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Introduction

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| INTRODUCTION

Nelly Mwale & Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse

The Mandate of the Circle and It's Fulfilment in the Volume

This introductory chapter maps the layout of the volume. Besides highlighting the main methods which have informed the chapters in the volume, it also uncovers the main contributions and features of theologies generated by women in the southern region as addressed by authors in this volume.

As an African baby born in an ecumenical surrounding, the Circle has grown with a marked presence in different spheres as informed by its mandate since inception. Kanyoro (1997:11) spells out the objectives of the Circle as follows:

The main objective of the Circle women is to write and publish theological literature written by African women from their experience of religion and culture on this continent. Research and writing for publication is our target and sole reason for being. Thus we are an academic group. We want to fill a gap in African women's profile as well as in theological writings from Africa.

With this clear objective, the Circle has been at the vanguard of historical resistance against oppressive structures and ideologies. One way in which this has been done is through theologising on issues of concern so as to amplify Pan-African and inter-religious theological perspectives of African women.

Emerging in a context characterised with dominant male theologies, the Circle has produced distinct African theologies (Dube, 1999; Masenya, 2000). As pointed out by Hadebe (2016), African theologies like other theologies elsewhere were the domain of male theologians which grew in the context of colonialism and certain missionary theologies that denigrated African cultures. Consequently, African female theologians questioned the tendency of many African male theologians to consistently portray African culture in a positive light with regard to its treatment of women while blaming colonialism and its capitalistic systems for women's experiences of oppression (Habebe, 2016:3). Additionally, theologies

of liberation generated by the matriarchs of the Circle have been grounded in culture. As stressed by Kanyoro (2002) and Oduyoye (1994), culture is central to theologising in the Circle such that cultural hermeneutics is appropriated as a first step towards African women's liberation theologies.

This volume, is therefore framed on the notion of theologies of liberation in order to show case women's contributions to liberation theologies in response to multiple oppressions in southern Africa. Anchored on Nehanda, the book is framed in the narrative of Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, popularly known as Mbuya Nehanda (Grandmother Nehanda) who was a spirit medium and renowned for leading a rebellion against British occupation in the 19th century in Zimbabwe. This is to demonstrate resistance to all forms of oppression by the matriarchs and their handmaids in the Circle. Through this volume, authors resist different forms of oppression and demonstrate the active roles of African women in shaping the narrative of theologies of liberation. As per the indigenous teachings of the Shona that Nehanda, a powerful and revered ancestral spirit speaks through female mediums, authors in this volume speak through writing to celebrate the work of our Circle matriarchs and their handmaids. Authors also claim freedom from oppression, socio-economic, environmental and all forms of global injustices using the narratives of the Circle matriarchs and the theologies which have been generated by our matriarchs.

A Glimpse into Methodological Approaches

Aware of the debates surrounding the notion of liberation theologies and African theologies (Maluleke, 1997), the volume approaches theologies of liberation as generated by African women theologians. In this regard, the focus is on African women theologians who have stood up to the silencing of their voices from theologising and ignored negative aspects of culture which characterised their experiences. In the words of Oduyoye (1995), African women had to construct their own theology. Accordingly, African Women theologians in the Circle have devised theologies and methods grounded in their local context. Among these methods are what Nadar (2012) identifies as storytelling. African women theologians take storytelling as a legitimate methodology and a powerful source of theology. Authors in the volume thus utilise diverse methodologies, including narrative research methodologies informed by both secondary sources

and primary sources of data in which story telling largely emerges as the dominant method. This affirms the understanding of the story or narrative in the Circle as a liberative tool as linked to the beading motif. As will be shown by Thandi de-Jong (in chapter 7), a beading motif is an African women's expression of their individual and collective *narrative* which stresses how the African women tell their stories and narrate their experiences as they bead, using each bead of unique colours. Both the telling and choice of the bead's colour and pattern in each bead finds its place as it is inspired by the ambiance, context, and safety of the space in which such beading is taking place. Habbad (2012) also includes storytelling as a key defining feature of African women theologies. She notes that the characteristics and foci of women's theologies include cultural hermeneutics, storytelling, the Bible, a communal theology, theological and social advocacy, a liberation trajectory, the intersection of gender with societal issues, a multi-disciplinary intention, an interfaith dimension and an emphasis on subjectivities and particular locations.

