion continues to maintain patriarchal structures that women become submissive to and do not have power to question patriarchal orders. Technically, women and men in religious spheres enjoy variable rights. The sustainable developmental goals demand for equal gender rights between men and women. Thus, in this viewpoint religion is a barrier to the supposedly cordial relationship which exists between gender and peace building as enshrined in the UNRC 1325. Some scholars traditionally believe that religion, gender, and peace building are exclusive of each other. They take religion as spiritual by virtue of having metaphysical realities whilst gender and peace building belong to social science studies. This position creates a missing link when analysing the interaction between gender and peace building.

The inclusion of religion in the religious, gender and peace building matrix is a recent development. This was after it was realised that humanity by its very nature is spiritual though the patriarchal nature of religion hampers the operationalisation of the UNRC 1325 which demand that, women in all walks of life be actively involved in peace building initiatives. There are gross patriarchal practices in religion that disempower women. Radical scholars believe that religion has no direct correlation between gender and peace building (Juschka, 2018). This school of thought strongly believes that religion remains part and parcel of one's private life. Gender and peace building are taken as having their own peculiar interaction where religion is a misfit. The primary goal of religion is preparing people for heaven and gender-peace building are mundane aspects. This variation of the worldview makes religion irrelevant to the nexus between gender and peace building. Yet it is clear that religion cannot be removed or shied away from in any peace building initiatives matrix.

Religion in Peace Building Matrix

The nexus between religion and peace building remains a grey area as there is no treaty or convention to define gender and religion in the context of peace building. With how powerful religion is in fostering issues of peace building it is an oversight on the part of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to compel states and non-state actors in peace building initiatives to include religion and women as indispensable variables. Religion is a very powerful institution and its members are loyal to its teachings hence the need to tap into this undermined and neglected sector. The lenses through which the issues of peace building are viewed must change and efforts must be churned towards harnessing gender and religion into peace building initiatives.

The religious sphere creates a narrative that, it is the will of God that women be subordinate to men. This narrative derived from the creation myths that God created men first and woman as an afterthought. As a result, most theologies follow this flawed creation narrative which dehumanise women and deny them space to do peacebuilding work. The logic behind supporting a gendered approach to peace building is that it enhances the efficiency and effective peace building. According to Diaz women's involvement in formal missions and talks remain low (Diaz, 2010:1). Women are generally denied access to the broader agenda of peace building and conflict resolution that leads to sustainable development (Puechguirbal, 2010:177). The assumption advanced by the proponents of the UNSCR 1325 is that women involved in peace building will address gender related concerns since conflicts affect women than men.

Conclusion

There is a need to ensure that, the UN Women create, a platform where religious women's voice is heard and supported. There is also the need to create several platforms in society that encourage women participation in peace building. The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 talks of partnerships and synergies that create or brings together religious teachings, gender issues, peace building initiatives, universal human rights, national constitution, and the lived realities of people. Peace building should not be limited to the public sphere but promoted in private spaces as well where comprehensive teachings and new models of socialisation

are deliberately promoted to inculcate the culture of peace at home and in public.

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30 Religion, Gender, and African Masculinities

Ezra Chitando Speaks

Molly *Manyonganise*, Masiwa Ragies *Gunda*, Linda *Naicker*

Abstract

The study of religion, gender and African masculinities has come a long way. The contributions of African scholars of religion and theology are notable in this area. For example, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians commonly referred to as 'the Circle' has done a lot in terms of engagement with discourses on religion and gender as well as challenging heteronormative notions of gender. The Circle has also interrogated the role of sacred texts in shaping gendered attitudes in ways that disenfranchises women. However, the Circle has noted that women's struggles for liberation cannot be realized if men are left behind. Hence, it has always called for a two-winged theology that encompasses both genders. In this respect, the Circle has created space for men (whom it calls 'friends of the Circle') to participate in its activities of researching and publishing on issues of religion/theology and gender. One of the men who has journeyed with the Circle is Ezra Chitando. Throughout his academic journey with the Circle, he has offered moral and academic support to both women and men whose interest is in calling for the liberation of women from the shackles of patriarchy. As such, he has published extensively on issues of religion, gender and African masculinities. Therefore, in this chapter, we endeavor to present Ezra Chitando's views based on an interview we had with him, on how far the study of religion, gender and African masculinities has gone, the achievements realized, lessons learnt and the future of the field. Our intention is to evaluate, critique and provide a way forward for the study of religion, gender and African masculinities.

Keywords: African masculinities, Ezra Chitando, gender, patriarchy, religion, the Circle

Introduction

Ezra Chitando is a man of many talents wearing many hats! For many people, this is recipe for mediocrity and half-hearted commitments, however for Ezra this has been a recipe for immense impact. Ezra is a Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe and one of the few individuals that became professors very early because of his industry, international recognition and community impact. He also served as a Theology Consultant for the World Council of Churches (WCC) with the task to work with churches in Africa to assist in their responses to HIV & AIDS, through the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA) programme. Ezra was one of a group of theologians in Africa, who contributed immensely to the demystification of HIV & AIDS, challenging the initial attempts to quarantine HIV & AIDS in the medical compartment by demonstrating how it intersected with all other spheres of life. In addressing religious leaders in Africa, Ezra became synonymous with life-giving theologies. He challenged faith leaders on the death-dealing theologies and teachings that were increasing the levels of stigmatisation that people living with and personally affected by HIV & AIDS were enduring in society. He advocated alternative theologies, theologies of compassion, of life, of love became the centrepieces of activities driven by EHAIA across Africa.

