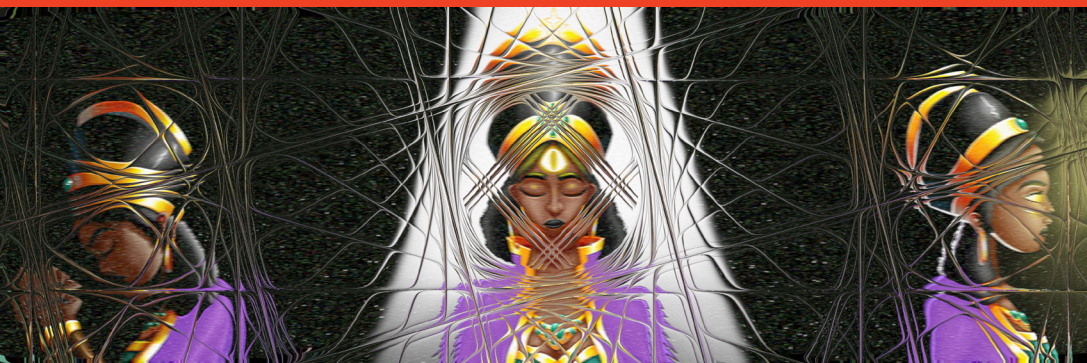


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Loreen Maseno, Esther Mombo,
Nagaju Muke and Veronica Kahindo (Eds.)

QUEEN OF SHEBA

East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation
(Circle Jubilee Volume 2)



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2024

Queen of Sheba

East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation
(Circle Jubilee Volume 2)

With a preface by Musa W. Dube

edited by

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Dedicated

to

TERESIA MBARI HINGA

(1955-2023)

*A founding Member
of the Circle*



*You burnt the midnight oil,
You turned millions of pages and scribed hundreds of scrolls,
You communed with millions of sages and became a sage woman,
You broke the silence and became a teacher to the nations.
Your defeated death and earned eternal life!
Heaven welcomes you!
The Circle salutes you!*



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The Editors



PREFACE

The Quest for Theological Wisdom

Following the footsteps of the Queen of Sheba,
Mama Walatta Petros and Kimpa Vita
in the Quest for Feminist/Womanist Theological Space

Musa W. Dube

The East and Central African theological landscape features impressive figures of legendary spiritual women, who rose against both patriarchal and colonial powers and established powerful social movements of resistance. These historical women lay a very important foundation for East and Central African feminist and womanist movements as they claim their place in the public space. In am thinking here of the likes of Mama Walatta Petros of Ethiopia and Kimpa Vita of Democratic Republic of Congo. Walatta Petros (1572-1642) was born into Ethiopian Orthodox faith. When Roman Catholic missionaries came to her country, insisting on converting Ethiopians to their own kind of Christianity. Walatta Petros made it a point to publicly resist the colonial cultural movement. Mama Walatta stood her own ground against the Ethiopian Emperor and her husband who had succumbed to the Roman Catholic missionary imposition of western ways of practicing Christianity. She went to denounce her marriage, became a nun and founded a large popular following and communities in resistance of cultural imperialism. In 1672 a book (Hagiography) was written about her, *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros*, and she was elevated to the status of sainthood in the Ethiopian Othodox Church.

Kimpa Vita was born in 1684 in the Kongo Kingdom, which was then under the influence of Portuguese colonial culture. She was baptized Dona Beatrice in the Roman Catholic Church. Later, she claimed to be possessed by the spirit of Saint Anthony. She proclaimed, among other things, that Jesus and his disciples were black Congolese, and that God would restore the Kingdom of Kongo. Kimpa Vita also called for the removal of white biblical art from the cathedral, pointing out that they were

as good as any fetish /pagan symbols. The prophetic message of Kimpa Vita obviously attacked racism/whiteness and its function in colonial settings. She resisted the empire, stating that the kingdom of the colonized will be restored. Kimpa Vita's message resonated with the oppressed masses of Kongo pulling off a massive following. Both her message and its impact threatened the colonial powers, who crucified and killed her in 1702. Her death did not end her movement, as she is credited with the beginning African Independent Churches in Africa (Dube 1996:111-129). Both Mama Wallatta and Kimpa Vita used spiritual capital to rise against colonial and patriarchal powers as well as national collaborating leaders, thereby laying the foundation for African Women theologians of East and Central African regions, to take their God-given right to pursue women's rights, communal rights and national rights to be free from all forms of oppression.

This volume, named after another legendary woman, the Queen of Sheba, is one of the three regional volumes commissioned in preparation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians' (henceforth Circle) return to its place of birth in July 1-5, 2004. The volumes rose within the context of preparing to produce biographies of the founding members of the Circle, when more members of the Circle expressed interest to write that particular volume on *Mothering African Women's Theologies: The Stories of Our Circle Pioneers*, could accommodate them. Regional volumes, exploring theologies generated by African women, thus came into being. The three regional volumes focused on exploring South, East/Central and West African women's liberation theologies generated since the launch of the Circle in 1989. These volumes are:

- *Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Theologies of Liberation*, edited by Loreen Maseno, Esther Mombo, Muke Najagu and Veronica K. Kahindo.
- *Nehanda: Women's Theologies of Liberation in Southern Africa*, edited by Nelly Mwale, Rosinah Gabaitse, Dorothy Tembo and Fundiswa Kobo.
- *Sankofa: Liberation Theologies of West African Women*, edited by Seyram Ameneyedi, Marceline Yele and Yosi Maton.

In addition to three regional volumes, the idea of producing thematic volumes was also birthed. The Circle thus commissioned continent and diaspora wide thematic volumes, focusing on biographies, ethics, philosophies, African Indigenous Religions, legendary African women, and Earth in African women's literature. The Circle also launched a creative writing volume, to engage its non-academic members and audiences on current environmental challenges, facing Mother Earth. All the volumes mark the journey back to Ghana, within which, *Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation* is situated.

Background Sankofa 2024 Journeys and Queen of Sheba

In 1989 69 African women gathered at Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon, Ghana under the leadership of Mercy Amba Oduyoye. She had spent more than a decade searching for women in religion or theology, be it in the academy, the faith spaces, or both. Oduyoye had noticed that while women were dominant members in religious gatherings and cultural practices, there were hardly there in the leadership of faith institutions and academic departments of religion. African archbishops, bishops, priests, deacons, professors, and academic doctors of religion were largely men. The absence of women from both the academic theological space and the leadership space of believers had consequences on the lives of women and female children. Male-generated interpretations of cultures and scriptures were often used to oppress, exploit, and keep women as sub-ordinated and second-class citizens in their families, communities and nations. An International Committee of eight chaired by Mercy A. Oduyoye and consisting of Betty Ekeya (Kenya); Rosemary Edet (Nigeria), Sr Bernadette Mbuy Beya (DRC), Elizabeth Amoah (Ghana), Brigalia Bam (South Africa); Rose Zoe Obianga (Cameroon) and Musimbi Kanyoro (Kenya) assisted with planning for the conference in 1988 (Kanyoro 2012:22).

Oduyoye and the planning committee thus gathered 69 African women from almost every African country (where they could be found) and from all religions and cultures to challenge this scenario. Sisters from the African diaspora were also invited. It was a launch of a transformative African female intelligentsia space with a clear agenda. The quest was to

generate cultural and religious-based interpretations that embrace and empower all genders. Women from all religions and cultures were thus invited to enter the space of researching, reading, interpretation and re-interpreting the cultural/scriptural texts with the purpose of interrogating and exposing oppressive aspects, as well as to generate liberating interpretations that affirm all members of the Earth Community. The Circle was thus launched in 1989 with a clear agenda for women to research, read, interpret, write, and publish in the area of cultural/religious texts for the liberation and empowerment of women in particular, and the whole Earth Community overall. Since women in religion were seriously lacking, mentoring became an important strategy for building the capacity of African women in the academy and in leadership of faith-related institutions.

The first research period (1989-2002) of the Circle was characterized by building its capacity and interrogating how religions/cultures construct and impact women, as well as finding ways of re-interpreting religions for the empowerment of women. In the second research period (2002-2019) the Circle focused on religions/theology/cultures and HIV&AIDS, as well as capacitating Faith-Based Communities for a constructive response, given the gravity of the HIV&AIDS epidemic on the African continent, and to African women and children, in particular. At its recent Africa-wide conference (July 2019), the Circle decided to adopt the theme of *Religions/Theology/Culture, the Environment and Sustainable Development Goals*. This theme was building on the conference theme; namely, Mother Africa: Mother Earth and Religion/Theology/Ethics/Philosophy. Eight volumes co-edited from the conference proceedings are listed in the reference below.

It needs to be mentioned here that Covid 19, which appeared in the global community by the end of 2019, was unforeseen, unplanned for and a major disruption and health threat to African women, people and the world at large. The adopted theme of the Circle was not only put on a halt by Covid 19, but the Circle also had to apply itself to a new critical context and its impact on women. Towards this end three books were embarked; two of which were published (Hadebe et al. 2021 & Labeodan et al. 2021) while the third one is still forthcoming. Notably the huge and shocking impact of Covid 19 has come to shape the research focus of the Circle, for

the executive committee decided that the theme for the forthcoming conference in Ghana will be “*Sankofa 2024: Earth, Pandemics, Gender and Religion.*”

Sankofa 2024: Thirty-five Years Later

In July 2024, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians continental conference will therefore, return to Legon, Ghana, where the Circle was first launched in 1989. In accordance the 2019 chosen theme and the impact of Covid 19, research focus will be *Sankofa 2024: Earth, Pandemics and Religion.*” This will be the first return to its birthplace since the launch. Dubbed *Sankofa 2024*, the return will be an intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage to reconnect and recommit ourselves to our quest for justice-oriented knowledges and communities. Sankofa is a Ghanaian Adinkra symbol represented by a bird stretching its neck back to groom its tail. “The Sankofa symbolizes people’s quest for knowledge with the implication that the quest is based on critical examination, intelligent and patient investigation. It is this wisdom in learning from the past which ensures a strong future.” In preparation for this return, the Circle seeks to carry a comprehensive (in depth and thorough) assessment of what the founding members and their handmaidens achieved since 1989 in order to map the way forward. The term handmaidens here refer to those African women theologians and faith leaders, who did not make it to the 1989 launch meeting, who nonetheless received and implemented the vision of the Circle with vigor in its first two decades.

This volume, therefore, sought to research, analyze, map, interpret, re-interpret, expand, theorize, among others, the theological works, ideas, and perspectives produced by the founding matriarchs and the handmaidens of the Circle: What kinds of interpretations and theologies of liberation did they generate? What sources did they use? What kinds of theories did they generate? How were their theologies of liberation constructed? What kind of Christology/ies, ecclesiology/s or missiological models did they propose? What hermeneutics did they generate and utilize? What has been the impact of the theological/ethical/philosophical ideas that they generated? How did they impact faith and the academic spaces? What

pedagogical techniques did they generate and employ? What was the distinct contribution of the Founding Matriarchs and their Handmaids to the world? How does the work of founding mothers and handmaidens of the Circle address patriarchy, colonialism, neocolonialism, tribalism, ethnic poverty, violence, religious difference, age, sexuality, and disability in their constructions of liberating theologies? Papers in this volume seek to address some of these questions, by engaging each author to focus on a particular theologian's work.

Unlike the short papers for the biographies volume, *Mothering African Women's Theologies: The Stories of Our Circle Pioneers*, the three regional volumes sought longer papers that enable deeper analysis to highlight the contributions of individual theologians and faith leaders. This volume therefore focuses on those women who made theological contributions through their research and publications or provided leadership in faith-related and ecumenical spaces. It does not seek to cover all women theologians; rather, it features those whose theological contributions are especially significant. The aim of this volume, therefore, is to make sure that by the July 2024 Ghana gathering regional contributions have been researched and published to map the way forward. Given this background, the statement of the problem, goals, specific objectives and research questions of this regional volume (which are the same as other regional volumes) are stated below.

Statement of the Problem

Whereas in 1989, African women launched the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, seeking to develop a theology that flies with two healthy wings, up to now, the Circle has not carried a comprehensive analysis of the theology/ies produced by African women. The Circle, up to now, has not comprehensively asked evaluative questions, but it is now the agenda of this volume (and its sister volumes) to ask the following questions: How was a theology of two wings produced? What did it seek to do? How does it fly with two wholistic wings, better than other alternatives? How has it contributed to the African male-dominated theologies, feminist theologies, and theologies of the Global South? What, in other

words, are the effects, achievements, strengths, and weakness of African women theologies of liberation?

Goal

Named after the legendary Ethiopian Queen, who visited King Solomon in search for wisdom, the volume reclaims her legacy for feminist liberational journeys in East and Central Africa. The volume, *Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation* seeks to thoroughly investigate the theology/ies generated by the Circle Matriarchs of East and Central Africa and how they contributed towards theologies of liberation in the region, continent, and the world by focusing closely and analytically upon each theologian's work. In so doing, this volume becomes an important part of mapping an African feminist liberative histography in theology.

Specific Objectives

Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation (through its authors) sought to deeply research theological ideas produced by significant theological matriarchs of East and Central Africa by:

1. Investigating the historical/cultural/economic/religious **contexts** that motivated their work.
2. Highlighting the **sources**, they used to generate their theological ideas (stories? scriptures? cultures?).
3. Discussing specific features and **uniqueness** of the theology of a particular matriarch.
4. Discussing the **purpose** of the Matriarch's generated theological thinking.
5. Investigating how the proposed theology **addresses** patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, racism, tribalism, sexual and disability-based discrimination among other social factors.
6. Analyzing how the Matriarch's theology **converses** with (a) African male theologians, (b) Global South theologies, and (c) Western feminist theologians.

7. Highlighting each essay's **main strength and contribution** to the world of knowledge and liberation.
8. Discerning its **potential applications** to the future world and work.

Research Questions

To meet the above goal and its specific objectives, the volume *Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation* sought (through its authors) to address the following research questions:

1. What were the theological **contexts** that informed this theological Matriarch's work?
2. What are the theological **sources** used by this matriarchal work (personal narratives? Scriptures? Culture)?
3. What are the particular **characteristics/themes** of this particular Matriarch's theology?
4. What is the purpose of her **theology**, and what does it seek to achieve?
5. How do her theological ideas **challenge and transform** patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, tribalism, agism, sexual and dis/ability-based discrimination etc.?
6. How does this theology **converse** with African male theologians and Western feminist theologians?
7. What are the main **strengths and contributions** of this theology to the larger world of knowledge?
8. How is the theology generated **applicable** to our future world and work?

CONCLUSION

The East and Central African theological landscape stretches from African Indigenous Religions to legendary women leaders such as Queen of Sheba, Mama Walatta Petros, Kimpa Vita and to millions of everyday women who embrace one faith or another as their own way of living. In 1989, when Mercy Oduyoye called on African women to launch the Circle,

women from East and Central African countries such, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia heeded the call and became founding matriarchs of the Circle. These included Anne Kubai, Musimbi Kanyoro, Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, Betty Ekaya, Sr Bernadette Mbuy Beya, Nyambura Njoroge among others. Many more who did not go, but who received the agenda of the Circle, became the champions of its vision. These include Hazel Anyanga, Emily Onyango, Mary Getui, Esther Mombo, Philomena Mwaura, Hannah Kinoti, Damaris Paritau, Elisabeth Vibila, Faith Lugazia, Grace Wamue, among others. This volume recognizes the cultural theological roots of East and Central African landscape and seeks to celebrate the founding matriarchs and handmaidens of the region and to map the way forward. While this preface maps out the broad agenda of the Sankofa 2024 volumes, the editors through their introduction and the individual chapters will tell the story of the road covered in this journey from 1989 to the Sankofa 2024 pilgrimage and beyond. Through analyzing the various chapters, the editors' introduction will map for us themes, methods, theories, major contributions, strengths, weaknesses and gaps gleaned from the theological historiography of East and Central Africa. Their introduction will highlight how the goal, specific objectives and the research questions are addressed by the volume. In so doing, they will point the whole Circle to the areas that need further consolidation and new explorations.

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SECTION ONE



Queen of Sheba – Patriarchy and Matriarchy

1 | Mapping East and Central African Feminist Theologies

Loreen Maseno

Introduction

The Circle of concerned African women theologians (hereafter the Circle) was founded on the 25th September 1989 in Accra, Ghana. The Circle is a contemporary network of women from across Africa, some of whom live outside Africa. It is a voluntary movement, whose work often takes place within regional meetings. The Circle was inaugurated in order to facilitate the writing, research and publication by a Pan-African multi-religious and multiracial network of women. Within the Circle is the open acknowledgement and appreciation of differences, therefore, there is a focus to work hand in hand, and not in division or strife. According to Hinga, the Circle is concerned with voicing protests against sexism and its roots in religion and culture (Hinga 1996:31). The Circle seeks to develop women's theological contribution in Churches, Schools, Colleges, Universities and in the society and therefore be agents of change in both customary and modern legislation. The Circle places emphasis on the impact of Religion and culture upon African women. It remains a community of African women theologians who come together to discuss issues of common concerns based on their experiences in their different religions and cultures.

The Circle members dialogue with their male counterparts in many areas. These common areas include poverty, racism, cultural, social, ethnic and political problems. Further, the Circle members present a 'Two-winged' theology. This theology asserts a relationship with African men. In this theology, women work in co-operation with men of good will for the reconstruction of a cultural and religious praxis of sexual equality. But this theology also emphasizes the necessity of critiquing culture and religion from the perspective of 'Christ as the norm for the fullness of the

human being' (Oduyoye 1990:27). Participants of the Circle regard Oduyoye as the Queen Mother of the movement (Pemberton 2003:63).

There is a consensus in Africa that the Circle is representative of African women's theological perspectives. Any representative coverage of African women's theology must take into consideration the Circle. One of the earliest coordinators of the Circle, Musimbi Kanyoro states,

In coming late to the scene, African women theologians are caught in the dilemma of disagreeing with the presentation of inculturation as the basis for African liberation theology. While affirming the need for reclaiming culture through the theology of inculturation, we African women theologians make the claim that inculturation is not sufficient unless the cultures we reclaim are analysed and are deemed worthy in terms of promoting justice and support for life and the dignity of women... Pursuing a theology of inculturation from a gender and feminist perspective is a new step forward (Kanyoro 2001:167, 169).

The continuous work of the founding mothers of mentoring, opening the doors of the Circle to all irrespective of creed, education or literacy and not giving up continues to be part of threading the beads of the story of the Circle. Kanyoro invited Mercy Oduyoye back on board to serve the Circle because she knew that her presence would strengthen the Circle even after she became coordinator (Kanyoro 2006:20-36). She notes that the Circle as an open-ended forum, remains hospitable to new people and that since Oduyoye recruited and mentored her, she soon found herself recruiting and mentoring other female scholars across the continent. This she did by telling the story of the Circle, which also helped to secure funding from various donors Kanyoro (2006:23-31).

This book volume takes into cognizance the cultural and theological roots of East and Central African landscape. It goes further to celebrate the founding matriarchs. Whereas preceding this preface maps out the broad agenda of all the Sankofa 2024 volumes, this volume introduction tells the story of the road covered in this journey from 1989 to the Sankofa 2024 pilgrimage and beyond, paying special attention to the matriarchs' contribution to Theology in East and Central Africa by way of sources and themes. Consequently, this volume analyses and interprets East and Central African feminist theologians' contribution to theology in Africa. It re-interprets, expands and analyzes their attempt to utilize feminist analysis

of women's subordination. It investigates the theology/ies generated from the Circle matriarchs and handmaidens of East & Central Africa and how they contribute towards theologies of liberation in the region, continent and the world by focusing and researching each theologians' work deeply. It is important to note that these are East African women's theologies and not theology. Phiri has aptly showed that African women theologians want to acknowledge that even within Africa, there is a diversity of women's experiences due to the multiple differences in race, culture, politics, economy and religion (Phiri 2004:16). This introduction maps East and Central African Feminist theologies by way of sources and themes used to generate theologies.

Questions regarding people's wellbeing and their status are explained within the framework of culture. African culture and society are diverse. Yet, this multiplicity informs Africa's people with norms to live by and how to structure social relations. In theological circles in Africa, there has been an interest as to how cultural contexts must and will shape theological reflection. East and Central African feminist theologians realize that they are situated in the context of African culture. Taking their cultural context seriously, many East and Central African Feminist theologies critique those aspects of culture which are not life affirming. Musimbi Kanyoro notes that there are many aspects of culture which diminish women and continue to be practiced religiously, often making women objects of cultural preservation. Many harmful traditional practices are therefore, passed on as "cultural values" and are not to be discussed, challenged or changed (Kanyoro 2001).

Taking from the East and Central African feminist theologies, it is clear that they are making attempts at 'gendering African theology'. Gendering theology designates the process of integrating a strategic and social understanding of women as a distinct group, thereby incorporating women's cultural experience in their analysis and including a commitment to the emancipation of women into African theology. It is clear that East and Central African Feminist Theologies have something to say of the category 'women' and therefore they ensure to show a sensitivity to women as a distinct social group.

Even though scholars disagree on the place of women in traditional African societies, there is a consensus that the place of women in Africa's

religious tradition was significant. According to the theologian Musa Dube, most women in African societies held prominent religious positions (Dube 1998:226). According to the theologian Hannah Herzel, before the coming of Christianity and colonialism, African women were regarded as having gifts such as healings, prophecy, exorcisms, which were exercised voluntarily, and which were embraced in African religion (Herzel 1981:68). African women's involvement in African indigenous religion's prophetic roles was very significant since prophecy in Africa was and is to date highly regarded (Herzel 1981:67-69).

Studies have shown that the coming of Christianity and the colonizers created sudden changes in African societies. A case point is that formal education favored the training of males for the church and the colonial offices, where African females were excluded. Missionary Christianity went ahead to endorsed the training of African males who assumed and enforced a strictly patriarchal view of the church and in the use of the bible. Therefore, it can be said that Christianity in Africa reinforced patriarchy and an androcentric mind-set.

In general, the interaction of African women with Western Christianity that collaborated with colonial powers left them exploited, exposed to terrible forms of violence and perpetual dependency. Therefore as explained by Oduyoye, "(African women) have to contend however with the fact that western Christian culture and patriarchal ideology have seeped in, to enhance the power of men or to endow men with power where they had none, while suppressing aspects of African culture that are favorable to women" (Oduyoye 2001:28).

Even when theological training was not availed to many women, through speeches, songs, dance, stories and prayers, African women were able to express their thoughts and conceptualisation of who God is. It is very important therefore to note that East and Central African feminist theologians do theology in Africa at different levels. Theology in East and Central Africa can be done by the uneducated but also it is a professional, systematic discipline in itself. The theologian Elizabeth Amoah has described genuine theologising by women as that which involves reflections on the conceptions of God in their daily lives and needs in the church. Therefore, theology has traditionally been done by those women who are not formally educated, who express theology through spontaneous poetic

songs, lyrics and prayers. It is also done at a formal level by women who are Sunday school teachers and Guidance Counsellors. At the same time, it is done at an academic level (Amoah 1995:1). However, the resonance of voices of women academicians and those in the community at large makes a strong case that for women in Africa, theology is an activity rooted in praxis. There is an emphasis on doing theology and not just writing it.

East and Central African Feminist Theologians demonstrate their concerns and priorities since they do not accept that African men's theology should suffice for the entire faith community. Therefore, there ought to be a study of African Christian theology in the women-centred key. This is to be understood as what highlights women as actors, agents and thinkers (Oduyoye 2001:10). Theologically trained women in East and Central African explore several themes. However, given the need for selection, recurring themes that cut across the publications of East and Central African feminist theologians and are well highlighted in the sections of this book include are community, Christology, liberation, health and healing, culture, ecclesiology and Pastoral theology (Maseno 2020a). The theme of community is explored by many East and Central African feminist theologians due to their sense of and responsibility for extended families and the respect accorded to ancestors. For community, the kin group is very important and often a person's individuality is best fulfilled in relation to others. However, there are dynamics that are involved in trying to stay in community which is deeply patriarchal.

East and Central African feminist theologians explore the theme of Christology where Jesus is understood as both human and divine. Herein, they show Jesus as a concrete person who befriends women in Africa who empowers them to be active agents in society (Hinga 1992). Further, Christological models have been exemplified for the purposes of reflection (Maseno-Ouma 2014; Nasimiyu 1989; Joziassse 2016). Although African women's Christologies emphasize the person, a bounded person with form and shape, (Oduyoye 2001:57-63; Nasimiyu 2005:72-80) studies among widows, however, assert that Jesus Christ is more fluid, on the threshold, in between and shifting. They assert that Jesus affirms the place in widows' lives where definitions that restrict their bodies and restrain their minds lose their hold, allowing for encounters full of life (Maseno-Ouma 2014). In working on this theme, scholars have charted,

framed and reconsidered assembled feminist Christologies, thus attending to new and plausible typologies within the wide area of feminist Christology (Maseno 2015; Maseno 2020b). In general, Oduyoye aptly notes that Christology is not meant to analyse the nature of Christ but to identify all his saving acts for which African women may cling in hope of liberation. At the same time, Christology is to celebrate the victories over domination and death and to attribute these to Jesus rather than other terrestrial or human powers (Oduyoye 2001:63).

East and Central African feminist theologians also focus the theme of ecclesiology, where attention is paid to the household of God. One burning issue for the Church in Africa is the representation of females in leadership. Accordingly, Phiri has highlighted that women over generations in Africa have been conditioned to look up to men only for leadership and as such many women are under-represented in all the decision-making bodies of our Churches in African society today, at all levels and even their condition of service needs further review (Phiri 1996:67-71). But it is in the same churches that psychological violence, threatening of women ministers, sacking those who dissent, writing warning letters abounds (Phiri 1996:63-105). All these and more are common in the leadership levels, but in the pews, we are confronted with ministry to prostitutes, the victims of domestic violence, and the victims of sexual harassment in the workplace, and many who have deep spiritual needs.

Eschatology with reference to the resurrection of the body and the words of women are other themes investigated. According to Gathogo, eschatology focuses on the fullness and fruitfulness of life here, in this land of the living. Further, African eschatology does not only focus on the last days and things without due regard to our present time (Gathogo 2010).

The theme of hospitality is also explored. On the African continent, hospitality is encouraged, and this is true in the church. African women have laced much emphasis on the subject of hospitality since they see it as the mark of divinity and therefore, something to which human beings should aspire. However, at the same time, some women share experiences of hospitality that make them feel less than human (Oduyoye 2001:74) when girls are given off to other chiefs to cement good neighbourliness. This is common when men in Africa force their daughters to

marry their creditors or friends as a gesture of misplaced hospitality (Gathogo 2010).

Other themes include spirituality, sacrifice and missiology (Oduyoye 2001:20). Two other themes explored by East and Central African Feminist Theologians are the themes of empowerment and liberation. Liberation as a theme grants a voice to the voiceless, motivates to social change and helps develop a new sense of responsibility and solidarity. By empowerment East and Central African Feminist theologians choose to understand power in a new way. This new understanding of power implies 'enabling power', empowerment that can be collective, can develop and increase so that all who participate in it are affirmed and strengthened. This is evident in rituals of affirmation that women theologians and leaders engage in (Maseno 2017). In general, this is different from the power that is practised in a dominant, hierarchical mode where power is exercised as 'power over'.

Another prevalent theme is the theme of ecology. Many women theologians have added their voice to matters climate change and creation care, with the aim of encouraging many to listen to creation and be prophetic in action (Chirongoma and Mombo 2021; Chirongoma and Kiilu 2022; Maseno 2022; Maseno 2017). In general, these are some themes by East and Central African Feminist Theologies theologians which indicate their variety of commitments. At the same time, their emphasis is on praxis, on doing theology as an activity that is ongoing and rooted in praxis. It is from issues frequently encountered that they raise their theological concerns and hence the themes they attend to.

East and Central African feminist theologians use various sources for their theological enterprise. The bible is a source for East and Central African Feminist Theologies. Most of the East and Central African Feminist theologians are keen churchwomen, several ordained into the Eucharist ministry while others are laywomen. For the East and Central African feminist theologians, the bible is central in their theologising. However, the bible cannot be the only norm since, "any interpretation of the bible is unacceptable if it does harm to women, the vulnerable and the voiceless" (Oduyoye 2001:12).

Theological reflection bearing on hermeneutical analysis of the bible in Africa is complemented by other sources such as stories, folklores and legends (Oduyoye 1995). Narrative theology prevails in both oral and written materials. Stories play a normative role in Africa in general and therefore, African women accept stories as a source for theology (Oduyoye 2001:10). At the same time, African religio-cultural heritage provides insights that are appropriated by the East and Central African feminist theologians. Written sources that are a useful source for African women's theology are articles and publications by the Circle.

The Christian feminist movement of the west serves as another source for African women's theology. According to Kanyoro, "feminist methodology is used because it challenges cultural socialization and rejects the assumption that the roles of women and men have already been fixed, either by the creator or by the culture" (Kanyoro 2001:168). Feminist theology after originating from the west has been accessed by East and Central African feminist theologians in Africa through writings and academic forums. Indeed, feminist theology in Africa, as mentioned earlier, has developed because of African women's association with institutions, ideas and publications of the west.

