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1 | Mbuya Nehanda's Legacy Fanning the Spirit of Anti-colonialism: Towards a Theology of Resistance and the Resurrection Motif

Terence Mupangwa & Sophie Chirongoma

Abstract

Mbuya¹ Nehanda is a Zimbabwean spirit medium who opposed and resisted the oppression of the indigenous Zimbabweans by the British colonial regime. Zimbabwe was colonized by the British in the late 1880s. This ushered in racial discrimination, marginalization and the chockfull oppression of black people. Africans endured land appropriation, being deprived of rights such as access to education and the infringements of their freedom in all aspects of life. A cocktail of these infractions propelled Mbuya Nehanda to lead a revolution against colonial rule. She ignited the spirit of resistance, and her legendary statement, “my bones shall rise again”, has continued to fan the spirit of resistance against colonial oppression in Zimbabwe. This statement also has an affinity with the resurrection motif. Although in some Christian circles, resistance is considered an evil act, in this chapter, we proffer that the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda should spur all women of faith to boldly challenge and resist all systemic injustices. Informed by the theology of resistance and the resurrection spirit, we tender that women of this world should claim freedom from male supremacy, racial, socio-economic and all forms of global injustices.

Keywords: African indigenous religion, colonialism, justice, male supremacy, Mbuya Nehanda, resistance theology, resurrection theology, Spirit medium, oppression, Zimbabwe

¹ The Shona term “Mbuya” literally refers to “grandmother.” It is also used to express respect either for elderly women or for women who hold a position of authority. Here, it is used to express the high respect and honour that the Zimbabweans ascribe to Mbuya Nehanda for her historic role.

Introduction

Colonialism wreaked havoc not only in Zimbabwe but in all the colonized territories world over. The colonial-induced injustices endured by the indigenous people of Zimbabwe led Mbuya Nehanda to defy the patriarchal outlook in the Shona traditional religion by rising to the occasion and leading the resistance movement against the colonial empire. Through her tenacious and resolute leadership, she managed to resurrect the spirit of resistance against colonial oppression in Zimbabwe. Mbuya Nehanda challenged the status quo by going against the societal expectations whereby leadership was (and continues to be) male centred. She also defied the odds by daring to challenge the British colonial regime, which was perceived as invincible. Mbuya Nehanda's revolutionary spirit and boldness to challenge white supremacy in Zimbabwe ignited the zeal of the general populace to continue fighting for independence, even several years after she had been executed. Our paper, therefore, invites all those who are trapped in the throes of marginalization, injustice and dehumanization to be spurred by the theologies of resurrection and tenacious resistance. Whilst drawing from the wells of Mbuya Nehanda's indigenous wisdom and tenacity to resist, those facing any form of injustice should defy and break all the chains that continue to bind them in the doldrums of the empire. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part will focus on the biography of Mbuya Nehanda and how she resisted white supremacy, which eventually led to her execution at the hands of the colonial oppressors who were desperately trying to silence her. Reflecting on the experiences of contemporary African women, using the Shona women as a case study, the second part of the paper proffers that women should be motivated, empowered and propelled by Mbuya Nehanda's spirit to resist any form of oppression they are going through. This is informed by the understanding that resurrection theology is about becoming active agents of positive change and transformation to restore justice, equality and the humanity of all people, regardless of their colour or creed. Similarly, we foreground the fact that the theology of resistance is hinged on the insistence that the world cannot continue to accommodate evil and injustice. Hence, evils such as the racial and gender oppression that the world was and is still facing have to be challenged. Whilst some people use religion to mask their pain and others manipulate religion as a tool to cow others to submit to being silenced, oppressed and dehumanized by the empire, our paper foregrounds the need for religion to nurture a

vibrant resistance theology which has the power to resurrect all those entombed by the life-denying and death-dealing forces of the empire (See Zvingowanisei and Chirongoma 2021; Chirongoma and Mupangwa 2021). We also emphasize the fact that the resurrection motif should continue to energize and empower the oppressed, marginalized and silenced members of the human family to challenge and resist the status quo.

Who is Mbuya Nehanda?

