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## **Disrupting the Waters of Patriarchy : A Critical Evaluation of the Role of Christianity in Promoting Male Hegemony and Women's Economic Disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa**

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## 5 Disrupting the Waters of Patriarchy

### A Critical Evaluation of the Role of Christianity in Promoting Male Hegemony and Women's Economic Disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa

*Linda Naicker*

#### Abstract

The economic disenfranchisement of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is influenced by a variety of intersecting factors that create barriers to development and full participation in the economy. Addressing these factors requires a multifaceted approach. In this chapter, I address the issue of patriarchal biblical interpretation and male hegemony. Scholars have long argued that androcentric biblical interpretations have prioritized and advanced male agendas and positions. In so doing, women's roles, perspectives, and positions in society are deliberately cast as secondary to that of men, reinforcing patriarchy. Consequently, the subordinate and subservient positions of women have become a taken for granted norm. Following a qualitative research design using interpretive analysis of the work of Ezra Chitando and African Women's Theology, I contend that androcentrism, patriarchy and dominant and toxic masculinities, sanctioned by male hegemony and biblical interpretation, play a pivotal role in the economic disenfranchisement of women in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Keywords:** Sub-Saharan Africa, women, economic disenfranchisement, male hegemony, patriarchal biblical interpretation

#### Introduction

Despite numerous advances towards gender equality in various sectors, African women continue to struggle to attain economic empowerment.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'empowerment' to indicate increased economic, political, cultural, and spiritual agency of women. In the context of this chapter, empowerment would result in capacity building which was previously denied or inhibited.

While there exist numerous intersecting factors contributing to the economic disempowerment of women, this chapter focuses on the intersections of Christianity and hegemonic masculinities in the perpetuation of disparity in economic opportunities for women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through critical analysis of the intersections of Christianity, gender, and economics, I explore the embedded mechanisms that impede women's economic growth and development. While Christianity in Africa is undoubtedly a source of inspiration and upholds important values and beliefs, it arrived on the African shores hand in glove with colonialism and exploitation. Christianity's impact on gender relations cannot be ignored and has long been the topic of many feminist/womanist scholars in Africa, the likes of Professor Ezra Chitando who notes that some biblical texts are often selectively used to justify the oppression of women (Chitando, 2004:151). Chitando (2013:4) contends that Christianity is a major force in the construction of masculinities in Africa and that patriarchal power structures are sustained and maintained in the Church. I contend that this level of ecclesial justification and complicity contributes to a myriad of stresses economically disenfranchised women experience. Taking into account that Chitando (2007a:40) advocates for the deconstruction of hegemonic masculinities in Church and society, I adopt his work on masculinities as a framework to illustrate the link between Christianity, male hegemony, and women's economic disempowerment. Drawing on insights from African Women's Theology and several of Chitando's works, this chapter expounds that given the centrality of the Christian faith in Sub-Saharan Africa, it plays a pivotal role in sustaining and maintaining patriarchal power dynamics that impinge on women's rights to full participation in societies as well as access to economic opportunities and resources. In line with Chitando's scholarship and African Women's Theology, I offer alternative interpretations that challenge the patriarchal subversion of women and promote race and gender equity and economic justice. I maintain that for women in Sub-Saharan Africa to be economically uplifted, the ideals of male power and control over women sanctioned by Christian traditions must be addressed. Biblical interpretations that are inclusive and affirming towards women must be adopted as positive ecclesial practice and ecclesial traditions must be redefined to emphasise egalitarianism, full inclusivity, and full participation of all people in Church and society.

### **Christianity in Africa**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century is popularly known as the period in which Europeans made a scramble for Africa to acquire the most economically viable lands and resources on the continent. Along with colonization, came Christianity. Christianity was in many ways used as a pacifier to facilitate colonization and the cultural assimilation of Africans. At that time, a new pseudo philosophy emerged in Europe known as scientific racism, pseudo scientifically ranking people from the most primitive to the most evolved. This vile ideology justified European expansion into Africa under the premise that both science and nature support the conquest of Africa because Africans were deemed inferior to Europeans and superable (Schmidt, 2015). Within the context of pseudo-scientific racism, white men were regarded as the highest order in the human race and the most evolved. Next in the hierarchy was white women. Black/African men were considered far less evolved than white women but far more evolved than Black/African women. Black/African women were, therefore, at the very bottom of the hierarchy and the most socially, culturally, religiously, economically, and politically disenfranchised and exploited. According to Masondo (2018:226), Christianity was brought to Sub-Saharan Africa for it to take root so that indigenous people become “*re-formed*” in the image of the colonizers. Christian missionaries were committed to Christianity, commerce and civilization and colonization and evangelization aimed to alter the consciousness of African converts. In sum, Christianity came to Africa hand in glove with colonial oppression and domination. Resultantly, missionaries who brought the Gospel to Africa, sought first and foremost, to advance the interests and cultures of their colonial peers.