Many East and Central African feminist theologians utilise women's experience from women laborers, sexual exploitation, and oppressive hierarchical structures in the churches, oppressive customs and marriage structure. Nyambura Njoroge considered how Christian women in Kenya resisted female circumcision, which exploited many among the Gikuyu. According to her, the work of African women theologians in analysing both scripture and culture had the effect of exposing structures of oppression in Church and society (Njoroge 2000). African women's theology draws much from their context and experience since they do not write theology that is remote and removed from their daily living. They grant that there are unique experiences and insights that come from individuals in their contexts (Maseno 2020a). These are the some of the sources that East and Central African feminist theologians employ. All these sources and themes are important in the economy of theologizing. They grant the perspectives which are pertinent in mapping the reflections and understanding of the context, culture and experiences of many women across

the region. Such possibilities allow for dynamism and sufficient critique of each of these to allow for renewal and future research possibilities.

Through analyzing the various chapters, the contributors map themes, sources, methods, theories, major contributions, strengths, weaknesses and gaps gleaned from East and Central Africa. Their introduction will highlight how the goal, specific objectives and the research questions are addressed by the volume.

This volume is arranged into 4 sections:

- *Part One* comprises four chapters and is titled **Queen of Sheba – Patriarchy and Matriarchy**

Chapter One by Loreen Maseno lays bare the sources and themes for African women theologies engaged for the theological enterprise by women theologians in East and Central Africa. The chapter argues that in this enterprise, East and Central African Feminist Theologians demonstrate their concerns and priorities do not accept that African men's theology should suffice for the entire faith community in the region.

Chapter Two by Daniel Assefa and Tekletsadik Belachew underscores the unique place given to the Queen of Sheba, the biblical figure who went to visit King Solomon, and was praised by Jesus for her search of Wisdom. They focus on the significant sources which depict the ways this fascinating figure has been described and understood in Ethiopian texts, starting from traditional Ethiopian biblical commentaries.

Chapter Three by Pauline Njiru attests to Emily Onyango's contribution in breaking the walls of a Patriarchal Church. This was a woman who undertook her theological education at a time when the Anglican church of Kenya was not yet sure what to do with women called to serve God in the ordained ministry in a male dominated arena. Onyango appears to have broken the walls of patriarchal restrictions to the formal training of females into ministry and ordination.

Chapter Four by Dorcas Juma juxtaposes Anna Mghwira and Bathsheba who both played a key role in the politics and religious events of the nation of Tanzania and Israel respectively. Juma adopts an African women's her-

meneutical lens in re-thinking patriarchy in the life of Anna Elisha Mghwira means by documenting her contribution to societal transformation through religion and politics and further, by mapping the way forward for the circle in such a way that can pave way for the life of both men and women of God to flourish.

- *Part Two* is titled
African Women's Theology, Religion, Health, Healing and Culture
(This section expounds three chapters.)

Chapter Five by Hope Karangwa Munezero & Francoise Niyonsaba attends to a healing theology. They explore the journey of Rwandese women in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide in order to lay bare their theology as well as the impact(s) they had in the healing memories. The chapter demonstrates how the faith of Rwandese women and their healing memories and restoration reaped good harvest not only to their families but also to the whole community.

Chapter Six by Monica Osuka and Loreen Maseno considers select works of Anne Kubai with the aim of understanding the contexts that motivated her work. It also highlights specific features of her theology such as her interrogation of patriarchy and infertility, Genocide and reconstruction, forgiveness and other social factors and their purpose for Christendom in East Africa.

Chapter Seven by Dorcas Juma considers cultural hermeneutics as espoused by the Matriarch Musimbi Kanyoro who analyzes cultural resources, experiences, the practices of African women and the role of cultural hermeneutics in reading the Bible. She addresses the issue of the accountability of the church, women's organizations in the Church and African women theologians. Understood as a theology of women empowerment, Kanyoro's feminist cultural hermeneutics is arguably a global pilgrimage of Justice. Kanyoro posits that any biblical approach that seeks to take on a liberating approach and women empowerment should take seriously the experiences of women, their vantage point and how culture can inform and be informed by the Bible.

- *Part Three* of this book covers aspects of **Christology and Liberation**

Here we are exposed to **Chapter Eight** by Telesia Musili who analyzes Kinoti's search for African feminist ethics. This chapter espouses that Kinoti's ethics centers on communitarian notions of care and collective engagement driven by moral values. The care that is touched upon is noted to be both an ethical concept and as gendered labor to foreground an ethical framework of justice. This remains pertinent for as a strategy for lives of people who are construed as aging, needy and vulnerable, giving special attention to African Indigenous cultural and religious sources grounded in real-life experiences.

Chapter Nine by Loreen Maseno analyses Hinga's theological formation, contexts and sources. It accentuates Hinga's explorations of African religions, Feminist theologies and Religion and contemporary moral issues in conversation with patriarchy, gender, western feminist theology and African male theologians. In general, this chapter asserts that for the present and future, Hinga's input outlines that any relevant Christology for African women is one which presents Christ as a concrete and personal figure who engenders hope in the oppressed by siding with women.

Chapter Ten by Rev. Joyce Damian Ngandango examines Lyimo-Mbowe's theological concepts of the emancipation of women in the African and biblical context, focusing on the perceptions of female inferiority in select biblical texts and African traditional culture and how these affect social transformation. This chapter discusses how Lyimo-Mbowe's interpretations of biblical passages are relevant to the biblical hermeneutics that support the emancipation of women in the African context.

Chapter Eleven by Esther Mombo and Heleen Joziassse consider the basic Christological question, "Who do you say that I am?" to unravel how Anne Nasimiyu Wasike construes an African women's Christology. The authors overall horizon is to understand Nasimiyu's exploration of the interplay between context and theology, and how African women with a variety of life experiences express their Christologies. It also discusses how Nasimiyu wrestled with patriarchy, gender, western feminist theology within her Christology because an African woman needs a Christ who saves and affects the whole of her life.

- *Part Four*, which is the last section comprises chapters that attend to **Ecclesiology and Pastoral Theology in East and Central Africa**

Chapter Twelve by Witness Issa presents theological contributions of the Matriarch Faith Lugazia to a transformative Theological perspective, gender emancipation, and spiritual pedagogical theology. It analyses Faith's theology of the Holy Spirit and the influence of Pentecostalism in the gender discourse to highlight her critiques and perspective. The chapter further considers Lugazia's contribution to gender parity, the Church in Africa, and the response to the challenges of Prosperity theology to give the reader a deeper understanding of her legacy.

Chapter Thirteen by Christine Nakyeyune revisits Grace Nyonyozi Ndyabahika's post-conflict pastoral theology and liberation ethics. It examines her commitment to women emancipation based on her calling as a female minister to encourage many other women to live lives liberated from the ecclesiastical roles imposed on women in the Church of Uganda.

Chapter Fourteen by Nagaju Muke considers Mombo inclusive theology and a liberating church. Re-imagining Mombo's theology draws from her works to explore the strength and weakness of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda in building an inclusive community. Specific emphasis is placed on gender equality and inclusion of the ordination of single women. The chapter wrestles with the status quo, in which the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda has been promoting women's ordination since 1980s, it is important to note that single women are still denied ordination due to their marital status.

Cognisant that some matriarchs from the region have not been accorded full chapters, I highlight three of these, albeit in brief. These are Mary Getui, Nyambura Njoroge and Philomena Mwaura. As early as 1989, Prof. Mary Getui who is currently a full professor at the Catholic University of East Africa, was part of the planning group of African women that organized the inaugural continental gathering of African women theologians in Accra, Ghana. This is where the Circle was formed. Thereafter, she became very active in the local Chapter Circle, becoming its local coordinator in 1992. She played a major role in organizing two conferences for the Circle, in 1994 and 1996 where she served as the chair of the local organizing committee. The East and Central Africa Circle owes a lot to Getui's

sterling coordination. According to Getui, African Christianity needs to express the intellectual, social and religious milieu relevant to the continent. She therefore aptly attends to the themes of sexism (Getui 2012); marginalization (Getui 2020); violence against women (Getui 1996) among others. She therefore, delves into the socio-economic and cultural set ups in Kenyan society. She adopts a method of theological reconstruction where she notes its relevance and its timeliness in a society undergoing rapid change and there are many people needing help to cope with these changes (Getui 1999).

In consideration of the causes of violence in Africa, Getui notes that there are different types of violence that affect people through acts of structural, ideological and institutional decisions. The varieties of these types of violence include but are not limited to these as colonialism, imperialism, racism, sexism, slave trade, forced displacement and extraction of resources (Getui & Kanyandago 2003). Getui interrogates African Indigenous Religions in relation to lived realities of African women. She presupposes an adoption of 'the good' in African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) such as fair Trade. For her, trade as practiced in African tradition and set highlights the good that AIRs can offer to the world such as showing how human dignity supersedes value for money; where trust-building is embedded in welcoming the stranger in private homes regardless of ethnicity and nationality (Getui 2007).

Dr. Jane Nyambura Njoroge was the first clergy woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in 1982. She is a Kenyan ecumenical leader and Presbyterian minister. As early as 1978, she enrolled in Saint Paul's United Theological College, being the first African woman there to undertake a Bachelor of Divinity degree. She earned her doctorate in 1992 on African Christian Theology and Ethics from Princeton Theological Seminary, USA, again being the very first African woman to do so. She recently retired from being a long-serving director of the HIV and Aids Advocacy and Initiatives by the WCC. She is a founding member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and a member of the Kenyan chapter. She avers that for many years there was a missing voice of women in Africa, which appeared muted. However, following the book publication *hearing and knowing* by Mercy Oduyoye, many African

women were keen to tell of their faith stories as they have heard and known them, and not to rely on others to write about them (Njoroge 1997).

As a Circle member, Njoroge remains passionate on themes affecting African women such as HIV/AIDS, Social relationships, the participation and inclusion of women in the church leadership, patriarchy, community, ecclesiology, and has written widely for example “Groaning and Languishing in Labour Pains” in *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*; She is co-editor with Musa Dube of *Talitha Cum: Theologies of African Women*.

Philomena Njeri Mwaura is a Kenyan theologian and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Kenyatta University. Throughout her career, she has significantly contributed to the discourse on women’s place and role in African and Christian contexts. As a Matriarch and active member of the Circle, she writes with a strong focus on liberation theology, to shed light on the experiences of African women, their responses to patriarchal challenges, and their theological perspectives. Mwaura has played a vital role within the Circle since its inception in 1989. She served as the organization’s president from 2004 to 2008 and has been a co-editor of the African Journal of Gender and Religion.

Mwaura’s areas of reflection with regard to African women include the nuanced dynamics of gender and religion in Africa, African Christianity, New religious movements, Christian Religious Education, Church history, gender and theology, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Africa, gender and Power in Relations, African Initiated Churches, discrimination and violence, Religion and Media, women’s agency and challenging oppressive systems.

For these three matriarchs, their other significant contribution lies in their mentorship of young African women theologians, serving as a source of inspiration and guidance. They continue to empower women in the Circle and beyond to speak out against discrimination and violence through her work, enabling them to reclaim their agency and challenge oppressive systems.

All these chapters point the whole Circle to the areas that need further consolidation and new explorations such as how healing theologies from

post-war communities could be translated to pandemic ravaged communities in the face of Ebola, Covid-19 and other pandemics ravaging African communities in the present and the future. These essays have pointed to ways in which courage is necessary for any patriarchal walls to be broken and the need to have those who lead the path, shining a light. The essays have demonstrated that women are agents and capable as thinkers and persons who can change societies in every sphere. In all, East and Central African women theologians will continue to critique women's subordination within the power dynamics of culture, Religion and society.

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2 | **Revisiting and Re-membering the Queen of Sheba**

The daughter of Wisdom, thirsty for Wisdom

Daniel Assefa & Tekletsadik Belachew

Introduction

Ethiopian literature and art, especially the epic “Kebra Nagast” (KN, The Glory of the Kings) reserves a unique place for the Queen of Sheba, the biblical figure who went to visit King Solomon (1 Kings 10), and was praised by Jesus for her search of Wisdom (Matthew 12:42). The way this fascinating figure has been described and understood in Ethiopian texts, starting from traditional Ethiopian biblical commentaries, is worth studying. While the references to the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopian literature are difficult to exhaust due to their extraordinary abundance, this essay will focus on the Bible and the KN in terms of theology and hermeneutics. It will explore the gender constructions and roles associated with Queen of Sheba, and interrogate her story for possible feminist models it offers. While the paper will highlight that Queen of Sheba is constructed within patriarchal thought, the paper will particularly explore how the story of the Queen Sheba embodies theological leadership that transgresses gender-based dualisms and hierarchies to offer liberating paradigms for all members of the community. Accordingly, it has three parts: 1) Riddles of Wisdom: The Queen of Sheba in the Bible; 2) The daughter of Wisdom, thirsty for Wisdom: The Queen of Sheba in the Kebra Nagast; and 3) Theological Virtues: Insights from the Narrative of the Queen of Sheba for African Women Theologies.

1. Riddles of Wisdom: The Queen of Sheba in the Bible

Hearing about wisdom

In the book of Kings various people encountered King Solomon. That other people came to witness the wisdom of Solomon is mentioned in 1 King 5:9-14. Nevertheless, the Queen of Sheba is the only one mentioned alone, as an individual who went that far in search of Wisdom. Other people who met king Solomon did it for other interests.

All Isra'el heard of the decision the king had made and held the king in awe, for they saw that God's wisdom was in him, enabling him to render justice properly. (1 Ki 3:28 CJB)

Other leaders went to look for resources and economic benefits. Others looked for weapons or for expertise for military advantages. In the first Book of Kings, we see the Queen of the Sheba is interested in Wisdom. She decides that it is worthwhile to travel a long distance to meet a wise person, the famous King Solomon. This shows in the first place that the Queen of Sheba was attentive to what goes around the world concerning wisdom. One listens more carefully to what one most cherishes.

Testing the wisest

The Queen of Sheba did not go empty handed to meet King Solomon. Bringing tributes as a token of respect is expected from a visitor. The gifts may be accepted from any monarch.

She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices, and very much gold, and precious stones. (1 Kgs 10:1)

However, the queen had something in addition. She went with a collection of riddles, which are not expressed in the KN in detail. Instead of the riddles, the KN presents poetic verses on the mouth of the Queen, who wanted to verify whether what she heard about is true or not.

When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon (fame due to the name of the LORD), she came to test him with hard questions (NRS). (1 Kgs 10:1)

Discussing and admiring wisdom

The Queen of Sheba engages in a conversation. It is not about military or economic alliance. It is rather about wisdom. It is a time dedicated to learning, to inspiration. This shows how wisdom is treasured by this Queen. The Queen observes and admires. She appreciates harmony and beauty. She is capable of marveling. For wisdom is the source of happiness and blessedness. She remarked,

Happy are your wives! Happy are these your servants, who continually attend you and hear your wisdom! (1 Kgs 1:8)

Her thirst for wisdom turned to admiration, doxology and generosity. The Queen of Sheba concluded her admiring speech with the praise of the God of Solomon.

Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king to execute justice and righteousness. (1 Kgs 10:9)

The praise then leads to a most generous gesture of gift-giving.

Then she gave the king one hundred twenty talents of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones; never again did spices come in such quantity as that which the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon. (1 Kgs 10:10)

Gifts of any kind are gifts of the person's herself. Material gifts are only extension of a person – the real gift. This captivating story of the Queen of Sheba interpreted in the KN as an epic narrative.

2. The daughter of Wisdom, thirsty of Wisdom: The Queen of Sheba in the Kebra Nagast

The *Kebra Nagast* (KN) or '*The Glory of Kings*' is a medieval Ethiopian epic narrative that interprets the stories of the Queen of Sheba among other stories and biblical texts. It has lots of relevance for anyone, and in particular African theologians. Some scholars call the KN narrative a historical novel. Mercy Amba Oduyoye in depicting the journey of contemporary African women theologians whereby she played a

significant role in forming the Circle emphasize the role of narrative as follows:

In forming their liberative theology, many African women employ a 'narrative' theology, utilizing their life-experiences and sharing their reflections in the form of stories, thus extending the study of theology beyond the academic realm. They also express theology in poetry and lyric in an attempt to heal the dualistic breaches that have been imbibed from Western education. (Oduyoye 2000:220).

Paying attention to Wisdom around the world

The KN inserts a narrative that fills the gap in the Book of Kings. According to 1 Kgs 10, we only learn that the Queen heard of the fame of King Solomon. We do not know who told her or how she came to know of the reputation of the king of Jerusalem. According to the KN chapters 22 and 23, there is a loyal servant merchant by the name of Tamrin who used to tell the Queen Sheba regularly about the Wisdom of Solomon.

And each morning TÂMŔÎN related to the Queen [about] all the wisdom of SOLOMON, how he administered judgment and did what was just, and how he ordered his table, and how he made feasts, and how he taught wisdom, and how he directed his servants and all his affairs on a wise system, and how they went on their errands at his command, and how no man defrauded another, and how no man purloined the property of his neighbor, and how there was neither a thief nor a robber in his days. For in his wisdom he knew those who had done wrong, and he chastised them, and made them afraid, and they did not repeat their evil deeds, but they lived in a state of peace which had mingled therein the fear of the King. All these things did TÂMŔÎN relate unto the Queen, and each morning he recalled the things that he had seen with the King and described them unto her. (KN 22)

The KN tells us also the reaction of the Queen of Sheba to what she hears. The text explains why she decides to go and see King Solomon. It is not just a question of skepticism. She is rather delighted because she was fascinated by wisdom. She is full of admiration.

Captivated by Wisdom

The Queen of Sheba is so moved to the point of weeping. In other words, one sees that she trusted her servant merchant who was also a seeker and admirer of wisdom. TĀMRĪN is depicted as a rich merchant who supplied goods to King Solomon as well as observed the Wisdom of Solomon.

And the Queen was struck dumb with wonder at the things that she heard from the merchant her servant, and she thought in her heart that she would go to him; and she wept by reason of the greatness of her pleasure in those things that TĀMRĪN had told her. And she was exceedingly anxious to go to him... (KN).

Search for Wisdom at any cost

A difficulty is mentioned in the KN. The queen desires to go to Jerusalem to see King Solomon. However, it is far away. It is not easy to go that far. After a long time of hesitation, the desire to make the journey became so strong. She decides to take all risk for the sake of wisdom. In other words, the thirst for wisdom enabled her to confront all eventual difficulties.

When she pondered upon the long journey she thought that it was too far and too difficult to undertake. And time after time she asked TĀMRĪN questions about how, and time after time TĀMRĪN told her about him, and she became very wishful and most desirous to go that she might hear his wisdom, and see his face, and embrace him, and petition his royalty. And her heart inclined to go to him, for God had made her heart incline to go and had made her to desire it. (KN 23)

The KN then depicts a speech of the Queen of Sheba that justifies her plan of her journey to encounter King Solomon. The speech is a poetic praise of wisdom. The Queen affirms that wisdom surpasses all treasures here on earth. She confesses that wisdom is the best thing among all creatures. For the sake of comparison, she mentions honey, wine, light, precious stones, oil, meat, gold and silver. Besides, comparison, she also presents wisdom as the source of various values like joy, light, speed, shield, helmet, chain-work and belt, understanding, consolation, preservation of wealth and kingdoms. Also, the Queen compares wisdom to a mother, a protector, a place of refuge. The KN narrates the Queen's expression of wisdom in beautiful poetic forms as follows:

And the Queen said unto them,
Hearken, O ye who are my people, and give ye ear to my words.
For I desire wisdom and my heart seeketh to find understanding.
I am smitten with the love of wisdom,
and I am constrained by the cords of understanding;
for wisdom is far better than treasure of gold and silver,
and wisdom is the best of everything that hath been created on the earth.
Now unto what under the heavens shall wisdom be compared?
It is sweeter than honey, and it maketh one to rejoice more than wine,
and it illumineth more than the sun,
and it is to be loved more than precious stones.
And it fatteneth more than oil, and it satisfieth more than dainty meats,
and it giveth [a man] more renown than thousands of gold and silver.
It is a source of joy for the heart,
and a bright and shining light for the eyes,
and a giver of speed to the feet, and a shield for the breast,
and a helmet for the head, and chain-work for the neck,
and a belt for the loins.
It maketh the ears to hear and hearts to understand,
it is a teacher of those who are learned,
and it is a consoler of those who are discreet and prudent,
and it giveth fame to those who seek after it.
And as for a kingdom, it cannot stand without wisdom,
and riches cannot be preserved without wisdom;
the foot cannot keep the place wherein it hath set itself without wisdom.
And without wisdom that which the tongue speaketh is not acceptable.
Wisdom is the best of all treasures.
He who heapeth up gold and silver doeth so to no profit without wisdom,
but he who heapeth up wisdom—no man can filch it from his heart.
That which fools heap up the wise consume.
And because of the wickedness of those who do evil
the righteous are praised;
and because of the wicked acts of fools the wise are beloved.

Wisdom is an exalted thing and a rich thing;
I will love her like a mother,
and she shall embrace me like her child.
I will follow the footprints of wisdom
and she shall protect me for ever;
I will seek after wisdom, and she shall be with me for ever;
I will follow her footprints, and she shall not cast me away;

*I will lean upon her, and she shall be unto me a wall of adamant;
I will seek asylum with her,
and she shall be unto me power and strength;
I will rejoice in her, and she shall be unto me abundant grace.
For it is right for us to follow the footprints of wisdom,
and for the soles of our feet to stand upon the threshold
of the gates of wisdom. (KN 24)*

Here the Queen expresses remarkable theological statements through the poetic genre that accommodates metaphorical and symbolic language. This is indeed significant when one considers the unique place and potential of African proverbs and poetry for theological discourse.

The Queen then exhorts her subjects to search wisdom, to follow wisdom with eagerness.

*Let us seek her, and we shall find her;
let us love her, and she will not withdraw herself from us;
let us pursue her, and we shall overtake her;
let us ask, and we shall receive;
and let us turn our hearts to her so that we may never forget her.
If [we] remember her, she will have us in remembrance;
and in connection with fools thou shalt not remember wisdom,
for they do not hold her in honour, and she doth not love them. (KN 24)*

The KN then puts the rationale for the queen's decision to meet King Solomon. Loving wisdom includes, according to her, honoring the wise person. She loves a wise person because she loves wisdom. In other words, she believes that wisdom resides and is manifested in wise persons.

*The honouring of wisdom is the honouring of the wise man,
and the loving of wisdom is the loving of the wise man.
Love the wise man and withdraw not thyself from him,
and by the sight of him thou shalt become wise;
hearken to the utterance of his mouth,
so that thou mayest become like unto him;
watch the place whereon he hath set his foot, and leave him not,
so that thou mayest receive the remainder of his wisdom.
And I love him merely on hearing concerning him
and without seeing him,
and the whole story of him that hath been told me is to me as the desire of my
heart, and like water to the thirsty man. (KN 24)*

The narratives of KN describes the reaction of the subjects of the Queen. On the one hand, they underline that wisdom is already with her. They assert that she is not lacking in wisdom. On the other hand, they respect her desire to go in search of wisdom and of discovering the wisdom of King Solomon. They will hence follow her and facilitate her journey.

And her nobles, and her slaves, and her handmaidens, and her counsellors answered and said unto her,

"O our Lady, as for wisdom, it is not lacking in thee, and it is because of thy wisdom that thou lovest wisdom. And to for us, if thou goest we will go with thee, and if thou sittest down we will sit down with thee; our death shall be with thy death, and our life with thy life." Then the Queen made ready to set out on her journey with great pomp and majesty, and with great equipment and many preparations. For, by the Will of God, her heart desired to go to JERUSALEM so that she might hear the Wisdom of Solomon; for she had hearkened eagerly. So she made ready to set out. And seven hundred and ninety-seven camels were loaded, and mules and asses innumerable were loaded, and she set out on her journey and followed her road without pause, and her heart had confidence in God. (KN 24)

The dialogue between Queen Sheba and her subjects is worth noting. She is open to tell them what she thinks and what she feels. She expresses her emotions, her marvels. She shares her plan. The subjects listen to her and appreciate her adventurous plan despite its risks. Listening, consultation and decision are converging here.

Blessed is the wise!

With remarkable epistemic humility the Queen of Sheba expresses her admiration and her desire to be the servant of the wise King of the people of God.

And the Queen MÂKĔDÂ spake unto King Solomon, saying, "Blessed art thou, my lord, in that such wisdom and understanding have been given unto thee. For myself I only wish that I could be as one of the least of thine handmaidens, so that I could wash thy feet, and hearken to thy wisdom, and apprehend thy understanding, and serve thy majesty, and enjoy thy wisdom. O how greatly have pleased me thy answering, and the sweetness of thy voice, and the beauty of thy going, and the graciousness of thy words, and the readiness thereof. The sweetness of thy voice maketh the heart to rejoice, and maketh the bones fat, and giveth courage

to hearts, and goodwill and grace to the lips, and strength to the gait. I look upon thee and I see that thy wisdom is immeasurable and thine understanding inexhaustible, and that it is like unto a lamp in the darkness, and like unto a pomegranate in the garden, and like unto a pearl in the sea, and like unto the Morning Star among the stars, and like unto the light of the moon in the mist, and like unto a glorious dawn and sunrise in the heavens. And I give thanks unto Him that brought me hither and showed thee to me, and made me to tread upon the threshold of thy gate, and made me to hear thy voice". (KN 26)

***Reciprocal Recognition of Wisdom and Exchange of Gifts:
King Solomon recognizes the wisdom of the Queen of Sheba***

And King Solomon answered and said unto her, "Wisdom and understanding spring from thee thyself. As for me, [I only possess them] in the measure in which the God of ISRAEL hath given [them] to me because I asked and entreated them from Him. And thou, although thou dost not know the God of ISRAEL, hast this wisdom which thou hast made to grow in thine heart, and [it hath made thee come] to see me, the vassal and slave of my God, and the building of His sanctuary which I am establishing, and wherein I serve and move round about my Lady, the Tabernacle of the Law of the God of ISRAEL, the holy and heavenly ZION. Now, I am the slave of my God, and I am not a free man; I do not serve according to my own will but according to His Will. And this speech of mine springeth not from myself, but I give utterance only to what He maketh me to utter. Whatsoever He commandeth me that I do; wheresoever He wisheth me to go thither I go; whatsoever He teacheth me that I speak; that concerning which He giveth me wisdom I understand. For from being only dust He hath made me flesh, and from being only water He hath made me a solid man, and from being only an ejected drop, which shot forth upon the ground would have dried up on the surface of the earth, He hath fashioned me in His own likeness and hath made me in His own image". (KN 26)

The third part of this paper is to point out the major theological lessons in the biblical text and the narrative interpretation of the KN that possibly nurture contemporary African women theological reflections and practices.

3. Theological Virtues: Insights from the Narrative of the Queen of Sheba for African Women Theologies

There are a number of theological insights that can be drawn from the story of the Queen of Sheba from the Bible as well as the epic narrative of KN. There are at least three major insights we choose to highlight namely permanent quest for wisdom, conviviality and dialogue. Towards African virtuous and moral theologizing, proverbs, poetry and riddles play innovative and creative role (Bujo 2018:25).

Permanent quest for wisdom

The Queen of Sheba does not stop learning and searching for wisdom. Although she is wise, as mentioned by her subjects, she still wants to grow in wisdom. Here, one may mention Saint Gregory of Nyssa, who defines perfection as constant growth, as something dynamic (Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Moses). Gregory of Nyssa presents Moses and Saint Paul as models of perfection, because both of them continue to grow in their loves and knowledge of God.

Incompleteness is an epistemic stance that the Queen of Sheba exhibited in her search for wisdom. Her community and King Solomon himself acknowledged she is a wise woman. And yet, she seeks more. Her humility her self-understanding of imperfection was part of her journey. The queen was not self-sufficient but someone who is in permanent work in progress in her continued quest for wisdom. As the famous story of “The Complete Gentleman” written by Amos Tutuola and as explained by Francis B. Nyamnjoh, incompleteness and indebtedness are important virtues as permanent quest for wisdom. African theological wisdom particularly among the Circle is a search that is not a lonely journey but a deliberate activity of ubuntuism that seeks wisdom in the community of past, present and future. In the words of Nyamnjoh, “For Tutuola, incompleteness is not a condition to shy away from, or be guilty of, or feel that you need to work hard to complete it, but rather just something to recognize and embrace.” (Nyamnjoh 2022:594). This leads us to the next section namely conviviality over against isolated independence.

Conviviality

Conviviality may include several points but here we are limiting it to gifts and hospitality. The exchange of gifts and wisdom through riddles lends to the concept of convivial African women's theological scholarship. Incompleteness, interconnections, interdependence, reciprocity and mutuality suggests an important scholarly virtue summed up in conviviality (Nyamnjoh 2017:61). One needs to learn to be both guest and host, as well as embrace the "stranger" as his/her own. Across the continent of Africa, particularly in the rural areas, welcoming guests, offering meals and other gestures of hospitality are common practices. Some African theologians proposed Guest Christology as a helpful, Incarnational, and culturally relevant theological category (Tiéno 1990). Can we extend such a superb culture of hospitality to African theologians to ponder about it? Conviviality implies hospitality and reciprocity of gifts.

Hospitality as a celebration and enactment of the cross is all about embracing the other. In Christian tradition, the theological idea of *perichoresis* (meaning "mutual indwelling," "making room," or "dancing around"), ascribes it to the holy Trinity and to God's embrace of the human other on the cross. The God who embraces us through the cross also calls us to participate in embracing one another. This is hospitality as an African cultural value and a character of virtuous theologian.

