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Religion, Gender and African Masculinities: Reflections from the Field (Introduction)

Molly *Manyonganise*, Masiwa R. *Gunda*, Linda *Naicker* & Joachim *Kügler*

Introduction

This volume is a critical reflection on religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa. Religion, gender and masculinities have been the subject of study globally and specifically in Africa for quite some time now. Scholars in the fields of religion, women, gender and critical men's studies on the African continent like their counterparts elsewhere have committed to analysing and critiquing the various ways in which religion, gender and masculinities as concepts intersect. Scholarship has also shown how religion influences gender relations on the African continent. While inroads have been made in ensuring the recognition of gender equality in some sectors, evidence on the ground shows that more still needs to be done. The home, religious and public institutions have remained gendered spaces. African women continue to be tangled in the intricate web of patriarchy. In light of the above, chapters in this book examine various themes and dimensions of the intersections of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa/African masculinities. They grapple with the following questions that arise from these intersections, namely, is African patriarchy ready to co-exist with powerful women? How do we untangle women and men from the intricate web of gender inequality that is reinforced through religion? What will it take for men to give up power and authority over women which they derive from culture and religion? How can the study of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa lead to societal transformation? In order to put the volume into its proper context, we provide an overview of the study of religion and gender in Africa in the next section.

The study of Religion and Gender in Africa: An Overview

Gender has become one of the most dynamic areas of research in Africa (Miescher, Manuh & Cole, 2007:2). Awumbila (2007:45) locates the emergence of gender and women's studies in Africa within a feminist intellectual tradition. Women's Studies as an academic discipline emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when women in the feminist movement began to question the absence of women's perspectives and women's lived experiences from which gender inequality was much more apparent as a system of domination (Manyonganise, 2023:24). Gender studies is a product of Women's studies (Scarborough & Risman, 2020:41). Gender studies came to replace Women's studies in the 1980s with emphasis on the difference between biological sex and culturally constructed notions of masculinity and femininity. Awumbila (2007) notes that throughout the 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholars in [Africa] led an intellectual movement that challenged essentialist notions of womanhood and insisted on recognizing and interrogating difference. Their focus was on establishing how the social location of women is determined by race, ethnicity, class, status and access to privilege.

Within the academic discipline of Religious Studies and/or Theology, gender became a category of analysis more often showing the influence of religion on gender relations. Chitando (2007) notes that gender in religious studies has been largely associated with women's studies. This has been criticized by a number of scholars. For example, Oyěwùmí (2005: xiii) is of the view that 'women' as a category cannot be used as a synonym for gender while Miescher, Manuh & Cole (2007) argue that reducing the concept of gender to women runs the risk of failing to "engage gender analytically as a mode of generating and reflecting historically determinate forms of manhood and notions of masculinity and femininity." More generally, the intersection of religion and gender constitutes a central theoretical and methodological framework to address issues of inclusion and exclusion, production of difference and the complicated power relationships in societies (Hopflinger, Lavanchy & Dahinden, 2012:16). Within Africa, The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians has been steadfast in amplifying and highlighting the diverse experiences and perspectives of African women, ensuring their voices are heard and acknowledged.

The study of gender in Africa, as in other contexts, has been complex. However, many themes have been explored in the process. Western feminist scholars studying gender in Africa depicted the African woman as powerless, subordinated and devoid of any agency. African scholarship contested this view (see Amadiume, 1987; Oyěwùmí, 1997, 2005). Amadiume and Oyěwùmí reject the existence of rigid gender roles in Africa prior to colonialism. They advance the thesis that gender in Africa was fluid. Oyěwùmí, in her radicalism completely rejects the existence of the notion of gender categories in Africa and argues that colonialism introduced this concept to Africa. She argues “the cultural logic of Western social categories is based on an ideology of biological determinism: the conception that biology provides the rationale for the organization of the social world” (Oyěwùmí, 1997:ix). These views have been criticized by a number of African gender scholars (see Mbilinyi, 1992; Mama, 2001; Manyonganise, 2023). The argument of these scholars is that the rejection of an existence of gender categories in Africa turns a blind eye to the many ways that religio-cultural beliefs and practices relegated women to the margins of African pre-colonial societies.

