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Home and Homeless : Cheryl Dibeela Crossing Racial, Gender and Religious Boundaries

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22 | Home and Homeless: Cheryl Dibeela Crossing Racial, Gender and Religious Boundaries

Cheryl Dibeela & *Prince Dibeela*

Abstract

This article is a social biographical approach in its intent. The chapter explores the intersection of boundary-crossing, homelessness, alienation and in-between spaces with race, gender and religion as I have experienced it both in my adopted home in Botswana and my home of birth, which is South Africa. I met my husband at the Federal theological Seminary in 1989. Our meeting was fateful because it led to our marriage. In our youth we did not see any potential hurdles on the way ahead. All we saw was hope, blissful love and a coming together of two different cultures. However, this meeting led to cultural and spiritual turbulences which this article reflects on. The people I have been married into became my people. Yet at the same time I have always been aware of othering innuendos. The article focuses on belonging yet feeling a sense of being in a 'strange land.' By the same token the article reflects on the strangeness of being home. Being away from family and the community in which I (Cheryl) was hewn, has had its cultural disconnect. Returning home to the so-called coloured community always brought contradictions in my life. I would always be looking forward to returning to my folks in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Yet for some reason after a couple of days there, I would want to return to my adopted home--Botswana. In this chapter, I explore the persistence of feeling like a stranger in both homes/countries—the sense of alienation and living in between spaces and belonging nowhere. Utilizing the gender category, I explore 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.'

Keywords: Boundary-crossing, homelessness, alienation, apartheid, women leaders, African Christianity, marriage, African studies, home, in-between spaces, race and gender

Introduction

The writer of the gospel of Matthew tells a piece about Joseph having to take his family to flee to Egypt. Effectively this means that Jesus became a refugee as an infant. This is how he puts across this narrative; "When the magi had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up!" he said. "Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the Child to kill Him" (Matt2:13).

This mostly meant that this family had to sneak in as illegal migrants as there would not have been time to follow the necessary procedures when one travels to a foreign country. According to the Matthean narrative Jesus, and his family, were foreign nationals during his childhood days. This Christological view is critical for our discussion in this paper. Human existence is characterized by travels, cross-cultural engagements and intersectional experiences.

Being a traveler or a refugee does not make one self-sufficient as a human being. Self-sufficiency, I believe, goes against the principles of the Christian faith. This image of God as the travelling God, especially to across cultural and language borders remind us that this is what we are called to be. This is demonstrated by Mark's favorite Christological statement, "And Jesus crossed over to the other side..." (Mk 5:21). Mark is deliberate in presenting Jesus as one who was not territorial and who could not be domesticated by culture and the socio-political contexts of the time. In like manner people of faith ought to be those who are always going beyond themselves to cross-over to embrace the other.

I was born in Qheberha (Port Elizabeth) in South Africa. My ontological existence is that my body, the colour of my skin, is itself the embodiment of racial, ethnic and class intersectionality. This is because having been born as a person of mixed descent, otherwise known as colored in the Southern African context, this carries with it much political and theological connotations that follow me wherever I go. My upbringing was in an exclusively so-called colored community in apartheid South Africa of the seventies and eighties. Clearly, we were inheritors of different nationalities as a family. Whilst our real history was blurred because of the deliberate obfuscation of identities by the apartheid system, we knew that our ancestors were of Xhosa, Dutch and Malay origins. Yet interestingly though, there was always a pride in the European side of our racial his-

tory. There was a sense in which the Dutch heritage was seen and presented as though it was the dominant identity in our rather complicated personality. There was never any effort or interest in trying to dig-out our African or Asian historical identities. If anything, there was a shame associated with these non-European identities. We were taught to speak Afrikaans and some English but not any African language or culture. Anything to do with being African was seen as devaluing who we are as a family and as a wider community designated by this apartheid system as 'colored.' This was, of course, in accordance with the ideology and economy of apartheid South Africa.

Problematizing the Colored Notion

The difficulty and burden that I carried throughout by childhood and youth days was to proudly embrace this so-called colored identity. This particular 'racial identity' did not seem natural. It always felt like an artificial aberration designed by the apartheid system to suit its grand imaginings. Somehow it always felt like we as a people were used by the system to validate its existence. As a so-called colored person one was neither white nor black. We existed in this racial hollowness that made one to remain identity-less in their own home country.