Mbuya Nehanda was a spirit medium whose birth and actual name was Charwe Hwata. Charwe was born around 1862 and raised in Mazowe in the area now known as Chishawasha in central Mashonaland of Zimbabwe (Bertho 2018). The name Mbuya Nehanda is an honorary name as a result of her having been elevated to the status of a medium of a royal spirit of the first Nehanda, who was called Nyamhita Nyakasikana of Handa, the daughter of Mutota. Therefore, the name Mbuya Nehanda was polysemous as it referred to anyone who was possessed by this spirit (Bertho 2018). Bertho (2018) further avers that Charwe was initiated to become a spirit medium of Nehanda at a young age. Only when she had grown up, she began to function as a respected spirit medium of Nyamhita.

Not much about her parents and family is known except that they were hardworking farmers who were highly religious. The level of religiousness for Nehanda's family is reflected in her life, especially as an adult. She grew up in a very happy and loving family; hence, she had a secure and happy life (Mutunhu 1976). Due to her solid family background, she matured into a woman with remarkable leadership abilities and organizational skills (Mutunhu 1976). As she was growing up, Charwe was often described as kind-hearted, highly ethical and morally principled. It is said that people in her community regarded her as a woman of strong principles, endowed with wisdom and a clear and firm vision. She showed leadership skills, and she was highly organized in whatever she did (Mutunhu 1976). As a spirit medium, Nehanda became the intermediary of communication between the living Shona societies and the ancestral spirits. Nehanda is a depiction of resistance against the battles fought in the 19th and 20th centuries against colonialism. Nehanda Charwe is recognized as one of the greatest military leaders and freedom fighters of the 1880s and 1890s due to her resistance to colonialism in Southern Rhodesia (Bertho 2018).

Tapping into her spiritually and socially defined authority, Mbuya Nehanda functioned as a movement intellectual to the Chimurenga. She meticulously crafted strategies and motivation for a social protest that eventually led to the first Chimurenga (Kaoma 2016). Even though she was not a politician, she recruited the masses into a huge revolt against colonialism in what is popularly known and celebrated as the first Chimurenga (the war of liberation) of 1896-97. It is said that Mbuya Nehanda used cultural regulations and the Mwari cult to organize and lead a resistance movement against the British colonizers (Mafuranhunzi 1995). In this resistance, she was in control such that she was not just a visionary but also a pivotal pillar in providing the political structure for the social revolt (Kaoma 2016).

Nehanda was a courageous woman who eventually received a death sentence for her advocacy against racism. Before she died by execution, she boldly declared to the white settlers *mapfupa angu achamuka* (my bones will rise again). In uttering these words, she was prophetically declaring that even if they were to destroy her physical body, however, the seeds of resistance against colonial repression which she had planted were going to continue spreading well after her mortal body had been exterminated from this Mother Earth. In essence, Mbuya Nehanda was making a prophetic statement affirming that the spilling of her blood by execution was laying a symbolic and firm foundation for a theology of resistance and a fervour for the resurrection spirit, which was definitely going to continue fanning the anti-colonial fire even well after her death.

What informed Mbuya Nehanda's spirit of resistance?

Mbuya Nehanda was a leader of a countermovement to social injustices created by colonialism. As a leader of a revolting group, she was highly influenced by the Shona culture to successfully execute her military leadership duties. Furthermore, she also depended on the Mwari cult to organize the resistance movement. Mwari (God) in African indigenous religion only communicated with people through spirit mediums such as Mbuya Nehanda. In this regard, African indigenous religions played a proactive role in their engagement with colonialism. In the case of the first Chimurenga war, Mbuya Nehanda drew from the solid foundation of her African indigenous religion's sanctioned authority to successfully execute the resistance movement against white imperialism (Mutunhu 1976; Kaoma 2016).

In addition, Mbuya Nehanda was motivated to encourage the masses to revolt against the colonizers because the conditions that Cecil John Rhodes and the British South Africa Company had established in Southern Rhodesia were no longer tenable. As immigrants from Britain began to increase in Rhodesia in the 1880s, the relations between settlers and the indigenous owners of the land began to deteriorate. For instance, in 1888, Cecil John Rhodes obtained mining rights in Zimbabwe through trickery and criminal means. He tricked Lobengula, the king of the Ndebele, into signing a treaty that allowed him to mine minerals in the then Southern Rhodesia. It is believed that Lobengula, due to a failure to understand the British language in the treaty, was tricked into granting Cecil John Rhodes and his colleagues mining rights without understanding the actual meaning of the treaty he was signing. Cecil John Rhodes then used the Rudd concession in 1889 to acquire a Royal Charter for his Company to colonize Zimbabwe and subjugate its peoples (Mutunhu 1976). On 12 September 1890, the Union Jack was hoisted into place, formally annexing Zimbabwe as a British Colony. The settlers began to rob the Zimbabweans of their land and cattle. The indigenous Zimbabweans were driven to the barren, dry, and infertile land, most of which was unsuitable for human habitation, whilst the settlers occupied the fertile lands. In addition, they also sexually abused the Shona women, who were highly revered in Shona culture. This did not go down well with the Shona leaders. The circumstances continued to deteriorate from 1890 to 1896. As time went on, the indigenous religious leaders such as Mbuya Nehanda began to collaborate with political leaders in fighting against oppression from the British colonial empire which had taken over the social, political and economic leadership of their country.