Besides employing narrative research, the authors also demonstrate how matriarchs and their handmaids in the Circle employed their own experiences of pain and patriarchal oppression as a means to theologise. This is captured not only with personal interviews with the matriarchs, but also through the analysis of documents in the form of publications done by the Circle matriarchs of interest which became the sources of data for analysis. This is important as the volume takes stock of the matriarchs' contributions to theologies of liberation in Southern Africa. The authors also show that theology should be experienced or lived, hence largely engage with theoretical frameworks centred on the theology of resistance or liberation as generated by the Circle matriarchs themselves in Southern Africa.

Major contributions and Features of Southern African Women Liberation Theologies

Based on the research questions which the volume sought to address, this book showcases the contributions of the matriarchs to theologies of liberative as addressed in the four main thematic areas, namely, theoretical foundations for theologies of liberation, theologies generated by matriarchs, forms of resistance and the theological journeys of selected matriarchs.

The major contributions and features of Southern African women liberation theologies are highlighted in the four main parts of the book which mirror the range of studies at the centre of the Circle's research areas. Mombo (2003) notes that the range of studies undertaken by Circle members include Biblical and Cultural Hermeneutics; Religion in Pluralistic Cultures; Theological and Ministerial Formation for Women; and Women in Religion, which focuses on the stories of women and religion in Africa.

SECTION I (which is centred on the theoretical foundations of theologies of liberation) comprises five chapters. In this regard, *Chirongoma* and *Mupangwa* celebrate Mbuya Nehanda as a woman, who resisted white supremacy which eventually led to her execution, in **Chapter 1**. The duo shows that Mbuya Nehanda, a Zimbabwean spirit medium opposed and resisted the oppression of the indigenous Zimbabweans by the British colonial regime which ushered in discrimination, marginalization and the chockfull oppression of black people. These infractions propelled Mbuya Nehanda to lead a revolution against colonial rule and ignited the spirit of resistance. Her legendary statement, "my bones shall rise again", has continued to fan the spirit of resistance against colonial oppression in Zimbabwe and she has become one of the most celebrated matriarchies not only in the history of Zimbabwe's war of liberation but across Africa. The chapter argues that religion should never be used as a tool to silence the oppressed and the marginalized.

In **Chapter 2**, *Mutale Mulenga Kaunda* focuses on Musa Dube's African postcolonial feminist thinking. Pioneered in Africa by the scholars from the circle, Dube is one such pioneer who uses postcolonial theory for biblical interpretation in Africa. She has led the way in drawing from the postcolonial theory and interpreting the Bible in Africa in the light of the theory (Togaresei, 2016). Landman (2022:9) also celebrates Musa Dube by noting that the 21st century kicked off with at least two very influential publications by Circle members that let academics talk in different words about women's studies, one of which is *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Dube, 2000), after which nobody in theological academia, male or female, could publish on postcolonial interpretations of the Bible without quoting Dube. In the context of HIV and AIDS, Musa has done tremendous work too. It is for this reason that Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse (2008) celebrate Musa's activism and biblical reflections on HIV and AIDS in Africa. Accordingly, Mutale Mulenga Kaunda purpos-

ively focuses on two key concepts/metaphors in Dube's postcolonial feminist theologies, and affirms Dube's African women postcolonial theologizing using a decolonial lens. She shows that Dube's other ways of reading the Bible recognise the potential of the bible having death dealing forces in Africa if not interpreted critically, especially for women, hence Dube's apt use of concepts/metaphors as alternative ways of reading the bible for fullness of life which contributes to liberative theologies generated in southern Africa. Musa's contribution to theologies of liberation goes beyond scholarship, but leadership and mentorship as she has mentored many people across the globe.

