

Moyo, Elitha

Tears do not mean Blockage to the Successful Bright Future : The story of Felicidade Chirinda of the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique

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21 | Tears do not mean Blockage to the Successful Bright Future: The story of Felicidade Chirinda of the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique

Elitha Moyo

Abstract

African women theologians are the pioneers of gender justice in their communities. However, their work on gender justice has not been an easy process, some have experienced emotional abuse that led to internal weeping and grieving. They have been bullied and silenced by the authorities of their churches, families and other women forcing them into the peripherals of society, yet this did not stop them from pursuing the gender justice struggle. This chapter follows a narrative methodology to tell a story of one of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) (Thereafter the Circle) matriarchs, Felicidade Chirinda from Mozambique. Chirinda's story will be analysed through Mercy Oduyoye's theology of Christian Ministry as partnership of women and men. The chapter shows that when women and men partner in ministry, gender justice and development can be achieved.

Keywords: Rev Dr Felicidade Chirinda, Presbyterian Church of Mozambique, Gender justice, Theology of Christian ministry and development

Introduction

Gender justice has long been a source of contention and remains one of the most pressing human rights issues. Theologians and other scholars have attempted to explain why gender justice is still debatable in churches and in society, where women are inhibited from participating in the so-called male terrains or spheres (Familusi, 2012:310). According to the biblical perspective, scholars contend that the Old Testament stipulates that women are to be under the authority of all men (Madu,

2014:124). As a result of this claim, gender justice has been a thorn in the side of the church for a long time, as women are pushed to the pews and men into alters and leadership positions. However, according to the theological principle, people were created in God's image with equal rights and indignity; thus, women are obligated to have full rights of participation and to occupy leadership roles at all levels in their churches and societies. In addition, Mercy Oduyeye (1988) and other African women theologians established the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) (hereinafter the Circle), which aimed at liberating women in the church and in society. More so, the Lutheran World Federation (2013) argues that gender justice is about the protection and promotion of the dignity of women and men who, being created in the image of God, are co-responsible stewards of creation. Following the biblical perspective on women, churches have become a hotbed of gender injustice (Owusu, 2014:49). Furthermore, the Christian patriarchy viewpoint held that God created men to be the head of the family, the provider, and protector (Efe, 2020). As a result, Machingura and Nyakuhwa (2015:112) criticize the Church of Christ as patriarchal and argue that:

It is still a bone of contention as to whether the Church of Christ is upgrading or downgrading the status of women. Though the church has been known to be the voice of the voiceless in dealing with critical issues like the welfare of widows and orphans, disabled persons; one wonders what has happened to the case of women on leadership positions. Were they born to be followers of men? ... Patriarchy is to blame on most challenges faced by women in our society and church today.

The Circle has been fighting patriarchy since its inauguration, where they constantly reject gender inequality in church. They have been using their lived experiences of gender struggles to advocate for elimination of patriarchy. Isabel Phiri notes that theological institutes are dominated by male voices, as a result she argues that the Circle came together to reflect on what it means to be women of faith within their experiences of religion, culture, politics and social-economic structures in Africa (Phiri, 2008). Woman's place has been defined as the domestic space. For African men, it is not a norm for women to lead when there are men. Women involved in leadership positions are often demeaned and humiliated.

The primary goal of this study is to evaluate the impact of Circle in combating gender inequality through the story of Felicidade Chirinda of the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique, who was denigrated, humiliated, and sabotaged by men in positions of authority in her church because

she is a woman. The chapter will specifically investigate the effect of the Circle in combating patriarchy, which was perceived as a barrier to gender equality between men and women in churches, as well as debate whether ministerial collaboration between men and women would promote gender justice and development. This chapter follows narrative research as it is the principal method used by African women theologians in telling stories about their experiences in a patriarchal world. Mercy Oduyoye's theology on Christian Ministry as partnership of 'women and men' is used to analyse Chirinda's story. The chapter starts off by describing the methodology and theology of the study. This is followed by teasing out themes of a gender justice struggle in Church as it is narrated by Chirinda.