This reference to 'so-called' coloured was a contradiction, because you never thought of yourself as a so-called coloured — you thought of yourself as a coloured. The community was completely suspended between the blacks and the whites. My only memories of blacks were of the bogeyman who was going to catch you at night: *Tie boetie kom jou tang kom slaap.* I had no contact with black people, and what was amazing is that on the other side of the road were the Langa [African workers'] hostels. People ask me what is apartheid all about — this is what apartheid is: to have people living on the other side of the road or the railway line or the hill, and not to have any kind of human contact or recognize the person on the other side as a human being (SAHA 2015:2).

We were made to loathe and reject our blackness because, according to this system, it represented backwardness, slothfulness, viciousness and insane aspects of the human being. For some reason this was drilled effectively into the psyche of our parents who made a good point to socialize us well in rejecting our blackness. As indicated above, whilst we lived a stone throw from black communities we never played with black children, and we were reprimanded for using black or African languages. To

show that we were smart, we had to speak either Afrikaans or English as these languages represented a grander civilization. Whilst the apartheid system wired us to reject blackness, they nevertheless ingrained in our minds that whiteness was not attainable by us. It was a mere mirage that we could only aspire for. In other words, whilst we were not as backward and unintelligent as black folks, we should not think that we were at the same level as white folks (King 1994:150).

So one grew up in-between worlds. We did not belong to any of the major racial trajectories. This was for me and many others who are of mixed descent traumatic. We were made to reject African culture, yet we existed in the very womb of this cultural milieu we so much scorned. We aspired for a world we could never belong to, which in anyway did not want us. We were too pale, and our bodies represented and reminded the imperial white system of its historical evils. We were and continue to be a reminder of the rape, plunder and the slave trade visited upon humanity by the dominant white imperialists. To this day this spiritual *woundedness* is visible among the so-called colored communities in South Africa and the neighboring countries. These communities are ravaged by violence, drunkenness, gang wars, squalor and just drifting along. Sadly, the pioneers of this system are now sitting comfortably in their safe spaces and pontificating, blaming so-called colored and black communities for being uncivilized hence the hubbub in their communities.

Intersectionality and theological training

I grew up and was spiritually socialized in the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa, in the Eastern Cape. I was groomed by progressive church ministers such as Revds Jakes Alberts, Roxanne Jordaan, Sam Arends, Joseph Wing, Templeton Mahlinza and many others. At an early age I gained critical consciousness and felt called to the ministry of the word and sacrament. In 1988, at the age of 21, I left my home to begin theological studies at the Federal Theological Seminary in Pietermaritzburg. This was the beginning of my consciousness and becoming part of the travelling God. My life would never be the same again. The very entry into the seminary was a *pneumatological* protest against the group areas abnormality and the apartheid scandal. The spirit of God blew and drove me to this liberative community where for the first time in my life I communed with people from diverse ethnic, linguistic and racial backgrounds (John 3:8). This was most liberating, and it thrust me into a new

understanding of being Christian and liberating power of the gospel of Jesus the Palestinian. Here I met black people who were, contrary to the mendacities that had been drilled into my head, decent and God-fearing people. One of those was a young man by the name Moiserale Prince Dibeela who was a Motswana. He became my best friend as we studied together and participated in the anti-apartheid struggle through the activities of the United Democratic Front (UDF). We would go together to listen to great speeches by the anti-apartheid luminaries such as Winnie Mandela, Harry Gwala, Frank Chikane and Bishop Khoza Mgojo. We toyi-toyed together against the apartheid system and Prince would always hold my hand so that I wouldn't get lost in the crowds. We participated in fasting in solidarity with the political prisoners who had embarked of a hunger strike. As God would have it, I fell in love with Prince and married him on the 16th December 1989. This was despite the objections of my parents and some within the church family who felt that an interracial marriage such as the one we planned to go into would never survive. Apartheid was still in force and people so us as needlessly recalcitrant. Some students became hostile to Prince and even called him unpleasant names. My family tried to pressurize the then Principal of the Seminary, Rev Joseph Wing, to try and prevent the marriage. Fortunately, he took our side and refused to succumb to the pressure. Prince has today been my husband for thirty-three years.¹

The Federal Theological Seminary became the embodiment of intersectionality. Here not only was the seminary a microcosm of South African society, it was also a liberating space for re-reading the Bible, inherited theologies and human histories. Through the radical scholarship of this institution I was able to feel liberated from the debilitating racialization that had left me feeling that I did not belong. I began to appreciate scripture as a tool that is life affirming. As Jione Havea says; "Scripture makes people live, think, grow, review, love, hate, age and die" (2019:1).