Missionary activities in the colonies promoted patriarchal interpretations of the Bible, reinforced existing power structures, and advocated for male dominance. As a result, women’s roles were considered subordinate to those of men. Driven by patriarchal ideology, nineteenth century missionaries restricted African women’s access to resources and opportunities, thereby contributing to their economic oppression (Gunda, 2023). Colluding with colonial rulers, missionaries imposed Western norms and ideologies on African women, preventing them from participating in trade, working outside the home, and having ownership of land, thus propagating, and perpetuating their economic subjugation (Montgomery, 2017).

In the twenty first century, Christianity is entrenched in Sub-Saharan Africa with not less than 60% of the population pledging allegiance to the Christian faith (Togarasei, 2012:230). In fact, Christianity is so embedded,

that even people who have not attended Church for the past ten years still identify as Christian. Moreover, even those who do not consider themselves Christian, have in some way been exposed to and even impacted by Christian teachings through the medium of schools (Togarasei, 2012:230) and other social arrangements. Resultantly, Christian morality and teachings often determine the social constructs of societies. Moreover, scholars note that race and gender-based socio-economic disparities persist, favouring male access to and control of the economy (Lesetedi, 2018:193).

### **Feminization of Poverty<sup>2</sup>**

The economic marginalization of women is perpetuated through patriarchy and often manifested through structural and institutionalized power and domination (Gatwiri & McLaren, 2016:268). Uken (2018:3) elucidates that the feminization of poverty is an indication that women are poorer than men and that women's poverty is increasing to a larger extent in comparison to poverty among men. In exploring the effects of institutionalized power on women's economic disenfranchisement, it becomes crucial to investigate how these structures of power operate and contribute to the economic exclusion of women. The socio-cultural ways in which societies are structured influences the hegemonic configuration of gender. Within patriarchal power structures, economic status is a structural dimension of power and women's poverty is a consequence of structural power imbalances. Structural inequality that manifests in women's economic oppression is as a direct result of skewed gender relations. These gender biases in turn lead to disproportionate access to resources, education, employment, income, and assets (Ortner, 2006:6). Uken (2018:25) argues that women must increasingly deal with economic destitution and disparity in environments of progressively less choice. Moreover, Uken elaborates that even though monetary poverty is the main measure of the feminization of poverty, gender privilege in terms of women's social exclusion, livelihoods, training, and capacity building must not be ignored. Gender privilege must, therefore, be a vital consideration in understanding how gender poverty and gender inequality conflate in the feminization of poverty.

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'feminization of poverty' was coined by Diana Pearce in 1976. Pearce observed that women made up almost two thirds of the poor in America and that these women represented an increasingly large amount of economically disenfranchised groups. See Pearce, D. (1976). 'The feminization of Poverty: Women, Work and Welfare.' *Urban. Society Change Review* 11, 26-36.

I contend that Christianity, as it intersected with colonialism and patriarchy in Sub-Saharan Africa, both historically and in the present dispensation, to a large extent, is conspiratorial and complicit in the economic oppression and disempowerment of African women. In normalizing women's economic disempowerment through customs, practices, beliefs, and cultural affiliations, the feminization of poverty has become entrenched. Through the perpetuation of male hegemony, women's economic freedom has been trampled on because economic freedom lies in who has access to resources. Hunter (2002:101) illuminates that men's economic privilege and the patriarchal masculine discourse that surrounds it reproduces patriarchal systems of power and domination.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and many Christian denominations have embarked on programmes that positively impact the social and economic wellbeing of women. Research reveals that many Christian organizations are involved in the economic empowerment of women through providing skill enhancement programmes and other practical initiatives to increase the economic viability of women. However, in the main, resources are scant, and these initiatives do not even scratch the surface in terms of comprehensively addressing women's economic disempowerment in the region (Njoh and Akiwumi, 2012). Moreover, it is seldom that such programmes take into account the manner in which patriarchal biblical interpretation impacts the wellbeing and economic viability of women.