It is only love that dispels the sin of fear, exclusion, and alienation. Hospitality in the deepest sense is recognition of the image of God in the human other across differences of ethnicity and gender. The famous African maxim on communitarianism known as *Ubuntu* (in the South African language) says: "I am, because We Are!" The mystery of humanity involves recognizing God's image in the human other and affording her respect and dignity, as if we are seeing our creator and redeemer. Thus, the crux of hospitality is profound dialogue as an expression of understanding, respect, recognition, love, and embrace of the mysterious human other.

God is the ultimate and pure Giver and in Christ the Gift *par excellence*. God is the source of all good gifts and not in need of anything from creatures in return. Ethiopians mothers fondly quote an Amharic wisdom saying that can be roughly translated as "love is downward." This proverb

lays emphasis on the fact that the overflow of love usually descends from the mother to the child. Loving and pure gift is divine and maternal. Divine love-gift is more fundamentally unidirectional from God to humanity through Christ. This is true to wisdom, the ultimate source and the reciprocal exchange of gifts. No human person can monopolize wisdom and it is shared in the community of others imperfectly as incompleteness. “Incompleteness must be taken not as an apology, not as something you should be guilty of, but to say, that it is the way of the world, a universal; we are all incomplete, no incompleteness is exactly the same as for another person, but each incompleteness offers an opportunity for interesting encounters.” (Nyamnjoh 2022:597).

Dialogue

An African narrative theology employs folkloric orality and includes riddles. Such important ingredients of African culture and African women theologies ... gives context. Not only contemporary African women griots and matriarchs but also ancient African Christian spirituals are exemplars of the pursuit of wisdom. Earliest examples are including ancient African mothers who witnessed their Christian faith through martyrdom and in desert spirituality offer wisdom. Like riddles, in ancient Christianity and particularly in the Egyptian desert, many visited Spiritual Mothers (*Ammas* or *Mamas*) to seek psycho-spiritual consolation. They were great storytellers. People often go to their spiritual mother and ask “*Amma*: give me a word!” In such riddle-like exchanges the female desert dwellers were vulnerable and honest (Swan 2001:32). They were also known for their subtle humor, joyful spirit, self-denial, simplicity, profound humility and hospitality, and their love for God and neighbor.

Mercy Amba Oudyoye in describing African women-centered theology mentioned “It is intentionally dialogue-oriented and consciously invites and honors all voices.” She also adds “It seeks to replace hierarchy with humility.” (Oduyoye 2000:219). “The Circle begins doing theology with theological discourse and dialogue which then nurtures liberative and transformative thinking. Such reflection urges action. Action leads to further reflection, which then flows back into praxis.” (Oduyoye 2000:220). The Circle creates a space for women African theology do not exclude women and their perspective (Mombo 2003:91-103).

African Women Christian theologians are in dialogue with others including their spiritual ancestors. This requires remembering and revising the tradition such as the KN narrative of the Queen of Sheba. Kwame Bediako argued, “the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as a church with a memory” (Bediako 2004:33). The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) remembers Mark the evangelist as an African apostle, St. Athanasius (the author of *On the Incarnation* and *The Life of Anthony*) consecrated the first bishop of Ethiopia St. Frumentius (Belachew 2021:170-173). He stated, the Ethiopian Orthodox memory of the Bible as the great national epic KN narrates goes back to three thousand years, to the Old Testament story of the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Israel, the ark of covenant and the New Testament together (Bediako 2004:33).

CONCLUSION

The Queen of Sheba is a humble leader, thirsty of Wisdom. The Bible presents her as a wise queen who marvels at the discovery of mystery and knowledge, open-minded to learning, inquisitive, not relying on hearsay but ready to verify, and open to admiration. After appreciating what she sees, she congratulates the wise, including those who live with the wise king – the wisdom community. Her permanent quest for wisdom indicates that she was already wise, knew riddles and was capable of testing Solomon. Yet her wisdom consists also in her desire to be wiser.

From an intellectual curiosity that seeks wisdom at a sacrificial cost and admiration, the Queen of Sheba moves to generosity and doxology. One learns from this Queen important values for East and Central African women theologians, namely humility, a thirst for learning, capacity to admire, readiness to praise God and generosity or conviviality as a fruit of happiness.

The KN, which means the glory of kings, fills gaps so that the reader of the first Book of Kings understands better why and how the Queen of Sheba decided to go to Jerusalem to meet King Solomon. Accordingly, the main reason of her journey is a burning love of wisdom and the conviction that the wise persons are embodiment of wisdom. If wisdom is the best thing among all creatures, the most precious creature of God, theological

inquires should take seriously the theme of wisdom. This is true when one appreciates that wisdom is an attribute of God in the Sacred Scriptures. One may thus affirm that lady wisdom called the Queen of Sheba to eat from her banquet. And the queen's positive response becomes a model for East and Central African women theologians to imitate as it is praised by Christ in the Gospel. If she travelled so far in search of wisdom, what does it take for contemporary African theologians needs in order to discover the treasure of the Kingdom of God.

East and Central African women theologians can get valuable insights from the love of wisdom, conviviality, the dialogical search for wisdom exercised in the life of the Queen of Sheba through revisiting and remembering the queen of Sheba both from the biblical text and the narrative of the Kebra Nagast. To end with the prayer of Oduyoye:

“My experience is that whether the fire of faith smoulders in the ashes of wrong, we affirm that the grace of God will fan the dying embers into active flames.” (Oduyoye 2005:282).

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3 | **Breaking the Walls of a Patriarchal Church with Emily Onyango**

Pauline Njiru

Introduction

The Rt Rev Dr Emily Onyango is the assistant bishop in the Anglican church of Kenya, Bondo Diocese and a founding member of the circle of Concerned African women theologians. She is a scholar, researcher, and senior lecturer who teaches church history in the college of theology at Saint Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya. She leads The Africa Centre for Biblical Equity (TACBE) and is a Langham scholar, one of the top academic teams in the evangelical community. Bishop Emily Onyango has authored numerous publications.

This chapter outlines, Onyango's contribution in Breaking the walls of a Patriarchal Church as a woman who undertook her theological education at a time when the Anglican church of Kenya was not yet sure what to do with women called to serve God in the ordained ministry, rising in the ranks of the same church from a lay reader to a bishop in a male dominated arena.

It names the walls of a patriarchal church of training for the ministry and ordination to the three orders' and how Emily Onyango has broken all of these, opening doors for more women. The paper will also highlight Onyango's theology and the role it plays for present and future generation.

Understanding Patriarchy

The idea of patriarchy dates back to Weber (1947), who used it to describe societies through the status of their household head; however, this has since being advanced. In her book *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*, Deborah Madsen (2000) describes patriarchy as a cultural or ideological system that favors males and all things masculine as well as a political structure that gives men control and so advances their interests at the detriment of women.

I will define patriarchy as the act of having the male sex take control over women by virtue of believing that they are more superior. This happens in the different social settings, in our homes and churches and other structures, when women become the subordinates as the men dominate.

The term "patriarchy" is well-known and frequently used, yet its literal meaning has never been able to adequately convey its importance and effects. It is "a form of social organization in which the father or oldest male is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the male line". This definition does not talk about the unequal and lower status of women in society nor does it provide even the slightest hint of the long and woeful tale of women's oppression. The definition contains 'father', 'male' and 'male-line'; harmless words when put together makes us question the absence of 'mother', 'female' and 'female-line'. Why 'father', why not 'father-mother', why 'male', why not 'male-female'?

Patriarchy is a hierarchy in which men are in charge or are the rulers. but it can also be a term used to show how power relations function and how the impact of these power relations privileges one group over another.

Prof Tinyiko Maluleke puts it well; "Patriarchy is evil. However, to call patriarchy evil is neither enough nor helpful. The notion of evil is mainly a moral category rather than a concrete and scientific one. Patriarchy is not merely evil; it is ultimately repressive and oppressive. It is not merely something to be frowned upon, but something to be combated and overcome. Patriarchy is a supremacist ideology, i.e. it speaks to the supremacy of the male. It is not merely an attitude; it is a comprehensive, systematic ideology".¹

According to Nyambura Njoroge, "The hallmarks of patriarchy are domination, control, marginalization and gross conduct of injustices and it is exercised and promoted by both women and men".²

¹ <https://iam.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Evil-Of-Patriarchy-Report.pdf>. [accessed 26/04/2023]

² Njoroge, J.N. 2023.

Defining a patriarchal church

A patriarchal church is one in which women are excluded from leadership roles where, power and decision-making is exercised while men are the sole beneficiaries of these positions. This church also denies women access to helpful resources and only gives them limited opportunities to participate in different forums considered of lesser importance and value. This is often accompanied by a belief system that elevates men and subordinates' women. Whereas women are welcomed to worship, sing in the choir, clean the church and put flowers, they are not considered as effective in leadership positions. Mirroring the patriarchal society, the church has also adopted the patriarchal culture where it entrenches gender inequalities using the bible to back up cultural ideologies. Often biblical passages are quoted to keep the women in the pews, for example: "women should remain silent in the churches they are not allowed to speak but must be in submission as the law says...." (1 Corinthians 14:34-35 NIV). "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness, I don't allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, rather she is to remain quiet...." (1 Timothy 2:8-14). Reading the bible through the patriarchal lens, often leads to the marginalization and oppression of women within the church.

Like in the scripture, where we see women's major contribution to the salvation history, from the midwives in Egypt defying Pharaoh's orders to let the Hebrew sons to live (Exodus 1:15ff) to the women in the Gospels stories who surrounded Jesus with love and support in His earthly ministry, yet their story remained largely untold. A similar pattern of women in the African church exists where they have made immense contribution and their story remain largely untold. Like the PCEA Martriachs who formed the 'Kiama kia Ngo' – *The council of the shield*³ in the face Female genital mutilation to shield the girl child from undergoing the cut, and which later became the woman's guild, yet women contributions continued to be relegated to the margins.

Nyambura Njoroge has noted that the church in Africa has ignored the cries of women. the Women in Africa are in chains of injustice, and the

³ Njoroge, J.N. 2000.

church must face that challenge. In her writings she depicts Jesus as one who understood women and affirmed them. This Line of thought should encourage more women to pursue justice as they find ways and means to break the walls of patriarchy and reach Jesus through service and leadership.

In the space of Jesus the son of Mary and our brother, women cannot accept Marginalization and oppression. Women can and must step out and step up to possess what is rightfully theirs in the church.

It is worth noting that the church exists in cultural settings and therefore, there is usually an overapp between cultural beliefs and practices and Christian beliefs and practices. A good example is marriage among the agikuyu people of Kenya, where a woman left her parent's home and went to live in the husband's home which would normally be his parent's home. This practice continued to be taught as the norm in the Christian church even when the command usually quoted for marriage in Genesis 2:24 it is the man who leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife. Since in the Agikuyu culture dowry is paid for the bride, it means the parents have been compensated and they give away their daughter to go with the man. In the 1662 book of common prayer, the marriage liturgy invites the relatives of the girl to give away their daughter to the bridegroom; "Who give this woman to be married to this man?"⁴ It is such teachings and practices that continue to entrench patriarchy in the church either consciously or unconsciously. Culturally, due to the home setup and lack of modern hygiene facilities the woman in Agikuyu culture was seen as unclean and had to be secluded during her menstrual cycle, in the 20th century even with the advanced sanitation and tools eg the sanitary towels, the church in many places still taught that the woman was unclean if on her menstrual cycle and this was used to bar women from ordination especially in the Anglican church of Kenya. The roles assigned to the woman in a cultural setting of cooking and nurturing the children consequently become the Christian prescribed roles, slowly denying the women the opportunities of ministry and regating them to the pews.

⁴ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/The%20Book%20of%20Common%20Prayer%201662.pdf>, p. 177. [accessed 26/04/2023]

The patriarchal church uses culture and religion to subjugate women to a lesser level and it co-opts women to be the advocates and flag bearers of patriarchy. Those who propagate patriarchy must realize that it is an ideology that works against all in society and should be dismantled and replaced with Gender transformative ideologies.

Walls in a patriarchal church

This section addresses the following walls of a patriarchal church, citing mainly the Anglican church of Kenya: training for ministry/ studying theology, ordination to diaconate and priesthood and ordination to bishopric. In a patriarchal church women are relegated to the pews while the men secure the pulpit and other senior leadership positions. In recent years with the influx of ordination of women in the protestant, reformed and evangelical churches we have seen more women achieve leadership. In the Anglican church of Kenya, the wall of ordination for women was broken, many women in their hundreds have had access to theological education and to ordination, quite a number of these women have risen to church leadership roles of becoming rural deans archdeacons, canons and now bishops. This wall of ordination was being broken simultaneously in the mainline protestant and reformed churches especially in the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches in Kenya.

The wall of training for ministry/ studying theology

The mainstream church in Kenya followed the footsteps of the missionary church, where only men studied theology and trained for the ordained ministry. In most cases, where they were accompanied by their spouses in the training colleges, the women were only trained in home making, tailoring and knitting, cooking, and raising children. The ordained ministry was a reserve of the men for a long time.

Emily Onyango was among the first Kenyan women to break the wall of theological training, after joining St Paul's united theological college in the year 1980 to pursue a bachelor in divinity degree. Soaring higher, Onyango graduated with a PHD (history) in 2006 from the University of Wales UK.

Training for ordination might have looked an easier task, but bigger issues lay ahead. Due to the barriers mentioned above the church was not sure of what to do with women theologians. Women students excelled academically but their male counterparts bragged at them that they will never get the collar, meaning they will never get ordained. In many dioceses it was not clear what roles the women would be given in the church after undertaking theological education. In the diocese of Mt Kenya east, where the writer hails from) which later split to become Kirinyaga and Embu dioceses, trained women theologians were licensed as lay readers while their male counterparts were made deacons and later made deaconess while their male counterparts were priested. As lay readers and deaconesses the women were assigned to parishes to support the male clergy, some were privileged to be given roles of preaching, teaching Sunday school, teaching catechism and visiting the sick. The place of women in the church, having been deemed inferior, also consequently, made the ministries they were assigned look inferior and attract less attention from church leadership. Teaching Sunday school, for example which should be a priority ministry as it is foundational, continues to attract marginal attention in church leadership. Other theologically trained women were only there to be used to make food and beverages for the clergy and the parish meetings and also to serve as office messengers. The way out for many women who had studied theology at that time, like Emily was to do further studies and become school chaplains, or teach theology. With the rise of women in top leadership roles, it is my hope that these neglected ministries will also be given worthy attention and both gender encouraged and supported to take them up.

Upon her graduation with a doctoral degree, Onyango joined Dr Esther Mombo in 1999 to teach at St Paul's united theological college. Navigating the male dominated faculty, the dream of breaking the walls of patriarchy was becoming a reality. Soon after joining the faculty Emily was made the student dean while her sister Dr Mombo served the same faculty as the Academic dean. During their tenure many women students enrolled to study theology and many others went abroad for their master's degree, in the early 2000s women with theology degrees and master's degrees were becoming a formidable force and could no longer be ignored

by the male leadership in the church. Both Onyango and Mombo understood that by supporting many women to study theology, they were creating a real force of theologically trained women and this will greatly contribute in breaking walls of patriarchy.

In the Anglican church of Kenya Rev Lucia Okuthe was the first woman to be ordained in 1981. Soon after the Presbyterian church of Eastern Africa ordained their first, the Rev Nyambura Njoroge in 1982. The many questions the men were asking and using as barriers to women ordination were things like falling in love, dating and marrying, menstrual period, how will the woman handle conditions? By the time Emily was getting ordained, the menstrual period for women was still considered as unclean, and many women stayed away from receiving Holy Communion. Therefore, to imagine a woman in their menstrual period officiating communion was a no-go-zone. The men also battled with child birth and child rearing as these were considered totally a women's job. I remember in November 1991 when I went to the bishops examining chaplains interview in the Anglican diocese of Kirinyaga, to be recommended to be made a deaconess, all the above issues formed the interview questions.

The walls of ordination

The Lambeth conference in 1968, resolution 34, stated that all theological arguments for and against female ordination were both inconclusive⁵. Different provinces took different trajectories. In 1974, three bishops of the American Episcopal Church ordained eleven women. And in 1975, Anglican Church of Canada followed suit in authorizing female ordination.⁶ In 1976, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America passed a resolution declaring that "no one

⁵ Robinson, B.A. (2012). 'Ordination of Female Priests and Consecration of Female Bishops: The Worldwide Anglican Communion, 1960 to 1997'. Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. [Retrieved 8 January 2018]

⁶ Ibid.

shall be denied access" to ordination into the three orders of ministry: as deacons, priests or bishops, on the basis of their sex.⁷

These provinces had gone ahead of the communion and ordained women, leaving it to other provinces to forge their way forward. Kenya lagged behind for some time especially because some men clergy felt really threatened. Since the bishops examining chaplains who vetted the people to be ordained comprised of largely men and some tokenism women who were also obliged to support the men because they were made to feel that they were the privileged few and had to guard that privilege. Some women were only made deacons and were never priested. I interviewed Rev Martha Mumbi the first woman to be made deacon in the Anglican diocese of Nairobi, she said that the men could not agree for her to be priested. They argued that since she had taught some of them at Church army Africa, they felt that if she was ordained to priesthood she might as well become a bishop, something they could not allow.

The biggest wall to women ordination was the understanding of headship, where the man is seen as the head of the family. In this regard, the question that puzzled those against the ordination of women was; how would a woman become the head of a parish? Emily had to battle and break this wall when upon completing of her bachelor's degree in divinity, she passed the test for ordination. In 1984 and 1985 she was ordained deacon and priest consecutively by the Rt Rev Henry Okullu, the diocesan bishop of the diocese of Maseno South. Although Bishop Okullu was considered to be quite progressive and advocated for the ordination of women, the diocese dragged its feet in ordaining other women. During this time, the other dioceses were still debating on the issues of women uncleanliness and headship and struggled before they could actually ordain women. Onyango's parish ministry as an ordained clergy began in 1984 when she posted as a curate at St Stephen's cathedral Kisumu where she served for two years. She was a tutor at St John's School of mission and theology Kokise in 1986 to 1995, where she also became the Principal in the last three years. She was appointed the vicar in charge of Nyakongo Parish in 1995-1996. Up until this time, these were male privileged positions and for a woman to serve and be accepted was no mean achievement.

⁷ Ibid.

Her contemporaries Esther Mombo (now Prof Esther Mombo) and Joyce Karuri (now Rev Dr Joyce Karuri) were both tutors at Kapsabet bible school Diocese of Eldoret and St Andrew's college of theology and development Kabare diocese of Mt Kenya East respectively. According to the three women, terms and conditions for the women and the men differed significantly, especially the paycheck. In the Anglican church of Kenya, these three women's role, in theological education was a major contribution to breaking the walls and letting more women in. A decade after Onyango's ordination, the ACK Diocese of Kirinyaga ordained the first three women to the office of deacon in December 1992 breaking the walls and opening the doors for ordination to all the women who trained for ministry and successfully went through the bishops examining chaplains for vetting.

Onyango was later to be a role model and an inspiration to many young women as she was admitted in the diocese of Kirinyaga in 1996 where she was posted to lecture at St Andrew's college of theology and development. Although Karuri had taught in the same college for many years, the young women aspiring for ordination looked up to Onyango as a role model because she was an ordained clergy. During this time the diocese of Kirinyaga had admitted many women to train for ordination having ordained its first women clergy in July 1992, and December 1993 to diaconate and priesthood respectively. Alongside lecturing, Onyango also served as the Director of studies and later the vice principal in St Andrew's college, positions which until then in the history of the college were a preserve of the men.

In 1999, Emily Joined Dr Esther Mombo in St Paul's Theological college to teach church History. Very soon she would become the dean of students, giving her the opportunity to sit in the College Board. The biggest challenge of these pioneer women was that they had to be their own role models, although Emily admits that her Sunday school teacher and her Christian religious education teacher in high school were her role models. They did not have theologically trained and ordained women to be their role models. In the Presbyterian church of Eastern Africa, Nyambura Njoroge after her ordination in 1982, became a shining star and a role model to many. Their performance bar was set too high, any little mistake or error was magnified. Onyango's quiet spirit is admirable,

some of us who face it head on, find her too quiet. In Her quietness, walls have been broken. Her nomination to be the assistant bishop was faced by controversy, some members of her diocese feeling that time was not ripe for women to become bishops. It was challenged by six who alleged that the election was in total disregard of the canon law. They argued that the diocese was unable to afford an assistant bishop, stating financial constraints. The bishop had indicated that she would continue to teach at St Paul's university and this made the nay Sayers to argue that "If they can appoint someone then second her back where she came from then they do not need her services."⁸ They asked the Archbishop Most Rev Jackson Ole Sapit to intervene.

In 2014 the GAFCON primates adopted a moratorium on the ordination of women to the episcopate in their provinces. The move came after women priests unsuccessfully stood for election in the Anglican Church of Kenya in 2012 and 2014. After the moratorium was introduced, the GAFCON primates created a Task Force on Women in the Episcopate chaired by the Rt. Rev. Samson Mwaluda of Kenya. Their 2017 report recommended a moratorium be placed on ordaining further women bishops, "as the issue poses a threat to the unity we prize", former GAFCON chairman Archbishop Peter Jensen of Sydney said.⁹

However, the 24th meeting of Kenyan General Synod held 25-26 September 2019 at All Saints Cathedral in Nairobi, affirmed its support for women bishops. The language of the constitution allows any priest in good standing in the province aged 35 and older to stand for election. The consensus of synod was that the language of the constitution should explicitly state that male or female clergy may stand for election – not relying upon grammar to imply that male pronouns in the language of the constitution include the female. The amendment will not take legal effect until it is endorsed by the 2021 meeting of synod.¹⁰

In March 2021, Emily broke the wall and was ordained the first woman bishop in the Anglican church of Kenya, and fourth in Africa after

⁸ <https://anglican.ink/2021/01/26/appointment-of-women-bishop-in-kenya-challenged>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Anglican Church of Southern Africa ordained Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya bishop of Swaziland in 2012, Bishop Margaret Vertue Bishop of False Bay in 2012 and in 2016,¹¹ South Sudan Primate Daniel Deng Bul consecrated the Rev. Elizabeth Awut Ngor as an assistant bishop of the Diocese of Rumbek.¹² In September 2021, the second woman got elected to become the diocesan bishop of Butere, Kenya, beating two male candidates. Now opening wide the gates for more women to become bishops in the Anglican church of Kenya.

In my years of ministry in the church I have noted that one of the weapons used against women progress by the supporters of patriarchy is to make women who have broken the walls of a patriarchal church to think of themselves as better for a lack of a better word, than those who may still be struggling with patriarchy. Women who have climbed the ladder must constantly remind themselves that, firstly, they are no better than their struggling sisters. Secondly, they need to work hard to bring more women to where they are so that they can amplify the women work and voices. Thirdly, they must refuse to be used by patriarchy to close doors for other women or sit in the court rooms to condemn other women who may be facing Gender wars and are struggling with walls that create barriers in their expression of ministry in church. Professor Esther Mombo and Dr Nyambura Njoroge for example, have demonstrated that numbers matter in women's liberation by enabling so many to study theology, by linking them to scholarships and mentoring them. Many women look up to Dr Onyango to open such doors into the church's top leadership spaces.

¹¹ <https://www.google.com/search?q=Women+Bishops+in+anglican+church+in+Africa&oq=Women+Bishops+in+anglican+church+in+Africa&aqs-chrome.69i57.11466j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> . [accessed 02.30 14/03/2023]

¹² <https://religionnews.com/2021/08/05/amid-hesitation-in-african-anglican-provinces-kenya-appoints-first-two-women-bishops/> . [accessed 02.32 14/03/2023]

Emily Onyango's Theology

Dr Oyango is a church historian and has written extensively on issues of women. She links Gender based violence (GBV) to patriarchy, understanding of masculinity and femininity, social and economic factors. Onyango argues that African cultural practices like forced marriages, female genital mutilation and widow inheritance also lead to violation of women.¹³ She challenges the church to do more advocacy on the area of GBV to be able to support survivors better. In her paper 'The Challenge of Gender-Based Violence in Kenya and the Response of the Church'¹⁴ she demonstrates that the church has a long way to go in addressing the issues that affect women, especially GBV, rape, wrong theology especially around marriage that condemn women to bear with violence and almost always with dire consequences. She commands double share of respect from her students and congregation members as a scholar and a senior church leader and her approach to issues of patriarchy will continue to influence and have impact on many.

With her appointment to assist the bishop of Anglican Bondo diocese in Kenya, Onyango works in training clergy, and encouraging child empowerment. Upon her appointment she committed to participate in a 'well-structured pastoral ministry focusing on marriage, family and gender issues, including empowerment of widows. I particularly expect us to offer hope for those shackled by gender-based violence'¹⁵. The notion of a well-structured pastoral ministry is problematic since the church has been seen through its teaching of *Vumilia* (persevere) theology¹⁶, submission of the woman to the man to condone Gender based violence and it remains a challenge on how Onyango will navigate this role while remaining loyal to the bishop.

¹³ <http://www.missiontheologyanglican.org/article/the-challenge-of-gender-based-violence-in-kenya-and-the-response-of-the-church/> . [accessed 26/04/2023]

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Masai, J. (21 January 2021). "UPDATE: Kenyan Female Bishop Election Challenged". The Living Church. [accessed 5 February 2021]

¹⁶ <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2930&context=jiws>. [accessed 26/04/2023]

Challenges that women face in a patriarchal church

I will name some of the challenges that women face in patriarchal church, and how they can break down the walls that keep them marginalized. Firstly, their voices and experiences are often muted, ignored or dismissed, which can make it difficult for them to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives and the life of the church. This can also lead to a lack of representation of women's perspectives and concerns within the church. Secondly, women are often excluded from leadership roles and positions of authority within the church. This can limit their ability to contribute to the life of the church and make decisions that affect the wider community. Thirdly, women may also face sexism and discrimination within the church, which can make it difficult for them to feel valued and respected as full members of the community.

To overcome these challenges, women especially those in the margins must be given the right to self-represent themselves, gone are days when the church was seen as the voice of the voiceless, with immense work with marginalized groups I advocate for self-representation especially acknowledging that every human being in which ever language has a voice, although these voices could be faint and subdued and that the role of those in leadership like Onyango is to amplify these voices by creating safe spaces for them to be heard and acted upon. Secondly women should be allowed to self-represent themselves, and this will happen by devolving leadership in the church so that the top leadership usually male in most denominations is not entitled to policy and decision making on behalf of those in the pews, instead churches must find ways of congregant participation in matters policy and decision making. And thirdly churches must be at the forefront in fighting sexism and discrimination based on gender, working towards creating and sustaining just communities for men and women. An ideology that must be promoted from Sunday school all the way to other church categories.

CONCLUSION

Onyango and her contemporaries have demonstrated that higher theological education is key in breaking the walls of patriarchy. Other ways of breaking the walls of a patriarchal church is by reading the Bible

and gaining new insights away from the traditional patriarchal interpretations. Women coming forward for electoral positions and refusing to be cowed. Mentorship is key, we must keep the numbers growing so as to eventually defeat patriarchy and create just communities for all human beings to be, grow and thrive.

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4 | **Re-thinking ‘Matriarchy’ in the Life of Anna Elisha Mghwira**

Women in Religion and Politics in the Context of
1 Kings 1:1-2:19

Dorcas Juma

Introduction

The concept re-thinking ‘Matriarchy’ is based on the ideology of a society in which everybody in the society enjoys perfect mutuality in leadership, economically, socially, in political decision making and at the cultural level (Heide Goettner-Abendroth & Karen P. Smith 2008:49). In many contemporary African societies, when one speaks about gender, culture, religion, politics, and power, there is always the concern of vanishingly few matriarchal societies around the world (Sarah Madaus 2019). Yet there continues to flourish a stubbornly persistent patriarchal structure that relegates women to the private sphere and empowers men to dominate over women in the name of religion, ‘our’ culture and ‘dirty’ politics. According to Isabel Apawo Phiri (2007:13), “in Patriarchal societies, culture is formulated by men while women are on the receiving end.” She says; “while culture is dynamic, aspects of culture that ensure male dominance over women are upheld by society at the expense of the personhood of women.” Even so, in the very African patriarchal societies, the contribution of women in development and societal transformation through religion and politics cannot be underestimated. Notably, an anthropological study conducted in Sumatra in Indonesia shows that scholars have used a western definition of power to define Matriarchy in ways that do not apply to non-Western societies. It seems that Matriarchy exists but not as a mirror image of patriarchy (Margaret L. Andersen & Howard F. Taylor 2016).