Another theme that has taken centre stage in the study of religion and gender is how colonialism and Christianity reinforced the patriarchal ideology and reconfigured gender relations in Africa (see Schmidt, 1988, 1991; Barnes, 1992; Allman, Geiger & Musisi, 2002; Vince, Rodet & Georg, 2007). Manyonganise (2023) reiterates that Western patriarchal ideology found a willing partner in the African one. As young men moved to towns, farms and mines in search of paid labour, they were constructed as breadwinners and providers of families while laws were put in place to domesticate women. The genderedness of the colonial education system widened the economic gap between men and women in Africa. This was generally reinforced by the Christian doctrine on silence and submission. Hence, in contemporary Africa, religious teachings continue to shape gender relations in ways that disenfranchised women. It needs to be noted though that women have started to make in-roads particularly in occupying positions in higher decision-making, and agenda setting jobs. As shall be discussed later, this has put masculinities in Africa in a crisis.

The issue of women’s leadership both in religious institutions and public offices has also been central in religion and gender studies. Religion and gender scholars have questioned the role of sacred texts in the marginalization of women from leadership posts. A study by Manyonganise (2023) is instructive of the many ways that both the written bible and the bible of

culture are utilized in marginalizing women from decision-making processes within the Zimbabwean context (see also Matutu's chapter in this volume). Oduyoye (1995) has critiqued African cultures and religions for treating African women as second-class citizens. In most cases, teachings in religious institutions have informed the way women are accorded space in the workplace as well as in national political processes in Africa. While some religious traditions ordain women, Manyonganise's study shows that this does not translate into effective women's leadership as church leaders indicated that they often establish parallel structures to disempower the ordained women. Even in those Christian traditions that scholars initially thought were accommodative of women's leadership, it is becoming clear that they, too, are oppressive when it comes to women's religious leadership which eventually translates to their marginalization in the wider society (see Mapuranga, 2018; Manyonganise, 2021). Other areas that cannot be discussed in this chapter in detail that have been examined are in the areas of sexuality, sexual reproductive health and rights, ecology, politics, peacebuilding, development, migration, etc. Some chapters in this volume continue to revisit these areas.

While the study of religion and gender in Africa tended to cast women as perpetual victims, scholarship arising in Africa has begun to focus on women's agency. In her study of the Shona, Cheater (1986) shows how through spirit possession women were able to subvert patriarchy as they were accorded respect and assumed authority in the space of ritual performance. In Christianity, Mapuranga (2018) notes that in the Pentecostal tradition in Zimbabwe, wives of Pentecostal church leaders are forming ministries within ministries which they lead. Manyonganise (2021), in her study of the *Ndadhinhiwa* (I am fed up) *Prayer Group*, shows that through agency the founder of the group was courageous enough to move away from the suffocating spaces of Pentecostal patriarchy to form her own group which accords her the opportunity to lead. The name of her group informs us that women in religious traditions are fed up with being relegated to peripheral positions and are doing something about it.

While the study of religion and gender in Africa has tackled a variety of critical issues affecting women and men in Africa, more still needs to be done. One area that has not received attention on the African continent is that of dangerous/ hegemonic/ toxic femininities. Hamilton et al, (2019: 316) notes that the role of femininity in social domination has not been a core concern in gender theory. In most cases, femininities have been de-

picted as vulnerable and in need of being saved. However, a critical analysis particularly in political spaces shows that we have femininities that are violent and are bent on subordinating both women and men. For a gender-equal society, such femininities need to be called out. Hence, scholarship should also focus on these issues and study them in their own right, rather than being solely fixated on the study of masculinities in Africa. It is imperative that research establishes how dangerous femininities partner with African patriarchy in oppressing other women. Hence, these femininities need to be studied alongside masculinities in Africa.

African Masculinities/Masculinities in Africa: An Analysis

There is a growing appreciation of the urgency of studying and engaging men and masculinities in Africa (Chitando et.al, 2024:2). Chitando et.al (2024:2) are of the view that the emergence of men and masculinities as an area of academic interest in the Global North had a definite impact on igniting interest in the field in Africa. Manyonganise (2023:23) avers that globally, the study of masculinities has come to complement the fields of Women's and Gender Studies. In concurrence, Chitando et.al (2024:3) argue that the focus on men and masculinities is closely tied to the feminist struggles against patriarchy and emerges from the call for men to become partners in the struggle for gender equality. In terms of definition, Connell & Messerschmidt (2005:836) contend that "masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished as social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular way." Therefore, masculinities are not monolithic. Amman & Staudacher (2021) explain that masculinities are not fixed male identities, but multiple, complex and intersectional social practices and experiences that are fluid and sometimes contradictory. Masculinities have been categorized into hegemonic, violent, subordinate, marginalized, militarized among others. Scholarship on masculinities note that hegemonic masculinity is the most common in most societies (see Connell, 1995; Nayak, 2023). Connell (1995) espoused the term 'hegemonic masculinity' which for Nayak (2023:171) operates as a framework for the production and reproduction of gender patterns across a grid of power. Yang (2020) is of the view that hegemonic masculinity is not static, but responsive to changes in the conditions of patriarchy. Abrahams, De Mori, & Knauss (2020) argue that a