In **Chapter 3**, *Lerato Mokoena* explores Bosadi theology by Madipoane Masenya. Mokoena shows that the 1980s and 1990s are the formative years of gender-specific frameworks in biblical feminist interpretation and that scholars such as Masenya seized an ideological opportunity to jump-start Bosadi Theology as a matter of intellectual insurgency. The intellectual insurgency resulted from the lack of correct antagonistic grammar that Euro-feminist frameworks provided. There was no way they could fashion the nervous condition of being black and being a woman and banishment. Those imported frameworks were gaslighting black women unleashing scandalous and boundless violence, and making it impossible for black women to be interlocutors in this ideation space. Therefore, Mokoena exemplifies how Masenya played around the tensions of race, patriarchy, sexism, classism, and even colonialism and Apartheid to examine the social and intimate lives of black South African women through developing a liberatory framework of *Bosadi* Theology on the South African Biblical Studies scene.

In **Chapter 4**, *Funlola O. Olojede* pays attention to the work of Juliana Claassens with specific reference to the unique features of her theological work within the historical, socio-cultural, economic and religious context that motivated her approaches. Olojede demonstrates the development of Claassens' theological thinking and how she has navigated various issues of discrimination and prejudice that stem from patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, racism, tribalism, sexual and disability-based, among other social factors, using diverse sources that include novels, films and music, besides Scriptures. By so doing, this chapter shows Claassens' main contributions to the world of knowledge and liberation as well as its potential applications to the future world and work.

Faith Matumbu wraps up Section I of the volume through her critical reflection of Isabel Mukonyora's theological works on the Masowe Concept

of Liberation in **Chapter 5**. Matumbu demonstrates that Mukonyora's theological work exposes the oppression during the colonial and post-colonial period in Zimbabwe. Through engagement with Masowe concept of liberation which is grounded in Isabel Mukonyoro's theological works, Matumbu argues that Mukonyoro's theology provides hope for redemption, a theology that tries to liberate the Shona people from the colonial hegemony and patriarchal thinking.

SECTION II of the volume (consisting of nine (09) chapters) draws attention to the specific theologies and theological methodologies generated by matriarchs in Southern Africa. *Lufuluw'hi Mudimeli* opens the section in **Chapter 6** by theologizing with Herstories through the lens of Christina Landman, a founding matriarch of the circle. Mudimeli shows how the contributions of Christina Landman through her theological works and perspectives, as well as her ecclesiastical participation impacted on South African faith communities and academic spaces. The author further shows that Landman, as the first South African woman to become a professor in theology, has trodden on the road less travelled and against all odds imprinted a mark on the South African soil and even beyond. Mudimeli argues that the main purpose of Landman's theology is to heal people from their pain as her theology is largely a theology of Narrative Compassion or a Theology of the Shared Story, one derived from people's stories and experiences, and not a theology that prescribes to people what their lives should be like. Landman's theology confronts patriarchy, colonialism, sexual discrimination as structural sins through the use of experiences/stories of people who suffer from these types of discrimination. Additionally, landman's theology has no gender as it invites dialogue between the binaries of male/female, Western/African etc, including everyone to share their pain with their oppressor and to enter dialogue with one another.

Chapters 7 and 8 continue with narrative theologies. In **Chapter 7**, *Thandi Soko-de Jong* focuses on Fulata Lusungu Moyo's theology and shows that the work of Fulata Lusungu Moyo (a Malawian systematic and feminist theologian, as well as one of the founding members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians) predominantly addresses religious and cultural influences on gender construction and women's sexuality. Through storytelling and humour that embody interpretations and theologies of liberation — against issues that dehumanise women, Fulata is an advocate for gender justice. Soko-de Jong also demonstrates that Fulata is also accredited with encouraging churches worldwide to adopt the

'Thursdays in Black' campaign against rape and violence during her tenure as Program Executive for Women in Church and Society at the World Council of Churches (2007 – 2019). Fulata's mission to help co-empower others and be a leading voice in discourses on justice, women and the church has inspired others, particularly young theologians and gender justice advocates.