Thus, Matriarchy should be understood from the perspective of a society in which women are empowered to awaken to the potential and

gifting bestowed on them by God. This is in reference to the power and vulnerability of women that have the potential to transform society in ways that enables the lives of both men and women to flourish. When Anna Elisha Mghwira was asked on how she balances family and politics, Mghwira said that she has always been a leader (Baraka Bitariho 2015). For Mghwira, if one is a head of a department, director, and advisor, then you are a leader (Simbarashe Msasanuri 2015). It is from this perspective that through an African Women's hermeneutical lens it is possible to Rethinking 'Matriarchy' in the religious and socio-political life of Anna Elisha Mghwira. Putting Mghwira's religious and political life in conversation with the life of Bathsheba from the context of 1 Kings 1:1-2:19 creates the possibility for two things. First, the possibility for rethinking matriarchy in such a way that creates an environment for steering empowerment conversational talks around the question of why women should hold religious and political leadership positions. Secondly, the question of how women in religion and politics have transformed society through gender parity dialogues forums and movements like the Circle. Women have an inherent teaching and leadership ability (Jennifer L. Martin 2011:18). In the inherent motherly instinct, women have given birth to ideas and societal socio-religious organs that water life allowing life to flourish. Mercy Amba Oduyoye gave birth to the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians (CCAWT) which was officially inaugurated in 1989 at Trinity College in Legon Ghana (Isabel Apawo Phiri & Sarojini Nadar 2012:21).

Anna Elisha Mghwira, is one of the founding matriarchs of the CCAWT now the Circle (Helen A. Labeodan 2016). Notably, "the road to Ghana was nurtured by a committee mainly composed of women from Africa; who were members of the ecumenical association of third world theologians (EATWOT)" (Phiri & Nadar 2012:21). For the pioneer founding matriarchs, "religion and culture are the crucial point of departure for creating a liberating theology that responds to the needs of women in Africa" (Phiri & Nadar 2012:21). After giving birth to the first-born child – the circle, *Mama* Oduyoye, through the Circle, gave birth to a theology that responds to the needs of African women in ways that empower women – African Women Theology (Oduyoye 2001). Oduyoye, was keen to ensure an effective response to the diverse and dynamic

vantage points, the plurality of African traditional religions and location of African women. Thus, *Mama* Oduyoye was keen to limit the word women to those who count themselves African and also believe that women have a desire and responsibility to do their own thinking in ways that speak their own words about God (Oduyoye 2001:10-11).

In African Women Theologies, the experiences of women are taken very seriously (Teresia M. Hinga 2017:54). Thus, in a conversational approach to the life of Mghwira and the role of Bathsheba in the religious and politics of the nation of Israel it is possible to see that, in patriarchal societies it is not women who change. It is the societal expectation of women that change people's perspectives towards women who dare the traditional structures that relegate women to the private sphere. Sometimes the perspectives affect women positively, sometimes negatively. Thus, many women have continued to hesitate to venture into religious and political position because of the 'branding' of such women as 'the bad girls.' In patriarchal settings, a good woman is one who stays away from women who transcend traditional boundaries. In patriarchal settings, socially constructed norms have socialized women to believe that men are born leaders, while women are natural caretakers of men in the name of the home (Catherine E. McKinley 2023:11). Unfortunately, women will be the first ones to discourage fellow women from brazing the challenge of entering politics or playing a key role in shaping religious life and political life of patriarchal societies (Kevin Otieno 2016). For Mghwira, patriarchal societies have socialized people to believe that a woman cannot take politics seriously despite the fact that in Tanzania; many women have held high positions such as ministers and other areas of leadership including the private sector and women in business. Yet, with all these female leaders people will still ask why a woman (Msasanuri 2015). Can this be the reason why Bathsheba for example, has often been viewed as one of the Bible's bad girls? (2 Samuel 11, 12; 1 Kings 1,2). For Collin Huber (2018), the 'Bad Girls' of the Bible like Bathsheba deserve a fresh look.

Mghwira's Societal Transformation Through Religion and Politics

In order to understand the role of Mghwira in societal transformation through religion and politics, it is important to begin by celebrating her through who she is. Mghwira is a Tanzanian Lutheran and a founding matriarch and member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT). She worked in her national church offices and in 2015 ran for presidency representing the Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT) – Wazalendo party in which she was the national chair (Paul Kollman & Cynthia Toms Smedley 2018:206). Anna Elisha Mghwira was born on January 23, 1959 and died in July 22, 2021. She was married to the late Shedrack Maghwiya in 1982, and was blessed with three boys - Fadjhili, Peter and Elisha (Bitariho 2015). Besides being a lawyer and a theologian, she was a development worker for a long time. She was well experienced in the operation of local government, international organizations, religious institutions and issues involving women, children, refugees, administrative and human rights. In political spheres, she is popularly known as a politician, who had the capacity to balance between politics and family life. Anna Elisha Mghwira came from a very humble background with a unique experience that would have prevented her from her celebrated achievements today. She spent her early years as a child at home due to a health problem which delayed her ability to walk (Wasomi Ajira 2021). She joined Nyerere Primary school from 1968-1974. She then went to Ihanja Secondary school from 1975 to 1978 before joining the Lutheran Seminary for her advanced level from secondary education 1979 to 1981. She attained her bachelor's degree in Theology from Tumaini University before joining the University of Dar es Salaam, where she attained LLB in 1986. She went to the University of Essex in England, where she attained a master's degree in law (LLM) in 2000 (Ajira 2021).

Her father was a councilor through Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). TANU was the principal political party in the struggle for sovereignty in the East African state of Tanganyika (now Tanzania). The party was formed from the Tanganyika African Association by Julius Nyerere in July 1954 when he was teaching at St. Francis' College (which

is now known as Pugu High School). The policy of TANU was to build and maintain a socialist state whose aim was economic stability with self-sufficiency. Additionally, eradication of corruption and exploitation was important for TANU through production and exchange under the control of the peasants and workers (*Ujamaa*). *Ujamaa* is a Swahili word which means 'extended family', 'brotherhood' (Alistair Boddy-Evans 2019). Through TANU her father championed for a society in which all people look at each other as an extended family in a brotherly way (Ajira 2021). It is therefore possible to argue that Mghwira's passion to affect the society positively through religion and politics was shaped by a 'redemptive' and transformative masculinity that she experienced through her father (Andrea Doucet 2006:61). Just like Tabitha/Dorcas in Acts 9:36-43 who was creative with her hands, Mghwira was also creative with her hands. Mghwira is known for her good works and acts of charity in her later life that touched many lives. She also used her skills in braiding hair and crochet work to contribute to her school fees for her two years of secondary education. Some of her products were sold in the United States by one of her teachers, earning her US\$1,200. Shortly the hand work turned into serious profit after her clients learnt of her skills and decided to donate more (apart from purchasing her products) for her school fees up to "A" level (Ajira 2021).

Thus, Mghwira's societal transformation through religion and politics can be seen in different ways. She was brought up in the hands of a father who believed in a society in which all people live together as extended family with 'brotherly' love. Her theological education also seems to have firm roots in the main ideologies of African Women Theology which champions for an approach of theology that does not stop on theory, but moves to commitment, advocacy and transforming praxis (Oduyoye 2001:16). One sees this aspect in her passion to brace the challenge of contesting for presidency – a country's top-most seat that has always been believed to be the reserve of men. Arguably, she might have known that the top-most seat holds all organs of the government that shape policies and decisions that can change the country into a country that embraces gender parity. In fact, through her courage to vie for presidency, Tanzania is the first east African country to have a female president Mama Samia Suluhu (Abdi Latif Dahir 2022). Mghwira planted a seed of theology in

praxis that is now growing and bearing fruit in Mama Samia Suluhu. Mama Samia Suluhu, as her name suggests in Swahili – *Suluhu* means solution to problems, has changed the political landscape of Tanzania and the attitude of many east African male presidents towards the leadership of women. Kenya now has a woman in the position of chief justice. Martha Koome was sworn in as new Kenyan Chief Justice on May 21, 2021 (Edgar Odongo 2021).

Anna Elisha Mghwira showed leadership traits during her youthful days to such an extent that she held various leadership positions at school, church and in the community (Miriam Zacharia Matinda 2019:115). One African proverb goes: ‘when a forest is growing, it does not scream. People just marvel with awe when it’s already grown, “what a forest!” Religion and politics require women to be enterprising people. It requires women to be courageous enough and venture into traditionally and religiously male structures and leadership roles traditionally reserved and branded masculine. This is “because traditional gender roles and patriarchy go hand in hand” (Linda L. Lindsey 2015:403). This way, patriarchal societies that suppress women and make it difficult for women to transform society through religious and political position will only marvel at the achievements of women when there is created a society that dignifies both men and women. While religion and politics has shaped women’s lives and perspective of life, the life of Mghwira is a religious and political institution in itself in ways that challenge women not to watch from a distance as they continue to be portrayed as passive recipients of societal injustices. “If there is no enemy within, the enemy outside can do us no harm” (African Proverb - Fearless Motivation 2017). That means that the power to transform the negative patriarchal worldview towards women’s role in religion and politics can be de-constructed when women realize their potential from the inside out without allowing the fear of unknown from preventing one.

Re-thinking ‘Matriarchy’ in the Life of Anna Elisha Mghwira

The main aim of this paper is to re-think matriarchy in the life of Mghwira from an African women’s hermeneutical lens. An African women’s hermeneutical lens is an approach that empowers African

women with the skills for interpreting the Bible and culture from women's own location (Oduyoye 2001:11). The approach recognizes that the Bible has become part of the African context hence the need to use a biblical and cultural lens that is keen on women's experiences and point of view (Kudzai Biri 2020:87-89). An African women's hermeneutical lens finds its roots in African women's Theology. African women's Theology expresses aspects of global and African Christian theologies from the vantage point of women's experiences and location. African Women Theology reflects women's heritage of participation in Africa's colonial and missionary history (Oduyoye 2001:11). African Women Theology recognizes that there are unique insights that come from contexts other than one's own and that there is something to be appreciated from that which is different (Loreen Maseno 2021:3-6). African women Theology emphasizes on the use of dialogue in such ways, which strengthen the aim of women in affirmation and continued questioning of tradition. The aspect of dialogue is very important in view of contemporary challenges facing African women today such as Gender Based Violence (GBV), marginalization and the relegation of women to the periphery in all spheres of the society. African Women Theology is keen on women's struggle as long as it contributes to the creation of theologies that respond to the demands of spirituality and the challenges that deny Gods people the right to live with dignity as proposed in Genesis 1:27, regardless of time and space (Oduyoye 2001:11).

Therefore, re-think matriarchy in the life of Maghwira from an African woman's hermeneutical lens means re-defining matriarchy from the context of her role in societal transformation through religion and politics. Matriarchy is commonly understood in three different ways. First; a system of society or government ruled by a woman or women. Second; a form of social organization in which descendants and relationship are reckoned through the female line and third; the state of being an older, powerful woman in a family or group (Douglas Wilson 2018:10). Notably, this perspective of matriarchy has been criticized as a mirror form of patriarchies and a western Euro-centric perspective (Shehla Burney 2012:43-172). The main concern is that an understanding of a society from such a context socializes, some women to also exercise their power negatively to dominate, oppress and dehumanize fellow women. In

Kenyan streets and public space phrase there is a common phrase that says ‘women are enemies of themselves.’ Notably, “Women take the lead in calling out men as beasts. Yet in the confines of their homes, or [spheres of influence] they turn into the very oppressors they so hate” (Sarah Haluwa 2019). According to Haluwa (2019), “women with power will mistreat, underpay and kick the hell out of their house girls and juniors at work, just for the fun of it.” It has therefore been proposed, that Matriarchy should be understood from the perspective of an emphasis of maternal meanings. This is where maternal symbols are linked to social practices influencing the lives of both sexes and where women play a central role in these practices (Sara Ruddick 2009:306).

In Mghwiras religious and political contributions, one sees a matriarchal society in which women leaders are moved with compassion towards the suffering in the society. Maghwira understood well that empowerment is very important in having the capacity to influence policy, make demands, and call to account the state institutions that affect upon the lives of both men and women. That is why Jethro Pettit (2012:2-5) is keen to point out that “empowerment and participation are deeply complementary and can be considered both means and ends, processes and outcomes.” Thus, according to Oduyoye (2001:17), “Theology [proper] has had to deal with the community in its manifestation of empowerment as well as its organized limitations on individual and often on initiatives and innovations.” This is the Matriarchal society that Mghwira enables one to see in her societal transformation through religion and politics. A society in which women have religious and political representation allows for mutual dialogue on matters collective action. Thus, in Mghwiras religious and political societal influence, one sees a matriarchal society which considers and values women’s participation in public religious and political life hence the need to champion for the empowerment of women in ways that allows for women to access and mobilize equal distribution of resources for gender parity within formal and informal religious and political spaces. In Mghwira’s political and religious influence, one sees a Matriarchal society in which religious and political empowerment is no longer conceptualized as limited to men. At the same time, women are not forced to behave like men if they are to be considered for political and religious positions.

In Mghwira's religious and political contribution to societal transformation, one sees a Matriarchal society in which widows brace traditional challenges to destabilize the status quo. According to Kate Young (2006:200), "a widow is usually a woman who has fulfilled all, or many, of the expectations of society; she has married, borne children, nurtured and educated them, cared for her husband, and often many of his close kin as well." These are all qualities that Mghwira embodies. Unfortunately, in many patriarchal societies like East Africa, "a widow is in an anomalous social position; she is feared as a potential danger to social stability, because she is a single adult woman, whose sexuality is no longer contained within a marital relationship, to be controlled by her husband" (Young 2006:200-202). Arguably, in spite of the fact that Mghwira is a widow, in her religious and political life, it is possible to see a society that accepts the matrilineal and material services of women, listens to their voices, seeks their leadership and welcome their initiatives for a holistic society that celebrates the lives of all. In Mghwira's contribution, one envisions a matriarchal society in which women are challenged not to align themselves with patriarchal forces that question the true humanity of the 'other' (Biri 2020:102). Instead of finding ways to justify the oppression and marginalization of the already marginalized, all women are motivated to evaluate the contribution of fellow women in dialogue with the contribution of biblical women to the transformation of society (Nishimoto 2014:248).

The Bible plays a key role in the lives of many African Christian women. Mary L. Kategile (2020:41) has pointed out "Since the arrival of Christianity in Africa, the Bible has been received well by Africans. It has become the canon in most spheres of life." According to Kategile (2020:41), "for African women especially, the Bible was and still is the book of hope and courage to whatever situations women experience since the Bible provides them equal status with men and new avenues of religious service." For Kategile (2020:41-43), Gender equality has its basis in the Bible and it is God's intention for women and men to serve together in all aspects of church life including leadership." Thus, putting women's contribution in dialogue with the contribution of biblical women empowers African women to envision a matriarchal society that illuminates the value of the completely human person. Speaking about

Deborah in Judges 4-5 for example, Kategile (2020:42) has pointed out “Deborah played multi roles in her time. She was a wife, keeper of the tabernacle lamps, counselor to her people, judge and deliverer during the time of war - multi roles like the roles of many women today.” Bathsheba the daughter of Eliam and widow to Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11) is known by many Bible readers as a “bathing beauty, and not as a power-player in the religious and political life of Israel as a nation” (Jessica Feinstein 2008). However, Feinstein (2008) has argued: “as queen mother, Bathsheba occupies one of the most important positions in Israel. Her transformation from a silent object of lust to a politically astute – and vocal – queen, is striking. She displays the wisdom gained from a lifetime as a politician’s consort.” Thus, Mghwira’s just like Bathsheba was widowed in a patriarchal setting in which widows are seen as a curs and bad omen in the society. Bathsheba remarried unlike Mghwira. Through Bathsheba’s marriage to King David, she got the opportunity to influence religious and political life of Israel. Mghwira remained a widow. Yet in her status of widowhood in a patriarchal society, she contributed a lot religiously and politically.

Women in religion and politics in the context of 1 Kings 1:1-2:19

We now put Mghwira’s religious and political contribution to societal transformation in dialogue with Bathsheba’s’ role in religious and political life of Israel in the context of 1 Kings 1-2:19. This will be done in order to celebrate the role of the circle in women empowerment for societal transformation. Arguably, the role of women in religion and politics in the context of 1 Kings 1:1-2:19 allows for one to do a remembrance of Mghwira the *sahn-koh-fah* way in mapping the way forward for the circle the Mghwira-Bathsheba way. Religion and politics remain the main sources of women’s oppression, exploitation and subordination in addition to culture. Politics discriminates against women using the law and constant amendment of the law while religion does it in her structure, belief system and in practice. The Old Testament boldly exposes instances of sexual abuse against Dinah, and Dinah, the Concubine woman, Bathsheba and Tamar among many other women

(Genesis 34; Judges 19; 2 Samuel 11 & 13). Yet the Old Testament also shows how political, cultural, social and religious positions of men have aided men in power to cover up instances of sexual abuse, women exploitation, oppression and the silencing of women's voices (Craig 2005:269). In the name of God's judgment over the sinfulness of some political and religious leaders in Israel for example, a Son of a King can rape her father's concubines on the roof of the palace in daylight for all Israel to see. (2 Samuel 12:1; 2 Samuel 16-18). Unfortunately, many commentators lighten the actions of Absalom by indicating that he sleeps/ lay with his father's concubines (C. Dennis Williams 2015:31-33 & Ira Sharkansky 2014:109). For Mark Rutland (2021:119), "Absalom methodically raped his father's concubines." What Absalom did was the use of patriarchal power as a tool of oppression against women; but also, to humiliate his father. In the same way, some African worrying communities use their political power against each other by raping, abusing and silencing the voices of women (Chantal Kalisa 2009:117 & Nicola Weston 2011:6). However, when women take the center stage, religion and politics transforms into a tool of empowerment for women and a societal transformational agent for a holistic society that values the humanity of all.

The role of Bathsheba in the religious and political life of Israel in 1 Kings 1:1-2:19 is set within the background 1, that has a male contestant who has already put himself forward and said, "I will be king" (1 Kings 1:5). The aspirant for the top leadership in Israel is introduced as Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith. The role of Adonijah's mother in his political ambition is not very clear from the text. However, we are told that his father did not rebuked him for behaving the way he did and that he was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom (1 Kings 1:6). It is not surprising that King David did not rebuke his son for his behavior. In patriarchal settings it is 'normal' for men to scheme, conspire and support each other to get their favorite candidate who will protect their deals and interests into religious and political positions (Chukwuemeka E. Onyejinduaka 2013:9). Nathan the prophet already knew that Bathsheba, Solomon's mother had already made King David to swear an oath that Solomon Bathsheba's son shall inherit David's throne (1 Kings 1:11-14). With the prophet Nathan on her side, Bathsheba uses her

womanhood wisdom to bow down, prostrating herself before the king and to remind him of his oath. Bathsheba Knowing very well how political schemes work in patriarchal setting she is concerned that as soon as King David dies Bathsheba and her son Solomon will be treated as criminals. In many African countries, women play a key role in conflict resolution and peace building. When they take part in peace talks, the likelihood of that agreement lasting is increased. Women should use the same wisdom to build healthy and inclusive societies knowing very well that “we still live in a male-dominated world and in a male-dominated culture” (Elizabeth C. Wolfe 2019:23).

In Bathsheba’s approach to religion and politics, one sees a woman who knows that religion and politics requires one to be familiar with how patriarchal settings work in order to maneuver through. The words of the prophet Nathan in 1 Kings 1:11 “Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king, and our lord David knows nothing about it?” (NIV) shows that the Prophet Nathan was a confidant and advisor of Bathsheba. That is why in 1 Kings 1:12-13, the prophet Nathan advises the queen mother to go and use King David’s oath to her against the King. The fact that Nathan knew about the oath shows that Bathsheba kept the king’s confidant – Nathan even closer to her in order to protect her political interests. Thus, while Bathsheba was doing the bowing and the prostrating before King David where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him as in 1 Kings 1:14-16, it is the prophet Nathan who does the talking. In many African settings men use their wealth and social standing in the society, to seek support from influential people in society in order to acquire top political position that can allow them to influence decisions in favor of male and the dominance of men over women. Thus, according to Robert Bahlheda (2015:19), “the key to changing our civilization lies in understanding patriarchy and its overwhelming control over who we are, how we act, and how we think as a human being”. Did Adonijah know about the oath of King David to Bathsheba that would see the enthronement of Solomon as King? (1 Kings 1:11-14) We do not know. However, we know that in a way similar to the way politics function in African patriarchal settings, Adonijah schemed to be King after David by going down and sacrificing great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep. He invited all the king’s sons, the commanders of the army and

Abiathar the priest to eat and drinking with him and saying, 'Long lives King Adonijah! (1 Kings 1:24-27).

Politics does not have to be dirty so that people should play dirty to get political position. Men in patriarchal societies play dirty politics because they treat politics as status. Bathsheba enthroned Solomon as King without playing dirty politics but using a maternal instinct and a matriarchal inherent ability and influence to just remind the King about his oath (Feinstein 2008). Thus, a celebration in remembrance of Mghwira the *SAHN-koh-fah* way means mapping the way forward for the circle the Mghwira-Bathsheba way. That means just as in Mghwira's and Bathsheba's life, women should not seek attention through self-pity especially if they are in difficult circumstances that can prevent women from daring traditional barriers that bar women from religious and political leadership positions. Mghwira had a difficult early childhood experience that delayed her from walking. Just like Bathsheba, she was also widowed. Yet, their achievements and contributions to religious leadership positions and political spheres have the potential to transform the minds of many women. Through their lives, women learn to challenge their prevailing circumstances and experiences in such a way that women's achieving attracts attention to their role in societal transformation (George Mathew 1994:136). Many women with special needs in patriarchal settings for example face a lot of discrimination on top of the additional gender-based oppression (Ellen Desmet & Eva Brems 2017:126). In most cases, such discrimination impacts directly on the self-esteem of the victims causing many to seek self-pity. Mghwira and Bathsheba's life challenges women in patriarchal societies to realize that no condition is permanent. If every woman is given the opportunity, the sky is not even the limit since women commune with God directly through midwifery and procreation (L. Juliana M. Claassens 2012:35). I am not sure if Mghwira knew that one day one time, someone will be writing an article in celebration of her contribution to societal change through religion and politics. Yet, her contribution to religion and the political sphere transcend the borders of her country. Through the Circle, one can see how important it is for women to walk together in season and out of season.

CONCLUSION

As a member of the circle, it is such a humbling experience to get the opportunity to rethink Matriarchy through Mghwira's religious and political contribution to societal transformation in the context of 1 Kings 1:1-2:19. As a pan-African ecumenical organization the CCAWT supports scholarly research of African women theologians. Thus, this paper continues to emphasize the main aim of the Circle; to mentor the next generation of African women (theologians) throughout their academic careers. The world continues to be reminded that women's dignity is human dignity through a continuous countering of societal social constructions that dehumanize women. The world gets to read liberating literature by African women that counter dominant patriarchal narratives that have constantly socialized women to accept male dominance as a norm (Fidelis Nkomazana & Obed N. Kealotswe 2010:223 & Mpyana Fulgence Nyengele 2004). Thus, a celebration of Anna Elisha Mghwira as a founding Matriarch of the circle through her religious and political contribution to societal transformation already means remembrance in order to give the circle a prophetic vision that desires the dignity of all.

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SECTION TWO



African Women's Theology, Religion, Health, Healing and Culture

5 | ***“By the Rivers of Babylon, There We Sat and We cried When We Remembered Zion” (Psa 137)***

Post-Genocide Rwandese Women’s
Healing Theology

Hope Karangwa Munezero & Françoise Niyonsaba

Introduction

In 1994, Rwanda experienced a genocide in which approximately 1,000,000 lives were lost. In a period of 100 days, no life was left untouched (Banyanga, 2017:2). As Banyanga highlighted, it was a result of a long history of dominance by the minority Tutsis (about 14% of the population) over the majority Hutus (about 85%), greatly intensified under the colonial rule of the Belgians from which it gained independence in 1962. The country experienced a Hutu revolt in 1959 and a civil war in 1990, all which led to loss of thousands of lives and migrations. Among those greatly affected by genocide, women were the most vulnerable. They suffered rape, they were widowed, witnessed murder of their own children, or even forced to kill them (Banyanga, 2008:1).

This paper seeks describes the effects the 1994 genocide against Tutsi had on women but also how Rwandese women stood through. Methodologically, the paper gives insight on the 1994 genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda, the effect of the genocide on women, healing and reconciliation in the aftermath, the role of the church during and after genocide. It assesses Rwandese women’s healing theology in Post-genocide Rwanda, using stories of women who were particularly connected with the church. In other words, this paper uses a desk review approach to describe the situation and stories of Rwandese women interviewed in order to understand the views and perceptions on women’s theology of healing in Rwanda.

The 1994 Genocide against Tutsi: Effects on Women

Genocide is the deliberate and systematic destruction of a group of people because of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race. The term was derived from the Greek “*genos*” meaning ‘race, tribe, or nation’ and the Latin “*cide*” meaning ‘killing’ (Andreopoulos, 2022). Although the term itself is of recent origin, genocide has been practiced throughout history. According to Thucydides¹, the people of Mole were slaughtered after refusing to surrender to the Athenians during the Peloponnesian² war. Also, in ancient times, it was common for victors in war to massacre all the men of a conquered population. Twentieth-century events often cited as genocide include the 1915 Armenian massacre by the Turkish-led Ottoman Empire, the nearly complete execution of European Jews and Roma (Gypsies) by Nazi-Germany during World War II, and the killing of Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda in 1994 (Ibid).

Rwanda had been a German colony since 1895 to 1916 and a Belgian colony from 1916 until it received independence in 1962. The Rwandan community, prior to the coming of colonizers and white missionaries, had three social categories namely Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. These categories had absolutely no ethnic implication until the Belgians policy of divide and rule. Their ideology sought to categorize the three groups as ethnically and racially distinct, despite the fact that they all share one ethnicity, one language and a common heritage as *Banyarwanda* (Muke, 2016:1).

The system elevated Tutsis over other groups in many ways including education and leadership which led to the Hutu revolt in 1959 in which many Tutsi people were killed and many others fled to seek refuge in neighboring countries. In 1990, a group that called itself the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) entered the country from Uganda, signaling the beginning of a civil war. This was a group that is composed of mainly children of Tutsi refugees from earlier violence, who came by force into Rwanda at least in part because the government had not allowed Tutsi refugees to return. Among the Hutus, an ideology of “Hutu power”

¹ Thucydides is a great ancient Greek historian and author of the history of Peloponnesian war, which recounts the 5th century B.C.E. war between Sparta and Athens to the year 411 B.C.E.

² Peloponnesians are people from southern Peninsula of Greece.

developed and was propagated by elements of the government and media, intensifying fear and devaluation of Tutsis.

The genocide was planned, prepared, and then executed in 1994 from 7 April after the plane crash in which president Habyarimana Juvenal died, until 15 July, making it around 100 days in which members of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, as well as moderate Hutu and Twa, who opposed to the massacre were killed by armed Hutu militias. Approximately one million lives were lost, others widowed and orphaned. The cruelty of the genocide against Tutsi was shown in that people killed their friends, their family members, their classmate, and their church members. It was then stopped by the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA), defeating the government army (Prunier, 1995). Subsequently, the new government has been promoting unity and reconciliation among Rwandese.

Catherine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin in their paper entitled 'Aftermath: women in Post genocide Rwanda', they discuss the impacts of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi on women. There was 'destruction of trust' as family and friends fled and neighbors became enemies leaving fear and insecurities in environments where women found "solace and support" (Newbury & Baldwin, 2000:3). Sexual violence was probably the most intense in what women suffered. Some were raped, turned into sex slaves, impregnated by the perpetrators. As if this was not enough, these women suffered social stigma to a large extent. Bearing a child of a genocide perpetrator was something the society could hardly tolerate leave alone the child growing up to ask about his father. (Ibid., 4).

The authors also mentioned "expanded family responsibilities" as a result of genocide. Families fostered orphans from relatives, neighbors and friends adding to the pressure that women in childbearing age would need to produce children to replace those who had died. More to this, 1996 demographic survey showed that approximately 54% of the population was women and 34% of the households were women-headed in comparison to 25% shown in 1994 (Ibid., 6). It goes without saying that 34% is just the number of those who were courageous to display their status and also 1996 means that the number lacks the refugees who returned to the country in the following years. Briefly put, the effects of

genocide on women left a big mark that they had to suffer deeply even afterwards as they reestablished their lives and those of their families.

Healing

Healing can be defined as restoring to health and causing an undesirable condition to be overcome. In addition, healing refers to restoration of a person who has been ill in body or mind or both to full health. Healing in African indigenous cultures is a corporate matter involving the totality of the person, family, and community (Olademo, 2012:53). Healing also refers to any kind of supernatural healing of the body from any kind of sickness or disease (Raichur, n.d.: Para 4). It is reviewed as any strategy, process or activity that improves the psychological health of individuals, following extensive violent conflict. However, healing is not only about assisting individual to address their psychological health needs in an isolated way, rather, it depends upon and linked to repairing and rebuilding communities and the social context. This implies restoring a normalized everyday life that can recreate and confirm people's sense of being and belonging (Muke, 2021:461).

More to the above, Schreiter argued that healing is a process which takes more than a generation to accomplish. Therefore, he suggested three stages through which the process often moves. First, acknowledging the loss, second making the connections, and the third taking new action. He also explains that acknowledging loss does not mean to abandon the past; rather, to create a new relationship to it (Schreiter, 2008:461-462). Thus, Staub added that healing strengthens the self, moderates the perception of the world as dangerous, and makes it more likely that positive changes in the other group are perceived (Staub, 2006). Consequently, healing in the context of post-1994 genocide in Rwanda, sought to address the wounds of the individuals as well as the community as a whole. This is a process through counselling of several kind provided by the government and many Non-Profit Organizations that created support groups. The church participated by teaching steps to meet, tell the truth, and confess the wrong done. This helped to heal wounds and trauma related to the guilty and restoring broken relationships between the perpetrators and survivors.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the act of causing two people or groups to become friendly again after conflicts, an argument or disagreement (Britannica, 2022). Reconciliation is often restricted to interpersonal relationships and becomes defined in terms of bringing together former adversaries on the basis of a minimum mutual acceptance. This implies the restoration or transformation of the minimal acceptable relationships between former adversaries, which builds on a minimum of mutual acceptance, in a viable and cooperative manner (Lederach, 1997:24). In this regard, a minimum acceptable relationship between former adversaries' is defined in terms of the existence of mutual trust, positive attitudes and behaviors, and the consideration of the parties' needs and interests.