This liberation experience enabled me to go back in time and identify with Jesus the Palestinian who was himself a person of mixed descent, belonging to a world not dissimilar to the one I came from. He had been born into the Roman Empire and had to be a refugee as an infant because of the madness of Herod. In our context PW Botha was the Herod. He was brutal in enforcing the apartheid system and tried his best to keep us

¹ Prince and I have two children, Lorato and Tumelo who are now adults and both live in Johannesburg with their families

divided and ignorant of each other. The boy children were killed ruthlessly under PW Botha just as had been the case under Herod (Matthew 2:16-18). Many of them ran to neighboring countries whilst many others joined the armies of the Liberation Movement, especially APLA and the Umkhonto we Sizwe. Many more were locked in prisons, and some even given the death penalty. Of course, they were women in these armies, however, the young men were the majority in these military movements. Here theological intersectionality meant a liberating movement in time and space that could not be confined to the apartheid structures. My world became surprisingly and liberatingly similar to that of the first century Roman Empire. Somehow, I felt a sense of proximity and solidarity with that so-called colored by the name Jesus of Nazareth. I no longer felt I existed in that racial hollowness that made me feel I did not belong.

Further, at the Federal Theological Seminary I was introduced to the work and activism of Steve Biko who was brutally killed by the apartheid system in 1977. He exposed the falsehood that was the racial categorization of people on the basis of the apartheid system. According to Steve Biko the human race was divided only on two categories which were black and white. The color black represented the class condition of people who have been oppressed and economically plundered by successive white imperialist regimes. The idea that there was a racial group called colored was a mere ploy to divide Black folks who were historically the underclass. The idea that there were different from darker Africans betrayed the chicanery that sought to divide and weaken the resistance of the oppressed. Whiteness represented privilege, exclusivity, illegitimate gain and imperial domination of those that did not belong to this racial category.

Through these experiences theology as a discourse became a liberating vehicle to traverse space, history and phenomena without being locked in particular imperial epistemologies. I took off the coat of being called colored and identified as a black person of mixed descent. As Steve Biko argues, I came to understand that, "Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being" (1978:61).

This was to some extent class-suicide on my part. Other so-called colored folks clung to this false identity as they saw it as more honorable and a ticket for survival in Apartheid South Africa. However, I felt it was liberating to embrace my blackness and to be part of the struggle for emancipation and building a non-racial society.

I also embraced many other identities. I identified with the Syrophenician Woman who had the nerve to confront patriarchy as expressed by Jesus, and was affirmed by him instead of being punished (Mark 7:24-30). It dawned on me and became ingrained in my consciousness that as women we cannot expect liberation at the mercy of men. Like the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, we must push our way through crowded spaces such as in institutions of learning, in churches and demand or even snatch our liberation (Luke 8:43-48). In my academic and theological journey, I found myself at odds with received ecclesiologies, traditional theologies and biblical scholarship. I came to the recognition that, "The life of faith will be a life of history and conflict, a life that sees that no neutrality is possible, and recognizes that revolutionary praxis can lead to theological creativity, in which a new reading of the Bible and the Christian tradition can emerge" (Brown, 1978:59).

Beyond this, I met in scripture many women, my sisters and mothers, who I had hitherto not heard of in the sermons. I was fed with in my beloved Congregationalist church. I met the subversive pair whose names are Shiprah and Puah, without whom there would never have been the Exodus experience (Exodus 1:15-21). Yet for some reason they are ignored by hermeneuticians and homeleticians alike who would rather choose to focus on Moses, Aaron and Jethro. I met Hannah, the Matriarch of the prophetic tradition whose commitment to the worship of Yahweh is demonstrated in her struggle through humiliation by a culture that taunts women who have challenges to do with child bearing (1 Samuel 1:1-8). Yet she emerges as a woman of valor and spiritual tenacity. Through her the word of God is heard again through the enunciation of her son Samuel and a subsequent generation of militant prophetic preachers. Through my new theological experience, I met many other women in the Bible whose role had hitherto been minimized, sidelined and even maligned.