I argue that the Church in many ways is complicit in the economic disempowerment of women through the perpetuation of practices, traditions and teachings that valorise men and both overtly and covertly disparage women. This takes place through religious and cultural ideologies and patriarchal biblical interpretation, which produces theological incongruities that lead to women's economic disempowerment and the feminization of poverty. Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:3) confirm that religious and cultural ideologies often reinforce hegemonic masculinities, and this brand of masculinity is generally recognized as the most desirable and most powerful within a given society. Tonono (2018:5) corroborates that the oppression of women in faith-based communities is perpetuated in both overt and covert ways. Overtly, the churches ignore issues that lead to the subservient positions of women by actively promoting the status quo of male hegemony. Covertly, the patriarchal interpretations of certain biblical texts advance a narrow and archaic understanding of what a "model Christian woman" should be. This macro-system within churches and

faith communities has created enabling environments for women's social, political, cultural, religious, and economic oppression.

A compelling argument as to how such oppression inhibits women's economic growth and development can be made through an analysis of the work on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) by Siyabulela Tonono. Tonono (2018:5-6) contends that through biblical interpretation, the Church upholds male superiority and employs biblical narratives such as the creation story to enforce male headship and domination of women as ordained by God. Tonono expounds that Ephesians 5 is often used as spiritual basis for entrenching women's submission in the home and in society as the natural order of things. According to Tonono, the Church propagates and perpetuates hierarchical and male hegemonic conception of women within Christianity. Tonono articulates that the Church's teachings on what the model Christian women should be is deeply flawed and often entraps women in pockets of oppression in their own homes and in society at large. Astutely, Tonono goes on to say that patriarchal churches breed patriarchal societies as the stench of patriarchy permeates society with the same vigour that it permeates the pews, entrenching itself in all areas of social interaction. Patriarchal power structures, grant credence to male power, male might, male control, male force, male aggression, and male domination as God sanctioned and sanctified by biblical texts (Tonono, 2018). Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:3) corroborate that many men in various contexts use religious texts to justify the dominance of women the world over with some even justifying this dominance on the basis that it is sacred texts that afford them the privilege of domination over women. Haddad (2002:425) affirms that the feminization of poverty is propagated through women's marginalization, which leads to the gendered nature of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. The nexus between patriarchal practices, traditions and teachings and women's economic disempowerment and the feminization of poverty is, therefore, apparent.

### **Ecclesial Enculturation and Ecclesial Biblical Interpretation**

Ecclesial enculturation or the formation of socio-cultural/religious environments often entrench male hegemony and patriarchal conceptions of women (Naicker, 2021:181). Such environments have the propensity to facilitate social injustices against women and very often, do not consider its complicity in entrenching structural and systemic oppression. The ways in which Church traditions frame what the model Christian women should be, for example, only serves to embed gender inequality and this

in turn becomes internalized by women in Church and society. The idealization of male figures in the Bible often serve to propagate notions of male headship and male supremacy. For instance, Proverbs 31 is often cited to exemplify women's domesticity, resourcefulness, and ingenuity. While these may all be praiseworthy traits to possess, one cannot ignore the subtle and often not so subtle ways in which this text is co-opted through ecclesial enculturation to cement traditional gendered roles for women and men. The woman is relegated to the household sphere, cooking, sewing, and providing food while the husband occupies a position of leadership and authority within and outside the home. While the Proverbs 31 woman does engage in the business affairs of the family, and this is noteworthy, she is often interpreted as the one who is carrying the entire workload of ensuring her family's provision and well-being to the exclusion of any input from her husband. This notion of perfection is what brings women to the point of exhaustion and unable to cope long-term, thereby affecting their productivity in the long run. This standard for women promulgated through ecclesial enculturation promotes the idea that if a woman is unable to attain this level of resourcefulness, she is not good enough. Masenya (2004:73) notes that the text serves mainly to "keep the patriarchal status quo intact."

Employing a Bosadi (womanhood) approach, shaped by Masenya's (2004:77) own experiences in an African socio-cultural context, the forces of oppression such as racism, classism and sexism are key concepts in the interpretive process. The depiction in Proverbs 31: 10-31, argues Masenya, is not of a flesh and blood woman but of an idealized woman based on societal expectations of women. Her industry, asserts Masenya, appears to be exaggerated because no human could carry out the numerous activities ascribed to her. The text also reveals the patriarchal nature of Israelite society and the expectations held of women. For Masenya, the text is obviously written from an androcentric male perspective. An alternative interpretation, following a Bosadi approach would critique the cultural oppression of women inherent in the text and take seriously the notion that there is no free-value interpretation of biblical texts. Furthermore, the idea that those who benefit from patriarchy, racism, classism, and sexism will always strive to maintain the status quo. It is the task of those who interpret the text from a liberative perspective to critically evaluate the context of the biblical text in conjunction with the context of the present-day reader of the text (Masenya, 2004).