This understanding is restricted to the process involving the transformation or change at the relationship level after a violent conflict has caused a rupture in people's relationships (Sentama, 2014). According to Fernando Enns, the process of reconciliation may include "different elements such as the confession of guilt, atonement, asking and granting of forgiveness up to a newly ordered relationship" (Schliesser, 2018:7).

The reconciliation process in Rwanda focuses on reconstructing the Rwandan identity, as well as balancing justice, truth, peace, and security in the country. Different measures have been taken by the Rwandan government towards achieving the goal of perpetrators and victims living side by side in peace. For example, the Constitution now states that all Rwandans share equal rights. In addition, laws have been passed to fight discrimination and divisive genocide ideology (NURC, 2012).

The church is very involved and committed to the reconciliation work that includes the teaching of the Bible (Bataringaya, 2016:97). In this process of unity and reconciliation, churches in Rwanda collaborated with the government in the national process of reconciliation, supplementing the government's top-down strategy with bottom-up approaches (Schliesser, 2018:7). Rebuild social relationships, helping both victims and perpetrators to live together peacefully without hatred, fear, or bitterness (Muke, 2021:464).

Post-Genocide Theology

After genocide, Christian churches were faced with a crisis of trust. Due to the perceived complicity of the churches, many Rwandese turned away, if not from Christianity itself, but from the established churches. This resulted in significant changes in Rwanda's religion-scape. Since the genocide, the Catholic Church has lost about one third of its members. In contrast, the Protestant denominations have had a steady increase in membership. From 19% in 1990, they have doubled to 38% in 2015 (NISR, 2015). Churches failed to provide a refuge for the victims but instead became "chambers of death" (Newbury & Baldwin, 2000:3). As a result, credibility was lost and there was a need to repent before God and Rwandan society. Different approaches were taken by church leaders to apologize for this great failure.

There is the Detmold confession where Christians of different Churches, from Rwanda and elsewhere, gathered at Detmold-Germany from 7th-12th December 1996 at the invitation of Dr. Fulgence Rubayiza, in collaboration with the ecumenical community of Hiddesen, to pray and reflect on their common commitment to build a Rwanda where people can in harmony. After discussions, there was confession of each party and forgiveness granted as well as agreement to work together (Ntezimana, 2002). Also, Presbyterian Church in Rwanda's (EPR) synod council that gathered from 10 to 15 December 1996 composed a message of confession and repentance to all Rwandans which was formulated as follows:

Dear Rwandans and Christians, the time has come to proceed with self-criticism because the Church of God is ashamed of having been incapable of opposing or denouncing the planning and execution of the genocide. As God servant Nehemiah did (Neh. 1:5-11), so, we the Synod, in the name of the members of the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda, repent and ask forgiveness before God and the nation for our weakness and lack of courage when these were needed. The Synod asks the people of Rwanda and the world-wide Christian family to oppose every rejection of God's will for his creatures, to denounce and strongly resist ethnicity, regionalism, and religious divisions. For God, there is no Jew, Greek, Hutu, Tutsi nor Twa. We are all one in Christ (Nsengimana, 2015).

Despite this, religion has been and continues to be part of Rwanda's system and churches assume a crucial role in all processes affecting Rwandan society. After the 1994 genocide against Tutsi there was a need for the theology of healing, reconciliation, and resilience; churches cooperated with the government to unite Rwandans and reintegrate the communities. This meant using the Bible to relate with the post genocide context, draw out parts of scriptures that relate especially in the annual commemoration period, take the first step as faith leaders to embrace changes and accompany others on the same journey.

Women's Theology

Since the first century, women have been active in the theology and mission of the Church. Luke-Acts reveals how Jesus and the apostles cared for women and enlisted them in kingdom service, and John contains the astonishing tale of how Jesus carried on a full theological conversation with a scandalous Samaritan woman which would have been unthinkable at the time for two reasons: because she was a woman and a Samaritan (Grisham, 2021). As the Church grew throughout the world, women flocked to Christianity because of the ways it gave them more dignity than the male-centric Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures. In fact, the office of deacon (Acts 6:1-7) was established to provide care for the large number of Christian widows, which led to more conversions (Grisham, 2021).

Unfortunately, many women consider theology to be a man's world (Brand, 2021). They are shy and do not regard this field as their own which in many ways is a result of the construction of our society. Thus, African women's theology committed to the emancipation of women covering the several themes such as ecclesiology, hospitality, community, spirituality, sacrifice, ecology and missiology. It examines African culture and demonstrates an understanding of women as a distinct group with inherent varieties within this category. Furthermore, African women's theology incorporates experiences of African women in their perspectives while analyzing women's subordination (Phiri, 2004).

The sociocultural context in Rwanda before 1994 included polygamy leaving the majority of women housewives with no say on the household

decisions. A woman was looked upon to carry out the family responsibilities (PROFAM, 2015). After the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, many families were headed by single parents; the number of orphans and groups headed by a minor increased. The government of Rwanda established the national policy for family promotion to empower women to increase the wellbeing of the Rwandan family (PROFAM, 2015). Consequently, the way of thinking of women after the 1994 genocide improved; there was a major shift in gender roles, women heading families, taking up roles of judges in Gacaca courts (NURC, 2005).

The efforts of the government in empowering women were reflected in all sectors of the government. Churches also shown such change. We cannot ignore the fact that to some, it is still history and sometimes considered a taboo; but currently the number of female pastors increase and in theological institutions there are young girls and mothers year after year who join to be part of the ministry. They are supported by their churches, lecturers, and stories of those who have been there before the genocide.

Post-Genocide Rwandese Women Journeys

As stated earlier, after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, many women were left responsible for families. After the death of their partners, many of the women raised their children and other orphans from extended families. Below are short stories of women, represented by abbreviations, who were widowed by genocide. Their families were, and still are, part of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (EPR) as one of the denominations that had been working in Rwanda for many years before genocide. The stories display a combination of efforts that made it possible for these women to stand after the tragedy.

Before genocide, MBGN was a schoolteacher married to a pastor in EPR with whom they had five children. The husband was killed in 1994 genocide. "After 1994 genocide I was in darkness, I did not see the light of hope." Said MBGN. Being left with the children to raise alone, her fear was that the children will become street kids as it was hard to support the family. She is very grateful because now her children have completed

university studies and are employed. She also added, “We have seen also the hand of God through the church.” As a spouse of the late pastor, the church gave her family a house to live in and helped her to rejoin work as a schoolteacher and accompanied her in trauma healing process.

Another great story of resilience is of NYRHM. She is a Christian member of EPR and a widow from the 1994 genocide. She had five children with her husband who was a church elder and a schoolteacher before 1994 genocide. In her words, NYRHM stated that “During genocide we were scattered, everyone escaped alone. After genocide, I thought I was alone and fortunately met my five children but the father was dead. We were in deep sorrow and fear of life and it was very hard to live next to the family that killed my husband. I fought really hard to forgive.” Before genocide, they were farmers which she continued for survivor after. She also got support from the church, neighbors, and the government to pay school fees for the children. “I do different activities in church because I feel that it is one way to praise God for leading us through this whole journey from 1994 up to now. I am courageous to do so until I die” said NYRHM.

NYRHM is also one of the women who fought for justice after genocide. She was a judge in Gacaca courts that sought the justice for genocide survivors and victims. She said that “joining Gacaca courts as a judge gave the way to forgive and teach others to confess and to forgive. I thank God for accompanying us in the hard journey we were able to go through.”

MKBE was a pastor in EPR. Her husband was a teacher and they had four children. The husband was killed during genocide. In her words, she said, “I fled with nothing, I did not know where my kids and husband were. But later we met while still fleeing. My husband was killed in my sight.” She continued; “After genocide, we tried to go back home but we find no house. We lived in the refugee camp, living a very bad life with fear and tears. It is hard to describe the situation” The family of MKBE got a house from the church and she continued the pastoral ministry. With tears, she said these words:

It was very hard to help other genocide survivors in the process of healing and reconciliation while my heart was still bleeding. I tried to heal myself first in order to help others. I told my heart 'You can do that; you are able to help others.' I then tried to help others as church minister. I had doubly hard; taking care of my family and the congregation with many traumatized people. I thank God who helped me to overcome everything. All my children studied well and now have their happy families. I deeply thank God for this (MKBE).

Post-Genocide Rwandese Women Healing Theology

In this part, we can look back on where we started. Questions like where the church was, thoughts about God amidst such a horrible experience, how Rwandese women survived such traumatizing events and rebuild families and churches. There is no denying that the experience was terrible beyond words. Women suffered all Newbury and Baldwin discussed and more.

They encountered loss of loved ones, fear and tears. The church was guilty not only of not offering refuge but of being accomplices in the act.

Despite this horrible encounter Rwandese women kept working. They realized the task is big and had to find ways to provide for families they were left with. They stayed in churches that many others were deserting and decided to be part of the rebuilding. Those in ministry had to go the extra mile to heal their wounds and be able to accompany others. Part of the journey was grieving, learning to forgive, raising children of their late spouses of from rape, leaning to live in communities with perpetrators and receiving them in their homes of congregations. Among the things and people that are told to have been great source of help in the process there is family, friends, neighbors, the government, the church, and most importantly God. It is common for human beings to blame God for bad things and in return abandon faith. Rwandese women instead attribute the gift of life after genocide to God, and prayer, Bible study, to have been strong tools throughout.

CONCLUSION

1994 genocide against Tutsi, left many wounds, orphans and widows. The process of healing, unity and reconciliation was and is still hard on all sides; be it on the side of churches in Rwanda, the government, and the community in general. Women, being the most vulnerable, suffered a great deal. But we see more than this; they did not give up. Not on their families, not on the church, not on the community and not on God. They worked hard to support themselves and heal their wounds as well as the Rwandan community. This spirit becomes a steppingstone for other women walking the road and younger generations to confidently rise.

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6 | **Anne Kubai Weaving the Tapestry of Religion and Post-Conflict Social Construction for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians**

Monika Osuka & Loreen Maseno

Introduction

Anne Kubai considered one of the Matriarchs of the Circle of concerned African Women Theologians in Africa. She is a Kenyan by origin and has contributed to the scholarly journey of the circle over the years. This chapter sets out to examine her select works with the aim of understanding the contexts that motivated her work. It shall also highlight the sources she used to generate her theological ideas. Further, the essay shall discuss how she weaves specific features of her theology and their purpose for Christendom in East Africa. Weaving any tapestry in life involves a journey, and not all journeys are similar. Some tapestries present challenges and pain, while others indicate victory and flourishing. Some tapestries by Kubai are in the midst of genocide, while others are in social action in vulnerable communities. By placing a sharp focus on her context, this chapter in essence highlights her engagements in different spheres and the kinds of interpretations of liberation she generates. It shall point out the sources that she uses, the theology she generates and the kind of ecclesiology/s she proposes for African women theologians of the present and the future. Further, it also points to the impact of her theological, community action and communicative ideas that she generates. In all this chapter also firms how her faith has been able to impact the academic spaces. In conclusion, Kubai's theology shall be exposed by reason of how she addresses multiple themes such as patriarchy and infertility, Genocide and reconstruction, Community engagement, forgiveness and other social factors.

Kenya and the Religious Demographics

Kenya is a country in East Africa. It received its independence in 1963, having once been a British protectorate. Kenya is known for its beautiful coastline on the Indian Ocean. It also boasts of tropical climate and encompasses savannah, lakelands, the dramatic Great Rift Valley and mountain highlands. The wildlife in Kenya is well appreciated all over, having lions, elephants and rhinos. Currently, Kenya is East Africa's largest and most important business, financial, and transportation hub. Kenya has several minerals and has begun oil exploration in the Turkana areas. The capital city of Kenya is Nairobi. Kenya also has the largest, most diversified economy and boasts the second largest population in East Africa. Most of the population comprises young people with averagely high levels of education. The currency of Kenya is the Kenya Shilling. Kenya hosts the largest refugee camp in the world and has been home to many refugees from war torn areas of East and central Africa.

Kenya religiosity cannot be referenced in the absence of the key religions practiced, namely Islam and Christianity which remain the two major religions in the region. According to the US department of state, Religious demographics indicates in midyear 2021, that out of 52 Million Kenyans, approximately 85.5 percent of the total population is Christian and 11 percent Muslim. Meanwhile, other religious groups include the Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is, and those adhering to various traditional religious beliefs. Within the Christian fraternity, it is estimated that Non-evangelical Protestants account for 33 percent of the population, Roman Catholics 21 percent, and other Christian denominations, including evangelical Protestants, African Instituted Churches and Orthodox churches, 32 percent (US Department of State website).

Anne Kubai

Anne Kubai was born in Kenya. She is associate professor of World Christianity and Interreligious Studies. Currently, she is a researcher at the School of Historical and Contemporary Studies at Södertörn University, Sweden. She is affiliated Research Fellow at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Kubai is Professor Extraordinarius, Institute of Gender Studies, University of South Africa.

Her career has seen move across several universities and organizations in Kenya and Rwanda. She has ably stated on her profile that she worked as Research Director for Life & Peace Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, and has also worked as Senior Social Scientist at the Division of Global Health (IHCAR), at Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. Until recently she was a researcher at the Centre for Multidisciplinary Research on Racism (CEMFOR) at the Department of Theology, Uppsala University (see Kubai Profile 2023).

Her research interests are varied and have morphed over the years. These include interests in African women, genocide, mass atrocities, religion, Pastoralist communities in East Africa, peacebuilding, conflict, migrants in Scandinavia, sexual and gender-based violence, transitional justice, international migration and human trafficking, human security and psychosocial studies. She also has a keen interest in the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. She has over the years published numerous peer reviewed journal articles, contributions to anthologies, co-edited anthologies, research reports, popular science articles.

Themes from Kubai's writings and their significance for African women's theology in East and Central Africa

Kubai employs of a combination of several pedagogical and research designs in her theological enterprise. These include but are not limited to ethnography, qualitative design, participatory action research, event based, direct approach and inquiry method. These are seen in her several pieces of writing. She touches upon several themes, which are significant for theology in East and Central Africa. In the sections that follow, a treatment of these themes is made in conversation with other women theologians and male theologians from the region.

Bareness and infertility

In one of her articles, Christian Couples coping with childlessness: Narratives from Machame, Kilimanjaro, Kubai addresses the issues of patriarchy, violence in a family set up, (Kubai 2011). This is a theme which

has been well addressed by Oduyoye and Nasimiyu. According to Nasimiyu, the status of a woman in African culture depends on the number of children she bears and her entire life is centred on children. A childless marriage is calamitous for the couple and the clan. It follows that a marriage cannot be sealed without children. This leaves the women involved vulnerable (Nasimiyu 1999).

John Mbiti takes this a notch further and asserts that in African practices and popular beliefs, procreation remains at the center of marriage, a childless marriage can become a most painful and embarrassing situation...traditional attitudes and philosophy of marriage make it extremely hard for a childless man to be successful and happy (Mbiti 1987:43). He further notes that through marriage and procreation a person becomes immortalized. But Oduyoye takes a turn and in identifying herself as childless, states that she an African woman reading Mbiti's assessment, and that she is a lay Christian, born into a doubly matrilineal and monogamous home, a spouse, but not a mother (Oduyoye 1993:345). Oduyoye laments that in African societies female sexuality has no autonomous value outside of marriage and motherhood. It is assumed that a woman must be married (Oduyoye 1992:15). Woman, marriage and motherhood constitute an unbroken continuum (Oduyoye 1992:22).

In most African societies, by begetting a great number of children, a woman is meant to increase the man's wealth. It was important not only to have children but male children, for the purpose of family inheritance. However, though childbearing and nurture is the responsibility of the women in most communities, husbands have almost absolute right over the children. In these patriarchal societies, the father can command his daughters to marry men of his own choice and can even select wives for his sons without any consultation (Nasimiyu 1999:154-155).

In conversation with these African theologians, Kubai is able to point out that barrenness is a challenge that is gendered. This is because once a man and a woman get married, it is expected that the woman will conceive and give birth to children. But immediately this does not materialize, the woman is blamed. This is due to the prime value that African communities place on children. Kubai notes that children are viewed as a source of financial security, labor force as well as sources of respect to an individual in the community. She further states that if a

couple does not have children, they are not considered as adults hence they will not be able to make decisions, decisions regarding family and communal matters. Not having children is considered deviant behavior, a curse abnormal and immoral, she reiterates (Kubai 2011).

In her studies among the Chagga, barrenness and having female children only were qualifications for divorce among the Chagga people of Tanzania. Therefore, only male children were counted, having female children was equated to not having children at all. It is important to note that before the divorce was initiated, other mediums such as offering several sacrifices to the ancestors were explored to give solutions to the childlessness state (Kubai 2011).

In her contribution to African women's theology, Kubai sums up that infertility is one of the Sexual and Reproductive, Health and Rights issues on the African continent that has not been addressed, mainly because barrenness is not primary concern for national health policy. It appears that the main agenda is limiting fertility and teaching family planning and not helping the childless despite that fact that children are highly regarded in the African culture.

But more than twelve years after Kubai authored her work on the theme, there is no change. Barren women are still faced with the same challenges. There is urgent need to further interrogate the various cultural beliefs and practices that surround family, having children using scientific methods and favorable policies to be enacted.

Genocide and Reconstruction

Kubai has waded into the waters of war and genocide in Africa. Her focus has been on the Rwandan Genocide. According to Banyanga, Rwanda experienced a genocide in 1994, in which approximately 1,000,000 people died. Many others suffered rape, were widowed, witnessed murder of their own children over a period of 100 days (Banyanga 2008, 2017). It is in the public domain that the genocide was planned, prepared, and then executed from 7 April 1994, right after the plane crash in which president Habyarimana Juvenal died. The genocide lasted to 15 July, making it about 100 days in which members of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, as

well as moderate Hutu and Twa, who opposed to the massacre were killed by armed Hutu militias.

For Kubai, the Rwandan Genocide happened at a time when she was pursuing her doctoral studies. She stated that she had an opportunity watch these events through television, the importance of science and technology cannot be over emphasized. She later went to Rwanda to carry out a study. The event that took place thirty-one years ago continue to shape the present Rwanda. In an article titled 'It was the work of Satan,' (Kubai 2013), Rwanda has been characterized in many ways. For instance: some see it as a success story of a country that has been reconstructed from the ashes of genocide (Muke 2016), with a growth rate per with other African countries, building many new roads, schools and health facilities, three and a half million refugees had been repatriated and resettled by 2003, this number has continued to rise since the repatriation is still on going, Rwanda stands out as the country with the highest number of women in parliament, which at some point stood at 56% and for this achievement the government has earned admiration from several quarters.

This has served to liberate women from political bondage which is normally male dominated. Women in the political space can now make decisions that affect their fellow women, themselves, the country, and world at large. Kubai points to the success story that has come out of Rwanda after their steady reconstruction (Kubai 2014). In many ways the country is changed and peace prevails. However, Kubai also takes note of the way a number of perpetrators, when apprehended used religious terms to describe their actions and passing the buck to Satan whom they claimed led them down that path. Kubai also explores in a skilled way ethnicity and gender violence in Rwanda from cultural and historical perspectives, which she links to the encounters between cultural beliefs and practices. She is supportive of the new gender equality policy and home-grown programs in Rwanda that pay particular attention to the health of women (Kubai 2014).

Forgiveness and Confession

This is a theme that ties neatly with the genocide theme, since many victims and perpetrators had to get into the space of forgiveness. There was the Detmold confession which involved many churches across Rwanda. These Christians from Rwanda and elsewhere, gathered at Detmold-Germany from 7th-12th December 1996 at the invitation of Dr. Fulgence Rubayiza, in collaboration with the ecumenical community of Hiddesen. Their priority, two years after the genocide was to reflect on their common commitment to build a Rwanda where people can live and work in harmony. In this forum, there was confession by each party and forgiveness sought so that in the end there was a commitment to work together (Ntezimana 2002).

Through her diverse knowledge, ethical ideas have been borne. In an article titled 'Confession and Forgiveness as a strategy for development in post-genocide Rwanda,' (Kubai 2016), per the government of Rwanda reconciliation is believed to be the only moral alternative to post-genocide challenges. Communities must be mobilized and reshaped for social, political, and economic reconstruction (NURC). This is believed to create a delicate situation. Consequently, among other strategies, the state has turned to the concepts of confession and forgiveness which have deep religious roots and systemized them at the individual and community or state level to bring about reconciliation, justice, social cohesion, and ultimately economic development. In this perspective there are key concerns that have been raised and Kubai ponders on some of these such as the question if forgiveness restores victims and empowers them to heal their communities? What empirical evidence exists that religiously inspired justice and reconciliation process after mass political violence?

These are fundamental questions when turning to religion for such long-term practical challenges. Confession and forgiveness are tools that can be employed in the daily lives of people at the individual and community level in pursuit for reconciliation and social justice.

African's and Church in Diaspora

In the article 'Singing the Lords Song in a strange land: African Churches in Sweden between segregation and integration found,' (Kubai 2013), she sought to investigate on the migrant churches and Christian communities that were established by the African churches in Sweden.

It has been shown by scholars the way migration and movements involve various dynamic. For example, according to Adogame, in 1990 there was estimated to be 30 million voluntary international migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, about three and a half percent of the total population. Prior to this time, African migration to Europe had followed the historical and linguistic trails of colonialism with Great Britain and France as preferred destinations of migrants. However, it has been shown in more recent times, that African migration assumed a more diffused dimension with noticeable numbers of immigrants from several African countries flocking to countries with which they had no colonial ties, mainly in Western Europe, North America, and the Arab world (Adogame 2013:496-498).

Kubai has lived for many years in Sweden and has also worked in this context. She is alive to the fact that migration and living in diaspora are no mean feats. Many African's in diaspora face different hurdles and to be able to go through such, they have learnt to work with each other, to support each other with child rearing and other chores. Important spaces for these migrants include the churches where they find support, can express themselves in their local dialects and there is some form of community. Similarly Adogame states that many Africans who undergo complex forms of migration often carried traits of their religious and cultural identity with them. As they sojourn in new geo-cultural contexts, these migrants are made to identify, organize, and reconstruct "their religion" both for themselves and their host societies. Further to this, within the last three decades there has been a rapid proliferation of African Christian communities in diaspora, thus resulting in the remapping of old religious landscapes (Adogame 2013:496-498).

Little had been known about African Churches in Sweden, so Kubai took upon herself the challenge to shed some light on the proliferation of African Christian communities and examine its role in the integration of

African immigration into the Swedish society. In this study, she made use of ethnographic methods in religious spaces whereby she interrogated 27 church groups and fellowship, three churches: Immanuel International Fellowship at Immanuel Church, Smryna International Church, and Grace Connection Church.

This is an implication that Africans are notoriously religious, even in diaspora they still hold onto their faith, and they wish to integrate with the natives of the foreign land as well as their theological interpretation in a different social set up. This results into social cohesion at the internal and external level.

Ethnicity and Gender Based Violence

For this section, we consider Kubai's writing, 'Making and unmaking techniques in the Rwandan context: Implication for Gender Based Violence, Health and Wellbeing of Women,' (Kubai 2013). The author sets out to examine ethnicity and GBV in Rwanda from a cultural beliefs and practices and to find new gender equality policy and programs and the implication of the encounters to the health of women. This was carried out using community mobilization dialogs, individual interviews as well as interrogative approaches.

The study concluded that violence has continued and there is a conflict between cultural, tradition, the de-ethnicization and gender equality policies, some of the gender violence preventive programs are influenced by the ethos of the traditional norms hence unwittingly perpetuate GBV.

GBV and violence general are challenges are still ailing the society in the twenty first century, the perpetrators are still being asked to give solutions. If this still goes on, violence is here to stay.

Professor Kubai continues to write on security issues. In an article termed, 'Between Justice and Reconciliation,' the society is caught between justice and reconciliation. She notes that one of the major challenges of Rwanda today is to engender reconciliation in a deeply wounded nation and o justice to both victims and perpetrators. It is difficult to affirm the victims, punish the perpetrators and at the same time bring about reconciliation between them. There are unequivocal

claims especially from the victims, that there can be no justice without reparation and there can be no reconciliation without justice. Consequently, the Gacaca process was brought into play, it has turned out to be a source of fear for perpetrators who are desperate to bury the evidence by intimidating the survivors and the survivors who are now living in fear of their lives. Therefore, there is a rising insecurity of survivors, this has become a matter of national concern, (Kubai 2007).

Human trafficking and poverty

To address ethnic poverty and violence through academia, Kubai has authored an article titled, 'Trafficking of Ethiopian Women to Europe-Making Choices, taking risks and implications,' (Kubai 2016). Ethiopian women victims of trafficking- the agency of these women in the whole trafficking process and issues of decision making- trying a chance, or just taking a risk to get out of poverty or difficult social circumstances, considering that they are lured, tricked coerced or even forced into the hands of traffickers by a wide range of circumstances and people, family, and friends. The traffickers target girls with economic, social and family challenges, the vulnerable ones. This is usually done using service agencies and human smugglers who facilitate the process of migration through several routes. Many use the desert route that begins from Sudan to North Africa then cross to Europe.

This is an effort to sensitize the public on the presence and practice of human trafficking due to poverty driven reasons. It is very crucial for communities to work towards self-sustainability. In Kenya today, girls are taken to countries such as Saudi Arabia. They face a lot of challenges including death.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined Kubai's selected works and shown the way she skillfully engages religious and present phenomena from her space in Diaspora. She continues to articulate matters touching women's subordination in pastoral communities, the migrant situations in Scandinavia and provides theological possibilities for further reflection.

Her select works have also highlighted her sources and priorities in the theological enterprise. She generates useful ideas for the church, community and women in Africa. Also, her work carries along her life journey and engagement in different spheres and the kinds of interpretations of liberation she generates. It points out the sources that she uses, the theology she generates and the kind of ecclesiology/-ies she proposes for African women theologians of the present and the future.

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7 | **Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics and a Theology of Women Empowerment:**

Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro's Global Pilgrimages of Justice

Dorcas Juma

Introduction

Religion and sacred texts remain central to the spirituality of many African women. Therefore, when women take the center stage in the interpretation of sacred texts it is possible to underscore ways in which religious discourses change when women emerge as central players in gendered forms of religious discourses and historical memory deconstruction and reconstruction. For Maha Marouan (2018:130), women's active participation in religious liberation discourses "reclaims African women's relationship to the divine and presents them as women with authority." Without women's voices in religious liberating discourses like biblical interpretations, women continue to be socialized to be custodians of retrogressive cultural ideologies continuously relegating them to the periphery. Through religious rituals, ideologies and cultural practices such as birth rites, naming, initiation rites, marriage, polygamy, death, burial rites, widowhood rites and wife inheritance, older women socialize girls and younger women into being acceptable, respectable and noble women in the family and their communities. African women are at the center of the family institution and structure. The Family institution is central in transmitting religious and cultural values from one generation to the other. That is why; African women remain the custodians of religious and cultural values of every African society. According to Fulata Lusungu Moyo (2004:72-72), "families and marriages are the basis of the African community. Their procreative value ensures the structure of the religio-culture of the people. It influences conception of body-selves, our relationships with others and with God through our ancestor." Thus, religion, culture and sacred texts continue

to be the canon – the measuring rod of many African Christian communities. Men in patriarchal societies like Kenya for example use the Bible to demand total submission of women in the name of God.

The book of Book of Ruth for example, arguably reinforces theologies and cultural ideologies of wife inheritance in many African Christian societies. The Book of Ruth illustrates how women are supposed to accept wife inheritance by the brother of the deceased. The idea behind is to keep the family property within the family line and to help the deceased continue his lineage through procreation. In fact, the issues of wife inheritance in the Book of Ruth stems from the Ancient Israelite society, which was highly patriarchal (see Carol L. Meyers 2014:19-25). This shows how patriarchal systems lessen the worth of women. For many African Christian women, the Bible is central to their spirituality. Female characters in the Bible speak directly to their experiences. Women read their stories through the voices of female characters in the Bible and retell their stories through the experiences of female characters in the Bible (see Madipoane J. Masenya 1995:154). That is why Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (2002), introduces feminist cultural hermeneutics as the key to African women's liberation theology. In her approach to African culture as a resource for doing theology, Kanyoro (2002) takes serious the experiences and the practices of African women and the role of feminist cultural hermeneutics in reading the Bible.