Theological training also introduced me to a movement of women who have come out to challenge patriarchy, colonialism and other life-denying forms. I soon found myself in the company of sisters and mothers such as Musa Dube, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Sarojini Nadar and many others.

These became the light that brightened the dark crevices of sexism and offered glimpses of hope for the journey. Through their readings of scripture the biblical text became a 'site of struggle,' for power, for voices of women to be heard and for a more inclusive society (Dube and Staley, 2002:10).

On the Journey with the Travelling God

If one understands travelling as applied to life and the implications it has on our lives, then one can understand God's image as the Traveler. Scripture is filled with people who are wandering from one area to the other. Some travel out of their own volition while others have no choice. One can think of several stories related in the Bible. The Israelites and the Exodus experience (Exodus 12:31ff); Jacob who was the brother to Esau. He eventually deceived his whole family especially his father Isaac who was at an old age into believing that he was Esau and stole his birth right (Gen 27:29). He then had to move away because conflict ensued, and he ended up at Laban's well (Genesis 27:41ff). Joseph who was human trafficked by his brothers due to jealousy and ended up in Egypt in the house of Potiphar (Genesis 37:12ff). Hagar, an Egyptian woman worked in a foreign land as a domestic servant to a rich man named Abraham and his wife Sarah. Hagar became Abraham's concubine when it was clear that Sarah was barren. Ishmael was born out of this relationship. Hagar ultimately had to flee into the wilderness of Beersheba with her son Ishmael (Genesis 16). Then there is Ruth, the Moabite. Ruth and Orpah, two young Moabite women, joined Naomi and her family who settled in Moab to escape a famine in Judah. They were married to the sons of Elimelech and Naomi. Both women were widowed at a young age. Ruth decided to remain with her husband's mother, whilst Orpah decided to return home. These are just a few examples of people that moved from one setting to the other. All of the above characters, seemed to have a conversion or transformational experience through their travelling.

In my case, on completion of my theological studies, at which point I was already married to my husband, I was placed to be minister in charge of a group of churches in central Botswana. It helps to be a youth because I had no inhibitions and felt ready to conquer the spiritual and socio-political demons I could face. We were a young couple and had agreed between us that ours would be a ministry based on a partnership of equality,

respect and transformative leadership. We came into a situation of a ministry that was dominated by older men who had set standards that were exclusively male. In order to be a minister one had to be male, or at least an old woman, and had to be able to offer an unpaid selfless service because they were called by God. My husband and I felt as though we were traversing an ecclesiological space that put us between two worlds. We had a vision that our being together was a gift of a partnership of marriage that placed upon us a big responsibility to set a new standard for a new understanding of being church. We talked a lot about this, how we would do things together, support one another, model an example of marriage that would demonstrate discipleship. Many people had wondered whether I would manage my ministerial placement in Mabeleapudi, Tshimoyapula, Mmashoro and Paje. However, God had equipped me not only with a theological qualification, my stubborn character and commitment to the liberating God, but had also given me a partner in marriage who was an integral part of my ministry. We both agreed that ministry was and ought to be a liberating space, where both women and men are co-participants in communion with the travelling God. During this time in this group of churches we were at all times stared at by death because of the experience of HIV and AIDS in the country. We had to preach healing and hope, advocate for sexual reproductive health, get involved in the formation of multi-sectoral community structures to combat HIV and AIDS, and we had to weekly conduct funerals to send off the departed. This appeared effortless to outsiders, and many appreciated this ministry couple. They put a lot of demands on us as we represented something of an exotic ecclesiastical experience. We conducted many marriages together, facilitated workshops together and did many other things together. When I became expectant with our second child, by which time we had moved to Gaborone and I was the Minister at Broadhurst Congregational Church, Prince initially took on a lot of my ministerial responsibilities. However, it soon appeared that some members of the church preferred a male minister than a woman who was evidently pregnant. Once this became apparent, we agreed that he would step back so that I perform my duties as a Minister. I put on my clerical garments and baptized young and old, presided at communion, did pastoral visits and preached the word of God. Some people silently objected and some even stayed away from Holy Communion saying they could not receive from a pregnant woman. When they could not get the acquiescence of my husband to their hushed demurrals the small group

started having nocturnal meetings with my predecessor who was a male minister. Sadly, these were women who were being used by a male individual to undermine the ministerial leadership of woman minister. This, to a large extent, became the story of my life in subsequent years. A story of the oppressed being used as tools to serve the interests of patriarchal agendas.