Narrative Research and Christian Ministry as Partnership of Women and Men

African women theologians use story telling or narrative research to interrogate their lived experiences. Kanyoro (2001:168) advocates for storytelling to probe cultural conditioning of African women's thinking in order to discover the origins of their belief system. Storytelling is part of narrative research used by African women theologians to tell their hidden stories and use those stories to argue for gender justice. According to Kanyoro (2002:23):

...our stories are a basis for theology. Indeed, women globally are saying theology should begin with our stories – what we feel in our society, how we feel about our children, our families, what enrages us, what makes us laugh, what our lives mean to the next neighbour and how we experience God in all of these.

Data used in this chapter is teased out from Felicidade Chirinda's essay about her lived experiences of gender injustice in her church in Mozambique. It is assumed that Chirinda's story of gender injustice is every woman's story.

Felicidade Chirinda's Biography

Chirinda was born in 1950, the first child in a family of seven. She grew up in a Christian family. Her father served as the Evangelist and missionaries' driver in the Presbyterian church of Mozambique and later became

a minister of the word and sacrament in 1962 in the same church. Chirinda by then was 12 years old. For a man it is very easy to climb the ladder of leadership as per one's wishes, support and resources will always be available.

When Chirinda reached the age of 7, her parents sent her to stay with Aunt Dorothy Chirinda the sister to her father in Maputo the capital city of Mozambique to start her primary education. In Matutuine rural where her parents were staying, there were no schools. Chirinda's stay with Aunt Dorothy was like spreading salt on a fresh wound due to traditional and cultural beliefs which say whatever is done by aunties is appropriate for children especially the girl child. Her father ordered Chirinda to go back to her aunt's place without any intervention which worsened her situation. This act by the parents created a deep hatred between Aunt Dorothy and Felicidade's mother. Chirinda narrated "I cried and could not stop until I arrived at school". During school assembly time, School Director Ms Christine Ries saw her and took her to her house and from that day she committed to take care Chirinda. The school director notified her parents about this situation who agreed with it. When she was 16 Chirinda was staying with another missionary who was working in Mozambique until she turned 18. Chirinda describes this period as the beginning of her hard and turbulent journey to the vocation affirmation (Chirinda, 2022).

It is true that success never comes on a silver platter. When Chirinda finished her secondary education, Suisse missionaries trained her as a Pre-school teacher, and she worked there for 2 years. She was forced to leave the work because her father who was working as the minister of the word was suspended in the church, and this affected her. Being the elderly child, she was forced to look for a job to take care of her siblings which was a setback in her life journey. There is a Shona proverb which says, "*rugare tangenhamo*" meaning, good life comes after a struggle. Hence, ways to success have hurdles and as a female the road is rougher compared to a male.

Chirinda got married in 1975 and was blessed with 2 children a girl and a boy. After 8 years of marriage her husband was involved in a serious car accident which left him with permanent handicap and wheelchair for the rest of his life for 19 years until he passed on. During this period, Chirinda had to resign from her job to be a full-time caregiver to her husband until his death in 2000. She remained a widow and committed to take care for her children, parents, and siblings.

Felicidade Chirinda' Story of Gender Injustice

Chirinda who against all odds defeated patriarchy from domesticating her succeeded in leading the church of Mozambique as a woman. She has worked side by side with men and women in stewardship, diaconal, uniting men and women in ministry. The following themes from Chirinda's essay will be discussed in connection to gender justice: Oppression of women by other women; empowerment of women is an empowerment for the community, empowering each other; missionary education enforcing women's gender roles (pre-school teacher). This is followed by other themes of Chirinda journey in the midst of pains and tears in the hand of the church and also the gender injustice she experienced as a lay person and an ordained minister.

Oppression of Women by other Women

Many years later, my mother told me that my suffering in the hands of Auntie Dorothy was the cause of her heart disease, recounts Chirinda (2022). One could imagine how women suffer for their children to the extent of developing chronic diseases. Felicidade's primary school was full of tears, misery, and she became uninterested in education due to the treatment by her aunt. She pointed out that the aunt mistreated her to the point where one day she cut her hair on one side and people at school laughed and made fun of her (Chirinda, 2022). It is very regretful for women to ill-treat other women. "Regardless of whether this indirect aggression toward other women a result of biology or social conditioning is, we all have a choice. A choice to change the overwhelming trend of tearing each other down instead of building each other up".¹ Women are not aware that when we tear one other down, we (women) destroy our future.