The Book of Ruth is another compelling example of how ecclesial enculturation propagates male hegemony and female submission and subordination. Ruth is not seen as an agential, strong leader who takes initiative and becomes the breadwinner of her family, but rather, as a docile damsel in distress, who is dependent on the good graces of a man. The idealization of Boaz through ecclesial enculturation promotes male headship and authority and the control of women by men. The valorisation of clear-cut roles for women as confined to the domestic sphere and men as strong leaders internalizes and embeds gender inequality. Many ecclesial traditions valorise this theological positionality, paving the way for the poverty and destitution of women. It is, therefore, undeniable that there exists a strong relationship between the economic disempowerment of women and ideological oppression reproduced through unequal ecclesial and societal structures and systems. Ecclesial enculturation that valorises male domination, power and might stigmatizes women and is, therefore, oppressive, life denying and incompatible with the tenets of Christianity.

Indubitably, women's economic disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa is largely because of institutionalized structural and systemic power imbalances and male hegemonic domination. African women theologians illuminate how patriarchal systems and cultural norms, and standards contribute to the economic disempowerment of women in Africa, noting that limitations within these systems restrict women's access to resources, decision making power and economic opportunities (Phiri and Nadar, 2006). Another aspect that is related to women's economic disempowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa is gender-based violence which is inclusive of domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexual assault. These forms of violence restrict women from full participation in economic activities and often result in physical, emotional, and mental trauma which impinges on women's economic productivity. Moreover, unequal access to educational opportunities limits women's ability to acquire knowledge and skill to participate fully in economic activities and compete in the job market (Phiri, 1997). African women theologians emphasise that inequality in land ownership for women is a major factor in the economic disempowerment of women as customary practices and legal frameworks marginalize women's rights to land, restricting their access to productive resources and economic viability and independence (Phiri and Nadar, 2006).

The ways in which ecclesia enculturates adherents, construes and disseminates theological beliefs and principles and co-opts biblical interpretation, marginalizes, and inhibits every developmental trajectory of women.

Women's situational economic distresses, therefore, must be seen in light of their socio-religious, socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic positionality in societies and must be seen as the vice that hold them in pockets of oppression. Oduyoye (2004:99) avers that the Church must be seen as a community of "men and women walking together on the journey home, with the Church as the umbrella of faith, hope and love". If the Church is steeped in androcentric and patriarchal hegemonic hierarchy, then clearly, it has not yet become "a community of men and women walking together..." as Oduyoye envisions.

For the Church to realize this level of communalism and egalitarianism, hegemonic masculinities must be challenged and deconstructed in Church and society. It is also crucial that we take seriously the efforts made by womanist theologians, activists, and communities to challenge patriarchal power dynamics within Church and society and their promotion of the full inclusion and full participation of women in the household of God and in society. Ecclesial traditions that do not foster egalitarianism and the full economic participation of women must be challenged and alternative traditions and perspectives must be advocated for. Such initiative will play a critical role in women's economic emancipation.

To achieve this, a critical theological evaluation of how women's economic disenfranchisement intersects with religion, race, culture and politics and the ways in which male hegemony contribute to women's economic disempowerment must be confronted. This inevitably involves questioning of traditional interpretations of biblical texts that reinforce gender inequalities. To challenge and dismantle structures of male hegemonic power, we must advocate for policy changes in both the ecclesial and secular spheres of life and the promotion of gender equality in the home, in education, in employment and in decision making processes. In the critical evaluation of these intersections and the development of ecclesial and theological frameworks, there must be an affirmation of the equal worth and dignity of all people, regardless of gender, thereby promoting social and economic justice for all. To that end, hegemonic masculinities in Church and society must be deconstructed and redemptive masculinities that support gender equity and address root causes of women's economic oppression must be reimagined.