Mbuya Nehanda was extremely appalled by the social injustices that the indigenous Zimbabweans were going through. She was convinced that the white people's deeds were evil, inhuman, and destructive. Vambe (1972:120) highlights that Mbuya Nehanda "viewed the White men, as filled with hate and fear, killing her people as if they were game or vermin and asked the spirits of the ancestors again and again why they had brought this evil." She could not endure witnessing her people being removed from their ancestral homes without their consent, subjected to racial and political oppression, economic exploitation, dehumanizing forced labour, and unbearable physical torture by the settlers. Mbuya Nehanda was convinced that Mwari disapproved of the British presence and demanded that they be removed. All these forms of oppression led

her to dedicate much of her time in training men and women who volunteered to fight under her leadership. By the time the first Chimurenga began, Mbuya Nehanda's soldiers were ready to fight the forces of colonialism and economic exploitation. To strengthen her strategies, Mbuya Nehanda instituted military headquarters in the Husaka Mountain's network of caves (Bertho 2018). Her motivation in doing all this was to liberate the people of Zimbabwe from colonial repression.

Mbuya Nehanda's wisdom as pillars for the theologies of resistance and resurrection

Mbuya Nehanda never got an opportunity to write about her theology or philosophy of life. However, we can deduce her theology and philosophy of life from how she conducted her life, particularly how she responded to the colonial empire. For instance, her theology of resistance did not compartmentalize the indigenous Zimbabwean men and women's experiences of colonial repression. Neither did she envisage indigenous men and women as enemies who were antagonistic towards each other. Additionally, she did not envision the experiences of colonial repression as a system solely rooted in patriarchal structures. Rather, she viewed men and women as partners, complementing each other in their struggle against colonial systems that undermined both women and men of Zimbabwe. Her army comprised both men and women, which is an indication that she believed in partnership, unity and solidarity. Without men in the equation, Mbuya Nehanda perceived the army as a one-winged bird with limited capacity to function properly. She embraced the reality that there was a need for the inclusion of both men and women in the army so that it could effectively operate, just like a two-winged bird can soar above the heights. This resonates with African Women Theologians' two-winged theology (See Oduyoye 1990; Chirongoma and Mupangwa 2021; Mupangwa and Chirongoma 2021a; Mupangwa and Chirongoma 2021b). Similarly, Mbuya Nehanda's collaboration with Sekuru² Kaguvi shows that she believed that unified collaboration between men and women was

² This is a Shona term meaning 'grandfather,' it is either used to refer to an elderly man as a code of respect or it can also be used as an honorific term, in reference to a person holding a position of authority such as a chief, king or spirit medium. In this sense, Sekuru Kaguvi was one of the renowned

crucial if Zimbabwe was to be liberated. Hence, Mbuya Nehanda's stance was that women and men were not opponents but counterparts in the struggle against white supremacy, which undermined women and elevated men. This is where her philosophy of life, which is the seedbed for resistance and resurrection theology, runs counter to the central tenets of Western feminism. Western feminism views men as enemies and prioritizes sexism more than racism and class (Hudson-Weems 1993). Aidoo (1999), for example, is quoted as having claimed that "Western feminists appear as 'destroyers of homes.' Imported mainly from America to ruin nice African homes" (See also Oyewumi 2002, 2016). Thus, in partnership with men, Mbuya Nehanda dismantled the patriarchy which upheld the headship of men and was used as a ploy by the British colonial empire to pursue their goal of tearing asunder the solid African family and societal networks. Her emphasis was on eradicating the racism that the Zimbabwean people were being subjected to.