¹ When We Tear One Woman Down, We Tear All Women Down. | HuffPost Voices 20th July 2022, 10-25.

Missionary education enforcing women's gender roles (pre-school teacher)

Patriarchal rule clearly distinguishes the values and norms that women and men can embrace. This chapter considered this as gender conditioning or socialization. Thus, gender conditioning from birth crippled human mind to the extent of normalizing this abnormal. Hence the African culture conditioned people that women are inferior and there is no space for women leadership, and they took it as normal. Suisse missionaries who trained Chirinda as a pre-school teacher might think that she helped her to cross the bridge of oppression, instead, Suisse just domesticated her to do what the community and patriarchy system expects from a woman i.e., taking care of children, the sick and being a housewife. In some instances, Women are guilty of internalising oppressive socialisations (Chisale, 2018). African women theologians such as Kamaara and Wangila (2009:131) argue that 'women are not only victims but also perpetrators of oppression against themselves'. Women tend to protect some oppressive teachings of culture and tradition. However, other theologians have denigrated the allegations posed against women for being the perpetrators of oppression against themselves (Oduyoye, 2003b). This is because women are only allowed to conform to the church and traditional doctrines, which inhibits them from participating in male terrain, thereby making women continue to be the victims (Chisale, 2018).

Concept of Patriarchy

The term patriarchy literally means father's rule, and it was originally used to describe a certain type of man-dominated household, the patriarch's massive home, which included women, junior males, children, slaves, and domestic workers all under the sway of one dominant male (Stone, 2012). It is now more broadly defined as male domination, power dynamics in which males dominate women, and a system in which women are kept subservient in a variety of ways (Swift, 2010).

Ankara (2009) highlighted that patriarchy refers to male domination in both the public and private spheres. Feminists frequently use the term patriarchy to describe the power dynamics between men and women. As a result, to feminists, patriarchy is more than a term; it is an idea, and like other concepts, it is a tool for understanding women's experiences (White, 2005). Various academics describe patriarchy in different ways.

Patriarchy is defined by Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, as kinship systems in which males sell women (Zahedi, 2008). According to Walby (1990:20), patriarchy is described as a system of social structures and practices in which males control, enslave, and exploit women. She regards patriarchy as a system because it allows us to reject the idea of biological determinism, which holds that men and women are born equal.

As a result, patriarchy refers to the system of institutionalized male superiority. As a result, patriarchy may be characterized as a network of financially based social links between men and women that, although hierarchical, promote or support masculine independence and unity, allowing males to exert authority over women (Jagger and Rosenberg, 1984). Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological distinctions between men and women, ensuring that males are always in dominating, or masculine, positions and females are always in subordinate, or feminine, roles (Keyman et al., 2004). Due to the prevalence of this paradigm, men frequently gain the seeming cooperation of the very women they punish (White, 2005). This is achieved "through institutions like academia, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and encourages women's service to men." Millett (1977:35). The patriarchal system is characterized by power, domination, hierarchy, and competitiveness. As a result, patriarchy refers to males as a societal framework and practices dominating, abusing, and exploiting women (Sturges, 2004).

In terms of the origins of patriarchy, traditionalists believe that males are intended to control and females to be subordinate, which explains the popularity and genesis of patriarchy (Shorideh et al., 2012). They believe that this hierarchy has always existed and will continue to exist, much like other natural laws. Others argue that patriarchy is man-made, not natural, and hence susceptible to change. Aristotle provided analogous "theories" in this respect, referring to males as active and females as passive (Swift, 2010). In his perspective, female meant "mutilated man," someone without a soul. According to him, a woman's fundamental frailty causes her to be inferior in her capabilities, understanding capacity, and, as a result, ability to form judgments (Sturges, 2004). Men are born to dominate, and women are born to be dominated because they are superior to him. "A man's courage is demonstrated when he tells a woman to conform," he observed (Learner, 1989:8-11).