Ezra's work with the Circle, the WCC and faith leaders and communities in Africa and beyond led him to one of his greatest contributions in this regard. Whereas, many will speak of the elephant in the room, Ezra reasoned that if HIV & AIDS were the elephant in the room, then patriarchy was the room. The problem was not the elephant; the problem was the room. There began his concerted efforts to dismantle the room to free the elephant and the concept of transformative, alternative, redemptive masculinity became a major area of focus for Ezra. HIV & AIDS were wreaking havoc in communities because of the toxicity that was being sowed by patriarchal norms and values in these communities. In this regard, his ally-ship with the Circle was one driven by common interest, the dismantling of toxic masculinities in Africa. No wonder Ezra seamlessly partnered and collaborated with and fitted into the activities of the Circle. Faith communities and women had a stake in the production line that produced men in the different communities, buying into the traditional African idiom, it is easier to build young boys than to repair old and broken men. Ezra advocated a re-think, a re-imagination of masculinity and challenged faith communities to revise, re-do, abandon even, the toxic

masculinity curriculum that had been the basis of socializing young boys into broken and dangerous men who were driving HIV infection rates through the roof in Africa.

The questions that kept knocking in our heads were to do with the intentionality of Ezra's work and commitments, how can a man intentionally seek to dismantle that which gives him unmerited privileges? What motivated him to swim against the current? We were convinced there has to be something in his background that could shed light on the choices that Ezra has made in the past three decades. What follows in this chapter are our findings from talking to Ezra through interviews we had with him, our discussion and analysis. While we have tried to present Ezra's responses *verbatim*, due to space limitations, we have had to paraphrase some parts but at all times with the goal of maintaining the meaning and essence of his words. Twelve questions were put to Ezra and below are the responses.

In Conversation with Ezra Chitando: The Man, Motivations and Reflections

1. Who is Ezra Chitando both at home and in the field of academia?

The unassuming and humble Prof, began by highlighting that "my personality and socialization do not allow me to talk about myself!" Yet, recognizing the importance of the interview, he said, "Ezra Chitando is a village boy from rural Masvingo, in Zimbabwe, a son of two Christian school teachers and educated at a Christian boarding school. Born during the colonial period, I experienced the ecstasy of independence. An only son in a family of five must count for something in what I have become because I have always been among women." Christian young man growing up alongside his female siblings. In adulthood and after starting his own nuclear family, two girls were added to the family with an only son coming later down the line. Ezra's life is one mostly spend among women. At home, "Ezra strives to be a loving and caring husband and father, brother, friend and fellow traveler to his immediate and larger families." In academia, Ezra is the ultimate team player working with colleagues across the Humanities and Social Sciences in a wide variety of areas, especially on the interface of religion and various other spheres of life. "Ezra is an

avid but rational football fan who also enjoys music, particularly acapella gospel music.”

2. What influenced your interest in researching and writing on religion, gender and African masculinities?

Ezra surmised that it was impossible “to pinpoint the exact moment, but I would like to believe that the formative years back home were quite influential. My parents, particularly my mother, was insistent on ensuring that I shared the household chores with my sisters. Thus, I can grind nuts into a paste (*kukuya dovi*), I can use the mortar and pestle (*kutswa*), balance a bucket of water on my head while carrying other items in my hands (multi-tasking) and other ‘typically feminine’ gender roles. You would notice that I did not include cooking in this list! It could be that my competence was limited, so I was scrapped off the cooking duties quite early?! But, when I read what my womanist/feminist friends write, I am learning that ‘feigned incompetence’ is a patriarchal strategy to avoid accomplishing domestic chores!” Ezra speaks of his observations growing up and seeing women accomplishing multiple tasks and providing leadership in their families, community and even in traditional religious rituals and ceremonies. He also was aware of the challenges they faced. The seeds had been sown!

After completing his High School where he studied Divinity, Shona and Economics, he enrolled for a Bachelor’s Degree at the University of Zimbabwe where he studied Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy and then did an Honours Degree in Religious Studies. He recalls a Departmental Seminar in which Rosemary Radford Ruether was the guest presenter, convened by Dr. (now Prof.) Paul¹ Gundani. He says of Ruether, “I was fascinated. She was powerful. I do remember during the Q & A session that I put up my hand and asked, ‘As a man, can I become a feminist?’ Her answer was an unhesitating, ‘Yes’ and she went on to explain that I had to ‘work out my own salvation in fear and trembling’ (my own rendition here), i.e., I had to find out, on my own, how I could participate in the struggle for gender justice as a man.” Further motivation came

¹ While I have referred to my former lecturers and colleagues using their first names, I face the same struggle that I face when requesting my former students who are now colleagues to use my first name. My religio-cultural upbringing does not allow me to use the first name on my mentors, but cultural imperialism allows me to do so. I guess that in the postcolonial condition we have to live with this ambivalence!

through interactions with Isabel Mukonyora, Christianity in Africa lecturer, who emphasized women's roles in the growth of Christianity in Africa and Tabona Shoko's focus on sexual symbolism in Zimbabwean and African traditional religions. Ezra became a Teaching Assistant in the Department and his office mate, Edward Antonio, was a mentor in philosophy, politics and gender, providing him with other lenses. This watered the seed that had been sown in the formative years. This watering and interest in women's issues was further enhanced by the interactions he had with the works of "African women theologians, Mercy Oduyoye, Musimbi Kanyoro, and later on, Musa W. Dube and others."