Migration, Cross-cultural ministry and Intersectionality

Travelling also takes one outside of one's comfort zone. When one takes the decision to leave their familiar surroundings, they place upon themselves a self-limitation. They will most likely communicate in a different language, or have to engage in a new accent, and even a new social idiom that they are not familiar to. From 1998 to 2001 my husband started working as a Mission Enabler in the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom. We were based in Leicestershire and we both struggled with the complex accent of area. The children quickly adapted to the new accent and the environment. However, it took us quite a while before we were able to let go of our defend guards. We missed home, the familiar foods, friends and the comfort of our church culture. It soon dawned on us that we were different. We were the other. We often had to be patronized and given false sympathy because we came from Africa. However, we also enjoyed radical hospitality that we were not accustomed to. We were used to a hospitality culture that is selective and gave preference based on categories such as race, gender and nationality. We were humbled to learn of the radical hospitality in the United Reformed Church, which was embedded in their ecclesiology which had the self-understanding that we should always have the stranger among us. They valued the voice of the other. This is something that should become a permanent feature of any Christian community. There ought to be a structured system of always having the door open for the stranger. There are many Christians who restrict themselves to their families, clan and denomination. This way they inadvertently deny themselves of the joy of being ministered to by the stranger.

While in the UK I did my Masters Programme with DE Montfort University and later worked as a community liaison officer for the Methodist Church in Leicester. As Mission Partners, we enjoyed the privileges of being in the protection of the ecclesiastical agencies that had facilitated our travel to the UK. However, the reality of being a foreigner stays with you all the time. We worked in churches that were predominantly Caucasian

where it was always assumed that we had run away from some bad political or economic situation where we had come from. We also had effects of our own internalized oppression as we assumed that the churches, we were serving would be vibrant with a knowledge base that would exceed that of those from whence we came. However, this was an erroneous assumption. It soon became apparent at the lack of knowledge of key components of the Christian faith. The disjuncture between what we perceived as the Christian west and what was the reality was astounding. At seminary the knowledge industry was dominated by Western scholars such as Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Hans Kung, Walter Bruggemann, Leslie Newbegin, and many others. However, it was shocking to see big Victorian churches that were most of the time almost empty, with an elderly membership. Even more shocking was the lack of understanding of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. This was mind boggling taking into consideration that for over two centuries the West had transported a whole industry of Christian Education to the countries of the South. Interestingly, the church in the UK and in the North in general had very little knowledge of the key tenets of the Christian faith. Remarkably, we found our experience as walking the indigenous British folks in the basics of faith. It became a humbly experience to teach and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, the savior and liberator. Though we were strangers in a strange land the ecclesiastical landscape we found ourselves in gave us the opportunity to adapt and fuse our experiences of both the north and the south. It soon became apparent that the pedestal we put our sisters and brothers in the North is a result of two hundred years of imperialism. However, at the basic level they are as vulnerable, ignorant, fretful, fearful, hopeful and searching for peace, security and joy like human beings everywhere.

In my role as Community Liaison Officer I worked with asylum seekers, especially from Zimbabwe. This was at the height of the political turmoil around the land question in Zimbabwe. This work was a painful experience at two levels. First, there were black and white asylum seekers, and both groups came from Zimbabwe. White Zimbabweans walked into the United Kingdom and either just got their British citizenship reinstated or their asylum status granted through a seamless process. For black Zimbabweans, it was a very different story. Many of them were kept in detention centres for long periods of times, others were sent to so-called third-countries, whilst many others were returned to Zimbabwe to face