There is an aspect of family centrality in Mbuya Nehanda's theology of resistance. As a loving and devoted mother, Mbuya Nehanda resisted the white settlers for the sake of her family. Just like many other families and societal anchored African women, she was never concerned solely about her personal interests and pursuits. Rather, Mbuya Nehanda was resolute in placing the family at the center for ultimate human survival. Since a mother is a nurturer of children, Mbuya Nehanda used that strength of being a nurturer to lead the liberation movement for Zimbabwe. She nurtured the freedom fighters until they were ready to fight the enemy.

In addition, Mbuya Nehanda's theology of resurrection shows flexible role playing. She demonstrated comfort in the domestic sphere with the family, and the workplace as the leader of an army, not sacrificing either role in her quest for fulfilment. While she appreciated traditional male and female roles, she was not trapped in the patriarchal assigned gender roles, as she did what was to be done at any given time. When she had to train soldiers, she took up the role without being constrained by her sexuality as a woman, particularly in light of the fact that during that time, the colonial empire had relegated women to the domestic realm. She took up the responsibility of a politician even though she was a woman because she knew that she had the capacity to free the country from European oppression.

spirit mediums who joined arms with Mbuya Nehanda to lead the war against the colonial empire.

Spirituality is another aspect that characterized Mbuya Nehanda's theology of resistance. Spirituality means having a sacred belief in a higher being or power (Lepherd 2015). Mbuya Nehanda was highly religious and spiritual. The source of her power and ability was Mwari (God). She communicated with Mwari (God) through the ancestors (Mutunhu 1976). It is this sacred power that sustained her throughout her lifetime. This theology of resistance empowers women to understand their gendered status in society, while giving them a voice to negotiate their survival and equality in a world that is dominated by patriarchal trends and other forms of oppression.

By continuing to inspire the masses to rise and fight against oppression even beyond the grave, Mbuya Nehanda's resistance theology has birthed a theology of resurrection as her resurrected spirit continues to power the engine of freedom and liberation of the oppressed. Her spirit has become the force that energizes those who have endured marginalization and indignity for too long, to rise up from the ashes and reclaim their humanity and dignity. It is akin to being awakened from the graves where they were buried under the oppressive hands of the empire. That zeal to arise and resist oppression can be manifested in various ways. It is these numerous facets of resistance that we turn to discuss below.

Experiences of black women as they fought western hegemony

The spirit of resistance against western domination amongst women was not only found in Nehanda of Zimbabwe. Similar defiance and resilience were also exuded by other African women such as queen Nzinga of Angola, Kimpa Vita of the Kingdom of Kongo and Nontetha Nkwenkwe of South Africa. Nontetha Nkwenkwe survived a deadly influenza epidemic in 1918 which ripped the whole of South Africa. Her survival made her believe that she was spared from this virus for a purpose. The colonizers thought she was mentally disturbed because she also functioned as a prophet besides resisting settler domination. Consequently, they arrested her and held her in isolation which eventually led to her death (South African History Online, n.d.).

Kimpa Vita was also killed when she mobilised the Kingdom of Kongo to fight against the Portuguese who had destroyed the kingdom, which they had found developed and organized politically, spiritually, socially and morally. Kimpa fought hard with the determination that her people

should gain liberation in all those facets of life. She utilized both Catholicism and the Kongo people's indigenous religion as an avenue of overthrowing the colonizers and in the process, she came up with a new religion. Through her new religion, her intention was to awaken the citizens of the Kongo to the challenges they faced and to the need to unite. It was through Kimpa's newly found religious movement that the Bakongo were made to realize that it was their responsibility to reclaim their independence and not that of the foreign God, whom the colonizers had introduced to them. The movement grew exponentially and the Portuguese colonial authorities began to feel really threatened by this movement. In order to stop the movement, the Portuguese felt that it was necessary for her to die. She was therefore sentenced to death by fire (Bayeck 2021).

Queen Nzinga of Angola is well-known for resisting European colonization as well. Nzinga Mbande took a leading role for four decades in the war against the Portuguese in Angola. During Queen Nzinga's reign, Angola was under siege from the Portuguese and they had adopted the 'divide and rule' trajectory to fuel conflict between the ethnic groups. The Ndongo Kingdom had become a source of slaves for the Portuguese and their wish was to expand the colony. In 1622, Nzinga negotiated peace terms with the Portuguese governor in Luanda. She used her charisma to inspire her people to resist the Europeans (Black History Heroes Blog, n.d.).