In **Chapter 8**, *Mwawi N. Chilongozi* and *Mercy Chilapula* focus on Getrude Kapuma's narrative theology of pastoral care. The duo present Kapuma as a renowned woman theologian and an ordained minister in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Blantyre Synod in Malawi whose theology can be described as a narrative theology of pastoral care. Chilongozi and Chilapula show that Kapuma was a fearless crusader of women's rights in the Church as she has fought for the ordination of women in the Church and championed the cause of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. Additionally, the duo argue that Kapuma's theology is a narrative theology as she is committed to the theological significance of storytelling and the power of storytelling that brings healing to the traumatised and especially widows. Through her writing, Kapuma narrates the challenges that widows face from property grabbing to widow cleansing rituals and argues that the church has an important role of pastoral care to the widows as they are denied their human dignity and most of them suffer in silence. The authors conclude by arguing that the influence of her theology was far reaching as the Blantyre Synod had taken on board the narrative theology of pastoral care for widows while some congregations/churches were creating support networks for widows.

In **Chapter 9**, *Anniegrace Mapangisana Hlatywayo* theologises with Lilian Dube in Zimbabwe and the Diaspora. She demonstrates that Lilian Dube was the first Black woman to earn a Doctor of Theology Degree from Stellenbosch University, South Africa and that Lilian Dube has championed the cause for gender justice and the emancipation and empowerment of African women. Her contributions have also been through scholarship which spans over decades of research in African Theology and Religion, Gender and Sexuality and the devastating gendered HIV and AIDS and several professional positions within the international arena. Hlatywayo further highlights Dube's quest for sensitive theologies that seek to negate and transform patriarchal bias that predisposes women of their spiritual and leadership capabilities.

While Hlatywayo draws our attention to sensitive theologies for transforming patriarchy, *Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse* in **Chapter 10** dwells on theologies of survival. Gabaitse shows that Beverly Haddad is a blend of three worlds, a woman, a priest and an intellectual-activist for women's rights and dignity. Gabaitse stresses that the contribution of Haddad to the theological and developmental discourse opposing the oppression and marginalization of African women is unquestionable. By this, Haddad was amongst the pioneers of women ordination in the Anglican Church, thus helping in the claiming of the right and place of women in the priesthood. She also spent years as an academic, teaching and researching in the area of women, church and development, with the aim of discovering the role of the church and theology in the empowerment of marginalized women both in the church and in society. Largely focused on what Sandra Pertek called "capturing the strength of survivors in coping with severity of exploitation", Haddad has contributed to the development of an appreciation of theology as a tool of building resilience in women's groups so as to transform them from victims of oppression to agents of freedom and liberation.

In **Chapter 11**, *Sonene Nyawo* uses five (5) selected works of Joyce Vilakati, a feminist literary critic who engages with historical texts to discover the hidden voices of women, whilst exposing patriarchal beliefs and stereotypes that relegate women to the periphery. Nyawo anchors the chapter on the recognition that Feminist critical readings manifest the injustices against women widely believed to be justified by the bible, whilst at the same time are an empowering force to women in families, church and in the entire society. As such, African women theologians in the Circle, using gendered lenses, have challenged the pervasive rhetoric that depicts African women as inferior, inexpressive and docile. These theologians are committed to magnifying the whimpering voices of African women victims and survivors of the patriarchal wrath, irrespective of their religious associations. Given that some of the Circle champions might have changed residence, and are in the other world, whilst others have aged to remember their contribution, Sonene argues that retrieving their insights is more to recognise that they still speak to our hearts and minds.

Selena D. Headley explores Dennis Ackermann's feminist theology of praxis formed in lament in **Chapter 12**. Headley shows that Dennis Ackermann's feminist theology of praxis was forged in lament. Soaked in the historic pathos of a brutal, dehumanising apartheid system which caused her to wrestle with personal and communal pain and trauma in

pathways of resistance, Ackerman rooted her theological pilgrimage in personal and collective experiences of suffering. Ackermann opted for an embodied spirituality in tension with the status quo of most faith communities, and thus engaged in activist scholarship immersed in the concerns of the marginalised and traumatised, struggling with the implications of the loss of lament for the faith community. Headley argues that Ackermann's contributions reflecting on individual and communal lament provide guidance of how to move toward the dream of God for a just society.