According to modern psychology, women's biology influences their minds, and hence their skills and responsibilities. Sigmund Freud, for

example, felt that anatomy determined women's fate (Stone, 2012). A typical human being, in his perspective, was a man (Freud, 1977). Yet, these concepts of male supremacy have been contested, and no historical or scientific evidence to support such beliefs has been uncovered. Although men and women have biological differences, these disparities do not have to serve as the foundation for a male-dominated sexual hierarchy (Somer, 2007). Consideration of some of these notions leads us to believe that patriarchy is the outcome of historical processes. There is no accepted hypothesis on the origins of patriarchy. I will only quickly outline a few of the key notions presented here. Friedrich Engels released *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* in 1884, which provided an essential explanation for the origins of patriarchy. Engels was born in 1940. Phillips (2010) noted that, women's subordination began, according to Engels, with the development of private property, when the feminine sex was vanquished throughout history. He claims that historically, both class divisions and female servitude evolved (Nash, 2008). When private property initially formed in society, males fought hard to maintain their power and property so that they might pass it on to their children (Swift, 2010). To secure this inheritance, the mother's right was abolished. To secure the father's prerogative, women had to be domesticated and restrained, and their sexuality had to be managed and controlled. Patriarchy and monogamy for women evolved during this time period, according to Engels (Sinha, 2010).

Women's Subordination

Patriarchy, which believes that men are innately superior to women, shamelessly supports women's dependency on and subordination to men in all aspects of life (Chisale, 2018). As a result, men wield complete power and authority in the family, community, and state. As a result of patriarchy, women were denied legal rights and opportunities (Kasomo, 2010:129). Patriarchal ideals hinder women's mobility by denying them autonomy over themselves and their possessions. Subordination means having less power or authority than someone else in a group or organization (Hornby 2003:1296).

Subordination of women in most nations refers to their lower status, lack of access to resources and decision-making, and patriarchal dictatorship (Moyo, 2021). As a result, female subordination reflects their inferior status when compared to males. Feelings of powerlessness, prejudice, and

low self-esteem and confidence all contribute to women's subjugation. Female subordination is thus a power dynamic in which men govern over women. Women's subordination is an essential component of all interpersonal dominance systems; however, feminists place it in different places and for different reasons (Chisale, 2018). Contemporary feminist philosophy begins with Simone de Beauvoir's contention that women are assigned to the second sex and are therefore subordinate because males perceive them as fundamentally different from themselves (Beauvior, 1974). Women, according to Kate Millet's idea of subordination, are a dependent sex class subject to patriarchal dominance (Millet, 1977). The patriarchal system oppresses women in a multitude of ways. Nyangweso (2009) highlighted that discrimination, neglecting, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, and violence are all forms of subordination we experience on a daily basis, regardless of class, in the home, at work, and in society (Moyo, 2021).

Breaking the Patriarchy Walls

Following the trend of early church fathers, which ruled the nature of women to the extent of lost human identity, Recatla seminary Board of IPM maintained this understanding of these old and corrupt school of thought and tried to hinder Chirinda's calling to the ordained ministry. Plato and Aristotle believed that women are inferior to men and labelled them essentially as child-bearers and housekeepers, (Wood, 2017:2). Kasomo (2010:128) cited Augustine's views that a woman can only get the image of God when taken together with man who is her head. Due to this fact a woman is always assigned the role of a helpmate. Hence the helpmate is only assigned to procreation and care giving (Kasomo, 2010:129; Moyo, 2021).

However, by virtue of playing the role of father in the family, Chirinda was respected as an important figure in the society (Chisale, 2018). This has opposed the proposal of Plato, Aristotle, and other African theologians of considering women as child bearers and housekeeper (Madu, 2014). Chirinda proved that it is not about the church, men, or human beings' decision but about Oduyoye theory which is the main leading theology of this article of "Christian Ministry as Partnership" as opposed to men dominant leadership. Emphasising the theology of "Two Wings" gives basis and makes it possible in terms of African context in development. The IPM Recatla Board, other churches and communities refused

women leadership, they reacted to an old school of thought that is even currently criticised by African theologians of irrelevant context to African gender challenges of women inclusion. Nyangweso (2009:110-111) says:

basic argument is that Eurocentric-based approaches to gender empowerment in Africa are unhealthy as they tend to promote antagonism and competition. A feminist theological paradigm that is suitable for this context is one that acknowledges that men and women ought to work together as complementary agents. While past approaches to gender equality have been efficient in empowering women, they have not been effective because: (i) they have alienated the sexes to the detriment of society; and (ii) they do not take cognizance of the cultural context of Africa where family values and relationships hold high premium. Utilizing an African feminist hermeneutics that draw from a contextual theology, these authors argue for a gender complementarity approach as opposed to gender competitiveness.