While Ezra's first focus was on religion and gender (women's issues), the turn to masculinities as part of the focus on gender was a bit late. In fact, he avers, this was inspired "by Musa Dube (2002/3) who conscientised me to the need for men to take up the challenge (HIV & AIDS) more directly, actively and consistently." Adriaan van Klinken (2013) reiterates this observation. Ezra credits the preparatory work for the book, *AfricaPraying* (Dube, 2003) for steering him "into religion, gender and masculinities". He singles out "Musa Dube, Isabel Phiri, Tinyiko Maluleke, Sarojini Nadar, Moiserela Prince and Cherly Dibeela, and Gideon Byamugisha", as scholars from whom he learnt a lot. "I was in distinguished company! I have sat at the feet of highly knowledgeable, sharp and effective women and men who have provided insights into the possible roles of men in the quest for a better world."

As the Theology Consultant for the WCC-EHAIA programme, Ezra found "an activist-academic platform to research, reflect, train and engage on religion, gender and masculinities in Africa". He sees as part of his motivation for what remains of his active ministry the mobilization of "men and boys to become partners with women and girls to secure gender justice for the Africa We Want. My awareness of men's challenges and strengths has been deepened by participating in numerous interfaith engagements where many facilitators and activists have highlighted the debt that we men owe to women." Fearing missing some names, Ezra pays homage and tribute to the many fountains of wisdom that have nurtured and mentored him over the decades and speaks fondly "of my many friends, sisters and activists within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and beyond".

3. In what way did your social background shape your study of the intersections between religion, gender and masculinities?

Having touched on other relevant factors in previous questions, Ezra reiterated “that the agents of socialisation in my life, including the immediate and larger families, the church, academic study, professional activism, as well as travel and exposure are all most likely relevant factors in informing my interpretation of religion, gender and masculinities (with a special focus on Africa). The Adventist tradition that I was brought up in and with which I identify is inextricably tied to the unique experience of Prophet Ellen G. White², a woman, a messenger.” Ezra pays tribute to his immediate family, where he says he cannot remember ever being “set aside” as special or superior to his sisters. Even though, he was aware and saw women being denigrated and violated in the community, he was raised to respect women and was aware of men who consulted their wives before making important decisions. The community had mechanisms of punishing men that disrespected women. Growing up, there was a bit of everything in the community, it was never a “one-size-fits-all” and that helped a lot, especially when we began focusing on masculinities, instead of just one masculinity.

4. Why, even with so much doubts on the intentions of male allies, did you dedicate your career and life to being in solidarity with women, especially African women?

“I have said on a number of occasions that we should not create heroes out of men who strive to stand, sit, walk, sing, act, etc. in solidarity with women. Thus, I accept the critique by some feminists that the talk of, ‘Male Champions’, ‘He for She’, runs the risk of what we draw attention to in the Introduction to *Redemptive Masculinities* (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012), namely, ‘male saviours!’” Ezra is acutely aware of the danger posed by the ‘male saviour’ complex and challenges himself to “remain hypervigilant in reviewing my positionality as a male scholar activist in the field of gender justice” (Siwila & Kobo, 2021). Without blaming women for mistrusting male-allies, Ezra highlights lessons learned from colleagues and friends, such as Sarojini Nadar, from whom he learned

² Ellen Gould White is one of the co-founders of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, she is regarded as a Prophet and/or messenger of God, and her writings are considered as a secondary companion to the Bible.

“that we should never compete in trauma, where we say, ‘look, my suffering is worse than yours’”, or be engaged in “competitive victimhood.” He affirms the appropriateness of the critique around sincerity and consistency of male allies and asserts, “I am not an angel. But, a human being who, driven by the knowledge that I can become a better version of myself, will continue to try. And try. And try. My former colleague at the WCC, Sue Parry, shared with me the notion that, ‘God does not seek extraordinary people to do ordinary work, but ordinary people to do extraordinary work’.” Getting personal, Ezra speaks eloquently about his resilience in standing in solidarity with women even as some have questioned his motivations, sincerity and consistency:

“First, I am motivated by self-interest. I would like to see a better world for myself, through all the women I am connected to living in a better world. I would like my lifetime partner, Anna, to feel safe, loved and respected in our home, at her workplace and in society. I would like my daughters, Mutsawashe and Tinevimbo, to grow up in a Zimbabwean/African and global context where their many gifts are appreciated. My many sisters, many mothers, many women colleagues, friends, etc., must, in one of the Bible’s most powerful articulations, “have life and life in abundance” (John 10: 10) (we evoked this in the volume in honour of Nyambura (Chitando, Mombo, & Gunda, 2021)). Thus, I participate in this struggle admittedly from vested self-interest. I strongly believe that when the world will have more men endowed with wombs, there is a better fighting chance for all the women in the world.”