In **Chapter 13**, *Anniegrace Mapangisana Hlatywayo* explores the work of an Old Testament Studies and Biblical hermeneutics scholar, Dora Mbuwayesango. Using selected writings of Mbuwayesango which focus on her expertise in biblical hermeneutics, Hlatywayo shows Mbuwayesango's endeavour to unshackle colonial chains through adopting a postcolonial feminist approach to biblical hermeneutics, lobbying for the recovery of indigenous meanings of African languages, lobbying for interdisciplinary Bible translations and the decolonisation of the gods of Africa from the colonial heist.

In closing SECTION II of the volume, *Eze Chika* theologizes in Her Name with Susan Rakoczy in **Chapter 14**. Chika highlights that Susan Rakoczy is an emerita professor of systematic theology and spirituality at St. Joseph's Theological Institute and the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Although, she is American, she has lived many years in Africa, specifically in Ghana and South Africa. She has been an academic of high reputation, who has contributed great insight towards women doing theology, popularly reflected in the book she authored in 2004 titled: *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Chika also shows how Rakoczy provides in-depth discussion regarding origins and development of feminist theology and its interpretations in Africa and other continents. Rakoczy's thematic analysis of women's trusting experience, which is presented as the core of feminist theology and spirituality reflects how African women (including women across the globe) despite their experience of frustration in the face of patriarchy strive to flourish. Chika argues that Rakoczy presents an African woman as one who surmounts any experience of limitations presented to her via Christianity and traditional religion.

SECTION III (comprising 2 chapters) of the volume focuses on forms of resistance as demonstrated by selected circle matriarchs from different religious traditions. One of the forms of resistance is talking back. Thus,

in **Chapter 15**, *Megan Robertson* trails Sarojini Nadar’s African Feminist Transdisciplinary Study of Religion. The author recalls that Sarojini Nadar introduced her to the feminist idea of ‘talking back. She therefore traces the ways in which Sarojini Nadar has negotiated, shaped and challenged the study of faith and feminism – what she refers to as “the f-words” – in contemporary South Africa. Nadar’s contribution to the study of gender and religion is framed in relation to her analysis of violence in Biblical text, in church and public life, and in higher education. Through her scholarship and embodied work, Robertson argues that Nadar has created a toolkit for talking back to patriarchal and heteronormative power in these various spheres. Not only does Nadar provide young black African scholars of religion with crucial underpinnings from which to continue to talk back, but she also demonstrates *how* this can be done in socially just and transformative ways.

In **Chapter 16**, *Mujahid Osman* traces the Intersectional Islamic Ethic of Shaikh. Osman shows how in her incisive reading of Islamic and feminist traditions, South African scholar Sa’diyya Shaikh maps out the challenge of engaged intersectional scholarship constructing an analytic called “multiple critique.” Shaikh challenges and reconfigures the boundaries of tradition through the use of an analytical and methodological approach which is informed by three intersectional registers of intervention, disrupting rapacious normative configurations of social power, and suggesting capacious modes of being human. Osman examines three interconnected themes in Sa’diyya’s engaged scholarship – religious anthropology, sociality, and the Divine-human relationship in Islam – to show how an intersectional approach develops discourses of compassionate succour for marginal communities by exposing the inner workings of dominant structures of power and cultivating alternative modes of being human. By so doing, Osman represents Sa’diyya’s reimagining of tradition as that which exposes the hidden histories of Muslim women fighting against gender injustice. Through her engaged scholarship, Shaikh therefore presents a more capacious framing of religious anthropology that is not premised on structures of violence or secular ontologies, but rather filtered through an Islamic ethics of love, compassion, and human dignity and presents a new vision of community that is based on intersectional justice.

SECTION IV of the volume (with six chapters) focuses on theological journeys of selected circle matriarchs. The section starts with the theological journey of Isabel Apawo Phiri, to whom this volume is dedicated.