These views by Oduyoye and Nyangweso mentioned above are supported by Isindebele proverb that says, “*Izandla ziyagezana*” and Shona “*Chara chimwe hachitsvanhi inda*” meaning one person cannot achieve greater work by themselves. The involvement of women as women doing theology through CCAWT opened new biblical pedagogies reflections that improve biblical interpretations.

Regardless of all difficulties she went through in this process, Chirinda enrolled at Khovo School of theology for three years and got a certificate in Theology. Due to her hard work, her New Testament lecturer Prof. Alexander Milton encouraged her to join the United Seminary of Ricatha (USR) to do two-year Diploma in Theology (Chirinda 2022). This move by Prof. Milton was not accepted by the majority members of the church board since at this stage, she was the only woman to compete with male student pastors. Nevertheless Prof. Milton insisted on support by Rev Dr Chamango who made personal compromise and openly saying, it is time to involve women in Theological Studies. Therefore, our General Treasurer can pursue Theological Studies at the Seminary. However, if she neglects her work at the Finance Department, she will be suspended at Ricatla² (Chirinda, 2022). However, with conditions which were attached that, if she neglected her duties at the financial Department, she would be suspended at Ricatla. It is always women who are given positions to lead,

² At the time, the Rev Dr. Simão Chamango was the Presbyterian Church Synod Council President as well as the Rector of the United Seminary of Ricatla.

with conditions to measure performance for approval. As a result of this, Oduyoye (2001) argues that, often woman's power is denied, and their experiences rejected they are given limited space attached with some strings that do not allow them freedom to express their feelings.

Fighting Oppression against All Odds

Chirinda was trained under spotlight conditions, meaning that making any mistake would cause her to be exonerated because she is a woman who joined men's domain. Chirinda passed with high marks to the extent that the same professor wanted to send her to South Africa for further studies as a way of preparing her to be a future lecturer at Ricatla Seminary. Once again, the IPM church leadership refused (Chirinda, 2022). Yet again, as if this was not enough and to strengthen their church patriarchy rule, they refused to send her to parishes for pastoral internship training. Madu (2014:123) pointed as undisputed that, women in the bible left milestones of development and revolution of their communities notwithstanding all probabilities against them. Mercy Oduyoye, an African theologian, argues that women are born to believe that being born a female resembles being born innately inferior, and due to their low self-esteem, they underrate themselves (Osuwu, 2015). This greatly hinders them from participating in male sports.

Additionally, in the African traditional perspective, women are also the most exploited, oppressed, and restricted by taboos, including by involving them in education processes that also constrain them from participating in male terrain (Familusi, 2012:310). However, this perspective is now considered an outdated practice since women are increasingly participating in churches and other social platforms. For instance, women such as Ester, Deborah, and Hannah were involved in super tasks that can be an encouraging point for today's women. The other example portrayed by Bangladesh community cited by Moyo (2021) from Solomon Island report (2016) said, women's leadership and authority have figurative power because it challenges prevalent theories that say men are leaders and a woman's place is in the home: When women start participating, it is difficult to speak out. In some places people are now supporting them. They had to prove they are honest and capable of leadership like Chirinda. Thus, there is need for demystifying gender inequality fears which is one critical issue to be incorporated. Chirinda applied same method of Participatory Bangladesh community using performance and

capabilities of few women in leadership post as the panacea to transforming the attitude of community towards women (Moyo, 2021). Chirinda's decision to study diploma in theology supported by two board members increased her critical analysis in theological views. Chisale (2020), pointed that resistance occurs because the church in Africa is a fertile ground where the oppression of women is promoted, and patriarchy is elevated as a norm. Of which patriarchy is an ideology that allows male leadership legitimising the oppression of women in all sectaries of societies (Sultana, 2010).