“Second, I am an idealist. I have a dream. That one day, women and men, if not in my time, then in the next generation, if not, then in the one to follow, can interact on the basis of equality, dignity and respect. Here, I am a prisoner of hope. I strive to continue to work in weakness, in fear and much trembling. I do know and anticipate that some of my sisters do not quite like Paul (and I am understating their attitude here), but I must concede that there are moments when I find him quite profound. Perhaps it is because although sometimes he pronounces very firm positions, he is painfully aware of his limitations, weaknesses and fallibility. Pauline masculinity is mostly fractured, subordinate and ambivalent.”

5. Considering the development and trajectory of the Circle since 1989 to the present, what in your opinion is the contribution of the Circle of African Women Theologians to the study of theology and religion globally and in Africa?

Ezra is quick to set a particular record straight, the Circle is not the totality of African women theologians or religious studies scholars, hence an assessment of the impact of the Circle must not be confused with an assessment of the impact of African women, he acknowledges that Mercy Oduyoye rightly makes this observation in her book, *Re-Membering Me* (2019). Aware of this dichotomy, Ezra summarizes what he considers as highlights of the Circle engagement, without pretending to be exhaustive of the Circle contributions. “The chapters by Musa Dube in *Compassionate Circles* (Chitando and Hadebe, 2009) remain helpful, although many books and articles by the Circle have since followed:

- a) Capturing and representing African women’s experiences and participation in the religions of Africa (African Traditional/ Indigenous Religions, Christianity, Islam, others)
- b) Highlighting the injustices and denial of women’s rights in religion, in Africa but with global implications. Simultaneously, the power of religion to secure women’s rights and liberation.
- c) Emerging from the current grant that I am coordinating (2021-2026), namely, “the Humboldt Research Hub in Africa on Women, Religion and Pandemics,” women’s leadership and activism during pandemics.
- d) Power of mentorship, collaboration and focus in a discipline.
- e) Interpretation and deployment of sacred texts for women’s full liberation, contesting received/inherited/oppressive patriarchal interpretations.
- f) Feminist/womanist approaches and potential for an interfaith women’s liberation, in Africa and globally.
- g) Women’s leadership in religion and society...in Africa and globally.
- h) Wrestling with the lived realities of women and girls in religion and society: violence against women, child marriage, oppressive purity codes, stigma and discrimination on the basis of singlehood, childlessness, etc.

- i) Power of narrative/story telling as effective approaches/ methodologies.
- j) Urgency of two-winged theologies for justice, equality and development, i.e., recognising the need for African women and men to co-operate.
- k) Strategies of resistance in the face of patriarchy...treading softly but firmly, lament, subterranean organising, instituting circles of compassion and care/solidarity...fixing each other's crowns.
- l) Clarifying and living up to the meaning of contextual theology by addressing the existential realities of African women, e.g. HIV & AIDS and now the environment and climate change.
- m) Demonstrating courage and refusing to be disregarded/silenced or ignored. For me, the Circle testifies to the indefatigable human spirit, determination and ongoing courage to defy the odds. Are we women? Yes, so what? Are we African? Indeed, but, is there a problem with that? You don't like us? We see! But, we are not going anywhere soon! Are we facing seemingly insurmountable odds? Of course, but, if God is for us, who then is against us?

6. What is your assessment of African male theologians' embrace of African Women Theology?

Ezra did not shy from acknowledging the tensions between African Theologies and African Women's Theology, noting how the traditional theologies had been male dominated, fully immersed in the patriarchal framework governing Africa in the 1960s. Having enjoyed unparalleled dominance of the field for decades, the emergence of African Women Theology, in particular, the Circle elicited reactions such as, "our African women are well behaved, why are you so militant?" Writings of African Women theologians were oft dismissed as "mere stories narrated by frustrated women". Sadly, this dimension persists among some of us, or, in our moments of weakness, we lapse into this mode." However, Ezra sees some genuine progress, noting a new generation of socially-engaged male scholars, especially those working on the liberation paradigm and in the ecumenical movement, as more positive in their engagement with African Women theologians. He also cites the mainstreaming of African

Women Theology in seminaries and universities as another sign of improvement. In summing up his evaluation of the relationship, Ezra says, “heart-warming initial and subsequent steps, more still to be accomplished”, he challenged his male counterparts to be deliberate and intentional in citing works by African women scholars and to begin to make their own publications intentionally gender sensitive.

7. What is the impact of African Women Theology on African women in general?

Ezra begins his response by being the Professor that he is by exploring the import of this question thus:

This is the abiding question, of course! Are we, the scholar-activists, having any real impact on the lives of the “ordinary people”? Are the ideas cooked in the ivory towers reaching the African townships, villages, valleys and mountaintops? This is the positive side of the question. The more sinister, negative side of the question: Are the Circle activists (and possibly its male accomplices) not endangering the lives of African women by suggesting radical theologies of liberation, only to retreat to their supposedly comfortable bases in the urban areas, far from the coal furnace of the struggle?