critical study of masculinities must consider that notions of gender circulate and interrelate within complex arrangements of power and broader social systems of domination, one of which is patriarchy. These are some of the critical points that we need to be cognizant of even as we focus on African masculinities/masculinities in Africa. Before we focus on this, we need to discuss the politics of naming.

When writing on masculinities particularly on the African continent, naming becomes crucial. Pasura & Christou (2024:525) opine that naming is not innocent. Contestations revolve around the meanings of 'Africa' and 'African'. Mudimbe (1988) argues that the idea of Africa is an invention of the West. In his analysis, discourses on Africa have always shaped and are shaped by power. Hence, for him, the term 'African' has multiple meanings as it represents (i) a geographical entity, (ii) a historical reality, (iii) a political construct, (iv) a racial inclination and (v) a specific economic history. Mudimbe, therefore, criticizes explorers, missionaries, anthropologists among others for propagating an exotic idea of Africa. Mazrui (1980) is of the view that Africa is not a static notion or concept, but an ongoing reality that is invented and continues to be reinvented in the context of Africa's relation to other civilizations. Hence, for Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Njgqulunga (2022:6-7) "Africa as an idea, concept, space, home and other iterations, continues to elicit contestations and animated debates in both scholarly circles as well as in political discourses of governance and development." In most cases, in the West, Africa is often seen as a country and not a continent. At times, when one indicates that they are from Africa, they are often asked questions like: "do you know a friend of mine who comes from Nigeria." This is often despite the fact that the person would be coming from a different part of Africa. Hence, when it comes to the study of masculinities by foreigners, the error has been to present them as homogenous. African scholars have rebuffed this notion (see Amman & Staudacher, 2021; Chitando, Mlambo, Mfecane & Ratele, 2024). They have drawn our attention to the fact that masculinities in Africa, or African masculinities, are multiple and varied.

But what is it that we are referring to as African masculinities/ masculinities in Africa? According to Epprecht (2007:1), African masculinities is an important contribution to a growing field of 'critical men's studies or gendered writing on men in Africa'. For Mbah (2023) the field of African masculinity studies seeks to understand gendered sociopolitical differentiation, historicize the constitution and contestation of patriarchy and heteronormativity and demonstrate how competing gender norms came to

define the modern identities of African peoples. He notes that “as a system of identity, African masculinities is much more than a cluster of norms, values, and behavioural patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Furthermore, it also refers to more than how African male bodies, subjectivities, and experiences are constituted in specific historical, cultural and social contexts” (Mbah, 2023). A critical question that arises is whether we can talk of African masculinities and/or masculinities in Africa. Are the two synonymous or different? African masculinities would imply that we have a particular set of masculinities that are distinctive to the African continent while masculinities in Africa may encompass those masculinities that are peculiarly African but inclusive of other masculinities from other contexts but resident in Africa. In this book, we are cognizant of the contestations that may arise in the usage of these terms. We have, therefore, chosen to work with both. Some authors chose to use African masculinities while others opted for masculinities in Africa as reflected in the title of the book.

Scholarship on African masculinities/masculinities in Africa have grappled with a number of issues. Some have examined the role of masculinities in perpetrating violence against women as well as society as a whole. Chitando (2020:52) notes that there is an interest in understanding how masculinities relate with violence at mass level as well as sexual and gender-based violence. Commenting on GBV, Fashola (2015:14) notes the influence of religion. He argues that through the use and abuse of religion and its sacred texts, some men justify their deployment of violence in intimate relationships. In his analysis, religious ideologies and manipulations of sacred texts are deployed to uphold physical, economic, spiritual and psychological violence against women. He charges that some religious leaders often prey on rather than pray for women in their institutions. In other words, religious leaders can also be perpetrators of sexual gender-based violence against women. In the final analysis, Fashola (2015:15) proposes that there is need for planned and systematic interventions to ensure that the interface between religion and masculinity promotes gender justice and development. Scholarship on masculinities and violence has weaved in youth masculinities as these are often deployed in war and armed conflicts in Africa. Barker & Ricardo (2005:24) note that there are direct links between violence and conflict with the way that manhoods or masculinities are constructed. In their analysis, many conflicts on the African continent are directly related to an attempt by young men

to acquire power, or to question the power of specific groups of older men and to live up to a specific version of manhood. An understanding of youth masculinities and violence may help African societies to reconsider the ways that boys are socialized.