This situation was criticised by other church members to question the IPM attitude toward women ministry (Chirinda, 2022). African Women Theologians advocated for partnership as stressed by Oduyoye's (2001) "Partnership between women and men" points to the common issue raised in (Genesis 1:26ff), that men and woman are to rule over all creation together (Moyo, 2021).

Women Empowerment is Empowerment for the Community

During her time at home as a widow Chirinda voluntarily helped women church groups to engage in livelihood activities. She proved true what the Commission of Status of Women report (2006) hypothesized that, women exclusion from leadership is a package for the non-development of a country. Every society should learn to accept the ability of women in leadership position if they desire to develop. It was during this volunteering when Rev Dr Chamango identified Chirinda and invited her to join Concourse Organised by the Presbyterian church of Mozambique.

In her autobiographical narrative Chirinda highlights the floods that affected Mozambique in 2000 displacing poor households. This is where she showcased her leadership skills and started to work organising people in groups of volunteers that provided care to the affected. This act is supported by IsiNdebele saying, "*Ukufundisa owesifazana yikufundisa isizwe sonke*" meaning, empowering a woman is to empower the whole nation. According to Chirinda, the situation challenged them as a group of concerned citizens to build a vocational school completed in 2004 for those children hence their mothers also benefited by getting knowledge on how to read and write and people were baptised at this school which was called Christian Association Women Arise supported by various partners. Chirinda's initiatives at Mozambique due to floods of 2000 left a legacy of which many lives survived socially, spiritually, and physically.

Regardless of all these, the IPM church was blinded to recognise all this and refused to officiate the opening ceremony of the institution existing today. The work done by Chirinda was validated by Sandler and Steel (2000:68), saying, “Though women appear invisible, they have been the pillars of parishes and take care of the local church and its worship”. Chirinda’s leadership shows that dominance of men in leadership positions is not an end, a partnership with women can yield more positive results.

Visible Emancipation Influence

Creation of Women Association enabled Chirinda to deal with various challenges: cultural issues, educational needs and economic issues affecting women livelihoods in the community. During her women emancipation period, she was the first woman in the community and church (IPM) to speak out denouncing discrimination and stigmatisation of People Living with HIV/AIDS with IPM Association members, (Chirinda, 2022). The denouncement created furore to the IPM’ leadership who as a result accused Chirinda as being a ringleader of women’s movement against the Church, leading the church to suspending women Association activities. The suspension did not materialise as the majority church members were in favour of Women association work. To date, the Association activities continue progressing within the Church and in the community.

Women Empowering other Women

Chirinda received strength and resilience from being a member of the Circle. Her work academically and in praxis is informed by the Circle’s objective to destroy and eliminate patriarchy in all areas of life. Oduyoye (2001:17) asserts that African women’s theology is concerned about promoting healthy and equal relations, replacing hierarchies with mutuality, theology that is society sensitive. This is true as the African community set-up is very communal oriented which the issue of societal relationships is core and valued. Few people could act as Prof. Milton and Rev Dr Chamango did to stand their ground for Chirinda and openly denounce the church’s women discrimination and oppression acts. In 2002 Chirinda in the Addis Ababa Continental Circle meeting was elected Lusophone chapter Coordinator due to her leadership calibre noticed by

Musa Dube who invited her to participate in a writing workshop in Botswana with the aim of producing an HIV/AIDS on sermon, liturgy and prayers for African Churches since the pandemic was rampaged by that time. Chirinda contributed 9 passages in Portuguese and the title of the book *Is Africa Praying: A Handbook on HIV/AIDS Sensitive Sermon Guidelines and Liturgy* that was launched on her absence in Cameroon, the IPM did not send a delegate but other denominations from Mozambique sent male delegates who by knowing Chirinda's leadership character nominated her. However, IPM reacted by writing a letter to the AACC General Secretary to consider another name than Chirinda's name which was rejected by the AACC Council. The IPM church as a way of punishing its pastor Chirinda ignored her position and did not support her travelling in cash or kind to the meetings