Ezra was quick to point out how the question of “impact” has often been used by defenders of patriarchy in their attempts to demonstrate that women activist-scholars and their allies are disconnected from the “real people” hence their intentions are selfish and of no consequence because they lack the *locus standi* (legitimacy to speak on behalf of others). Ezra argues that “it is in fact *not necessary* (the emphasis is intended) for the Circle to be having an impact on African women in general. Why? Because the story of that one, single, solo Circle activist is *itself* worth hearing and responding to.” He also thinks the question of impact need not be bloated in importance in order to negate the contributions of the Circle and African women scholars. Instead, Ezra acknowledges that human beings have the “tendency to resist oppression (Paulo Freire³ is clear on this), African women outside the Circle are taking steps towards challenging their exclusion and pressing for their liberation. This is not to suggest

³ Having cited Freire above, I must now quickly shut up in relation to this dimension of the question. Nobody belonging to the class of the oppressor has the right to spell out the nature/character of the struggle by the oppressed. Those of us who are co-conspirators seeking to be in solidarity with the oppressed must be humble enough to be guided by the oppressed.

that the Circle should not strive to uphold its conscientizing role, but that we must accept that there are multiple roles available in the struggle for women's liberation." The Circle's major focus was challenging their exclusion and non-recognition by male theologians and many other women are doing the same in various other spheres. To round off this question, Ezra happily declares:

"The Circle has had an impact on African women more generally. The issues raised so creatively and 'with passion and compassion' by the Circle are permeating society at various levels. Mothers Unions within the churches have heard the clarion call for women's inclusion in leadership. Male leaders in the different religions are being challenged to respond to the Circle's call for women's rights to be upheld and to stop stigma and discrimination against women. I have encountered the message of the Circle deep in Kajo Keji in rural South Sudan, as I have in Matsapha, an urban area in Eswatini. Graduates of African theology and religious studies have been carrying the Circle message of equality, justice, inclusion and solidarity far and wide. The Circle, therefore, continues to influence women in diverse faith communities in Africa and beyond."

8. How would you characterise the contributions of African Women Theology to the evolution of theological curriculum in Africa?

A more rounded and holistic African (nay, any other) theological curriculum must now necessarily include African women's theologies. Thus, the Circle has done exceedingly well in tabling gender on the agenda of African theology. The "irruption within an irruption" has been impossible to ignore for a while now. Of course, there are some who would still like to relegate African Women Theologies to a footnote, but, all those teachers, administrators, quality assurance managers who are serious about maintaining quality are ensuring that African Women's Theologies feature prominently in theological curricula in Africa. Thankfully, the Circle's significant theological output and collaboration with different ecumenical partners have contributed to the mainstreaming of women's issues and perspectives in the theological curricula in Africa. I have been privileged to have been actively involved in this area for many years now and can confirm that noteworthy progress has been made in theological institutions, private and church-based universities, as well as in the Arts and Humanities in some instances. This is also due to the fact that the Circle publications have addressed themes that are cross-cutting and hence interdisciplinary.

9. In your opinion, has the Circle's critique of religion and the many ways it interacts with gender and patriarchy resulted in changed perceptions towards women in particular?

Yes, I would link this to the earlier question about the impact of the Circle on African women more generally. To remind ourselves of a significant text in African liberation theology, the Circle has precipitated a "Farewell to Innocence" (Boesak, 2015). Thus, there has been the realisation and acknowledgement of 'HerStory' in religion and society. Women are not objects to be acted upon, but subjects exercising agency. The Circle's focus on women's experiences have brought out women's many talents, gifts and contributions to the fore. "No longer silent" is a slogan that has been taken up across the regions of Africa, with society reassessing its minimisation of women. I would say that the Circle has reaffirmed the importance of appreciating women's stories and accepting women's leadership in religion and society.

10. Can you comment on how far the study of religion, gender and African Masculinities has gone? Explain what still needs to be done.

Religion, gender and African Masculinities is a relatively new area of study beginning in earnest at the turn of the millennium, yet Ezra sees notable progress seen through the researches and publications that are coming through and the inclusion of this subject area in some universities and colleges. He also noted, "Some students have submitted theses on Transformative Masculinities at various levels and many faith-based organisations have embraced Transformative Masculinities in their programming and interventions. In fact, working with men and boys has become integral to many gender programmes and projects." However, he identifies work that still needs to be done:

1. We have not begun the task of mining/recovering indigenous values/concepts/practices that are relevant to the Transformative Masculinities agenda.
2. There is a lot of scope for interfaith Transformative Masculinities initiatives.
3. There is more work to be done around theorising religion, men and masculinities in Africa. I am convinced that there is scope for decolonisation and Africanisation in this space.