Kanyoro's feminist cultural hermeneutics is arguably a global pilgrimage of Justice and a Theology of women empowerment. While speaking about women's liberation and the African freedom struggle, Thomas Sankara on October 4, 1984 at the General Assembly of United Nations passionately exclaimed that, there is no true social revolution without the liberation of women (Judicaelle Irakoze 2018). The liberation of women in African Christian societies should start with the way they read sacred texts. The Bible for example, is a two-edged sword that can be used to oppress the vulnerable in the society or liberate them. With the correct tools of hermeneutics, the Bible is strong ammunition against the oppression and marginalization of women (see Alice Yafeh-Deigh 2021:61). In her life as a student when Kanyoro joined the movement against apartheid in the 1970s, her focus was to fight for women and girls. In many African patriarchal societies, retrogressive cultural practices have

a direct bearing on women and girls. Yet, when one reads the Bible especially the Old Testament, it is possible to see that the cultural setting and practices of the ancient Israelite society are in many ways similar to those of many societies in Africa. Aloo O. Mojola (2014:1) notes, “the Old Testament (OT) is much loved in Africa, perhaps due to its close cultural and religious affinities with traditional African culture and ethnic religions.” Therefore, culture, context, the vantage point and experiences of African women are very important in biblical interpretational discourses that have the aim of liberating women from retrogressive cultural practices that deny women the right to live with dignity. To argue that Kanyoro’s cultural hermeneutics is a global pilgrimage of Justice means to analyze how culture conditions how African women understand reality and apply the meaning of sacred texts.

In many African societies like Kenya, patriarchy uses culture to create hierarchy and gender binaries. In the name of religion, culture influences the behavior of women, determines the values, worldview, and attitudes of society towards women’s bodies in general and reproductive health, and rights in particular. This way, culture continues to shaped authority, responsibility, and identity among many African communities. In fact, according to Tunde Adeleke (2011:123), “culture is a powerful authority in Africa. It makes demands and imposes obligations that no man-made law can undermine or challenge.” That is why, when she served on an Independent Commission on sexual misconduct, accountability and culture change at Oxfam, co-chaired by Zainab Bangura and Katherine Sierra, Kanyoro saw the need to underscore culture as the main burrier to women’s empowerment and dignity. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2021), defines culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society.” David T. Adamo (2001:44) defines cultural hermeneutics as “an approach to biblical interpretation that makes African social cultural context a subject of interpretation.” Implicit in these definitions is the fact that at the center of feminist cultural hermeneutics is the issue of contextual reading of biblical texts. The context of the reader or the community of readers makes a difference if one reads the Bible as a straight white male who is born in Canada; a

lesbian who is born in Africa, an Asian man living in America, a black woman living in Europe or an African woman living in west Africa, central or East Africa (see David J. Ndegwah 2020). That is why Kanyoro presents feminist cultural hermeneutics as a means of seeking justice and liberation for African women (Esther Mombo & Heleen Joziasse 2012:190).

The Context of Kanyoro's Cultural Hermeneutics

In order to understand the significance of Kanyoro's feminist cultural Hermeneutics, it is important to analyze the historical, cultural, economic and religious contexts that motivated her work. Kanyoro has worked for over three decades with women and girls (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs 2023). One thing that stood out for her is that all women are connected. Their life conditions may differ. Yet, their problems are similar, and that women must learn from each other. Kanyoro was lucky to be raised and influenced by her parents who were health workers. While working as a volunteer at a shelter for abused women, she realized that cultural traditions both nourish and imprison us, and that we must sift out the bad habits and only keep what makes us grow (All American Speakers Bureau 2023). Kanyoro was blessed to study in a girls-only secondary school, which she says gave the girls the assurance that they can do any subject and become whatever they want. She did her undergraduate at the University of Nairobi, obtained a PhD in linguistics at the University of Texas and later a doctor of ministry. After working on language research and training of Bible translators, she was active for ten years in the Lutheran World Federation. Kanyoro has published 11 books and many articles on feminist theology, development and women's leadership. She was born in the rural Kenya and together with her nine siblings; they received a good education, supported by their parents, who considered this the best inheritance for their children (WikiPeaceWomen 2023). It is important to note that the rural areas of Kenya are still very rich with African societal cultural heritage. Therefore, it is possible to see that her interest in cultural hermeneutics was highly shaped by her upbringing.

Kanyoro's greatest motivation is that every woman has the power; every woman has the potential; every woman can shape her destiny and the world around her. Because of her interest in the empowerment of women and girls, since 1998, Kanyoro (53) has been chief executive officer of the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) that reaches more than 25 million women and girls in 122 countries. One arguably sees that the answer to Kanyoro's Cultural hermeneutics lies in understanding the impact that social location has on each individual (see Yafeh-Deigh 2021:62). Social location of every individual being such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, religion, disability, language, beliefs, behaviors, customs and worldview influences who they are and who they become. Kanyoro's feminist cultural hermeneutics shows that social locations are the lenses through which people read and interpret sacred texts (Kanyoro 2002). Every person who interprets sacred texts approaches them with assumptions, life experiences, cultural biases, religious affiliations and identity binaries in terms of position of power and privilege in relation to others in society (see C. Behan McCullagh 200:39). While a person's social location influences the way one reads sacred texts, it is important to note that sacred texts do not come to our contemporary world in a vacuum; and are not read in a vacuum. The Book of Ruth, which informed much of Kanyoro's cultural hermeneutics, comes to the contemporary African society with a rich cultural heritage of the ancient Israelite society (see Irmtraud Fischer 2007:143). Besides being a patriarchal society, Israel lived various experiences that shape their thinking, way of life and response to various aspects of life such as life and death (see Matthew Levering 2021:164). Power dynamics between the wealthy and the poor, the educated and uneducated, those with power and authority and those in positions of subordination characterized Israelite society as indicated in Deuteronomy 15:7, Proverbs 22:16, Isaiah 41:17, and Ecclesiastes 5:8.

Of relevance to this discussion is the fact that the biblical world like that of the book of Ruth finds a fertile ground in Africa's cultural societal settings. Women and girls who marry husbands from ethnic groups that do not share a cultural heritage with theirs for example, struggle to integrate into a foreign culture just like Ruth in 1:16-17. In many African Christian societies as noted by Lovemore Togarasei (2021: 127), "the Bible

forms the basis upon which Christians think about and practice their religion.” Therefore, submission, asserting identity as a ‘foreigner,’ loyalty, objectivity, invisibility, powerlessness and vulnerability in a foreign culture characterize the lives of many African Christian women. Saibu Mutaru 2018:257) for example points out that patriarchy in some African societies expect women to show respect towards husbands by remaining highly submissive. According to Mutaru (2018-257), “this cultural requirement contributes to the vulnerability and powerlessness of women.” Thus, the context of Kanyoro’s feminist cultural hermeneutics offers an alternative reading of biblical texts in ways that allows female biblical characters to speak to the experiences of women regardless of time and space. This happens in ways that the context of the Bible also informs the experiences of women in a liberating way. This way, the argued position of presenting cultural hermeneutics as a pilgrimage of justice is re-affirmed. Just like in the book of Ruth for example, the Luo community and many other African communities practice the Deuteronomy 25.5-10 levirate marriage. The Levirate custom of inheriting widows among the Supyire People of Mali for example also has theological pointers for Christian marriage as discussed by Jemphrey, Michael (2011). Knowing how cultural practices such as widow inheritance have a bearing on women and girls, one sees the importance of underscoring Kanyoro’s’ feminist cultural hermeneutics as a theology of women empowerment and a pilgrimage of Justice.

Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: A Theology of Women Empowerment

Kanyoro (2002) constructs feminist cultural hermeneutics as a collective story of African women doing communal theology. Community theology is a theology of communal solidarity; shared theological expressions and experiences informed by the traditions of people’s faith and believes. Communal theology acknowledges the fact that salvation is an individual relationship between an individual Christina and God as indicated in Philipians 2:12-13. However, we are called to be in community with one another because we are the people of God (see Benjamin H. Dunning 2006). Communal theology finds expression in the Ubuntu African

philosophy that places emphasis on ‘being self through others’ (see Susan Mans & Marius H. Smit 2021:202). When it comes to feminist cultural hermeneutics therefore, community theology finds meaning in the larger feminist liberation discourses when women read the Bible together and engage with the culture of the biblical world from the perspective of their collective experiences (Kanyoro 2001). Kanyoro (2002) uses this strategy of communal theology when she puts women in groups to do a Bible study of the book of Ruth. Her approach of doing communal theology using feminist cultural hermeneutics empowers women in her community to use their own experiences and vantage points to find meaning in the bible. Thus, feminist hermeneutics is generally the theory, art and practice of interpretation in the interest of women. Feminist hermeneutics addresses a broad realm of things, ranging from the Bible and other theological texts to human acts and products, with the aim of challenging and correcting the effects of patriarchy on them (Maxwell Constantine Chando Musingafi, Racheal Mafumbate, Thandi Fredah Khumalo 2021:57). Ruth A. Wienclaw (2023) defines feminist theology as “a theological movement primarily within Christianity and Judaism that is intended to reexamine scriptural teachings on women and women’s roles from a woman’s perspectives.”

Feminist cultural hermeneutics is part of the larger voices of feminist theologies advocating for the inclusion of women’s voices as equal partners with male voices in theological reflections and discourses. According to Mary Nyangweso (2018:145), feminist cultural hermeneutics emerges out of the concern that “although feminists have long aimed to fight gender inequality, they have stirred controversy due to a failure to accommodate diverse cultural, historical, and racial differences.” Even so, it is important to note the feminists open the way for contextual approaches to the interpretations of sacred texts in ways that have given voice to many women around the word to name, expose and criticize oppressive structures that deny women and girls the right to live with dignity. Feminists for example have empowered African women scholars to use taboo subjects like sex to propose ways of steering sex dignity talks in ways that unmute women’s voices on matters sex and sexuality (see Dorcas Chebet Juma 2022). Religion and culture remain a major source for theological reflections and biblical expositions in afro-feminist

approaches to biblical interpretations. However, feminist critical approaches to sacred texts have also empower women from African contexts to underscore religion and culture as the main sources of women's oppression (see Juma 2023:2-3). It is from this perspective that one would say that cultural hermeneutics shows how "local forms of Biblical contextualization and interpretation offer unique forms of empowerment to African Christians in general and African women reading and interpretations of sacred texts in different contexts."

Thus, as a Theology of empowerment, feminist cultural hermeneutics first, equips women with the necessary cultural hermeneutical tools to counter dominant interpretations of biblical texts that continue to present women as inferior religious objects. Kenya and many other African religious spaces have in the recent past witnessed heart-breaking incidences where sacred texts have been used to convince followers to do unimaginable things. Reverend Njohi, a local pastor at the Lord's Propeller Redemption Church in Kenya, for example ordered the female members of his congregation to attend church without any form of underwear so that they can receive the spirit of Jesus Christ in the best possible way (BellaNaija.com 2023). When men dominate biblical interpretations, ministerial and leadership spaces, it will be difficult for women to be liberated from oppressive patriarchal structures objectifying women in the name of religion. In another aspect of misleading biblical interpretation, one controversial Kenyan preacher Pastor Paul Mackenzie used the Bible to convince his followers that Jesus Christ is coming soon and that they must starve to death through fasting the way Christ fasted in Mark 2:18-22 to meet Jesus immediately. Unfortunately, women and children are his major victims and of other wrong biblical interpretations that continue to cost the lives of many in the name of God. The autopsy reports on exhumed bodies of the famous Shakahola Massacre incident in Kenya reveal that the causes of death were starvation and asphyxiation (Citizen Digital 2023). On the other hand, an analysis of Yasuyoshi Chiba (2023) on the life of Mackenzie shows that Mackenzie taught his followers that starvation brought salvation. As part of empowering women in diverse ways of countering gender inequalities, it is very important for biblical approaches such as feminist cultural hermeneutics to be mainstreamed within patriarchal structures in order to empower

especially women to faithfully interpret, apply, and teach passages of Scripture.

Secondly, Feminist cultural hermeneutics uses a gendered lens to interpret scriptures from either inside or outside traditional religious and structures of dominance. This is done to expose and criticize the marginalization of women with the aim of bringing justice, freedom, and equity between men and women. Stories of the widows like in the story of Ruth and Naomi in the book of Ruth for example who are at the periphery of the society shift to the center of liberation theological discourses. Glen Enander (2005:55) argues [the Bible] “and its interpretation have often been used by those in power to maintain their dominance over women, especially since it originated in a *kyriarchal* culture that used androcentric language.” As a tool of empowerment, feminist cultural hermeneutics is based on an active reading of scriptural texts through the lens of women’s issues from both ancient cultural practices and contemporary worldviews. Kanyoro’s feminist cultural hermeneutics is a theology of women empowerment since it is based on the active readings of women in the book of Ruth. Unlike androcentric biblical interpretations presented from an individual’s point of view, Kanyoro’s feminist cultural hermeneutics takes the approach of communal theology where women’s community experiences inform their liberation theological reflections.

Finally, yet importantly, feminist cultural hermeneutics considers African traditional religion and culture the pre-Christian traditions of African religiosity and postcolonial structures as a rich heritage in which sacred texts can be understood today. Speaking about strategies that African women use in interpreting scriptures, Mercy Oduyoye (2001:11), points out “cultural hermeneutics enables women to view the Bible through African eyes and to distinguish and extract from it what is liberation.” It is from the same perspective that feminist cultural hermeneutics empowers women doing theology in Africa to celebrate liberating aspects of African traditional religion and culture, but also to challenge oppressive cultural ideologies and religious beliefs. V. Ndikhokele & N. Mtshiselwa (2016) for example reads Ruth 4 and Leviticus 25:8-55 in the light of the landless and poor women in South Africa in ways that also elevates the contextual approach to ancient texts

by Esias E. Meyer who argues that Leviticus 25:8-55 holds liberating possibilities for women who are invisible. In contexts like Kenya where patriarchy is persistent and has striking similarity with that of the biblical world, it is important to equip women with alternative tools of biblical interpretations that are sensitive to the plight and experiences of women. Gender-sensitive biblical hermeneutics are alternatives that have the real potential to African women's liberation. The liberation is in empowering African women to realize their role as characters in the text and exponents of the texts as proposed by Nambalirwa Helen Nkabala (2013). Just like in the book of Ruth, poverty, land, powerlessness and the silenced voices of women are a justice issue. That is why the reality of poverty and landlessness on the part of women in many African societies remains the basis for reflection and more specifically in the fields of social and political sciences (V. Ndikhokele & N. Mtshiselwa 2016).

Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics as a Pilgrimage of Justice Today

While introducing feminist cultural hermeneutics as a communal theology, Kanyoro (2002) underscores the importance of the accountability of the church, women's organizations in the church and African women theologians. Religion and culture remain the main sources of women's oppression. The church uses religious ideologies and biblical cultural structures to socialize women to be passive recipients of injustices as observed by Moyo (2004:73). According to Holly Morse (2017:71), "the story of Eve in Genesis 3 remains an important symbolic site of female oppression, a religious and cultural myth that has been used and indeed the Bible as a whole is a key source of women's oppression." It is therefore important for the Church to accept responsibility of how the Church has historically oppressed women, by accounting for the negative attitudes towards the leadership roles of women bearing in mind that women are the majority in many African Christian churches. Justice is justice if judgment is dispensed and the reparation of women blended with efforts for women empowerment in Church. Eric A. Seibert (2018:2) notes with concern how "Christians have waged wars, executed "witches," brutalized children, oppressed women, enslaved Africans, massacred

Muslims, and exterminated Native Americans.” According to Seibert (2018:2), “during its 2,000-year history, the church has been responsible for unspeakable atrocities and massive amounts of bloodshed.” Thus, the question of justice on matters women’s oppression in the Church cannot take place without some serious consideration of reparations for women. One of the pilgrimage journeys for justice towards the issues of women oppression is a holistic approach towards the transformation of oppressive structures in ways that allows women to ascend into leadership positions without any barriers. Samuel Peni Ango (2016:152) for example gives an account of how “African instituted Churches as well as other newly established ministries across Nigeria are becoming more unequivocally supportive of women playing equitable roles just as men are doing.”

When it comes to the accountability of women’s organizations in the church, it is important to note that women’s organizations are largely responsible for the development, growth and economic sustainability of many churches in Africa. Some of the women’s organizations are just in form of Bible study groups in the church yet their contributions are transforming rigid church structures. Some of the women’s organizations have a long history of contributing to challenging religion and culture even during missionary Christianity in Africa. In the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) for example, women have organized themselves into a women’s organization called the woman’s Guild (The Presbyterian Church of East Africa – PCEA 2023). The women’s guild is a fellowship of women and girls of the PCEA that started in 1922 with the goal of rescuing young girls from the oppressive traditions and bringing them to Christianity. Unfortunately, the works and contribution of women’s organization remain undocumented and unrecognized. In the Reformed Church of East Africa – RCEA, women played a key role in championing for women’s ordination. The women’s desk collaborated and networked with women across the world, with Professor Esther Mombo playing a key role. After years of discussion, the RCEA General Synod approved the ordination of women at its synod in November 2017 under the leadership of Rev. Musa Kipkorir Kapkong Maina, the then RCEA moderator (see Phil Tanis 2018). Part of the barriers towards women ordination in the RCEA is culture and the interpretations of biblical texts such as Leviticus

11:1-15:33, 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14. In a pilgrimage of Justice against retrogressive cultural practices, women must work with men as partners because we are all equal in the eyes of God and we are gifted differently.

As we remain on the issue of accountability as a pilgrimage of justice, African women theologians on the other hand are doing a great job in accounting for the contribution of African women theologians. Some of them are showing how women theologians are challenging retrogressive cultural practices relegating women of all categories to the periphery. Zorodzai Dube (2016) for example uses theories from cultural studies, critical theory, and contextual and gender studies to locate the voices of African women theologians in their discussion of Alternative masculinity using the art of academic writing. Teresia M. Hinga (2017) also uses an African Christian feminist approach to take on a pilgrimage of justice journey in an enduring search for what matters. Part of her enduring search for what matters is her exposition of the biblical mandate for social transformation. Culture is a social construct that requires proper cultural hermeneutical tools to deconstruct oppressive cultural ideologies. The approaches should escalate advocacy for a just society that enables the lives of all to flourish regardless of gender, race, social class and context and vantage point. In Kenya and many other African patriarchal societies, widows are highly oppressed when it comes to land and property inheritance rights because women do not have right to inherit land or property. Priesting Kanyoro's feminist cultural hermeneutics as a pilgrimage of justice means lobbying for the ascension of women into key leadership position that determine the policies that address every aspects of women discrimination. Juma (2016:57) points out that "African women grapple with low social status and inequitable social relationships because of lack of representation in Key societal and religious leadership positions."

Feminist cultural hermeneutics is therefore a global a pilgrimage of justice. Today, Christian communities around the world have become more conscious like never before of the so many socio-economic injustices threatening life. The hope is in the shared faith and commitment of Christians globally in affirming the God of life by calling upon each other to affirm, sustain, and protect life by walking together to

transform society for the good of all. In the same spirit, feminist cultural hermeneutics is a global pilgrimage of justice because of its role in using scripture to empower women with the necessary hermeneutical tools that affirm life in ways that move the stories of the marginalized to the center of theological discourses. According to John Connell (2011:17), a “pilgrimage is a rite of passage, a journey of moral significance from the profane to the sacred, undertaken to propitiate supernatural forces responsible for causing illness, death and misfortune to restore shalom.” The above discussion therefore, has presented feminist cultural hermeneutics, as a pilgrimage of Justice is two perspectives. First from a *sankofa* point of view, feminist cultural hermeneutics opens up possibilities for remembrance in order to take accountability of historical injustices in church and society. The word *Sankofa* is from the Akan *Twi* language of the people of Ghana, which literally means to retrieve. The word *Sankofa* comes from the Akan proverb: “*Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi*” translated to mean, “it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot.” The African philosophy of *Sankofa* is in the aspect of knowing your history and your heritage understanding yourself currently, the world around you, and how to learn from the past to transform the present for the sake of the future as explained in detail by Christel N. Temple (2010). Thus, it is important to retrieve from our culture what is empowering, deconstruct what is oppressive, and reconstruct a society that is prolife for the sake of our future.

Secondly, as a theology of empowerment, feminist cultural hermeneutics takes every concerned theologian on a global prophetic journey of hope for a better tomorrow. As a Global Pilgrimages of Justice, feminist cultural hermeneutics has opened up dignity liberation theological discourses for posterity. All oppressions are connected to the multiple levels of systemic structures of injustices that affect people’s lives, with each system of oppression connected to a corresponding system of privilege and domination as pointed out by Dena R. Samuels, Abby L. Ferber & Andrea O’Reilly Herrera (2003). It is therefore important for all human beings to work together as core partners to bring down historical systems of oppression. By blending a concept of communal theology to the feminist cultural hermeneutics, Kanyoro arguably summons all to a way of life that is spiritually transformative to encounter

the vulnerable. Thorough feminist cultural hermeneutics, all are all called to find ourselves in a vulnerable place of becoming vulnerable to others by purging off one's own prejudices, preoccupations, priorities and pride moving from a comfort zone to destabilizing the status quo. As a global pilgrimage of Justice, feminist cultural hermeneutics is a transformative journey; a dialogical conversation that puts prioritizes the needs of others and the vision of God. By using a communal theological approach to do feminist cultural hermeneutics the community of believers around that world is called upon to fighting for equality by turning the tables on gender injustices upside down and rooting out all forms of oppression as observed by Joan Acker (2006).

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro the founding member of the Circle stands out for her courage to take women on a Pilgrimage of Justice in her many publications. Through her scholarly engagements, it is possible to see that one of the many tools of liberation is for women to find voice through publishing I the art of academic writing. In the discussion of one of Kanyoro's scholarly works in Kanyoro, (2002). *Introduction to Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: A Key to African Women's Liberation Theology*, it is possible to see how African women's voices have the potential to draw the attention of the world to the plight of the marginalized of the society for example the widows. Kanyoro's voice therefore stands out as a justice conversational tool that opens up more possibilities for doing contextual biblical interpretations. Even though women in patriarchal contexts like Kenya and other African societies remain vulnerable to misleading biblical interpretations, Kanyoro's feminist cultural hermeneutics offers hope that something good is happening within the same structures of women's oppression where sacred texts occupies a central place in the spirituality of women.

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SECTION THREE



Christology and Liberation

8 | Cultivating African Feminist Ethics of Liberation with Hannah Kinoti

Telesia Musili

Introduction

Hannah Wangechi Kinoti was born in Nyeri District (now Nyeri County) in August 1941 to Ruben and Ruth Gathii. She was the sixth and last-born child to her parents, a position that conferred her the privilege of attending the best schools. Hannah Kinoti was educated at Alliance Girls High School, Makerere College School in Kampala, and the University of Nairobi, where she did her doctorate in religious studies (Wamue, 2001). Her parents were among the first natives to convert to Christianity and joined what is to date the Presbyterian Church of East Africa. As a result, Kinoti grew up under the moral guidance of both Christian dictates and African culture, specifically Gikuyu culture, especially during her hay days in Kahuhia Primary School. Born amidst the Second World War (1939-1945) and impeding colonialism, Kinoti experienced a cultural mixture that almost eroded her identity. Though equipped with the knowledge, medical know-how, and a loving savior, the presence of colonialists, Jesus, who loved us all, must have been a sweet, bitter experience that would later shape Kinoti's frame of thought with regard to morality. Raised and schooled within an environment where nationalism, political freedom, and a quest for independence became a daily cry for all, even amidst Christian values, she immersed herself in critical thoughts, out of which she endeavored to find her identity and that of her Gikuyu people.

Hannah Wangechi Kinoti's seminal work *African Ethics Gikuyu Traditional Morality*, published in 2013, posthumously portrays her critical mind as she details her significant concerns. While affirming the introduction of modern education, mass media, and more accessible means of transport, Kinoti decries the spread of social evils in the country even after inculcating Christian ethos within the society (Kinoti, 2013). Moral decadence in Kenyan society was so immense as corruption,

robbery, prostitution, broken homes, and sexual promiscuity, among others, ravaged the community. She noted that “contemporary African society is lamenting a moral world fallen apart ... Today the African society ... seems to be in a state of near chaos in the realm of morality” (Kinoti, 1992:75, 86). The moral decadence, the disdain for African culture, and the bashing of their heritage and value systems by the missionaries had to be addressed. Kinoti followed in the thought trail of Mudimbe, who, as early as 1988, had already called for a critical interrogation of western and Eurocentric religious discourses in order to place the African World view at the center of their lives. Kinoti affirms that the missionaries had insisted on Africans’ absolute loyalty to missionary teaching, rendering indigenous knowledge and values as ‘pagan’ and ‘evil’ (Kinoti, 2013:15). She was, however, convinced that Africans and the Gikuyu specifically had a worthy cultural heritage and systems that had cohesion and integrity better than any colonial system could offer. Determined, Kinoti joined her contemporaries in search of authentic nationalism after the colonialists’ mentalities had somewhat distorted it.

Jesse Mugambi, a renowned Kenyan theologian, raised the concern with a pose on “how can Africans maintain the African ethic while embracing modernity?” (1997:19) he affirmed that Africans could become modernized and, at the same time, maintain their cultural and religious heritage. Several scholars, such as Nasimiyu Wasike (1992); Eitel (1986); Oruka (1990); Mageza (1997); Gyekye (1998), and Wiredu (1998), among others, joined in the drive of Africanizing morality. Laurenti Magesa (2004:23) called for an Africanization of Christianity, “a process that included integration of Christian doctrines and teachings with useful African traditional cultural values and modern way of life intending to make Christianity more relevant and acceptable to the African cultural contexts.” The search for an authentic African moral identity became the new field of scholarship from the 1990s onwards. This is not to indicate that there is a common African moral identity but a realization of the situatedness of acceptable behavior and marching up to societal expectations within a particular context. Scholars agree that imperialists’ indoctrination was a strong mental erasure of certain African religious beliefs, practices, values, and manners (Egunlusi, 2017).

Nevertheless, African religion and African morality are inseparable. John Mbiti's (1969) infamous assertion that Africans are notoriously religious permeates every dimension of our lives. This is to assert that each people have their own religious system, values, a set of beliefs and practices that they swear by for their cohesion. As Husien & Kebede (2017:59) opine, "religion is the strongest element in the traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned." As such, in Africa, religion can neither be explained away from morality nor can morality be singled out from religion (Ezeanya, 1980). In fact, the relationship between philosophy, religion, and morality is one of unity. The intertwining is exemplified by John Mbiti, a renowned religious scholar and theologian that Philosophy, religion, and; morality are life, thus community in its entirety is life. There is therefore no room for separation within the African worldview, but only complex interdependence (Mbiti, 1969). Thus, the imperial indoctrination of Christian ethics without a blend with whom the African children were and the environment within which they flourished was doomed to fail. Wiredu (1998) asserts that "in traditional Africa, what is morally good is conceived to be what is decent for humanity, and it brings dignity, respect, contentment, prosperity, and joy to man and his community. On the contrary, what is morally bad brings misery, misfortune, and disgrace." The communitarian characteristic of African morality rested on the well-being of society in all people's dimensions. Any disruption to orderliness accrued punishment instantaneously from the community, both the living and the ancestral spirit world. Though revered, the Christian concept of punishment in the afterlife, and the promise of hell, distorted the orderliness the community basked under in its indigenous moral systems. While lamenting this ideological crisis, Kinoti (1997:112) cites Kenyatta (2015:251), who asserted that:

Religious rites and hallowed traditions are no longer observed by the whole community. Moral rules are broken with impunity, for in place of unified tribal morality, there is now... a welter of disturbing influences, rules, and sanctions, whose net result is only that a Gikuyu does not know what he may or may not ought or ought not to do or believe but which leave him in no doubt at all about having broken the original morality of his people.

The distortion of Gikuyu's morality was real and disturbing, hence the quest for its recovery. Further, Kinoti, on the one hand, worried about the misogynistic paradigm that western modernism inculcated in her society through a patriarchal gospel. Only men became church leaders and catechists and owned land and property, of which children and their wives were part of property worth owning. On the other hand, she was grateful as demeaning practices within her Gikuyu culture were named and called out by the same patriarchal gospel. For instance, the celebration of the boy child over a girl child and female genital mutilation, among other ills, were components that had Kinoti argue for a balanced approach. She retorts,

There is a need for the Church in Africa to be truly African. Only then can the Church reconstruct a morality that is both African and Christian...contemporary African society is lamenting a moral world that has fallen apart. Therefore, there is a need to rekindle the memory of the many good moral and cultural values that guided and guarded traditional African societies (Kinoti, 1997:125).

Armed with the problem and challenges that had engulfed the Gikuyu community, Kinoti's consciousness to liberation was awakened, a task she undertook enthusiastically. In the preceding section, I engage contextually with Kinoti's literature to unearth ways that she utilizes to cultivate a feminist ethic that is liberating not only for the Gikuyu community but for all humanity.

Towards a feminist African ethic of liberation

Women theologians worldwide use their existential experiences for authentic theological reflections to enhance women's liberation consciousness. The Circle of Concerned African Women theologians, founded by Mercy Amba Oduyoye in 1989, of which Hannah Wangechi Kinoti was a member, employs narratology and women's life experiences to theologize. Indigenous knowledge systems embedded in folklore, riddles, proverbs, stories, folksongs, and other vehicles for passing down culture to future generations are thus interrogated and utilized towards life-affirming theologies. Kenyan feminist scholars such as Hannah Kinoti, Teresia Hinga, Musimbi Kanyoro, Mary Getui, Nyambura Njoroge, Philomena Mwaura, Hazel Ayanga, and Esther Mombo, among

others, have engaged in liberation and empowerment strides in their scholarship, following the framework of liberation theology. Liberation, empowerment, and women's rights have been a bedrock of women's scholarship, especially in interrogating repressive cultural and religious tenets that impede women's realization of their full potential. Therefore,

...the subject of women as liberators affirms women's consciousness in establishing authenticity in the face of alienation, marginalization, and oppression. Such consciousness is known to stem from corporeal limitations and the awakening of gender mainstreaming in all avenues of development. This has led to women's concern to participate actively in liberation and empowering themselves as a response to the conscientization of their roles both in the Church and society (Kabugi, 2014:3).

