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

Sonene Nyawo

Abstract

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Selected Works of Ezra Chitando

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

General Observations on Sexual and Gender-based Violence

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

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

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

Religious Literacy on Sexuality as the Church’s Response

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

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

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

African Feminist Hermeneutics as Appropriate Lenses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Response of the Church and the Proposed Alternative Solution

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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