Isabel Phiri is well known for her work in gender justice, HIV and AIDS and African Theology. Isabel Apawo Phiri has a special place in the history [herstory] of the Circle in that she participated in the convocation of the circle in 1989. Additionally, when the circle became institutionalised, Phiri became the second general coordinator of the circle at the pan-African meeting in Addis Ababa 2002 (Musimbi Kanyoro was the first general coordinator). Phiri is further considered as the mother of the Circle in Malawi. She is an icon for gender justice which brought her in conflict with the powers that be. For example, upon presentation of research findings (conducted with three other women academics at the university of Malawi on Sexual harassment and rape on campus) in 1995, Phiri became a victim of violent attacks from students and staff for speaking on a topic that was considered as a taboo. This resulted in the stoning of their house, including damaging her office. She was also threatened with excommunication from her church for allegedly inciting other church women to seek gender justice. As a result, Phiri left Malawi for Namibia in 1996.

Phiri also had a successful academic career. For example, besides lecturing at the University of Malawi, and Zomba theological College, she also held a teaching position at the university of Kwazulu Natal where she also served as Dean of the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics. She further served as an editor of the Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa. Phiri has also held numerous leadership positions. Apart from serving as the second general coordinator of the circle (2002-2007), Phiri also served as moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC)' Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation. Furthermore, Phiri served in other roles within the WCC such as Associate General Secretary for public witness and Diakonia through which she focused on issues centred on racism, sexuality, climate change and justice. She is also renowned for her presentation to the United Nations in New York on the Plan of Action for religious Leaders and actors to prevent incitement to violence in which she advanced that more women are needed in church leadership roles to prevent atrocity crimes. Phiri has also been featured in an exhibition on Faith in Gender Justice at the Scottish parliament with a famous quote 'Prophetic theology has turned me into an advocate for gender justice'. More recently, Phiri has been involved in the publications with the WCC on responding to the health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In **Chapter 17**, *Phoebe Faith Chifungo* analyses the theological journey of Isabel Apawo Phiri and demonstrates how Phiri's journey has contributed towards the liberative theologies. Chifungo shows that Phiri has contributed to theologies of liberation through her publications where she has profoundly condemned all kinds of women oppression but also through her sharing of liberating and empowering ways to women by re-reading the Bible from their own perspective. She has also explored a strong theoretical framework on the liberation of women, social inclusion and gender equality. Her profession and academic success as a professor are also a commendable contribution since both men and women have benefited from her liberative theological lecturing.

In **Chapter 18**, *Chimwemwe Harawa* recounts the journey of Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler and its theological significance in Malawi. Harawa demonstrates that the engagement of women in Theology is an endeavour which is not without a history and affirms that the birth of the Circle in 1989 has aided the development of theology. Harawa presents Rachel NyaGondwe Fiedler as a second-generation member of the circle in Malawi from the Evangelical Church, the first members being members of the Central African Presbyterian Church (Isabel Apawo Phiri, Fulata Moyo and Getrude Kapuma). Harawa argues that the contributions of NyaGondwe Fiedler to theologies of liberation have largely been through her roles as an academician and a social worker demonstrated through her numerous publications of theological significance.

In **Chapter 19**, *Nelly Mwale* trails the theological journey of Omega Bula who is identified as one of the first cohorts of the Circle in Zambia, alongside Peggy Mulambya Kabonde and Juliet Matembo. In this chapter, which is also in honour of Omega Omega, who died on January 31, 2023, after a battle with cancer, Mwale shows that Bula's theological engagement was shaped by her historical, religio-cultural, and economic context, which negatively affected people's wellbeing, women, and the Earth. Bula's theological journeys were centred on fostering a theology which she termed a theology of the promotion of an economy of life in which scripture, stories and experiences were used as empowering tools for justice. Her theology was, among other things, aimed at fostering a just economic system which dignified people (in a context where the free-market system was based on domination and exploitation), working in solidarity with women within and outside the churches and promoting the church's response to the call for justice in the economy and the Earth in concrete ways. As such, her theology addressed capitalism, patriarchy,

the environmental crisis, and other related social factors in practical ways and contributed to generating liberative theologies.