Yet in contemporary Africa, some scholars have depicted masculinities as being in crisis. In much of the emergent literature, African masculinities are analysed in terms of crises (Kirby & van Klinken, 2021). It is important to take note of Hearn's observation that the issue of masculinities in crisis/crisis in masculinity takes very different shapes, sometimes even opposite constructions, in different parts of the world and within different discourses (Hearn, 2022:563). For Hearn, this crisis revolves around the issue of 'role' and 'identity'. He explains that "crisis is often presented as 'fact', identity and a result of 'role confusion' for boys, young men and men around what it might mean to be a boy and man in contemporary times" (Hearn, 2022:563). In Africa, the crisis emanates from the fact that masculinities have been challenged by the steady rise of women in positions of power who have become economically independent while at the same time some men have found themselves unemployed and financially dependent on women. McLean (2020) critiques the hegemonic depictions of African men as providers. He notes that rising unemployment and expanding inequalities across sub-Saharan Africa often mean that men are unable to fulfil these normative expectations, thus, they experience anxieties as they navigate employment, marriage and parenthood, leading to mental health challenges among men (See Makamure Chapter 26 in this volume). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mwiine (2020) coined the term 'lockdown' masculinities. Such masculinities were depicted as being in crisis in the sense that they had to respond to the pandemic in the most 'unmasculine' ways, for example, the lockdowns forced men who are often depicted as courageous to hide in their homes and had to find other means of expressing their masculinity. The very fact of hiding showed that African masculinities can also be vulnerable and afraid in the full glare of women and children. Research has shown that during COVID-19 lockdowns, new masculinities emerged in Africa as men participated more in household chores as well as taking care of their children's needs (see Mwiine, 2020; Dery, 2021; Manyonganise, 2022; Mwiine & Katushabe, 2024). However, some scholars have contested the view that masculinities in Africa are in crisis. For example, McLean (2020) in her study of Sierra Leone,

argues that masculinities in Africa are not really in crisis, rather new masculine ideals related to equality, compassion and love are developing (see also Amman & Staudacher, 2021).

Other scholars have focused on the potential for masculinities to be transformed. Ezra Chitando has termed such masculinities as ‘redemptive’, ‘liberative’ and ‘transformative’. His argument is that negative masculinities such as hegemonic, violent, militaristic, oppressive, complicit etc have the potential of being redeemed, liberated and transformed. Reading through some of his publications such as *A New Man for a New Era: Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, Masculinities and HIV Epidemic* (2007), *Religious Ethics, HIV and AIDS and Masculinities in Southern Africa* (2008), *Redemptive Masculinities, HIV and Religion* (2012) co-edited with Sophia Chirongoma, *The Palgrave Handbook of African Men and Masculinities* (2024) (co-edited with Obert Bernard Mlambo, Sakhumzi Mfecane & Kopano Ratele), it is clear that Chitando feels that patriarchy has privileged men more than women in Africa. However, he notes that it is imperative that when faced with pandemics such as HIV & AIDS as well as COVID-19, enjoying the patriarchal dividend is detrimental for men. He, therefore, argues that men can, should and must change. From John, Siwila and Settler’s point of view, “an analysis of the works of Chitando on masculinities shows that he has raised and engaged critical issues around men and masculinities in relation to religion in a bold and provocative manner” (John, Siwila & Settler, 2013). His call for men to constructively deploy their masculinity is critical for gender justice. The other works that have shown the ability of masculinities to transform are in the area of masculinities and migration. Pasura & Christou (2018) have shown how African masculinities are (re)configured in the diaspora. In most cases, they have to carve a more respectable masculinity in contexts, on one hand, they may find themselves also marginalized due to their race and on the other, their African patriarchal ideology is challenged, as women enjoy greater legal protections and economic independence.