4. We need to be more intentional about applying the theories to particular religious individuals (see e.g. male religious leaders) and groups (see e.g. younger, middle aged, older, men with disabilities, types of religion, etc.).
 5. Explore the role of women in religion and their potential to influence masculinities.
 6. Reflect and explore how Transformative Masculinities in Africa can contribute to better health for women and more robust and sustainable development, including addressing issues of governance/corruption, peacebuilding and violent extremism, climate change, etc. In other words, virtually ensuring that all the contemporary popular/topical issues are approached from a Transformative Masculinities perspective (while continually interrogating the assumptions of and approaches to Transformative Masculinities).
- 11. What critical insight can you offer the Circle in terms of growth and development going forward?**

“Having cautioned myself regarding the importance of acute self-awareness in solidarity and drawing from the emerging reflections in pedagogies of solidarity, I am quite wary of prescribing the way forward to the Circle. However, in a number of writings on Africanisation of religious studies in Africa I have argued that it would be patronising for Global North (or any other) scholars to refuse to critique the work of African scholars due to inherited guilt. Similarly, it would be condescending for me to refuse to interact with my sisters in the Circle on the basis that I am an “outsider.” While there is an African proverb that says, “[I]t is the one who lives in the house who knows where the roof leaks,” it is also possible for a visitor to notice it ahead of the one who lives in the house. However, visitors need to keep calm and trust the process!”

Having said this, Ezra went on to spotlight some elements he considers critical for the Circle, such as, “mentorship for upcoming African women scholars in theology, religious studies and generally in Arts and Humanities (broaden the reach) who need guidance, support and accompaniment. Strengthen its synergies with the broader African women’s movement in its diversity.” He also implores the Circle to “be more intentional about interacting with interfaith initiatives that promote gender justice and collaborate with them for mutual growth and development.” He calls

on “the Circle to countenance the idea of income generation involving women within faith communities. Alongside its potential for consultancy, it could imagine according, for example, young African women in the ICT sector the opportunity to use their talents and gifts to do Circle-backed start-ups in agriculture, mining, tourism, etc. across the region.” Finally, Ezra calls on “retired Circle stalwarts with knowledge and experience in business development, leadership and management, resource mobilisation and other areas to come through to assist.”

12. Where do you see the Circle in 2030?

The tricky thing about the years is that they gallop at a frightening pace. When I was younger, everything was pinned on the magical year of 2000, then 2020, now 2030! The African Union is working with Agenda 2063. I do appreciate the importance of target years for strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning. But, for me, every mini/second, minute, hour, day, etc., is a moment of reckoning. The Circle must continue to deliver today, for it to be able to deliver in 2030, 2063 and the years that lie ahead. In the ideal world, Transformative Masculinities would be actualised soon and very soon and the cause for which the Circle was formed would be rendered unnecessary. However, we live in a real world and, as Gideon Byamugisha has cogently argued, “bringing change is not easy.” Thus, to cut short my roundabout way of responding, I anticipate a strong, vibrant, creative and productive Circle that will, like a tortoise that must move, stick out its head and continue to act to transform the world. It is also my hope and prayer that in 2030, the Circle will be like the chameleon; one eye looking back to celebrate and process what has gone before. Simultaneously, one eye would also look forward to a future full of hope, promise and conviction that African women of faith will experience the abundant life promised them in the religions.

Ezra Chitando: Discussion and Analysis

Professor Ezra Chitando is a dedicated scholar/activist whose personal experiences, cultural and religious influences, and commitment to justice and partnership, shape his work on religion, gender, and African masculinities. Chitando has made meaningful contributions to social justice and academic scholarship in various disciplines. In working towards social justice, he demonstrates and embodies commitment to equity, inclusivity,

ethical engagement, and the importance of mutual respect and understanding. His scholarship transcends the confines of academia, bringing about positive change and cementing lasting impact in Church and society. Chitando remains attuned to the values of solidarity and cooperation, recognizing their transformative potential in shaping a more just, equitable and interconnected world. Shaped by his background, upbringing, and scholarship, Chitando embodies a keen sense of self that is committed to community relationships, participation, and collaborative activism and research. This is evidenced through his involvement with various organizations and partnerships dedicated to working collectively towards social justice. His collaborative engagements with feminist/womanist and masculinities studies scholars, institutions and communities are a demonstration of his commitment to addressing gender related challenges within religious and societal contexts including the impact of patriarchy and HIV & AIDS on women and all subjugated peoples. As an activist/scholar, Chitando's approach to doing theology in the context of social justice is intersectional, recognizing the interconnectedness of various identities and experiences in shaping individuals and communities. In challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender equality and women's rights, Chitando stands in solidarity with women and all oppressed people. Hailing from rural Zimbabwe, Chitando's upbringing, family relationships, experiences growing up in colonial Zimbabwe, his education in a Christian boarding school, and his colleagues in academia all influence, shape and reshape the man he is today. Chitando has a deep commitment to community relationships, and community partnerships. His scholarly career boasts far-reaching professional, academic, research, publications and activist interests and accomplishments. Chitando's lived reality, scholarship, activism, and theological engagements is testament to the growth and development of the study of religion, gender and African masculinities and points the way towards how we should continue to align theological community engagement, activism and research in a praxis driven way.