### **Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinities in Christianity and Society**

Patriarchy and male hegemony function differently depending on women's social characteristics, as it intersects with race, class, and gender

oppression (Plaatjies Van Huffel, 2011:8). Ideological hegemony as it pertains to the lived experiences of economically disenfranchised women in Sub-Saharan Africa pervades every aspect of social interaction, rendering women the most marginalized of the marginalized. Ras (2017:2-5) elucidates that the devastating effects of domination of women amounts to death dealing forces that deny them wholeness and the full human experience. This level of domination results in physical, emotional, mental, and psychological breaking of their bodies as they struggle for survival. Women's economic marginalization is located within the political, cultural, and social context of under resourced communities, entrenching the feminization of poverty and rendering women's very bodies, sites of struggle (Naicker, 2021:123). Ezra Chitando (2007:114a) illuminates that there exists a diversity and hierarchy of masculinities and hegemonic masculinities are not only dangerous but also dominant. In co-opting patriarchy in a variety of ways, Church and society has intricately constructed, sustained, and maintained structures of power that economically disenfranchise women. The theological foundations of ecclesial biblical interpretation and ecclesial enculturation, therefore, serve to underpin male dominance, creating environments in which women struggle in a myriad of ways as they are forced to occupy subservient roles, inhibiting full participation in the economy. Resultantly, gender inequality intersects with economic disparity, creating situations of economic duress for women. It is, therefore, crucial that we confront and critically examine the ways in which theological perspectives and the selective use of biblical texts justify the oppression of women within Christianity and wider society. Understanding the economic implications of such power imbalances often sanctioned by the Church is vital in dismantling the systemic barriers that hinder women's economic growth and development. Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:3) note that men have used religious and cultural resources such as tradition, doctrines, and sacred texts to maintain dominance and sustain patriarchal privilege. Chitando (2007b, 2007c) actively engages Church and society towards redemptive masculinities and advocates for both Church and society to foster environments where men are developed and encouraged to be responsible, egalitarian, and not conform to oppressive patriarchal ideologies. Chitando (2007a) goes on to say that efforts at transforming hegemonic masculinities are often hindered because of patriarchal thinking, language, and structures. Furthermore, that a transformative outlook regarding masculinities that are toxic and dangerous is more liberating and more rewarding for men and that change is

indeed possible. For the transformation of masculinities to be realized in Africa, elucidates Chitando (2007a), men must act with compassion and stand in solidarity with women. Chitando & Chirongoma (2012:28) argue that “masculinities can and do change” and that the Church and faith-based organizations must “work towards the emergence of redemptive masculinities” and the emancipation of women, children, and fellow men from all forms of oppression. Elsewhere, Chitando (2010:2) notes that biblical texts can and must be used to reconstruct liberative masculinities. African women theologians assert that concerted efforts must be made to empower women in Church and society. The calibre of education must challenge patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and traditions and promote gender equality. Moreover, women and men must disavow toxic interpretations of religious texts and traditions by reinterpreting these to affirm women’s full personhood and full participation in all aspects of social and ecclesial life. In so doing, male hegemonic power structures and the social and economic structures that perpetuate women’s disempowerment will be challenged. The key is education that is redemptive, inclusive and life affirming (Phiri and Nadar, 2006).

### **The Role of African Women’s Theology in the Economic Emancipation of Women**

By and large, the wider Christian community is profoundly divided on the role of women in Church and society. While some uphold the full autonomy and equality of women, others assign gendered roles to women which are defined in complementarity to the roles of men. It is crucial to affirm that patriarchy and its consequences do not represent God’s purpose for women in Church and society (Pokrifka, 2016). Kanyoro & Oduyoye (2006:5) elucidate that it is the prerogative of women and men to bring reform to both church and society regarding the purpose of God in the lives of women. Telling women’s stories of struggle and faith experiences of women will force the Church to listen to the silenced voices of women thereby enriching the Church through the talents and gifts that women have to offer. Chitando argues that a willingness to engage with the Bible with an open mind has the potential to unlock life giving interpretations that challenge oppressive masculinities and discover alternative masculinities that are not harmful to women, children and subjugated men (Chitando, 2010:29).

African women theologians acknowledge and understand that interpretation of texts and traditions is never innocent and that forces such as power,

ideology and social construction of knowledge all influence interpretation. Moreover, that it is crucial that we engage in analysis that goes beyond face-value interpretations to include the ideological vices and structures of power that are designed to elevate one group through the exploitation of another. Furthermore, that the economic oppression of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is complex, and deeply rooted in social, cultural, and historic contexts. It is, therefore, crucial that we understand these specific contexts in addressing the contextual challenges faced by women in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chitando, 2010). Critical and contextual biblical interpretations that affirm the inherent worth and equality of all people are essential. These interpretations will challenge gender roles and norms, promoting justice and inclusion (Chitando, 2017).