The area that still requires attention in the study of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa/African masculinities is that of human sexuality. That is not to say no work has been done so far, but that certain areas still require further analysis. Some scholars like Van Klinken have sought to show the intersections of masculinity and queer studies. In his publication titled *‘Masculinities and the Male God’* (2017) van Klinken explores the relationship between the maleness of God and human masculinities. In his analysis, men in religions such as Christianity are often called upon

to exhibit traits of headship taking it from metaphoric expressions such as 'god the father'. In a chapter titled '*Masculinities, Religion and Sexualities*' (2020), Chitando focuses on the ways that religion influences masculinities and sexualities. He argues that there is a complex and dynamic play amongst the concepts of religion, masculinities and sexualities. In his analysis, "sexualities are crucial to the imagination and expression of masculinities." While Chitando (2020) notes that there is growing interest in the study of religion, masculinities and sexualities, we contend that there is need to further interrogate the implications for gender as well as masculinities in homosexual relations particularly focusing on what it means when there is performance of gender roles in such relations. Gunda (2011) argues that gender prejudice has been foundational in the cases of homophobia in Africa, especially as it is provided a logical framework through an appropriation of biblical texts, such as Genesis 1-3. Bjarne et.al (2023) opine that while the study of homosexuality has not been linked to the study of masculinities, it assists us in understanding the range of expressions of manhood in Africa. Reeser (2010:3), in the same vein, avers that another way to strip away neutral assumptions about masculinity is to consider what happens to masculinity in an age in which a person assigned female at birth can transition and be read as male. He asks a pertinent question: How can masculinity be natural when transmen are read as masculine cisgender men? Reeser goes further to challenge gender scholars to also consider female masculinity and not to be obsessed with male masculinity. For him, such an attempt would assist in tackling masculinity as a disembodied concept, that is, not aligned to any gender. He argues that "female masculinity is a threat to male masculinity, a challenge to its hegemony", and that attempts to ignore or suppress it could be viewed as ways to maintain the male body as the sole purveyor of masculinities (Reeser, 2023:139). In his analysis, female masculinity destabilizes imagined binary opposition between male masculinity and female femininity (Reeser, 2023:134). He notes, however, that the study of female masculinity has not been given attention in academic studies. Future studies may need to examine aspects of female masculinity as well as male femininity in order to ascertain the fluidity of these concepts. Within the African context, studies by Amadiume (1987) and Cheater (1986) may provide a valuable starting point. In her publication *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987), Amadiume points to the fluidity of gender in Africa. Cheater

(1986) notes how women's authority increased as they grew older and especially when they reach menopause. She posits that "commonly, post-menopausal women became a type of 'honorary male in the village society, having lost the mystical influence associated with domestic menstruation, abandoned domestic responsibilities to the work of younger women..." (Cheater, 1986:67). Mbah (2023) supports these views when he argues that "African masculinities, as historical subjects embodying distinctive socially constructed gender and sexual identities, have been both male and female." He further argues that by occupying a masculine sociopolitical position embodying masculine social traits and performing cultural deeds socially construed and symbolized as masculine, African men and women have constituted masculinity. These assertions require further probing, for us to fully understand the concepts of gender and masculinities in Africa.

Honouring Ezra Chitando: The Academic 'Prophet' of our Time

Contributors to this volume reflect on how far the study of religion, gender and African masculinities on the African continent has gone. The book is in honour of Ezra Chitando. Ezra Chitando has touched a lot of lives through academic mentorship and friendship. Most academics within Zimbabwe and beyond have benefitted from his academic guidance. He has been selfless in sharing his knowledge at times foregoing his comforts to make young scholars grow. He has been that academic light to many. This honour is befitting because he has disrupted the waters of patriarchy on the African continent and beyond. His works on religion and gender as well as in the area of African masculinities/masculinities in Africa are evidence to his affirmation that something needs to be done in the area of gender relations so that "all may live". His works have shaped how we think about gender, religion and masculinities. He did not shy away from calling himself a feminist and has been a friend of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians for years. Through his mentorship, he has managed to influence a change of attitudes towards women and encourage both men and women to be considerate in their relations. Since the book is in honour of Ezra Chitando, the authors are very intentional in engaging with his works specifically those that focus on religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa.

The book contributes to new knowledge through its critical reflection on the study of religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa. Such a reflection points us to new possibilities and avenues that can lead to the recognition of the humanity of both women and men. It enables us to 'sit down in order to go forward' (in Chitando's words)¹.