Religion, Gender, and African Masculinities: A Collaborative Approach to Gender Justice

In recent years, the intersections of religion, gender, and African masculinities have been the subject of increasing scholarly and activist attention. Through collaborative activism, Ezra Chitando has actively engaged in

promoting gender justice and women's rights. Chitando advocates for the inclusion of men in the struggle for gender equality and challenges patriarchal norms that perpetuate harmful expressions of masculinity. For Chitando, religious beliefs and practices play a key role in shaping notions of masculinity. Chitando argues that religion in Africa and its contemporary expressions merge with cultural expectations and practices to cement gendered roles, male hegemony, and oppression of women (Chitando, 2016). Notwithstanding this position regarding religion in Africa, Chitando avers that religion can be a powerful tool for promoting gender justice. In engaging religious communities in dialogue and raising awareness, there is potential for religious institutions to be agents of positive change in the pursuit of gender equality (Chitando, 2015). For Chitando, it is imperative that efforts towards gender justice actively engage women's rights organizations, gender activists and religious leaders. This level of collaboration has the potential for the creation of dynamic platforms that foster open dialogue and understanding (Chitando & Mawire, 2018). In the struggle for gender justice, Chitando opines that it is imperative that men become involved and participate actively. This, argues Chitando, will go a long way in the creation of more inclusive approaches that challenge harmful expressions of masculinity (Chitando, 2016). Underlining the significance of culturally sensitive approaches, Chitando advocates for critical reflection on cultural norms that hinder gender justice (Chitando, 2015). Moreover, Chitando (2016) contends that religious teachings should be critically examined and interpreted to support gender justice. Importantly, Chitando's work foregrounds how socialization processes influence types of masculinities that emerge within different cultural contexts and highlights the importance of collaborative engagements in challenging and transforming harmful gender norms.

The Role of Socialization in Shaping African Masculinities

Socialization or the process through which individuals learn and internalize societal norms, values, and behaviours significantly influences various expressions of African masculinities (Sokfa, 2013:20). Chitando's work on African masculinities highlights how socialization plays a crucial role in shaping the various expressions of masculinity in Africa. Cultural norms and traditions, avers Chitando, is a key aspect in the construction of mas-

culinities. Chitando's familiarity with men's roles in various religious contexts, including African Traditional Religions, African Independent Churches, Pentecostal Churches, mainline Churches, and Islam all point toward a hegemonic conception of masculinities that need to be decried and transformed. Hence the dire need to engage in activism and research that challenges patriarchal structures and promote partnership, equality, and justice within religious spaces. Chitando & Togarasei (2017) point out that religion plays a significant role in shaping masculinities in Africa. Religious beliefs and practices provide models of ideal masculinity and significantly influences how men perceive, construct, and carry out gendered roles. In some religious traditions, ideals of sacrificial and nurturing masculinities are foregrounded while more authoritarian and patriarchal forms of masculinity are foregrounded in others.

The promotion and valorisation of roles, behaviours, and characteristics considered essential for men, lead to the development of cultural scripting or forms of masculinity that emphasise traits such as strength, stoicism, and dominance as indicators of traditional masculinity (Chitando, 2008) (Chirovamavi, 2012). Chitando & Mawire (2018) elucidate that socialization within the family unit significantly impacts the development of forms of masculinity. This is corroborated by Manyonganise (2023:72) who argues that the family context is significant for gender development. It is here that gendered expectations for children are developed and enforced and ideas of what it means to be a man is inculcated. Ezra Chitando's own experiences during his formative years further exemplifies the impact of socialization on shaping African masculinities. Growing up in a household where women were in the majority, Chitando observed women holding leadership roles and actively participating in traditional rituals. Such observations likely contributed to his understanding of gender dynamics and presented a challenge to traditional gender norms that limit women's participation in specific roles and activities. It can be argued then that the absence of male privilege or the absence of being favoured or exalted because he is male led to the development of more egalitarian perspectives. The recognition that being male does not confer superiority or special privilege imbued in him a sense of equality among men and women, suggesting the potential for socialization to challenge and reshape traditional gender assumptions and expectations.

Understanding the role of socialization in the development of African masculinities is essential for the development of more inclusive, transformative, and egalitarian ways of being and fostering equitable gender

relations. From a theological perspective, how hegemonic masculinities are shaped at the level of ecclesia must be taken seriously. It cannot be denied that the socialization of both men and women within the Church shapes their social reality, and in particular the values, traits, and traditions they instil in their children. Tonono (2018:5) notes that the ways in which churches interpret biblical texts create a platform for skewed gender relations. In co-opting biblical texts to affirm the superiority of men over women, female subordination as God ordained is entrenched and toxic hegemonic masculinities are subtly endorsed. Tonono (2018:8) elucidates that while there are some measures instituted by faith-based organizations such as the World Council of Churches' Thursdays in Black Campaign and the We Will Speak Out coalition in South Africa, much more can and must be done. We contend that programs geared towards combating gender-based violence in churches must be accompanied by programmes geared toward addressing issues of African masculinities in churches. Such efforts must be collaborative, and praxis driven, creating action and reflection cycles that culminate in cutting edge research which leads to tangible transformation in the way men and women are socialized in churches and communities.