Growing Leadership Opportunities

In June 2001, a week before Chirinda ordination, the Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) Women's Desk Society proposed Chirinda's name to the position of women advisers. But IPM leadership advanced another name of a female pastor contesting Chirinda's nomination. Surprisingly, at the end of that year, the colleague who had been sent to the CCM' Women' Desk left the post. The CCM Women' Desk used that opportunity to renew their request for Chirinda who was now ordained. They also elected her also as the Vice-chairperson of the CCM Board Council which she served both positions. These positions opened doors for her to participate in many ecumenical platforms within the country Mozambique and international. When her term of office ended in 2009, she was elected as the Senate member, and Scripture Union National Director. She was then elected as the first woman National President and Board Chairperson in 2018, a position that she occupies to date (2022). This election came as a retirement package as she was already retired as the minister in the IPM. The words of Isaiah (55:8) "For my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord" are fulfilled and sometimes the church hinders God's plans thinking it is fighting a human being.

Whenever, God opens the way no one can block it. In 2005 in Nigeria at AACC General Committee Meeting they passed a decision to send Chirinda to further her theological studies at University of Pretoria in South Africa which also caused a friction within the IPM as it prohibited

her again to further her studies as if they were paying for her fees. Chirinda liberated herself by ignoring the decision by the church and sent her farewell letter to church for going to peruse her studies. The refusal decision by IPM for denying women leadership portrayed pure patriarchy ruling and ignorance. It forgot that God authorised both male and female to rule over His creation, (Genesis 1:26-31). There is nowhere God instructs superior rule to men only, meaning God's plan from the beginning was for women and men to work in partnership on equal ground. In her writing on "Partnership between women and men", especially in leadership, Phiri, and Haddad (2003) argued that: the church should also critically revisit the androcentric understandings of the Bible since these understandings have contributed to the perpetuation of that the female is inferior, and that the latter is God ordained. Although the IPM did not recognised Chirinda's position in the AACC other churches did and through her leadership they invited AACC to hold its general assembly for the first time in Mozambique. In that assembly Chirinda was elected for another position to serve as the AACC Southern Africa Vice-President.

Chirinda finished her PhD in practical theology in 2012 and graduated regardless of fostered more hatred from IPM leadership against Chirinda's personality. In July 2012 after the graduation the IPM planned to celebrate 125 years of its existence thus, they had to include Chirinda in the history of the church as the first woman pastor and celebrate her PhD degree in the church. The recognition for Chirinda came as a healing process after more than four decades of sobbing and suffering in the hands of Patriarchy ruling. Her election as leader of the Lusophone chapter enabled her to participate in trainings in Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Benin, Angola and Mozambique where senior members of the Circle were always present (Chirinda Essay, 2022).

Lessons from Chirinda's Theological Journey

Chirinda in her life journey that was full of challenges, she walked and lived the denunciation of social and missionary historical context of oppression with the hope that one day church and society would reflect and liberate its members. In that regard, they would be transformed to be faithful and welcoming institutions and practitioners of faith, hope and justice, especially, the church that supposed to be the amplifier on action for justice and be a voice of the oppressed and downtrodden in the public

space following Jesus' footsteps, {Luke 4:18}. Hence Phiri and Haddad (2003), highlighted that education should be geared towards women empowerment and could entail the redefinition and transformation of the African culture which is practiced even in the Christian church in a way that will be a life giving to all members both men and women. This concept by the two theologians is relevant to the Oduyoye theory of the "Ministry as Partnership of both men and women".

Chirinda's life journey although she 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. Her life journey portrays what one can call a theology of leadership, transform and transformed for transformation. Meaning, that through the mentorships by Musa Dube and other matriarchy mingling with Chirinda entirely transformed her for the transformation of the communities where she worked with in Mozambique and other countries. "Just brute to fore my story of violence and pain, that experience helped me to grow while claiming my dignity and respect" (Chirinda, 21 May 2022).

CONCLUSION

Today, the Circle's impact and influence grounded its roots in Mozambique, because of the fearless woman of God Chirinda. In other words, it is safe to say, Chirinda's work transformed many lives and continued as a leader for the Mozambique group and Southern Africa Region of circle of concerned women theologians. Leadership positions appointed or elected to Chirinda empowered her to work for the Mozambique Communities, including through the CIRCLE and AACC. The acts by Circle sisters encompassed concerns of Chirinda and of communal wellness through her leadership.

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