Ezra Chitando is a 'prophet' with honour among his own people both in Zimbabwe and Africa in general. As evidenced by the number of chapters from Zimbabweans in this volume, his works speak to their context, and they have benefitted immensely from his academic leadership. In order to show that his mentorship is not confined to Zimbabwe, non-Zimbabwean authors have also contributed to this volume showing Ezra Chitando's service to the African continent as a whole and also beyond.

Chapters in this volume

Section A: Celebrating Ezra Chitando's Legacy and Advocacy: Tributes from His Family

In **chapter 1**, Tinevimbo Chitando, Mutsawashe Chitando, Akatendeka Chitando and Anna Chitando (the immediate or nuclear family of Ezra), discuss the theme of the book focusing specifically on how Ezra Chitando's work in the field of religion, gender and African masculinities/masculinities in Africa have influenced the choices made by members of his family particularly his wife and children. They argue that contrary to the past, where family settings were generally the bastions of patriarchy and male privilege, there are progressive men who have questioned old patriarchal traditions and are champions of social justice and transformation. In their analysis, such men transform, challenge and confront cultural beliefs and practices that stifle social justice in a bid to oppress girls and women. Such men are willing to construct new and alternative masculinities based on equality and equity. Therefore, the chapter is an appreciation of the distinguished work of the feminist, Ezra Chitando, and acknowledges that girls and women need to strategically build alliances with progressive boys and men in order to ensure irreversible

¹ Ezra Chitando gave a keynote address at the 2011 ATISCA conference in Johannesburg, South Africa titled 'Sitting down in order to go forward'. While this sounds contradictory, it is important to always evaluate the work done so that one can complete the journey ahead.

social transformation. **Chapter 2** is a compilation of celebratory tributes from Ezra Chitando's siblings, nephews, and nieces (the offspring to his sisters). These tributes have been arranged according to seniority in terms of age. They provide us with Ezra Chitando's childhood and life experiences as a son to his parents, brother to his sisters and uncle to his nephews and nieces. His interest in questioning the oppressive nature of religion and culture on women may have been influenced by his socialization. This may not be a standard academic practice, yet in celebrating Ezra, the intersection of the man and the academic is critically important.

Section B: Theorizing Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Africa

In **chapter 3**, Happinos Marufu and Sarah Yeukai Matanga examine the depictions of gender roles from the Stone Age period to the present in order to establish whether there has been continuity and change. They argue that women have always played pivotal roles in the subsistence economy of Stone Age societies, a position which changed in the Iron Age period. For them, this marked the beginning of gender inequality in most African societies. However, a critical analysis of literary works in contemporary Zimbabwean society show that literary writers are advocating for gender equality. They locate the role of religion in bringing social transformation in the area of gender relations. In **chapter 4**, Sonene Nyawo proposes that religious literacy can assist in dealing with the scourge of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV). She argues that such literacy is crucial for both men and women. In her opinion, African feminist religious literacy would help women to be liberated from a dependency syndrome that put men at the top. Using African feminist lenses, she proposes liberative hermeneutics as a possible panacea to the ills of SGBV.

Linda Naicker, in **chapter 5**, makes an evaluation of the role of Christianity in promoting male hegemony and the disempowerment of women in sub-Saharan Africa. She addresses the challenge of androcentric biblical interpretation in this chapter which in her opinion have supported male agendas and positions. Her thesis is that androcentric biblical interpretations have entrenched male hegemony and treated women as second-class citizens thereby disenfranchising them economically in sub-Saharan Africa. In **chapter 6**, Susan Kilonzo focuses on how scholars of religion and theology can assume the responsibility of coming up with curricula on religion and masculinities with a view to educate future generations of young people. She contends that the current study of religion and masculinities in Africa does not show how young women and men benefit from it as

focus is usually placed on adults in most religious institutions. She, therefore, proposes ways in which a revised curriculum can lead to transformed masculinities and femininities.

Excellent Chireshe comes in, in **chapter 7** with an examination of Ezra Chitando's call for redemptive and transformative masculinities. She ventures into culturally contested space which calls for men not to shy away from crying as Jesus did the same over Lazarus. She argues that the very act of men crying shows that they can also be vulnerable and can lead to the adoption of masculinities that result in the health and wellbeing of all. She, therefore, challenges social norms and values that entrench patriarchal rigidity and calls for a transformed 'social curriculum'. In her opinion, this could lead to redemptive and transformative masculinities. In **chapter 8**, Paul Leshota discusses what he calls troubling African masculinities. He does this in conversation with Ezra Chitando's works. His is an investigation of Ezra Chitando's contribution to the study of religion, gender and masculinities focusing specifically on the HIV & AIDS pandemic.