The story of these three women shows that European invaders and/or colonizers met resistance on the African continent. Their story also underscores the leading role of women in resisting exploitation and colonization in Africa. This is evidence that women are not always defenceless individuals. They have strategies which can be implemented to fight not only for their rights, but for the rights of their communities as well.

Nehanda received a death sentence and Kimpa Vita was condemned to death for advocating against racism. The killing of these African women simply because they were fighting oppression is evidence that the colonizers did not value the lives of the black people. The life of a person is sacred and no one has the right to take it away irregardless of their color, race, class or gender. The colonizers had no right to take away their lives. However, the body can become a weapon of war. Despite the fact that they were killed, the resistance movements against colonial domination which they had birthed did not stop with the death of these powerful women, instead the revolutions intensified and eventually these African countries gained independence.

Their strength which was unusual and as warriors, spiritual leaders and anti-colonialist, is an excellent example of African women's commitment to the values of self-reliance and survival. From the period they started putting themselves in the forefront, other women in their nations joined in the struggle of resisting the colonizers. The isolation, the arrests and physical torture which they endured indicates the harrowing experiences that black women went through as they disturbed Western hegemony through resilience. The colonialists thought that subjecting these women to cruelty and violence was going to scare and dissuade them from leading the anti-colonial movements. However, these African women are icons of women's tenacity and resoluteness. Even in the face of death, their fortitude and resilience is testament to the fact that when women are determined to achieve a goal, they normally do not abort their mission until their vision has been accomplished. She makes sure that the vision is birthed. Their visionary and sterling leadership indicates that when a woman leads a movement, the people following her are never led into a donga (pit). Masenya (2016) noted that this refutes some stereotypical views claiming that when a woman leads, the people will fall into a (pit).

Forms of resistance

Writing as a form of resistance

One can use their writing skills to express discontent about the status quo. For instance, some women can resort to writing as an outlet to express their displeasure about the ingrained gender disparities in the domestic sphere, work places and also in the way the country is being run politically. There are several examples of women, such as African feminist writers, who use their lived experiences to challenge and protest against gender injustice and gender oppression (See Phiri 2009 and Chisale 2017). Most of these African feminists belong to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter, the Circle). The main objective of the Circle is to encourage women theologians to use writing to actively reflect on their experiences of patriarchal oppression in religion and society (Phiri 2009). There is power in the written word, hence, the Circle encourages women and offers them mentorship to author articles and books, reflecting on their own experiences. Through writing, more women will be encouraged and empowered to critique and to resist all forms of oppression.

However, Chisale (2017) laments the fact that this strategy may not be very effective because some women do not make an effort to read. Additionally, many more women are overburdened with the responsibility of undertaking household chores such that they do not find enough time to read and write. As a result, reading and writing often ends up becoming the preserve for women who are in academia. For this method to be more effective, women should not be limited to writing academic journal articles, books and book chapters; instead, they can also post their writings on other non-academic platforms. For instance, social media platforms may prove to be effective since most young people visit such platforms on almost a daily basis. Cognizant of this, the Circle has continually encouraged women to vocalize their views and opinions through writing by providing an opportunity for both academic and non-academic women to contribute to some manuscripts which publish short stories, poems, songs, prayers or short sermons. Such initiatives provide an avenue for women activists from various walks of life to put their thoughts into writing. Thus, writing as resistance should be strategically utilized if it is to achieve its purpose of transforming our society into an egalitarian society (Chisale 2017).

Speaking out as Resistance

Besides writing, women can also exercise their agency by speaking out or refusing to comply as a tool of resistance in both private and public spaces. Silence in some cases perpetuates oppression. In her study, Chisale (2017) found out that some women, particularly those who are the sole breadwinners, tend to resist control by voicing their concerns. However, another impediment is that due to the unequal gendered access to resources and opportunities, especially in the current Zimbabwean socio-economic situation, some women are shushed into silence because they will be trying to be cautious to avoid the proverbial biting of the hand that feeds them. Consequently, those who are not economically empowered do not have much liberty to express their disgruntlement. Another obstruction as noted by Chisale (2016) is the fact that some women are afraid of being labelled disrespectful, rude and unmarriageable material, hence, they resort to silence. It is therefore important to acknowledge that for some African women, with particular reference to the Shona in Zimbabwe, silence is not a matter of choice, rather, it is a matter of conforming to tradition and it is part of the politics of gender and identity. We contend that speaking out as resistance is a powerful resource which

should be used by every woman regardless their social class. As such, young women and girls should be socialized to embrace this tool as a valuable resource for their empowerment. Standing firmly on Mbuya Nehanda's shoulders, the women and girls of Zimbabwe, Africa and the world over should be inspired as they aspire to break the fetters of gender oppression and all other injustices which deny men and women their full humanity and dignity.