African Women's Theology seeks in this regard to engage and re-evaluate patriarchal interpretations and to put forward biblical and ecclesial teachings and practices that promote gender justice and women's economic empowerment through the recovery of women's voices in text and context. Through emphasising the abuse of Esther in the Book of Esther (Nadar, 2003), and the ingenuity of Ruth in the Book of Ruth (Naicker, 2021), and in other biblical texts, African women theologians highlight the presence, contributions, and violations of women in the Bible and challenge male centred interpretations that serve to economically marginalize women. Significantly, African Women's Theology acknowledges the intersectional nature of women's economic oppression and investigates how gender intersects with other social categories and women's economic disparity. Moreover, African Women's Theology proposes and provides frameworks that promote women's economic empowerment. In particular, the Bible is a key source of doing African Women's Theology. Moreover, African women theologians are concerned with reimagining and emphasizing ways of theological and biblical engagement that empowers women and promotes gender equality. The value of African Women's Theology does not only lie in its liberative outlook regarding gender and all forms of oppression but also in its potential to transform religious beliefs and practice by making issues of justice and equality key concepts in theological, biblical, and ecclesial interpretations and practices (Oduyoye, 2001c:32).

### **Justice and Economic Emancipation**

Within African Women's Theology, justice is seen as a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses not only legal and social equality but also the idea of restoration in all areas of lived experience in the pursuit of full

human existence that is holistic, fulfilling, and complete. Within this framework of justice, the interconnectedness of individuals within their communities is foregrounded. This level of justice necessitates addressing comprehensively, the historic and current structures of injustice and advocating on behalf of those who suffer inequality and prejudice. This level of justice also promotes healing and reconciliation. Oduyoye (1995:42) states that “justice is about the restoration of relationships in such a way that peace and well-being are restored within the community”. Justice then, incorporates economic, social, political, cultural, and religious dimensions of reality. For justice to be realized, redemption and liberation must be seen as transformative processes that bring about freedom and restoration. Redemption within the African context, posits Kanyoro (2002:115), is a communal experience that demands liberation from all forms of oppression and the renewal of human dignity for all. Moreover, it demands transformation of oppressive structures and systems and the creation of a meaningful and fruitful environment in which all people, individually and collectively, enjoy safe spaces to exercise their agency and resourcefulness (Kanyoro, 2002).

Economic emancipation and justice are central concerns within the framework of African Women’s Theology. Oduyoye (1995:62) argues that women’s economic empowerment is an essential component of justice because it grants women autonomy, dignity, and equal opportunities. Oduyoye notes that economic justice for women must encompass fair monetary remuneration, access to credit, land ownership, and the eradication of discrimination in the workplace, in Church and in society. Kanyoro (2002:108) argues that women’s economic emancipation is vital for overall liberation. For such emancipation to take place, patriarchal systems wherever they appear in Church and society, must be dismantled because these are the vices that hinder women’s economic growth and development. African Women’s Theology calls for collective action and advocacy in this regard, to challenge oppressive economic structures, create opportunities for women to engage in entrepreneurship, and support women’s economic networks. Kanyoro goes on to say that without such levels of intervention, the way will not be paved for sustainable development in Africa and economic justice for women will not be realized.

## Conclusion

The economic disenfranchisement of women in Sub-Saharan Africa is a complex issue and is influenced by various intersecting factors. This chapter has critically evaluated the role of Christianity in promoting male hegemony and women's economic disempowerment in the region. The chapter acknowledges the strides made by Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa to empower women economically but contends that much more can and must be done. This analysis revealed that androcentric biblical interpretations, sanctioned by male hegemony and patriarchal power structures, play a key role in perpetuating the subordination and economic discrimination of women, hindering women's access to economic opportunities and resources, and contributing to the feminization of poverty.

The Church, to a large extent, has been complicit in the economic oppression of women through the perpetuation of practices, traditions and teachings that reinforce male superiority in the Church and in society at large. Through ecclesial enculturation, the Church has aided the undermining of women's agency and valorising male domination and control of women. In addressing the economic disempowerment of women in Sub-Saharan Africa, comprehensive approaches that recognize the influence of Christianity, challenges patriarchal norms and standards, and promotes gender equity and economic justice must be imagined, reimaged, and disseminated. Through such processes, the ecclesial landscape will be transformed to promote women's economic empowerment in a comprehensive way and the creation of inclusive societies where men and women have equal access to economic opportunities will be realized.

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