Thando Soko-de-Jong, in **chapter 9** focuses on Ezra Chitando's advocacy as well as the contribution of African Women Theologians. She argues that Ezra Chitando, through his published works and activism has challenged the dominance of men in all religious spaces particularly in leadership positions. She, therefore, commends Ezra Chitando for his contribution to African Women Theologies at times co-authoring with African Women theologians. In **chapter 10**, Tenson Mabhuya Muyambo reflects on Ezra Chitando's contribution to the study of religion, gender and masculinities in Africa. His chapter makes a trajectory survey of how Ezra Chitando transitioned from phenomenology of religion to applied religion. He argues that Ezra Chitando's works demonstrate that religion is not an abstract but concrete entity that is experienced in the day to day lives of the people. He then concludes that Ezra Chitando has successfully engaged religion to find meaning and relevance on African realities, more particularly Zimbabwean realities.

Section C: Religion, Gender and Masculinities in Practice

In **chapter 11**, Gladys Mupangisana Hlatywayo focuses on the vulnerability of married women to HIV infection. She argues that when it comes to the HIV & AIDS pandemic, marriage does not offer women safe havens. She notes that while both genders are at risk of HIV infection, women are more vulnerable due to socio-cultural, biological and gender inequalities.

She further calls for the transformation of harmful masculinities through bold church and community action. She proposes that an HIV & AIDS discourse needs to engage both women and men so that they can work in solidarity as they confront the ills of the pandemic. She, therefore, argues for a theological framework that offers life and dignity to all humanity. Still on leadership struggles, Linda Tsara provides a critical analysis of how women's leadership is viewed in an African Independent Church, Topia Sungano Apostolic Church in **chapter 13**. Like Terrence Mupangwa, **chapter 12**, she argues that despite women constituting the majority in Topia Sungano Apostolic Church, they are absent in top leadership positions. Utilizing African feminist cultural hermeneutics, she highlights the oppressive tendencies in both African cultural and missionary education. The following **chapter 14**, Angeline Mavis Madongonda and Enna Sukutai Gudhlanga make a critical examination of the intersections of gender-based violence, religion and early child marriages in the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC) in Zimbabwe. They argue that girl children are sexual victims because they are forced to enter into these marriages. In their analysis, the association of religion with gender-based violence is both contradictory and unacceptable.

In **chapter 15**, Vengesai Chimininge examines the interface between African masculinities and sexual reproductive health focusing specifically on African Indigenous Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe. He argues that men's decisions and behaviours are shaped by rigid social and cultural norms relating to masculinity. As a result, religious and cultural beliefs influence the gender inequalities that may affect the sexual reproductive health care of women.

Moving on to **chapter 16**, Tawanda Matutu explores the gendered contestations for political leadership in Zimbabwe. He views these contestations as emanating from the masculinization of power in Zimbabwe's political turf. Through his analysis of gender power struggles in Zimbabwe's main political parties, he argues that the marginalization of women from political leadership is embedded within African indigenous religious beliefs and practices pertaining to leadership in governance. For him, this has entrenched patriarchy in political spaces where women have to occupy peripheral leadership posts thereby reinforcing the stereotyping of women in politics. In **chapter 17**, Nelly Mwale explores the intersection of religion, gender and health in Zambia. Using African eco-feminist theory, the chapter examines the work of Annie Chikanji and her Ubuntu learning hub showing how she promotes healthy living through offering herbal

courses that draw from indigenous knowledge systems. Nelly Mwale shows how Annie Chikanji's initiatives are driven by her religiosity. Documenting Chikanji's initiatives is seen by Mwale as critical in making sure that she is not overshadowed by patriarchy in the history of the study of religion in Africa in general and Zambia in particular.

In **chapter 18**, Beverley Haddad examines the concept of 'blessers' in the context of HIV in South Africa. She interrogates this concept in relation to transactional sex by young women showing how this is a challenge to African women's theologies. She positions young women as both victims and agents in a context of unemployment and poverty in South Africa. She argues that it is imperative for African women's theologies to speak about women's agency in ways that deal with unequal gender relations resulting from econo-patriarchy through the engagement with the intersections of economics, gender, and sexuality in contemporary South Africa. Kenosi Molato and Musa Dube, in **chapter 19**, examine the role of music in navigating through the complexities of life bringing healing in those times that words cannot be expressed. Using a case study of Culture Spears Traditional Group, the duo examines the concept of gender in songs. In **chapter 20**, Isabel Apawo Phiri interrogates the response of the African church leaders to homosexuality. She argues that their response is weak as it does not address issues of human sexuality in Africa in general. The chapter also traces the response of African theologians to homosexuality in Africa. Phiri refers to the World Council of Churches (WCC) document on creating safe spaces for broad conversations about human sexuality, arguing that forbearance needs to be the grounding spirituality for conversation on issues of human sexuality.