Hannah W. Kinoti's consciousness of women's oppression in various socio-cultural and religious realms is evident in several instances. Therefore, the theological reflections forthcoming from such varying cases are paramount to unearthing her drive for women's empowerment and liberation.

In the article "Growing Old in Africa: New Challenges for the Church" (2013:191-218), Kinoti recounts a few reminiscences with aging people within her community and residence in Nairobi. First, she recounts a story of a village man named Muraguri, whom she observed growing senile as she grew up in the village. Upon Muraguri's death, Kinoti tells how he was buried, "Muraguri's two sons wrapped him in his entire beddings which they had secured with strong strings made from fresh bark." The second story is of a frail old woman struggling to put a load of firewood on her back near Kangemi, one of the shanty towns of Nairobi city. Kinoti recounts stopping her car and helping the old lady transport her load easily. As they engaged, she narrated to Kinoti how she lost her family members through the Mau Mau liberation struggle, hence the anguish of compounding loneliness and poverty. Apart from these two pitiful stories, Kinoti recounts beautiful memories of visiting the mother of one of her teachers. She was a generous and talkative woman who entertained her and her friends till they were late for their afternoon class. Even though they received punishment for the lateness, they were happy they had visited a woman she thought deserved care despite her mental

state. In another teenage episode, Kinoti met a significantly older woman, again with a load of firewood on her back. Stooping to rest, she placed her hands on her knees for balance and engaged with young Kinoti. The old woman was concerned about the eating habits of Kinoti, who, being a teenager, looked tall and lean. She questioned Kinoti about her health and eating habits despite their being strangers. The concern never astonished Kinoti, who grew up in an environment where parenting was a communal responsibility. We realize that Kinoti recognizes, identifies, and supports those in dire need, especially aging, as a sign of solidarity with Christ. Kinoti avers that aging people are human. It's only that poverty, political unrest, civil war, and displacement, among other challenges, affect them adversely. She opines that the community and the Church, in particular, have a crucial role in addressing the plight of the aged.

Through the conviction that every human has an intrinsic worth, Kinoti utilizes her lived experience and storytelling to conscientize humanity with an ethic of liberation wrapped in care, not just for the aging persons but for the community as well. In her narrative analysis, several themes emerge that are crucial building blocks for her liberation ethic. They include:

I. Human Values

The well-being of a community is dependent on the relationships that exist among them. Kinoti avers that the well-being of an African indigenous community must be “understood from their context and experiences, in the totality of their environment (Kinoti, 1997:112).” She opines that it is from life’s experiences that well-being is comprehended and subsumed in “a host of other concepts including peace, harmony, goodwill, blessings and divine providence (Kinoti, 1997:113). All these are human values and virtues worth cultivating. Kinoti defines virtue as “all that in human behavior and deportment contributes towards social goodwill, harmony, peace and to an individual’s sense of well-being (Kinoti, 1997:199). Moral values are outstanding in Kinoti’s literature. Her concern for the aging persons and the drive to assist the women with loads of firewood attests to the care that she expects from humanity concerning those in unfortunate situations. She affirms that old age is a blessing that

God confers to people of good character, a component that highlights a connection between virtue, God's blessings, and old age.

Kinoti employs a metaphor from her doctorate fieldnotes exemplified by the Reverend Meshak Murage, formerly a minister from the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, that

...a good person has nine legs. With four the baby crawled; with two the growing up child and the mature adult walked; in ripe old age the old man and woman use three legs, the staff serving as support because the legs have become so weak. Hoary hair and the staff are the eventual rewards of a man, and of the woman, who is variously called *mutugi* (the hospitable man), *nyaguta* (the hospitable woman), *mwendwo ni iri* (the one loved by substance), *muumaandu* (the generous, charitable one) and *muthingu* (the righteous one) so are they the rewards of a *muthamaki* (worthy leader/counsellor) (Kinoti, 1997:197).

Symbolically, the staff had a crucial meaning among the Agikuyu. It is handled through ritual life in anticipation of eventually being used in old age. A small child was given a *gathanju* (wand) for grazing animals, while a girl was given a *ruthanju* (wand) to invite her relatives to her initiation ceremony. As a young bride, *muithuiya* (special staff) is given to symbolize married life. She would use the same staff later while returning to her mother, soon after marriage, and the staff symbolizes *gucokia makinya*. She would lean on the same staff and support herself in her old age, while for the older men, the staff is known as *muthigi* (elder's staff). The ritualized handling of staff cut across one's life and, at a deeper level, cultivated good character that would eventually make it possible to lean on the same at an older age (Kinoti, 1997). She affirms that virtue and morally upright character is not borne later in life but it is nurtured right from childhood, hence the proverb *Njuguna njega yuumaga ikuuniro* (A good club is got from the source). The ritualized staff that is owned since childhood links old age to being virtuous and blessed. It involved the inculcation of virtues by the socializing agents, internalization of the earned virtues, and an intentional uptake of the societal responsibility to pass the learned virtues over to the next generation. Inculcation of virtues is thus a communal responsibility that an individual takes up, not only as an avenue of experiencing a sense of belonging but also as ratified by the societal structures that bless and curse.

Kinoti thus utilizes her indigenous language, metaphors, and proverbs to situate the importance of human values and virtuous life as a prerequisite for blessing and attaining old age. Even though aging comes with frailty, she affirms that it is an age that accrues respect from the young, far and wide. Older people are respected in African communities as carriers of traditions, culture, moral framework, wisdom, and inheritance. The resource that the aging in our communities cements a communal relationship that transverses humanity to include the health of the animals, plants, and the entirety of the ecosphere. Kinoti affirms that “community and individual well-being was maintained through the observance of values of community life (Kinoti, 1997:115). The concept denotes a communitarian component of the liberative ethic grounded in relationships.

II. Indispensable relationships

A community’s moral order shapes the individuals that constitute it, and the individuals define the moral character of the community they are part of. Most African communities are organized along the Kinship system. A kinship system refers to a collaborative relationship between members of one household and members of a large linear group. The kinship system encompasses social responsibilities and expectations that ensure that the group members support one another (Mbiti, 1969). The social order of a community is maintained through ancestries.

The kinship system creates parenting cultures where all members are involved in the early training and care of the children. It is the responsibility of everyone in the community to parent and guides children in a morally upright manner. In one of the stories narrated by Kinoti, we note that an older woman was concerned about Kinoti’s eating habits. She worried that Kinoti was so lean, given that she was nearing teenagerhood, and encouraged her to feed. In other stories, she narrates how the aging men and women were taken care of not only by their relations but by other people as well. Kinoti herself narrates helping unknown older women along the way with their luggage. The obligation to take care of the children goes beyond the biological parents and the kinship formed of extended family members. Various African sayings and proverbs explain the culture of bringing up children. For example, the saying, “It takes a

village to raise a child,” signifies that raising a child is a shared responsibility by several kinship group members. The kinship community rules and participation are exalted over an individual.

Kinship denotes a community’s most vital force in Africans’ lives. It is a relationship between people with shared attitudes, a common origin, and living a common life. In addition, kinship is a system that has outlined family responsibilities, boundaries, interactions, and rights. They affect all aspects of human life in Africa, including care, marriages, and social status, since kinship controls people’s relationships, moral values, and attitudes. The kinship systems govern care, sexuality, marriage, reproduction, socialization, parenting, and other aspects of social organization. In African kinship systems, caregiving for older people and children flows from the relationships and attributes governing the kinship system. The kinship ties are an essential guide to who provides care and to what extent. The relationships formed dictate that the other members will care for older people in a kinship system. The responsibilities are shared among members based on the care required for older people and children. In a kinship system, a member cannot lack basic needs or care since members should care for one another.

Values of benevolence continued to flourish even in death. Kinoti exemplifies the moral values with the Gikuyu proverb, *iri tha ni iri iria* (the compassionate (cow) is the one that has milk (1997:118). The reciprocity of God’s generosity to them was gauged through the sharing that one engaged in amongst relations. Those who depicted this positive attribute were guaranteed old age, which would transition to the venerated ancestorship status. The ancestors are revered in the Gikuyu customs, as they watch over the community, rewarding and punishing moral behaviors. People of *iri* (substance-in terms of good character, good deportment, and diligence) never die; they are immortalized through naming. Naming children after their grandparents endowed with *iri* ensured a continued lineage of good morals and a solid society. Kinoti affirms a spiritual rebirth of the old in the young that morally ensures that society keeps her morals intact. Thus, relationships are evident in this life and continue even in death, forming a cyclic foundation that holds society together. Kinoti affirms that “a community’s well-being is expected to be enjoyed in life beyond the grave. She asserts that even though the Gikuyu

did not distinguish between heaven and hell, they distinguished between those who enjoyed peace in death and those who did not. The former she offers had adhered to a morality of virtue which enabled them to enjoy well-being. They are known to have cultivated moral attributes such as diligence, generosity, courage, temperance, and a sense of justice (Kinoti, 1997:119). Leading a morally upright life is a sure guarantee of being reborn through naming and enjoying peace in the land of the living dead, which can be said to be a liberating concept of non-gendered. Both men and women enjoyed ancestral status among the Agikuyu.

III. Mystical and Spiritual power

Reverence and veneration of the ancestries is a crucial component among the Gikuyu that Kinoti amplifies. Invoking the ancestral spirit world for justice upon immoral acts such as corruption and the killing of a loved one was common among the Gikuyu. The spirits were also consulted during calamities such as droughts and famine. Prayers and sacrifices were made facing Mt Kirinyaga (Mount Kenya), and there were uncompromising in his attitude and action to liberate people from suffering or to avenge the perpetrators. Most Gikuyu believed in the mystical and spiritual powers abhorred by their ancestors in managing the moral fabric of their society, as exemplified in the proverb *Ma ndikuaga* (Truth never dies) (Kinoti, 1998:56). The supernatural powers among the Gikuyu are believed to be keenly interested in matters of justice and fair play for the community's well-being. This heritage is crucial in the liberating as the inflicted punishment does not discriminate along any lines, such as gender, age, wealth, and clan, among other categories, but the spirit world is concerned with proper morality. Thus, moral caution is observed in adhering to proper morality to deter curses from the dying entering the spirit realm (Kinoti, 1998). While analyzing Muraguri's death and burial, Kinoti believed that his sons would later face his wrath for burying him indecently. Thus, African spirituality is crucial in maintaining social integrity and well-being, which feeds into Kinoti's liberating ethic.

While Kinoti affirms the indigeneity of morals, she does not shy away from Christianity. According to Masando (2018:209), "Christianity was meant to colonize the conscience and consciousness of the colonized in

ways that would make them lose their indigenesness. Ironically, it created conditions for the Africans to desire to be free, a factor leading to notions like ‘brotherhood’ and ‘oneness in Christ.’” Having been raised in a missionary environment, Kinoti affirms a blend of Christian morals within African morality. She argues that “African morality must be based on the love principle, and life-affirming morality taught by Jesus Christ, but not on the more negative, world-denying and absolutist affirmations which have characterized western Christianity for a very long time (Kinoti, 1997:126). Kinoti (2003:69) argues that the “power of the cross is a melting power of love for all.” This melting power of love at the cross brings reconciliation between man and God and between fellow human beings. Even though a Christian value, love is a virtue and a moral value that Africans embrace through their relationality within kinship structures. Thus, Kinoti’s feminist ethics centers on communitarian notions of care and communal engagement that are driven by moral values, the indispensability of human relationships, and ratified through mystical and spiritual powers that all revere. Kinoti’s three building blocks for her liberative ethic depict the possibility of constructing home-grown epistemology using decolonizing components that are crucial for advancing a just identity and community, as discussed below.

Decolonizing paradigms in Kinoti’s African Feminist Ethics

Decolonial theories protest the normalized, internalized patronizing epistemologies that impede just identities. European imperialism, monopoly of knowledge production, and Christian moralities demeaned African indigenous systems almost to the verge of extinction. However, Kinoti, among other scholars, detected the menace adherence to Christian ethics was breeding within the society and opted to confront it. Through her use of the indigenous language, Gikuyu, Kinoti affirms that morality and ethics are not universal everywhere. Societal expectations, just like individual experiences, differ greatly across localities. For instance, while arguing for care and respect for the aging in the communities, she affirms that respect is not pegged on patriarchal and gendered structures that regard men to the detriment of women but is anchored on seniority and character. Kinoti follows the thought thread of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, a

renowned Gikuyu writer who affirms the centrality of location in one's realization on self and follows knowledge production. Thiong'o notes (2008, 9) that "knowing oneself and one's environment is the correct basis of absorbing the world." In the same spirit, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians advocates for contextualized theologizing, where one's lived experiences form the foundation of critical engagement of matters of concern. Thus, the use of indigenous knowledge systems such as proverbs, language, tribe, clan, and kinship structures to advocate for change and search for one's identity is a positive step towards deconstructing "colonization of imagination, colonization of the mind and colonization of knowledge and power (Ndlovu, 2018:99).

The communitarian ethic that Kinoti exemplifies is not only situated but offers a solid ground for a critical engagement of one's identity. Understanding oneself is the first step towards analyzing and recognizing all aspects that are not in tune with one's identity. The moral identity that Kinoti drums for goes beyond blood relations to encompass all humanity (Metz, 2013). The principle of humanism, understood as concern for others by virtue of their intrinsic worth, is the first step towards an ethical, social praxis that upholds well-being. Practice and adherence to this principle seal all avenues for discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion, since, at the center of it all is a call to interpersonal relationships that includes all. Though communitarian, acting this form of morality invites self-introspection when deciding the action to be undertaken. The internalized values and cultivated virtues guide the subject in opting to respectfully help those in need and liberate those at the fringes of lack, domination, and oppression.

The African traditional communal way of life integrated older people into the extended family where the community was dutiful towards them. Old age was a social status that gave them vital responsibilities in the family and society, such as custodians of morality. Stigmatization of the aged due to western civilization, the generation gap, conflict of ideas between the aged and the young, and urbanization created a moral challenge that forced Kinoti to self-introspect in line with her identity. She realized that the new morality she was being inculcated with relegated some aspects that were crucial in her childhood. She utilized the Agikuyu proverb, *Nyumba na riika itiumaguo* (family and age group cannot be

abandoned), to ground her search for reconnecting with her roots. Thus, African identity becomes a crucial component to consider in decolonizing African ethics. As we seek to empower and liberate women, it is paramount that we are grounded, not only in our experiences but in the very beliefs that shape our being. Breaking all socialized and internalized normativity articulated by Simone De Beauvoir, cited by Simons (2010:26), that “humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being...She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the subject; he is the Absolute. She is the other.” But Kinoti rose beyond the stereotyping and provided a solid ethics governing the Agikuyu. This affirms that the subaltern can speak in deed (Dube, 2016).

Kinoti theorizes Agikuyu’s reality and lives by it even in her writings. She deliberately leans on Christian ethics through values that she located within her kinship structures. Human values undergird humanism and spring forth communitarian living. This navigation can retrace and rediscover precolonial African identities that respect our identities without bias. Kinoti’s attempt to situate an African feminist ethic that is communitarian, value-laden and toward care for humanity confirms that feminist scholars in Africa can construct a philosophy from the “lived experiences and material situations (Du Toit & Coetzee 2017:334).” Tamale (2020:43) holds similar sentiments: “if African women are to successfully challenge their subordination and oppression, they need to carefully and rigorously develop home-grown conceptualizations that capture the specific political economies and cultural realities encountered, as well as their traditional worldviews.” Thus, localized thought frames in navigating our day-to-day challenges is a promising ground for philosophizing and theologizing our way toward our liberation. As Mignolo (1999:235) would argue, decolonial thinking involves the “unveiling of epistemic silences” and “affirming the epistemic rights of the...devalued”. Thus, what is urgently required is an ontological and epistemological articulation of African female identity that can speak for, of, and from the African woman’s perspective for the good of humanity (Njoroge, 2000). Nyambura Njoroge (2000:173) confirms it is possible to successfully deconstruct repressive cultures while embracing the values

of solidarity, sisterhood and respect that hold others in esteem and value. She proudly speaks of the women's Guild in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa,

...From its beginnings in 1922, the Gikuyu women of the Women's Guild spoke out against injustices in the Kenyan Church and society. The "council of the shield" gathered itself to assert the dignity of African women. These women led the struggle against female circumcision, which was the socially accepted rite of passage into adulthood for Kenyan girls. As a society of churchwomen, the Guild also trained Bible women who taught classes of nearly one thousand participants. They developed a theology that emphasized the diversity of women's gifts (Romans 12) and the strident call of the great commission (Matt. 28:19). They nurtured themselves with fellowship, and grew spiritually through prayer, singing and Bible study. By the 1950s, the Guild had instituted structures to help women achieve a full range of ministerial activities in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa.

Kinoti's search for authentic Gikuyu ethics and Njoroge's articulated framework put in place by the PCEA women's Guild affirms that with the right spirit, enthusiasm, and solidarity, African feminists can retract to their roots, unlearn, learn, relearn and construct even an African feminist philosophy. A Feminist philosophy that does not just respond to the biased western or African male philosophies but a grounded philosophy that asks, responds to authentic questions and speaks to women's contexts, experiences, and situations.

CONCLUSION

The paper aimed to construct Hannah Wangeci Kinoti's African Feminist Ethic of Liberation. As moral decay ravaged the country in the 1990's Kenyan scholars worried about what had become of the young generation and their moral systems and opted to rescue it. Against this backdrop, Kinoti advanced a communitarian ethic based on ethical values and virtues that undergird human behavior for social cohesion. While challenging the blind adoption of Christian ethics as introduced by the missionaries, Kinoti adopted a blended form of ethics, where values that cut across Agikuyu culture and western Christianity were incorporated into her ethic. Outstanding in the virtue of love that oozes from the cross

of Christ that invites all for reconciliation. Kinoti utilizes her call to care for the aging to situate a communitarian and humanistic ethic that respects the well-being of all without any form of repression, discrimination or stigmatization. Aging persons are a societal resource that safeguards societal morality for peaceful co-existence. Kinoti's ethics is built on three pillars: human values/virtues, indispensable relations, and mystical and spiritual powers vested in the ancestries that undergird people's morality. Kinoti's ethic is built on indigenous knowledge systems known to the Agikuyu community, such as indigenous language, proverbs, rituals, and stories. Their utilization attests to the untapped resource and hence a call to prioritize looking back to the precolonial history to rebuild our identity as an avenue of philosophizing and theologizing within our geographical contexts and lived experiences. Liberation thus flows from recognizing the repressions we are going through and understanding our identity, locale, and what we deserve as humans toward communal well-being. Thus, locating ourselves on solid ground, where our positive ancestry speaks forth life, is a better ground for attaining total liberation.

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9 | African Women Befriending Jesus in Teresa Hinga's Ecclesia

Loreen Maseno

Introduction

Teresa Mbari Hinga, is a Kenyan and a professor of Religious Studies in U.S.A, specializing in African religions, Feminist theologies, Religion and contemporary moral issues. She holds a Doctorate from the University of Lancaster U.K. Her doctoral work was a unique contribution to her theological enterprise wherein she was able to examine the Legio Maria independent Church and the transformations this church had made upon Mariology from the Roman Catholic Church (Hinga 1992b).

For her, the distinct history of Africans is a history that is marked by colonialism, therefore the cultural context from which African women theologians speak is distinct. There is a decisively ambiguous impact of Christianity in the lives of African women. Christianity has participated in the oppression of women, since it has functioned to legitimize colonialism, racism and sexism. However, at the same time, African women have appropriated for themselves the gospel of liberty implied in Christianity (Hinga 1996:31).

This chapter highlights African traditional heritage as one of the sources for Hinga's theology. It points to Hinga's explorations of African religions and Feminist theologies. This chapter further explores Christology in which East African women can befriend Jesus first as a personal friend who engenders hope in many women. It shows how Hinga is critical of any Christology which encourages sexism, racism and patriarchy.

According to Hinga, "women's experiences are so diverse that to speak of a monolithic feminist theology is seemingly absurd" (Hinga 1996:27). Women around the globe have to come to realize that women's experiences are tremendously diverse. Consequently, this has occasioned the rise of several feminist theologies, as women analyse ways in which

sexism affects them in their particular social, political and historical locations (Hinga 2002:79). Hinga further notes,

Much has been written and said concerning the plight of all women all over the world. Protests, campaigns and symposia have been undertaken to highlight the problems of oppression met by women almost universally... It is of interest to note, however, that much of the discussion centres around the theme of woman as a victim of negative social circumstances and her place under the tutelage of patriarchy. The emphasis has been on the need to liberate women. (Hinga 1999:37, 41).

In general, Hinga is concerned about women being agents of social transformation, instead of being objects of mercy and kindness.” Her ideas are in conversation with patriarchy, gender, western feminist theology and African theology. In general, for the present and future, Hinga’s input outlines that any relevant Christology for African women is one which presents Christ as a concrete and personal figure who engenders hope in the oppressed by siding with women.

The historical, cultural and religious contexts that motivated her work

In theologising, Hinga takes cognisance that there is a decisively ambiguous impact of Christianity in the lives of African women. She notes that Christianity has participated in the oppression of women, since it functioned to legitimize colonialism, racism and sexism. These are the main historical contexts in which many East African women found themselves betwixt. The history of colonialism had a deep impact on many East African women. A number were denied access to theological training colleges and other training institutions for many years. Males were quickly recruited, trained and ordained. The selective criteria that was employed disenfranchised many females, who even dropped out of school since their prospects were dim.

Hinga is well versed with the colonial context in Kenya. Before 1914, British settlements had begun in the central highlands of Kenya. Colonialists ensured forceful eviction of people from their land and if they insisted to remain, they could only do so in the vicinity as squatters or forced laborers. These events were not very far from Hinga who was is

familiar with novels such as *a grain of Wheat* by Ngungi wa Thiongo. The colonial landscape was well replayed in the novel, whose characters are set a rural setting and are tremendously and diversely affected by colonialism.

In Kenya, this colonial context affected very many women indicating a somewhat grim future for them and their families. To begin with many males were incarcerated for no apparent reasons, and in order to provide forced labor around the railways and road construction. Very many young men from villages were arrested and taken to detention at the primacy of their marriages. This caused major societal disruptions in very many families, who ended up childless or divorced.

Racism is another context in which Hinga notes in her works. This context was particularly exploited by the colonialists who treated the rest as second-rate citizens. Many places were set apart for the people of colour and other places for the colonialists who took great advantage of such disparities. At the same time, the heads of top schools were only to be Caucasian, whereas the natives were not allowed to be leaders in top ranking schools for very many years. The types of trainings available for natives was skewed so as to fill the labour force with particular roles such as clerks, secretaries, typists and the like.

Sexism is another context in which Hinga's work grew from. Being one of the founder member of the Circle of Concerned African Theologians, she openly declares that the Circle is concerned with voicing protests against sexism and its roots in religion and culture (Hinga 1996:31). The Circle was founded on the 25th September 1989 in Accra, Ghana. It is a contemporary network of women from across Africa, and is a voluntary movement, whose work often takes place within regional meetings. The Circle was inaugurated in order to facilitate the writing, research and publication by a multi-religious and multiracial network of women (Maseno and Mligo 2019:37).

Sexism in East Africa has continued to disadvantage many women who are accorded a second-class citizen placement. In and of itself, sexism has hindered the advancement of many women who have what it takes in politics, health, education and other arena. In the face of sexism, she shows however, at the same time, that African women have appropriated

for themselves the gospel of liberty implied in Christianity (Hinga 1996:31). East African women dialogue with their male counterparts in many areas. These common areas and of which provide a broader context for East African women includes poverty, racism, cultural, social, ethnic and political problems.

In order to attend to sexism and in an effort to provide a cure, the Circle members present a 'Two-winged' theology. In this theology, women work in co-operation with men of good will for the reconstruction of a religious and a cultural praxis of sexual equality. This theology asserts a relationship with African men.

Sources and norms for Hinga's theological journey

Hinga notes that women around the globe have to come to realize that women's experiences are tremendously diverse. This diversity has occasioned the rise of several feminist theologies, as women analyse all the different ways in which sexism affects them in their particular social, political and historical locations (Hinga 2002:79). This reflection includes the appropriate sources for theology that Hinga takes up in her theologizing.

The first source that she uses is women's experience. In her doctoral study at the University of Lancaster U.K. she teased out the experiences of women within a Kenyan Independent Church, Legio Maria. She worked amongst many women from this church and gathered data which was fruitful for her work. These experiences of women inspired by Marian devotion were pertinent to the development of her theology on Mariology within an African Independent Church.

Hinga also uses Scripture as a source for her theologising. According to her, the virgin birth of Jesus and the nativity stories were key in exploring the role of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church and also in the Legio Church. Her findings brought to fore the way myths of powerful old women were symbolically connected to the Legio and was not limited to Mary the mother of Jesus, but also extended to post-menopausal women. In sum she was able to unfold with ease how Legio ideas were a blend of Luo mythology and Legion of Mary piety where there was an interaction with ancient myths and current translations of Christianity.

But in Hinga's use of biblical tradition, she avers to a critique of the bible in the economy of women's emancipation. In her view,

Seldom do we hear of women as subjects and actors in the drama of social action or as moral agents in history...The biblical tradition does seem to underline the fact that women are victims of social injustice. Women are targeted as objects of divine concern, particularly the case of the poor women, widowed women and barren women. However, it is significantly silent about women as social transformers. The New Testament is some improvement of the old, but it is not eloquent about the role of women as agents, as subjects that act rather than objects that are acted upon (Hinga 1999: 37, 41, 42).

It follows that many women are not encouraged in religious spaces to be agents and take the lead toward social transformation. It appears that this role is almost always given to the males in the community. They are the ones to decide how East African women are to operate and how far they can reach. Hinga seeks that many East African women take up the role of actors and agents whose actions can change society and the communities they live in.

Hinga references the African Traditional Heritage to set up inroads into her theologizing. For her African culture has positive aspects that encourage human flourishing, but there are also some aspects which should not be encouraged and they are not life affirming for many women. Hinga in her work on Inculturation points to how inculturation is an essential aspect for the application of the gospel as a liberative principle in all aspects of the African traditional Heritage. Thus, from the vantage point of this heritage, inculturation should proceed to point to the need to abide by the dignity of the Africans and the need for self-definition. For East African women, it means a preparedness to allow them to say 'this I am', and a preparedness to accept their rejection of extraneous definitions that are the culmination of the process of 'othering'.

Hinga and befriending Jesus in East Africa

Within Hinga's Christological matrix, it is important to note two aspects that were evident within the description of the Christology that found expression in missionary praxis. Jesus Christ was not native to the religious forms of East Africans. Jesus had to be introduced to the people

of the region primarily by the missionaries who spread inland in the early twentieth century. In doing so, two images of Christ were made prominent and expressed. One prevailing image in missionary praxis was that of Christ the conqueror who legitimized the subjugation of the African race during the period of colonial and imperial expansionism. As a conqueror, it was justified for many East Africans to be conquered from their ancestral lands and the country taken over in the name and with the help of this conquering and victorious Christ.

This was a Christ of conquest, who would win every battle and destroy those who stood in His way of Kingdom and colonial expansion. This Christ was the King in whose name new territories both physical and spiritual, were fought for, annexed and conquered. Each conquest was celebrated as having been undertaken in the name of and with the help of Jesus the King. This shade of imperial Christianity came along with an imperial Christ to match, where winning Africa for Christ was a major motivating factor.

This prevailing imagery had it that Africa was the treasure to be looted for Christ. Those who came to East Africa with an imperial Christ image, propagated cultural and spiritual imperialism of the highest level. As missionaries, they went on to relegate African culture to the dustbin, demanding that all converts take up new names “Christian names” found in the bible. They demanded that converts change their lifestyles, marriage agreements, clothing, diet and the like in order to be real Christians. But this mode of missionary expansion had dire consequences, for instance the welfare of African women concerned in polygamous marriages was not taken into consideration. Upon conversion, a polygamist would be asked to immediately send away all but one of his wives as a condition for baptism. Such a posture, did not take into consideration the future and wellbeing of those women and children who were discarded.

The second imagery propagated by the missionaries was that of Jesus Christ the liberator. To have this understood and demonstrated, many mission stations established by missionaries in the African interior served as orphanages and shelters. In the midst of natural disasters like famine and floods, a number of people found themselves unable to cope and they found shelter in the mission stations. For others, tribal wars were the

reason they left their homes to live in mission stations. Still for others, conversion and access to education were the driving forces. Some women took shelter in the mission stations in their attempts to be free from unsatisfactory marriages or harsh parental control.