the wrath of the political fury of the time. We worked with those in detention centres and those who were in the country waiting to be granted an asylum status so that they can stay freely in the country. At the Methodist Church we did our best to arrange for hearings for them, to register those that were illegal immigrants and to provide basic necessities as food and clothing. What compounded this experience was the sheer numbers that we had to deal with. There were many folks that had fled their country, and had come to Britain not only because they could speak English as citizens of a country that had hitherto been a British colony, but because Britain was at the centre of the land debacle in Zimbabwe. The ethnic divide between the Shona and the Ndebele was the vividly evident. Imperialism as all forms of dominant systems do, works and thrives on divide and rule. British imperialism had perfected this system in Africa, and its manifestations were now evident here on British soil. To combat this imperialistic malevolence, we embarked on a series of Bible studies on key Biblical themes such as ‘who is my neighbor?’ ‘The woman at the well,’ ‘Remember you were once strangers in Egypt,’ ‘Singing the Lord’s song in a strange land’ and many others. It was a major breakthrough to facilitate the different ethnic groups to sit together and engage each other. This took a lot of tack, patience and prayerful engagement to get to the point where these ethnic groups could start accepting each other as people fellow citizens of equal worth.

Working among the poor and vulnerable

At the end of our stint in the UK in 2001 we returned to Botswana where, with the assistance of my husband, I started a community ministry through an organization called Mabogo Dinku Advice Centre. The radical Jesus, whom I had been introduced to at the Federal theological Seminary and through my ministry over the years, transmuted my ministry. I now felt called to the streets of Gaborone to commune among the homeless boys who lived in the Main Mall. I felt the urge to work among sex workers, survivors of gender-based violence, those who had been imprisoned through a system that favoured the powerful who had money to buy the justice system. Through Mabogo Dinku our doors were opened in 2002 to all those who needed someone to talk to about their situation. Ours was to lend them a listening ear minus any moral judgement. People came through and poured their hearts about their dysfunctional families, abuse in church, victims of rape came through and many others.

The majority were young people who had dropped out of school and had nothing to do. In a lot of cases we listened to our clients and then referred them to other services such as counsellors, social workers and other civic society organizations. We built a partnership with the Social Services Department who were very supportive of the work we were doing. On one occasion we had a client who was a sex worker and had come to us because her son who was only ten had confronted her about her lifestyle. He said if she did not change her life of going out at night, he was going to commit suicide. She was particularly traumatized by the fact that he knew what she was doing. Every time she sneaked out, she thought to herself that he was too young to understand what she was up to. So, she came around and needed assistance with getting a regular job so she could quit being a sex worker. We called one of our contacts who was a lay pastor in one of the churches and was also running a business. We requested that he employ her in some clerical role and he agreed. Unfortunately, when he came around so we could introduce him to her she froze and indicated that she didn't want the job anymore. We were shocked and disappointed at what seemed like an ungrateful attitude. However, she later divulged to us that she couldn't work for him because he was one of her clients. This was outrageously obnoxious.

Through the work at Mabogo Dinku Advice Centre we decided to establish an offshoot organization called Sedibeng Skills Centre². The focus here was to equip young people with technical and life skills. We managed to organize opportunities for the young people to acquire skills in areas such as plumbing, thatching, electricals, welding and other construction related skills. Our long-lasting programme was a partnership we had with the Gaborone Sun Hotel. Through this programme the youth were placed at the hotel and given on the job training in hotel management. They would be trained in customer service, room service, culinary services and all other aspects of hotel management. The young people would be trained for six months, rotating in the different areas. Through this my ministry was nothing close to the conventional notion. However, every time I met members of the church, they would say how

² When we moved to Johannesburg at the end of 2005 we donated the Mabogo Dinku Advice Centre to the Church, which included financial, movable assets and the social networks among which was an annual grant from the Social Services Department of the government of Botswana. Sadly, the organization collapsed after a couple of years.

they wished I could return to ministry. I always explained, to their dissatisfaction, that I never left the ministry. What I was doing, walking with the poor and marginalized was the ministry to which I was called. Mine was to respond to the evangelical injunction that “I was hungry and you did not give me food, I was thirsty and you did not give me water, I was in prison and you did not visit me (Matthew 25:35-40).” I was troubled by the one-dimensional approach to ministry that had developed over the years. The words of Professor John de Gruchy speak to the heart of the problem I had to wrestle with: “Part of the problem is that too often we understand the church more as a static institution that we have to maintain, or a set of divided institutions that we have to unite, rather than a community of persons in which Christ is present and through which Christ engages the world” (De Gruchy, 2012:14).