In **Chapter 20, *Bridget Nonde Masaiti-Mukuka*** retrieves the theological history of Peggy Mulambya-Kabonde who was the first woman General Secretary of the United Church of Zambia and the regional coordinator of the Circle in Southern Africa. Identified by Omega Bula as an emerging African woman theologian, Mulambya-Kabonde was consequently appointed to attend the first inauguration of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989 in Ghana. She is therefore a founding member of the Circle in Zambia. In this chapter, Masaiti-Mukuka shows how colonialism, power, patriarchy, culture, ageism, gender and religion intersects in the theological journey of Mulambya-Kabonde. By focusing on Mulambya-Kabonde as the first female General Secretary of UCZ, the author also highlights the theological challenges and achievements she encountered, including Mulambya-Kabonde's leadership role which has contributed greatly to building the capacity of some church members. Masaiti-Mukuka further demonstrates how Mulambya-Kabonde's theological ideas challenge and transform patriarchy, colonialism, gender, culture and the subordination of women in the church.

Apart from the theological journeys of matriarchs in Zambia, the section also delves into the journey of matriarchs in other countries. For example, in **Chapter 21, *Elitha Moyo*** narrates Felicidade Chirinda's life journey and notes that although Chirinda was not among the Circle Pioneers in Ghana in 1989, her work and contributions toward the objective of 1989 matriarchy group are testimonies of what she has done to women livelihoods of Mozambique. Moyo highlights that Chirinda's life journey portrays what could be termed a theology of leadership, centred on transformation. The author argues that through mentorship by Musa Dube and other matriarchs mingling with Chirinda, Chirinda was entirely transformed for the transformation of the communities where she worked within Mozambique and other countries. Moyo advances that the Circle's impact and influence grounded its roots in Mozambique, because of the fearless work of Chirinda. The leadership positions she held empowered Chirinda to work for the Mozambique Communities, including through the CIRCLE and AACC. Moyo also shows that Chirinda's life journey was full of challenges, but she walked and lived the denunciation of social and missionary historical context of oppression with the hope that one day, the church and society would reflect and liberate its members.

Cheryl Dibeela and Prince Dibeela wrap up SECTION IV in **Chapter 22**, in which Cheryl recounts her own journey on being home and homeless in relation to her crossing of racial, gender and religious boundaries. The duo explore the intersection of boundary-crossing, homelessness, alienation and in-between spaces with race, gender and religion as Cheryl has experienced it both in her adopted home in Botswana and her home of birth, which is South Africa. The authors show how marriage is an act of self-limitation for the woman, for it is them who must be uprooted and transported to a new culture, and sometimes a new country. It is the woman who should learn the new culture, who should say 'your people will be my people and your God will be my God.' Additionally, the chapter shows Cheryl's involvement in activism within and outside the Church circles and brings to light her ailment in September 2020 (in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic), which has seriously curtailed her functioning.

Notable Strengths

The volume's strength lies in the attempt to consolidate the theologies generated by the Circle matriarchs and their handmaids through empirical engagement with their work. The chapters in the volume have either drawn on interviews with the matriarchs or publications (scholarly works) by the matriarchs themselves. In this way, the volume brings to life the voices of African women theologians and their engagement in various contexts.

Additionally, the national representation of the matriarchs covered in the volume affirms how women in the region have journeyed together to deal with issues which oppress humanity, including colonialism, religion, disease and culture among others. The volume also brings out the lived experiences of the matriarchs and their handmaids and points to the impact of these narratives to the wider society. By so doing, the volume also depicts the numerous roles played by the Circle membership at both local and global level.

With the Circle's mandate to write and publish theological literature written by African women from their experience of religion and culture on this continent, the work of the matriarchs and their handmaids in this volume is testimony to the commitment of the Circle to research on the effects of religion and culture on women's lives from the perspective of women and to produce theological texts that influence theological education into the future (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1990). For example, from the

early 2000s in the context of HIV and AIDS, the Circle rose to the occasion to formulate theologies that addressed the implications of the HIV epidemic on African women. As shown by Ayanga (2016), one of the main legacies of the Circle lays in giving voice to the voiceless as was the case in its earlier years by creating awareness of the plight of women on the ground, especially as far as HIV and AIDS were concerned, and by creating opportunities for women to undergo theological training.