Silence as resistance

Though silence, in some cases, can perpetuate domination, in some instances, it can also prove to be an effective way of resisting oppression. Tamale (2004) explains that African women are also socialized to resist domination in silence. Women's silence is often underestimated as a hidden transcript of resistance against patriarchy (Chisale 2017). Silence can be utilized as an effective tool of resistance against any form of domination. For example, some women use silence to protest against patriarchy in their marriage, family and societal set-up. This resonates with the research findings in a study conducted by Tamale (2004), she also concluded that women perceive silence as a critical tool in fighting against the abuse of power, especially in a patriarchal context. As the old adage goes, "silence speaks louder than words." Hence, there are times when the silence of the oppressed disarms the oppressor as the oppressor will be feeling uncomfortable, unease and afraid of the implication of their victim's silence.

Physical engagement as resistance

Whilst we are not encouraging people to engage in unwarranted physical violence, it, however, must be acknowledged that if it is the only option that can guarantee freedom, then the oppressed will have no choice but to resort to it to restore their freedom. History has taught us as a human race that situations may warrant the oppressed to physically fight the battle against their oppressors to win back their freedom and unfasten the chains imposed upon them. The example of the children of Israel as they journeyed towards the Promised Land is illustrative here. They engaged in a number of wars along their long walk to freedom as the tribes they encountered along the way wanted to dominate and to rule over them. However, after countless years of servitude under the Egyptian empire,

they were resolute about maintaining their freedom, and they had to engage in warfare to liberate themselves. In the same light, even after having endured years of oppression and injustice, African women and all other people heaving under the yoke of oppression world over should never be intimidated by their oppressors. Instead of wallowing in apathy and hopelessness, they should boldly adopt the strategy whenever the situation requires them to physically fight against the oppressor. Mbuya Nehanda encouraged Zimbabweans to physically fight the enemy, which eventually led to the liberation of the country, well after her demise. Even in the contemporary times, the memory of her determination, courage and fortitude to lead the war against the oppressor remains indelibly etched in the history of Zimbabwe. Her strong will and her courageous spirit of resistance continues to be invoked not only by the people of Zimbabwe, but by other African nationalities whenever the situation necessitates violent resistance against injustice and oppression.

Divorce as a form of resistance

Breaking the chains of abuse, violence and dehumanization through divorce is another powerful form of resistance. This is against the backdrop that many Christian churches in Zimbabwe and other parts of the global community teach that divorce is a sin. This teaching is mostly based on a twisted interpretation of the text which says, "God hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16). Some Christian husbands deliberately abuse their wives physically and emotionally because they are under the impression that the women are bound by the fear to sue for divorce since it is considered as a sin. Newspapers have also continually reported stories of countless women who have died as a result of enduring brutal abuse in their marriages. Domestic violence has become one of the leading causes of death as some Christian women including public figures and well accomplished women remain trapped in abusive marriages. It is heart breaking how numerous women have continued to persevere in toxic marriages, leading them to an early grave. Escaping from the vicious cycle of abuse and indignities through divorcing the abusive husband can therefore be recommended as one of the practical and effective ways of resisting oppression. However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are other amicable ways of resolving conflict in a marriage which should be pursued before resorting to divorce.