For me the church and the Mission of God should not be contained in human structures. It is a movement of the spirit that ought to be found in the whole of human existence. In 2005 I started an organization called Women at the Well. It is a fellowship and support system of women who are in ministry. Through this organization women in ministry in the UCCSA and our sister churches in the United Kingdom and the United States of America come together every other year to pray together, share experiences, learn together and plan. The gatherings bring together women ministers, evangelists and all others who are in ministry. It is always a time that we look forward to because it was our ‘girl time’, when we could debrief and lift each other up from the pits of patriarchy. The Women at the Well has done advocacy work within the church by encouraging women ministers to fight for justice and to raise their voice against all forms of sexism in the Church and society. It has also been a way through which we encourage solidarity among us as women. All systems of suppression function through divide and rule, and the church leadership sometimes selectively choose sisters who they use to soothe their conscious. This way they are able to tick the boxes or have a paragraph in their reports devoted to women representation. These women who are coopted often behave like ‘honorary men’ and more often than not they become a hindrance to gender justice. Through the Women at the Well we have been encouraging global solidarity among women ministers. We have also encouraged and pushed for scholarships for women ministers, and have even sponsored some to stand for positions in the Church. I had the privilege of traveling with some ministers to the United Kingdom and the USA for experiential learning purposes. Some of the ministers

that I have mentored through this process include Rev Corin Maboeta, Rev Zodwa Kakaza, Rev Felicia Ramaribana, Rev Johan Bezedenhout and many others. We have been trying, in the last few years, to make the Women at the Well ecumenically inclusive by inviting Presbyterian women ministers and Methodists. However, it is my hope that this will come to pass.

Intersectionality and 'global apartheid'

Besides my activism and work among the poor and marginalized I also worked as Mission Enabler for the Council for World Mission, starting from 2007 to 2013. In this role I traversed different countries, cultures and languages. My work entailed travelling within Southern Africa; Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Madagascar, Malawi, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia. I also regularly visited continents such as Europe, Pacific, East and South Asia and the Caribbean. In the process I have become an advocate for justice through teachings, facilitator of workshops and participating in ecumenical actions for a justice and peace. Over the years it has become clear that the system of apartheid has over the years mutated and become a global phenomenon. It is manifest in the West and their warfare against Palestine. The USA and the European Union Countries have openly embraced a racist attitude to Palestine, and continually sponsor Zionist Israel in their brutality against the occupied territories of Palestine. Further, global apartheid is also apparent through immigration laws and practices. Nationals from countries of the North travel freely all of the world without needing visas. However, most countries of the South have to acquire visas, whether they are travelling to the North or even among countries of the South. The acquisition of Visas and other requirements is an added cost burden that makes travel a very expensive undertaking. Through these travels, I witnessed and experienced the suffering of people of the South as they are excluded, returned, humiliated and imprisoned because they come from wrong countries and wear the wrong skin pigmentation. The word of Mary Grey became potent in this situation:

“At root, faith in a God who suffers with us does not so much emerge from a philosophical rejection of the impassible, omnipotent and sufficient God, but from an experience with a double content: the experience of affliction, of radical suffering which threatens to destroy the sense of

being a person, and of the presence of God in this affliction” (although not always) (2001:57).

Apartheid survived for almost fifty years in South Africa partly because of the complicity of the oppressed with the oppressor. We had, embedded in our communities and even within the liberation struggle, structures and individuals who worked against us. These were people who were paid by the system to spy on those who were in the struggle to end apartheid. I raise this issue here to demonstrate that even global racism and the continuance of systems of domination continue because of the amenability of some among the oppressed.

Once I traveled with my Prince to Jamaica. At the end of more than thirty hours of travel we arrived in Kingston and were just keen to go straight to the hotel to rest. However, there was a young lady at the Immigration in the Airport who insisted that we needed a visa for Botswana passport holder. We tried to gently explain to her that Botswana passport holders did not need a visa to enter Jamaica, we had checked with the authorities and in any case, it wasn't the first time for my husband to visit the country. The young lady became adamant and flippantly told us to wait whilst she was helping out other customers, who were evidently white. We protested but to no avail. I then started, to her annoyance, humming Bob Marley's:

*Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look? Ooh
Some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfill the book.*

She became very furious with me and said, “Ma'am that's not funny!” To which my husband laughed out so loud and said, ‘But she's just appreciating a Jamaican icon.’