The Circle matriarchs in the region have also led the way in designing theories that are grounded in the realities of the local context. For example, Masenya was the first black woman Old Testament scholar and designed her own theory, Bosadi, while Musa Dube is the second black New Testament scholar who is credited with having turned the corner of feminist biblical scholarship by bringing in the postcolonial feminist perspective. Women theologians in the region have also provided international and ecumenical leadership such as Omega Bula, Peggy Mulambya Kabonde, Isabel Phiri, Sarojini Nadar and many others. In short, our matriarchs have been leaders at both local and international levels and have continued to pass on the button to their handmaids. While numerous achievements have been recorded, the success stories have not been without challenges as they have had to fight patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, tribalism, ethnic poverty, violence, religious difference, age, sexuality, and disability in their constructions of liberating theologies.

The volume also stands true to the mentorship agenda of the Circle through the collaborative efforts of the Continental coordinator, Prof Musa Dube and the network of authors in the southern region. It is therefore a volume that is deemed significant to the academic, religious and secular society in the field of gender, religion, theology, development and sociology, among other disciplines.

Emerging Gaps

Although this volume has attempted to bring to the fore the contributions of the Circle matriarchs and their handmaids to the generation of theologies of liberation, not all women have been covered. For example, among the members of the International Committee of eight chaired by Mercy A. Oduyoye, consisting of Betty Ekeya (Kenya); Rosemary Edet (Nigeria), Sr Bernadette Mbuy Beya (DRC), Elizabeth Amoah (Ghana), Brigalia Bam (South Africa); Rose Zoe Obianga (Cameroon) and Musimbi Kanyoro (Kenya) who assisted with planning for the conference in 1988

(Kanyoro, 2012:22), the narrative of Brigalia Bam which should have formed part of this volume has not been included due to challenges among the authors who were assigned to cover her work.

Brigalia Bam's leadership contributions are acknowledged as she served as the General secretary of the South African Council of Churches and Director for the World Council of Churches sub-unit on women in Geneva before her return to south Africa. As well captured by Morrow (20 June 2018), Brigalia Bam is well known in South Africa as having served as the chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) from 1999 to 2011. She also previously served as secretary general of the South African Council of Churches. In a country that had recently been on the brink of racial civil war, she guided South Africans with humour, tolerance and impartiality along the path of inclusive democracy, states Morrow. Bam is further renowned for her role in advising on electoral matters in various African countries and promoting women's rights within and outside the church, including her rejection of racism. Starting her career as a teacher and social worker, Bam worked with the Young Women Christian Association in Natal Province in the 1950s and '60s where she sought to promote women's self-reliance in often deeply patriarchal communities. Having joined the World Council of Churches, she worked to build networks of Christian women; speak against the male domination that was characteristic of most churches; promote the ordination of women, and work for women's bodily as well as spiritual welfare 1967 to 1981. Bam stands out as a woman who fought for the liberation of women in the churches and beyond. Her contributions to the growth of African women theologies is also distinct through her assertion that 'if ever there was going to be a theology of liberation for women, woman had to reconstruct it. It would not come automatically even from the most radical of our theologies (Bam, 2005:10).

As a forward, attention could be given to the matriarchs and handmaids who have for one reason or the other not been captured in the three regional volumes.

CONCLUSION

Anchored on Nehanda, to emphasise how the legendary spiritual woman, Mbuya Nehanda offered public leadership to the communities through resisting colonial and patriarchal structures, the volume sought to demonstrate how resistance in its different forms has been an ongoing initiative in the Circle. The resistance from African women through their work in the Circle not only affirms the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda, the Zimbabwean spiritual freedom fighter who died for the same, but also brings to the fore the long-standing tradition of feminist intersectional liberation theology in Southern Africa. The volume, *Nehanda: Southern African Women's Theology of Liberation* therefore remains significant for mapping an African feminist liberative history in theology as will be shown by different authors in the following chapters.

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