Resistance and Resurrection Theologies as a Panacea of Violence and Oppression

In this section, the discussion will focus on how most Christian churches and the Shona culture in Zimbabwe view and respond to oppression, with a specific focus on how this impacted the way the oppressed respond to their uncomfortable circumstances at a continental and global level. It is an open secret that most churches view resistance as something evil. They encourage prayer more than taking action against any form of domination. The Christian teachings and the Shona cultural instructions on marriage encourage women to persevere in the hardships they face. Women are advised never to show signs of resistance because this may make the husband to be more aggressive than before. One of the oft quoted and abused scripture is Proverbs 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” As noted by Chirongoma (2006), Manyonganise (2015) as well as Sande and Chirongoma (2021), in the Shona culture, some of the often regurgitated wisdom sayings used to sustain the silencing of women trapped in abusive marriages are *murume ndiye musoro wemba* (the husband is the head of the homestead), hence, his actions/instructions must never be questioned; *chakafukidza dzimba matenga* (the domestic affairs should remain within the confines of the homestead); *nhumbu mukadzi mukuru, hairevi chayadya* (just as the stomach never discloses whatever it has swallowed, in the same manner, a mature/responsible woman should never disclose whatever struggles she’s going through within her domestic sphere); *usafukura hapwa pane vanhu* (a virtuous woman does not reveal the secrets of her family, in the same manner that a decent person does not expose her armpits in public). It is appallingly unfortunate that so many women have been made to uncritically follow such teachings but such strategies have never produced positive results. For example, some women have endured abusive marriages for more than 20 years, and yet their husbands have never changed for the better. Our standpoint in this chapter is to reassert the fact that resisting oppression is not a sin and women should never feel guilty nor be condemned when they resist oppression in marriage.

Politically, women are also experiencing oppression and discrimination. The Zimbabwean government just like most African governments is male dominated. Some of the political decisions being made by this male bloated leadership are negatively impacting the economy of Zimbabwe, consequently exposing many women to extreme poverty and inequality.

Instead of waiting for positive change and transformation to be granted to the people of Zimbabwe on a silver platter, the people who are failing to breathe under the oppressive systems which are suffocating them need to take an initiative to redress the injustices being perpetrated by the present regime (See Zvingowanisei and Chirongoma 2021). In our view, it is not enough for the church to continuously encourage its members to simply pray so that God can change the situation in Zimbabwe. While prayer is an effective weapon for turning situations around, there are circumstances when one is compelled to go beyond prayer and take a stance to openly denounce and resist oppression. Another historical event during the second liberation struggle in Zimbabwe is also illustrative here. In a bid to register their outrage against the unlawful arrest of Chief Reikai Tangwena, the women from Chief Reikai Tangwena's jurisdiction demonstrated by walking bare breasted and this demonstration immensely contributed towards his eventual release (Herald, 8 May 2013). Among these women, most probably there were Christians too who decided to take their Christianity beyond praying to a better and higher level of taking action.

Resistance will always face resistance and, most of the time, with very negative consequences. Mbuya Nehanda paid the price by sacrificing her own life. Women who stand up to oppose patriarchy should be prepared to be labelled and stigmatized by their families and society as a whole (Siwila 2012; Oduyoye 1994; Moyo 2005). Women should never allow fear to be a barrier to fighting for their freedom. Oppression in all forms should be resisted.

However, women should have wisdom as they apply the various methods of resistance. Mbuya Nehanda was wise enough to discern that their situation needed them to take up arms and not just talk about it or resist in silence. Women should know when to hold placards and when not to, when to be silent and when not to be, because circumstances may not require the same strategies. If a wrong strategy is employed, the resistance may end up being a catalyst for further oppression. With wisdom, the strategy employed will definitely become a tool for resistance and an avenue for liberation.

Being a Christian should never be a hindrance to resisting oppression. In fact, Christianity is about bringing liberty into the lives of people. The Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, recorded in Exodus 1 vv15-20, resisted the tyrannical mandate, refusing to comply, and they helped to deliver the Hebrew children, male and female. In doing all this, they were

displaying their fear of God and in the process, they were also putting their own lives at stake because defying Pharaoh's instruction was a crime punishable by death.

It is also our contention that the resurrection event is not confined to something that happened in the past, rather, resurrection is action taken now. We experience the resurrection when Christians refuse to surrender to violence, to the abuse of men and women because of their race, gender, social class, religious affiliation or any other distinctive marks. The resurrection becomes real when those suffering feel the divine presence encircling them and taking them through the process of emancipation from all forms of discrimination. Christ is risen when we hold fast to our own humanity and the humanity of others in the face of the violence that denies them the opportunity to enjoy their gift of having been created in *imago Dei*.

CONCLUSION

Mbuya Nehanda boldly and selflessly embraced the responsibility of making a change in her society by resisting white oppression. She sacrificed her life because her heart's desire was to see her people living in peace and tranquillity, where they would be enjoying the freedom to control their own political destiny and way of life. May the resistance and resurrection theologies which were endowed in Mbuya Nehanda continue to arise, shine and lead the men and women of Zimbabwe, all African nationals and the whole human race to join heads and arms to resist, fight and eradicate all forms of discrimination and oppression. This would usher in a new Mother Earth, endowed with the spirit of shalom.

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