Section D: Intersections: Religion, Gender and Society

In **chapter 21**, Masiwa Ragies Gunda focuses on gender injustice, racism, sexuality and xenophobia. Using the intersectional approach, and drawing from Ezra Chitando's scholarly works, the chapter demonstrates how the intersections of these concepts have led to the failure to acknowledge the contributions of women to sustainable social transformation as well as to fragmented quests for diversity, inclusion and belonging for the most vulnerable groups in African society. The chapter then implores African women theologians to embrace an intersectional approach to confront the intersecting marginalizing forces and to guard against inverted patriarchy in the African women's pursuit of holistic liberation. Gerald West, in **chapter 22**, seeks to show the way in which economic systems intersect

with patriarchal systems. Using selected texts from the books of Samuel and Kings as well as works from African biblical scholars, the chapter reflects on the usefulness of the concept of econo-patriarchy to contemporary biblical and theological work on African masculinities.

In **chapter 23**, Joachim Kügler focuses on variations of God's masculinity that appear quite queer from a modern perspective on masculinities. He explores this subject using sources belonging to the New Testament canon, as well as sources that are post-biblical in the Early Christian literature corpus. Clemence Makamure, **chapter 24**, examines the intersections of toxic masculinities and men's mental health in Zimbabwe. He argues that socio-cultural constructions of men in Africa causes them to shy away from exhibiting emotions that portray them as weak and vulnerable. The chapter uses the Afrocentric theory to interrogate the social cultural ethical beliefs and their effect on the nature and character of men and boys. In **chapter 25**, Julius Gathogo explores the utility of what he calls triumphalist-futurity theologies in the 21st century. He contests the view that these theologies cannot be restricted to American prosperity theologies of success and self-esteem. Julius Gathogo argues that these go beyond American theologies of prosperity as these address the African agenda from an all-embracing perspective. He locates Ezra Chitando within the paradigm of triumphalist-futurity perspective. Gathogo argues that Ezra Chitando addresses the African agenda with great urgency and confidence. Moving on, in **chapter 26**, Lovemore Togarasei explores Ezra Chitando's work on HIV & AIDS particularly the way he rallied men to be proactive in their response to the pandemic. He further argues that Ezra Chitando, through his scholarship has rallied African scholars from across the academic divide to respond to HIV.

In **chapter 27**, Zandile Ngubane and Beatrice Okyere-Manu make an ethical and theological reflection of the challenges faced by families with children living with albinism in South Africa. They argue that children living with albinism are vulnerable, and they deserve justice and equal opportunities. Using the ethical theory of consequentialism, their findings point to the fact that children living with albinism feel that they are not treated the same as those without. They, therefore, conclude that Chitando's call and advocacy for vulnerable groups need to be extended to people living with albinism. In **chapter 28**, Fortune Sibanda engages with selected works by Ezra Chitando to examine the Rastafari perspectives on gender, climate change, health and human sexuality. Using Afrocentricity, For-

tune Sibanda found that Rastafari is steadily progressing towards the promotion of gender equality by constructing alternative African masculinities both in the private and public spaces. However, he notes that challenges remain when it comes to Rastafari views on human sexuality and reproductive health. He advocates for Rastafarians to promote transformative masculinities with a view that ‘all may live’.

In **chapter 29**, Francis Machingura and Matthew Mare examine the intersections of religion, gender and peacebuilding. The duo argues that Zimbabwe as a nation has remained largely patriarchal in both its private and public spaces. They note that while women are advocating for gender equality, they continue to be hindered by both religion and culture. In their opinion, this negatively impacts on peacebuilding efforts. In **chapter 30**, Molly Manyonganise, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, and Linda Naicker endeavor to present Ezra Chitando’s views based on an interview they had with him, on how far the study of religion, gender and African masculinities has gone, the achievements realized, lessons learnt and the future of the field. Their intention is to evaluate, critique and provide a way forward for the study of religion, gender and African masculinities.

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