Collaborative Engagements

Transforming harmful gender norms requires collective efforts and diverse perspectives (Gabaitse, 2012). Collaborative engagement is a central aspect of Chitando's work. Throughout his scholarship and activism, Chitando emphasises the importance of working together with diverse stakeholders to address the complexities and challenges surrounding the construction of gender roles and masculinities in Africa. Collaborative engagement that promotes transformative masculinities cannot be limited to academic and activist partnerships but must extend to community involvement. Collaboration with local communities will address the contextual dynamics at play in the construction of masculinities and take seriously the value of lived experience and community knowledge in understanding African masculinities. Through direct engagement with communities, research and activism becomes contextually relevant and responsive to the specific challenges faced by individuals and families in different locals in Africa, promoting more equitable expressions of African masculinities. Oduyoye (2001) notes that collaborative engagements

are essential not only for academic growth but also for personal and spiritual growth and promotes professional capacity that is relevant, contextual, and empowering. Such collaborations often cut across national and denominational boundaries and help generate new ideas, expand research networks, and build collective knowledge. Furthermore, professional collaborations provide opportunities to amplify one's voice and engage interculturally and interreligiously, enabling unique perspectives and experiences to enhance one's activism, scholarship, and professional experience. These professional collaborations are rooted in social justice and transformative praxis and together with community engagement, form the bedrock of cutting-edge research and advocacy that addresses issues of gender, patriarchy, and other social concerns (Dube, 2006).

To gain diverse perspectives on African masculinities and to comprehensively address the scourge of hegemonic masculinities, interdisciplinary and intersectionality collaborations are essential. Working in partnership with gender scholars, sociologists, psychologists, and activists, will facilitate a broader understanding on the root causes and manifestations of hegemonic and toxic masculinities and how they manifest in various contexts. Drawing on insights from various fields can lead to the development of transformative strategies that challenge toxic notions of masculinity (Dube, 2006). Building partnerships with both men and women in various fields who recognize the need to challenge and deconstruct hegemonic masculinities is crucial in the work of transforming toxic masculinities in Africa. This level of collaboration and partnership promotes the idea of shared responsibility in dismantling oppressive gender norms and facilitate the engagement of critical dialogue and initiatives that seek alternative and more positive expressions of masculinity that is grounded in gender equality (Dube, 2006).

Collaborative engagement is essential for empowering grassroots activism that takes seriously the perspectives of women and men, community leaders and clergy in working towards challenging hegemonic masculinities and creating more equitable societies. At this level of collaborative engagement, support groups, workshops, community dialogues and the use of religious resources such as Contextual Bible Study should be encouraged to address the harmful impact of male hegemony, toxic masculinities and women's complicity in the promoting and sustain this level of societal and familial oppression (Mwaura & Onyango, 2020). Adopting intersectional approaches to understanding the issues of religion, gender

and masculinities will consider the complex layers of oppression and recognize the intersectional nature of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinities, race, class, sexuality, and religion. The examination of the multi-dimensional nature of oppression will facilitate the development of inclusive and contextually relevant strategies to challenge hegemonic norms and promote more diverse and accepting expressions of gender (Dube, 2006).

In working collaboratively, we must take seriously the involvement and participation of religious institutions in transforming patriarchal structures and promoting gender justice. Inclusive religious leadership must be advocated for in all decision-making processes within religious institutions. It is in this context that patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts will be challenged and advocacy for more the promotion of inclusive and affirming religious traditions will take place (Mwaura & Onyango, 2020). Such collaborations must extend beyond national boundaries to foster transnational solidarity in our work on gender justice and transformation. It is in this context that shared experiences, strategies and resources can shape and reshape initiatives towards building a more just and equitable world and strengthen the collective voice against oppression (Dube, 2006).

Conclusion

While no one can take away the work that has been done by the Circle, not even the male allies, there are some male allies of the Circle, who have made instrumental interventions in promoting the work of the Circle members and Ezra Chitando is one of the male allies that have been standing in solidarity with the Circle. The importance of socialization in shaping young boys is aptly demonstrated in the formative years of Ezra Chitando when he was raised without the unmerited privileges of traditional masculinities by a mother who was keen to raise an ally for her daughters, Chitando's sisters. Socialisation is not a one-off event but a lifelong learning process, Chitando benefited from encountering female and male scholars who were open to discussing gender injustice in Africa and has himself turned out to be a prolific mentor to young and budding African scholars. His embrace of collaborative work has seen him publish co-authored articles and co-edited books. Many young female African scholars of religion and theology proudly cite Ezra Chitando among their mentors and these are the present and the future of the Circle. In Ezra Chitando, the Circle has had and continues to have a humble and self-critical ally who fully understands that he is not a 'male saviour' for African women, but a proud son of an African woman, a husband, brother and father who

wishes a better world for all the women around him and all women in general.

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Professor Ezra Chitando is an excellent scholar and dedicated activist whose commitment to justice and partnership, shape his work on religion, gender, and African masculinities. Chitando has made meaningful contributions to social justice and academic scholarship in various disciplines. His scholarship transcends the confines of academia, bringing about positive change and lasting impact in Church and society. In this Festschrift, more than forty authors (family members, friends, and colleagues) from Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Malawi, Germany, and Botswana honour Chitando's academic and societal achievements, and carry on his struggle for redemptive gender roles.

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