This is how racism and imperial systems perpetuate themselves. By indoctrinating us to hate ourselves and to hate anything that reflects who we are. It is the victims of the very system that oppress them who put every effort into making sure that it functions. Prof Musa Dube puts it this way, “Imperialism expounds an ideology of inferior knowledge and

invalid religious faith for those who must be colonized. Authoritative travelers depend heavily upon constructions of ignorant natives” (2002:67).

Today the world over, imperial education has conditioned us to suspect black people of being illegal immigrants, giving false information and likely to be transporting some illegal substance. It is often the case that when two people are travelling together, one being white and the other black, the latter is likely to be searched longer than the former. It doesn't matter what part of the world they might be travelling in, whether its Nairobi, Singapore or London, the attitude and response is the same. What is even more painful is when black people express the harshest forms of this racist culture on fellow black people. This self-hate is the embodiment of colonial ideology.

Intersectionality and being a stranger: concluding thoughts

Through the education and experiences, I went through I became a global citizen. I became an embodiment of racial, gender, class and Global South intersectionality that could not be tamed and harnessed into limited spaces. As someone who is proud of where they come from, I have made regular trips to my home town Port Elizabeth (now known as Qheberha). Going back home was always something I looked forward to. However, once I am there for a few days I often feel a sense of not belonging, a sense that I am a stranger here. The racist undertones of the jokes about black people, the rejection of the government of the day simply because it's black and other undertones of my people, make me feel alienated in my own community. I would pick the subliminal intonations that 'why did you have to get married so far away?' 'Do we have to speak English all the time?' 'We are only comfortable with our mother tongue, which is Afrikaans.' These are undertones that often remind me that my community is a design of apartheid imperialism. I would immediately miss my husband and children. Whilst I was hewn from this community, I am now a global citizen whose citizenship is not determined by the color of one's skin. I belong to a citizenship that is anchored on commitment to social and racial justice, non-sexism, ethnic justice and a world where there is economic equity. Whilst I value my place of birth, I would often miss my marriage home, where the language and idiom of our household is respect and justice for all.

Being married in Botswana has been a joyful experience. There has not been any group areas act or any traces of the crudeness of apartheid. However, even here I often feel like a stranger. Often, I miss my language Afrikaans, I miss the customs of my people such as eating pickled fish and cross buns at Easter time. I miss seeing people who look like me so that I don't have to be stared at all the time, or put on a false pedestal as a '*lekgowa*' or white woman. I am tired of explaining to people in Botswana that I am not white but rather I am a 'black person of mixed descent.' Although I give praise to God for being married here where I have been received with such amazing love, I nevertheless still feel like a stranger. It feels to me like I belong to both worlds and yet at the same time I belong to neither.

CONCLUSION

Her activism and strong character have over the years rubbed some in the Church leadership the wrong way. She spoke truth to power without mincing her words. This earned her the wrath of those in power in the Church system. In 2019 she was abruptly transferred from the church where she was minister in charge. She accepted the transfer with grace. However, she was deeply hurt by the fact that after the so-called transfer she was kept at home without being given a ministerial appointment. Nevertheless, she continued running her organization which she had started in 2015 known as Tswang Learning Communities (TLC). She did similar work she used to do at Sedibeng Skills Centre whereby she partnered with Education Training Providers and have out of school youth trained for free. Over the years she has facilitated the training of over a thousand youth in different industry competencies.

In September 2020, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic Dr Cheryl Dibeela became ill. She was diagnosed with a progressive neurological disease, which has seriously curtailed her functioning. She is at home in Gaborone, Botswana where she is receiving care and is kept comfortable by myself with the support of the children. She continued her work as a teacher and mentor for most of 2020 when she was still functional. At that time, she supported and mentored, from her sick bed, a young lady

who was an intern minister. The young lady, Rev Botho Hiri, is now ordained to the ministry of the word and sacrament. She also assisted me by addressing an online workshop of Sudanese women refugees who are based in Nairobi, Kenya. It is the greatest privilege to look after and care for Cheryl during her illness. She is an amazing servant of God and continues to demonstrate spiritual tenacity in the struggle for life.

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