This imagery presented Jesus as one who cares and liberates the indigenous people from yokes, wars, diseases, illiteracy and the like. Health stations and schools were domiciled in these mission stations. Lives were saved in the face of pandemics and diseases. This Jesus was one who was near the suffering. It follows therefore that for Hinga, the Christ of the missionary enterprise was therefore an ambivalent one, on the one hand, a conqueror legitimizing subjugation and on the other hand a liberator.

East African women befriended Jesus who is as a personal friend who helps East African women bear their grief, loneliness and suffering. Over the years and even after independence, East African women have embraced Jesus in their songs, prayers, reflections and situations. Studies among East African widows have shown the way widows experience loneliness since they had a partner and spouse before. After their spouse died, they were left alone to plan matters. It was evident that a number wished that their loved one was present to do some of the things they would have normally done. For example, during important meetings in the home, widows found that there was a void and that they needed to call for elderly male relations who would be there when they wanted land divided, when cows were to be taken by their sons for bride wealth etc. Bearing loneliness is not easy for anyone. East African widows experiencing loneliness and a feeling of being abandoned or isolated led to a desire for the intervention of Jesus by many (Maseno-Ouma 2014).

Feelings of loneliness could be explained in various ways. It is possible that many East African widows were overwhelmed by day to day parenting responsibilities. Similarly, they may have felt uncomfortable with old friendships, since they felt uneasy being around married couples with their children and jealous of happy couples who were still together. For some widows, instead of enduring such mixed emotions, they deliberately removed themselves from common activities, thus intensifying their loneliness (Reggy-Mamo 1999:74-76).

Hinga shows that East African women befriend Jesus, the iconoclastic prophet who stands out as a critic of the status quo, an image often found within African Independent Churches. As a prophet, Jesus calls out all forms of oppression without fear. The prophet speaks on behalf of God. This is one of the offices of Christ and many East African women remain keen to hear the words of Jesus.

Hinga demonstrates how African women are victims of oppression and muteness in society therefore, an image of Christ that is popular is one that blends Christology with pneumatology, especially in the African Independent Churches, patronised mostly by women. For many women who are expected to be silent, the pneumatic possibilities where the tongue is unrestrained and the voice of God is heard through females and males, is an attractive Christology for many East African women. In which case, Jesus is the embodiment of the spirit, the power of God and he becomes the voice of the voiceless thus empowering women to be less inhibited and muted.

Besides the ambivalence created from the Christology of missionary praxis, East African women have boldly befriended Jesus and named Him in their lives and circumstances (Maseno-Ouma 2014). They are fearless in their articulation of whom Jesus Christ is to them. They go on to share this repository of theologies in their stories, dances and prayers for all to hear and become actors in the socio-political, cultural and economic arena (Maseno 2020). But at the same time, a relevant Christology for African women is one which presents Christ as a concrete and personal figure who engenders hope in the oppressed by siding with women. It is not enough to have any Christology but East African women seek a concrete Christ on the side of the powerless, giving them power and voice to speak for themselves.

The Christ that East African women befriend is the one who is actively concerned with the lots of victims of social injustice and the dismantling of unjust social structures. He is the Christ who is expected to be on the side of women as they fight for the dismantling of societal sexism that has oppressed them through the ages. At the same time, East African women have to be on the lookout and remain critical of any versions of Christology that would be opposed to their cause by encouraging sexism

and functions to entrench lopsided gender relations (Hinga 1994:261-268).

The purpose of Hinga's theological thinking

Hinga sets out to encourage women to step up for their liberation (Hinga 1992a). She encourages East African women to resist any Christology, biblical tradition, cultural mandate and praxis which oppresses and subjugates women. The purpose of her theologizing is to encourage, to conscientize, to awaken, quicken and embolden.

She is clear when she states,

Women therefore are called not only to be recipients of liberation to enjoy the privilege of liberation, but also to be challenged to become subjects, by actively undertaking the task of liberating, transforming, not only themselves but also society to ensure a more humane and egalitarian future (Hinga 1999:44-45).

Hinga is persuaded that East African women are a force to reckon with. They should upon liberation not remain comfortable but proceed with speed to transform the rest of society for the good of the coming generations. It is for her, not enough to be liberated, but to also as an active participant proceed to be an actor and a change agent across the region. This would enable the eschatological hope of a balanced society to come to pass.

Hinga's theology in relation to patriarchy and colonialism

It is clear that in many parts of East Africa, patriarchy and the rule of the father remains dominant. Within this context, there have been forces which women have had to contend with. Competition has stifled women's progress in many arenas. Others have missed out on opportunities due to the hierarchy embedded in the form of patriarchy experiences across the region. Hinga shows in her writings and papers the need for a consciousness-raising effort. When many women are conscientized to call out patriarchy in many of its forms, they shall be able to name these oppressive forces and find a way toward emancipation.

In as long as many women are unaware of what keeps them down, they will continue to be denied the opportunity to flourish in the society. To Hinga, many women in East Africa remain subjugated. However, there is need to invoke and stir up a process by means of which women are liberated, and a process that awakens them to participate in the process of human liberation in general (Hinga 1999:44). Consequently,

A society or [a community] is one where there is an eradication or correction of patriarchy which often leads to women being discriminated against, oppressed and exploited because of their sex. In a society or community, there needs to be an unmasking of sexual injustices and their subsequent elimination in order to bring about the liberation of women... It is with legitimation that women should take up the challenge of social transformation, unmasking and eradicating social injustices to pave the way for the eschatological community that the bible looks forward to (Hinga 1999:43).

Hinga seeks a correction of patriarchy owing to its devastating effects in society such as discrimination. Many women in East Africa are not given equal opportunity in the church and society. A number are not allowed to speak in certain arena. Hinga sees feminist theology in East Africa as an objection against the forced silence and at the same time a challenge to African women to rise against the forces of injustice that besiege them. Many years of forced silence may in fact have led (East African) women to become indifferent to the various oppressions (Hinga 1996:28).

Tradition is invoked when land matters are being discussed in villages and women are asked to only to watch. Discriminatory traditions continue unabated, even as many women are called on to serve their male kin around the clock oblivious of the toll these places on them. Those menial jobs that are not payable are relegated to women, whereas if men are to take them up, they demand to be paid.

Hinga emphasizes that patriarchy also encourages oppression and exploitation. When women go into the farms to plant cash crops, many are not rewarded when their husbands go to pick the bonuses of coffee and tea. Their labour is not accounted for and in many areas in Kenya, their husbands that opportunity to marry additional wives or disappear with other women until they have squandered the bonuses. The impact of

such exploitation is severe, with many children lacking basic needs in the home.

As a Christian, Hinga looks forward to the eschatological community where wild animals and humans shall live in peace and both females and males shall live as one humanity in mutuality. Social injustices have hindered community in many African settings. However, upon the eradication and elimination of sexual injustices, women shall be liberated to enjoy human flourishing in East Africa.

But the colonial expansion in East Africa is one historical patch that Hinga addresses and calls out for what it is. According to her, many East Africans have a distinct history marked by colonialism. This distinct history therefore, provides the cultural context from which African women theologians speak with a rather distinct voice. There is a decisively ambiguous impact of Christianity in the lives of African women. Christianity has participated in the oppression of women, since it has functioned to legitimize colonialism, racism and sexism. However, at the same time, African women have appropriated for themselves the gospel of liberty implied in Christianity (Hinga 1996:31).

Hinga in Conversation with John Pobee on Christology

John Pobee studied African and Christian religion in Africa, England, Germany and the United States. Between 1974 and 1975, he was a resident fellow at the Institute for Ecumenical and cultural research at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota. Pobee is a native of Ghana. He is author of many books and articles.

The quest for an African Christology has led to several Christologies, which try to interpret in categories of our time the Christ who meets us in our culture. Pobee's Christology is a functional one. It focuses on the deeds of Jesus that result in an image of Christ to the believer. In his seminal book, he asks,

Who is Jesus Christ? ... How does he affect my life? Why should an Akan (a tribe in Ghana) relate to Jesus of Nazareth, who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation? (Pobee 1979:81).

Pobee notes that the Akan outlook prefers concreteness to abstraction. For this reason, the Jesus of Nazareth is expressed in terms of Jesus' activity as Nana. Pobee states that,

In Akan society, the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the sanctions for the good life and punish evil. And the ancestors hold that authority as ministers of the Supreme Being. Our approach would be to look on Jesus as the Great and Greatest ancestor - in Akan language *Nana*. With that will go the power and authority to judge the deeds of men, rewarding the good, punishing the evil. Again, in our context, we shall seek to emphasize that even if Jesus is *Nana* like the other illustrious ancestors, he is a nonpareil of a judge; he is superior to the other ancestors by virtue of being closest to God and as God (Pobee 1979:94).

Both Hinga and Pobee are inclined to a functional and concrete Jesus who is experienced by the people. However, Hinga would be quick to note from Pobee's Christology the danger of having Jesus as *Nana*. This is because Ancestors among the Akan possess great human achievements and often, achievements by women in a patriarchal society are not taken into account. Furthermore, given the strict division of labour among the Akan traditional society, how would an Akan great ancestor relate to a downtrodden widow?

For Teresia Hinga's work, subordination of women is exemplified by their years of forced silence that has led many to acquiescence with the various oppressions. These insights are valuable in as far as women's experience is a norm and source for African women's theology and is consequently allow Hinga to critique the Nana possibility. The great ancestor would in many ways correctly fit in the experience of the Akan males and not the entire Akan community.

Hinga would continue to show that Pobee's Christology as a source for inculturation in Africa is lacking since he utilises a high Christology and in so doing, is unable to relate to the cries of the underprivileged and the downtrodden. The Akan is a patriarchal society. As such, it is a society characterised by asymmetric dualisms thereby legitimizing patriarchal relations of domination and subordination as "natural difference".

CONCLUSION

Hinga leads East African women to encounter and befriend Jesus. Her Christology is that which engenders self definition, liberation and empowerment for women. She is critical of any source for African Theology becoming that which encourages oppression, sexism and patriarchy. Hinga contributes enormously to African women's Christologies with important perspectives. She is able to distill how the imperial Christ in missionary praxis was a disservice for many who experienced colonial oppression. Further to this, Hinga's theological enterprise opens up room for further dialogue with African independent Churches on Christology, ecclesiology, mission and Mariology. It is clear that East African women, whether young or post-menopausal can be enjoined in powerful imagery and myths of independent Churches. These women would exude power and bring balance in the somewhat lopsided religious arena in Kenya. However, even as Hinga urges women to be agents of social transformation and not just wait to be liberated by others, she does not pay attention to the possible distinction of Woman and women when she decries the lack of agency among women. This makes it very difficult to envision women and men as allies and partners in the process of social change. At the same time, Hinga, opens possibilities for naming Jesus in the twenty first century regardless of status and background. Hinga leads East African women to raise their voices and speak in order to be heard in their liberated state. Hinga opens room for East African women to speak about Jesus Christ according to the feminist model of inclusion and reciprocity.

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10 | **Hoyce Lyimo–Mbowe with an Emancipatory Reading of the Bible in the African Context**

Joyce Damian Ngandango

Introduction

Rev. Prof. Hoyce Lyimo-Mbowe is an ordained Pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Eastern and Coastal Diocese. She is the second woman to hold a high academic level of theological education as a Professor. She has worked hard-as an academic and has made significant contributions as a writer of books and articles concerning Africa and Bible, and particularly issues pertaining to the emancipation of women. There is considerable appreciation for her contribution to the contextual hermeneutics and Theological publications.

She is also a thoughtful and effective leader within the church and the community, having served in various positions and in different parishes and institutions, as will be described later in this paper. Since January 2020, Lyimo-Mbowe has been working exclusively as Executive Director of the Mindol Ecumenical Foundation (MEF) in Kitwe, Zambia. Since the inception of MEF in 1959, Lyimo-Mbowe is the first female Executive Director.

This chapter examines Lyimo-Mbowe's Theological concepts of the emancipation of women in the African and biblical context, focusing on the perceptions of female inferiority in biblical texts and some African traditional culture and how these affect the social transformation of contemporary women. This chapter discusses how Lyimo-Mbowe's work addresses gender issues, Biblical hermeneutics in the African context African culture and African theology, with special focus on African womanist theology. In general, Lyimo-Mbowe's interpretations of biblical passages are relevant to the biblical hermeneutics that support the emancipation of women in the African context

Hoyce Lyimo-Mbowe

Early Family Life

Lyimo-Mbowe was born in Moshi – Kilimanjaro Region - Tanzania. She is a tenth of twelve children in family of Rev. Jacob Isaack Lyimo and Mama Luise Naftael Lyimo. Her father was a Pastor who worked in different parishes of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Northern Diocese. Her mother was a smallholder farmer entrepreneur. From an early age, her parents nurtured her faith and church experience by having her attend Sunday school classes and other related activities. In her childhood, she loved the work of her father as he was ministering in the church and admired the physical appearance of his pastoral robes. She says;

My father influenced my career choice. When I was young I loved the way my father appeared in his robe. I saw him looking like an Angel when he wore a robe during Sunday service, and without knowing that women were not allowed to be ordained to pastoral ministry, I said to myself, when I grow up, I want to be a Pastor, so that I can wear a robe and teach the word of God like my father¹.

From this experience, she was inspired so that, after she grew up, she would become a pastor, but she did not know that the system of the church at that time would not allow that to happen. In her pre-teen years, she realized that women could not be Pastors and there were no female pastors in the evangelical Lutheran church in Tanzania in those days. “This reality raised many questions in my mind. I felt disturbed and it was like my dream has been killed.”² she says. Then she decided to share her feelings with her mother, as she explains;

“I shared my feelings with my mother. She encouraged me and explained to me how my dream can remain valid by doing other jobs in the church. She insisted that I should not give up, but work hard in school and have a successful completion of my studies, so that I qualify to work for the church in other profession.”

¹ Interview with Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 12/11/2022.

² Ibid.

From this experience and the words of encouragement from her mother³, she promised herself two things: **(i)** To read Bible as much as possible and try to get to know why women were not allowed to be Pastors, and **(ii)** To work hard in her school and studies so that she could qualify for church jobs and work with the church after studies. Since her childhood she participated in church activities by singing choir, composing poems, memorizing Bible verses and teaching other children who were present in the church. These practices continued in her secondary schools life, as the active member and leader of Tanzania Student Christian Fellowship.⁴

Education back ground

From 1980 – 1986 Lyimo-Mbowe attended the Mrieny School, where she received her Certificate of Primary Education. She then joined Marangu School from 1987 to 1990 where she received her Certificate of Secondary Education. In 1990 when she was in Form Four, she heard the good news that Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania had decided to ordain women in the ministry. She revived her first dream and determined to pursue her ambition. Therefore, she proceeded to her advance level studies from 1991 to 1993 at Korogwe Girls High School. After a successful completion of her studies, she reminded her parents about her ambition to become a Pastor like her father. Her parents supported her in all the required interview procedures and she was selected.

Moreover, as she was getting ready to join the Theological College – Makumira, she met the first female Pastors on different occasions. She was inspired by female pastors during that time in many ways, such as Rev. Anna Makyao, Rev. Joseline Njama and Rev. Joyce Kibanga. She always admired their way of handling challenges and their confidence and dedication to their ministry. Lyimo-Mbowe attended the 100th Anniversary Jubilee of the Northern Diocese, where Pastor Joseline Njama read the Word of God with confidence. This experience further inspired her, and kept the fire burning in her heart so that she concluded that she had made the right choice to start the process of joining Theological College.

³ Lyimo Naftael L., Mother of Rev. Prof. Lyimo Mbowe H.

⁴ Interview with Lyimo-Mbowe H. 12/11/2022.

In 1994 she commenced the theological studies and in 1999 she successfully completed her studies in Bachelor of Divinity program at Makumira University College in Tanzania. During this time, she continued singing in the College choir (Neema choir) and also was appointed as college parish worker. On completion of her studies at Makumira College, she submitted her thesis, titled *Seeking for Wholeness*⁵.

From 2001 to 2003 she pursued her Master of Philosophy in Theology program at the school of Mission and Theology Stavanger, Norway. Her research paper for master's Programme is entitled, "Moses Married to a Cushite Woman: An Exegetical Analysis of Numbers 12".⁶ Her thesis was submitted to the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger in Cooperation with the University of Bergen – Norway.

From 2008 to 2009 Lyimo-Mbowe successfully completed the Germany Language Course in Bochum, Germany, and then commenced her doctoral studies in 2009. In 2014, she submitted her PhD dissertation on the Old Testament topic, "Feminist Expositions of the Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Deborah in Judges 4 and 5" to the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität in Bonn, Germany⁷. Later for three years from 2015 to 2017, she was a Post-Doctoral Fellow working on the research programme, with a focus on the Maasai and the Bible at VID Specialized University - Faculty of Theology and Diakonia in Norway. From the findings of her research work she published a Book entitled "Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading" with VID Specialized University Stavanger, Norway⁸.

⁵ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (1999). *Seeking for Holiness*. A Thesis submitted to Makumira University College – Tanzania.

⁶ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2003). *Moses Married to a Cushite Woman: An Exegetical Analysis of Numbers 12*". A Thesis submitted to the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger in Cooperation with the University of Bergen, Norway.

⁷ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2014). "Feminist Expositions of the Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Deborah in Judges 4 and 5" to the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität in Bonn, Germany.

⁸ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2017). "Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading" VID Specialized University Stavanger, Norway.

Lyimo-Mbowe was married to Rev. Daniel Mbowe on August 1, 1998, who has been very supportive in her ministry. She has learned much from her husband because he is senior, and he has been allowing her to work, travel, and study without restrictions. All these have contributed to her success.

Publications

Lyimo-Mbowe has published books and articles

Lyimo-Mbowe (2015), in this book she shows that, both women and men were leaders since ancient times; however, few female leaders are reported. Deborah was one of the powerful female leaders in ancient Israel. This work explored the feminist expositions of the Old Testament in Africa, with focus on the context of the offices held by Deborah as narrated in the book of Judges Chapters 4 and 5. The exegetical part shed light on the role played by the female leaders among the Israelites. The feminist paradigms in Judges 4 and 5 demonstrate how female characters in these chapters constructed a way to disagree with what seems to oppress women and deny their leadership capability. The findings of this study determined that gender should not have an effect on leadership in general⁹.

Lyimo-Mbowe (2020), she is also the author of another book, which is a critical study of some effects of popular biblical interpretations in the context of an East African ethnic group, the Maasai. The book focuses on parallels between concepts of female inferiority in biblical texts and in Maasai traditional culture. It investigates some parallels and analyses their problems as they are conceptualized in popular Maasai biblical interpretation and how these affect the social transformation of contemporary Maasai women. The book aims at sensitizing readers of the Bible to popular interpretations of biblical texts that consciously, and more often unconsciously, function as a legitimizing force, which authorizes or reinforces socio-cultural structures that oppress women. However, it demonstrates the potential of reading biblical texts from

⁹ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2015. *Feminist Expositions of the Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Deborah in Judges 4 and 5*. Berlin: Logos Verlag.

emancipatory perspectives, both in popular and academic critical contexts. Also, this book demonstrates how some popular Maasai biblical interpretations contributed in academic works to the emancipation of women. Moreover, this work develops its own contextual hermeneutics approach of women's liberation known as enkitok. The new approach borrows some aspects from social fields and it has been employed in this work on some selected biblical texts¹⁰.

Lyimo-Mbowe (2021), she also published an article where she describes how Kimpa Vita, an African woman and an ordinary reader of the Bible, contextualized some concepts from scripture and critically analysed some church images in her days. She made an effort to analyse various religio-and socio-cultural parallels between her traditions and biblical texts as well as church practices. She appreciated the potential for emancipation in the Bible. Kimpa Vita was burnt at the stake in the 1700s for challenging the ambiguities of missionary Christianity and its seeming support for colonialism and even slavery in the Congo. Kimpa also suffered martyrdom because of her gender. The Kimpa Vita story is an African women's story¹¹.

Lyimo-Mbowe (2008), she writes about the heated discussion within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) on women's ordination during 1980s to the Pastoral ministry. Lyimo-Mbowe observes how it encountered various hindrances like culture, church traditions and Biblical verses. In culture she wrote about Patriarchal system in most of African communities. The way children were raised even women themselves felt inferior to men, they believed cannot be leaders but only men are born to be leaders. On church traditions all mission societies which brought the Gospel and established churches in Tanzania considered only men. But also on the Bible verses she wrote on the 12th Assembly of ELCT in Morogoro 1990 were by Theologians who were against women's ordination mainly used Biblical texts 1 Cor14:34 and

¹⁰ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2020. *Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading*. USA: Peter Lang Publisher.

¹¹ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2021. Kimpa Vita: Contextualized Biblical Interpretation in *Breaking the Silence: A Collection of Research Papers by the Women Theologians on their Participation in the Church* (Printed by Moshi Lutheran Printing Press) Chapter 2.

2 Tim 2:12. The verses insist that the ordination of women as Pastors is forbidden Biblically. She concludes by showing efforts been made by ELCT to fight against the discrimination of women in the church ministry, many positive steps which were taken to include women in the church ministry where women theologians are ordained¹².

Working Experience as a Pastor

Lyimo-Mbowe in 1999 was ordained as Pastor and worked for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, East and Coastal Diocese in different capacities, served as pastor in charge of the different parishes as follows: the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, Eastern and Coastal Diocese Magomeni Mviringo, Kijitonyama, Matumbi and Kipawa.

She has also served as District Pastor at Ilala - Eastern and Coastal Diocese of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania and Kinondoni District – Eastern Coastal Diocese of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania where she provided supervision of 20 parishes (with 20 Pastors, 20 Evangelists and 20 Parish Workers), 45 sub-parishes (45 Evangelists and 45 Parish workers). More than 30,000 people were parishioners and congregants of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Eastern and Coastal Diocese – Kinondoni District. Moreover, she served as Secretary for the Desk of the Christian Education where she oversaw Diocesan schools and, at the same time, coordinated the teaching of the Christian Education in all primary and secondary schools in Dar es Salaam and other areas of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-Eastern and Coastal Diocese – Tanzania¹³.

From January 2018 to December 2019 she worked for Tumaini University Dar Es Salaam College as a Dean of Students, lecturer and

¹² Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2008). ELCT/ECD: Encouraging and empowering those Who are There” in *It Takes Two: The Ordination of Women in the Member Churches of the United Evangelical Mission*, Edited by Gesine V. Kloeden-Freudenberg, Heike Koch, Brunhild v. Local and Sonia Parera-Hummel. Wuppertal: UEM Publisher, 204-209.

¹³ Ibid.

Chaplain. This University belongs to the ELCT-East and Costal Diocese (A Constituent College of Tumaini University Makumira).

Moreover, in her teaching duties, she has served as a Supervisor at Justo Mwale University, and Rock View University, Supervising Masters and PhD students. Lyimo-Mbowe has been serving as a Lecturer at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, teaching Old Testament and Christian Education.

Lyimo-Mbowe has also been influential as a Guest Lecturer at Heidelberg University in Germany, teaching Diaconia in the African context. She worked part-time at the Volkshochschule, Bonn, Germany, providing instruction in Swahili language, as well as orienting Missionaries and Experts as they prepare to travel to East Africa for work. Finally, she was Part-Time Teacher at Moshi Secondary School, teaching Christian Education, and at Lyakirimu Secondary School, teaching Swahili and Geography.

Lyimo-Mbowe has served on various boards, including international boards like; The Foundation Board of United Evangelical Mission, Member of the UEM Executive Committee, the UEM Council and Classical Religious Texts in Global Contexts.

African woman

According to Ngandango 2021:87, an African woman is one who did not talk back to men, but must be silence to exhibit respect.¹⁴ Taiwo writes that women are subordinate to men and that their roles are less important because they are confined within the family unit. It is the men who had the decision-making power, the wisdom and the knowledge to build the communities¹⁵ (Taiwo 2010:215). Lyimo- Mbowe says:

Most African communities are Patriarchal. This reality led to the dominion of men over women. Men felt that they were the ones to lead,

¹⁴ Ngandango, J. (2021). The Contribution of women to the church growth in the Evangelical Lutheran Church-Iringa Diocese. *Breaking the Silence: A Collection of Research Papers by the Women Theologians on their Participation in the Church* (Printed by Moshi Lutheran Printing Press) Chapter 6, p. 87.

¹⁵ Taiwo, O. (2010). The Traditional Roles of African Women. Nigeria p. 210.

not women. Due to life system of many Tanzanian societies, and the way children are raised, even women themselves feel inferior to men. They believe that they know nothing and cannot be leaders; only men are born to be leaders¹⁶.

Hinga (2002) supports that there are social injustices experienced by African women because of Patriarchy in African communities. These lead to women being discriminated against their effort to be engaged in the communities in which they find themselves¹⁷

Most people would agree that women and girls are disadvantaged in life (Kabeer 2001)¹⁸. Nevertheless, girls and women in Africa face unequal opportunities for education, less inheritance and ownership of assets, discrimination in employment and occupations, violence at home and in public spaces, and limited political representation. It is on this basis that the position of Bulkachuwa (1996:15) is clearly stated as it relates to the Nigerian Woman:

In many areas women are still regarded as possessions to be inherited, they are given no formal education as it was formerly considered more advantageous to educate a female child who is given out in marriage at an early age. They are forever under the control of either their husband or male relatives.... They cannot inherit or own property nor can they participate fully in public life and the decision-making process within their immediate community. They had no right over the children they bear and are mostly the victims of domestic violence....¹⁹

¹⁶ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2008. ELCT/ECD: Encouraging and Empowering those Who are There” in *It Takes Two: The Ordination of Women in the Member Churches of the United Evangelical Mission*, Edited by Gesine V. Kloeden-Freudenberg, Heike Koch, Brunhild v. Local and Sonia Parera-Hummel, Wuppertal: UEM Publisher, 204-209.

¹⁷ Hinga, T. (2002). African Feminist Theologies, the global village, and the imperative of solidarity across borders: The case of the circle of concerned African women Theologies’, *Journal of feminist Studies in Theology* 18 (1), 79-86.

¹⁸ Kabeer, N. (2001). “Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Emancipation.” In *Discussing Women’s Emancipation-Theory and Practice*. Sida Studies No. 3. Stockholm: Novum Grafiska AB.

¹⁹ Bulkachuwa, Z. (1996), “The Nigerian Woman Her Rights and Obligations” in *Women Herald*, Vol. 8, 15-17.

add up to unambiguously diminished welfare and capacity to fulfill life aspirations. Gender matters for women, but it also matters for men.

African Theology

The fathers of African Theology such as Mbiti (1969)²⁰, Idowu (1973), and Mugambi (1991)²¹, among others, prioritized the definition of African Theology by offering an analysis and interpretation of the African culture in a dialogue with Christian faith. Such sentiments were strengthened by many conferences that were held to discuss the place of African Theology based on our context. An example of such a meeting was an African Conference of Churches meeting held in Abidjan in 1969, which defined African Theology as a theology that is grounded on the Bible and which speaks to the Africans mind set. However, this was as expressed in categories of thought which arise based on the philosophy of the African people. According to John Mbiti, the term “African Theology” means a theological reflection and expression by African Christians. For Muzorewa (1985), African Theology is an attempt to respond to a mandate to construct a biblically-based and relevant theology that speaks to the spiritual needs of the African people. African Theologians are in agreement that Western or Asian theologies do not touch the hearts of African believers because they are based on a religious language which is foreign to them.

Hence, there is a quest for a relevant African theology. For this reason, defining African Theology has become a cultural task that only African theologians could undertake.²² Maseno says African theology fails at the level of normative reflection because it tends to uncritically promote social

²⁰ Mbiti, J. (1969) "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology", in *African Theology En Route*, 83.

²¹ Mugambi, J.N.K. (1991). *The Future of the Church and the Church of the future in Africa*, in J.B. Chipenda, A. Karamanga, J.N.K. Mugambi & C.K Omari (eds). *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*. Nairobi: A.A.C.C, 381-383. *European Scientific Journal*, March 2018 edition, Vol. 14, No.8, ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857 – 7431, 226.

²² Muzorewa, G.H. (1985). *The Origins and Development of African Theology*. University of California: Orbis Books Publisher.

values that reflect the status quo and depict patriarchal cultural values²³ (Maseno 2020:44). Africa is important because traditionally African Theology laid an emphasis on the positive aspects in African community. This was because African theologians in the wake of liberation movements were very keen to see that the cultural heritage of their people was maintained and celebrated at all costs. To them there was a need to appreciate community in African culture and see to it that the integrity of African culture is upheld. However, in doing so, African theology turned a blind eye to what in African community is not worthy to be reclaimed²⁴.

Waweru (2018) writes that the desire to define African Theology by Africans increased in the mid-20th century when African Theology as a theological discipline came into being. A wave of protest against negative colonial and missionary interpretations of the religion and culture in Africa was on the rise. Africans were more and more becoming aware that theology is a contextual phenomenon and, hence, they began to read the Scriptures using their mother tongue. This resulted in interpretations that were not in agreement with Western theology interpretations. African theology as a discipline was undertaken to shape Christianity in Africa by adapting and using African concepts and ideas²⁵. According to Oduyoye, African women do not accept that African men's theology only should suffice for the entire faith community. Therefore, there ought to be a study of African Christian theology in the women-centered key. This is to be understood as what highlights women as actors, agents and thinkers²⁶ (Oduyoye 2001:10).

²³ Maseno, L. (2020). 'African Women Theologies', in C. Kaunda and J. Gathago (eds.), *African Theology, philosophy, and religions: Celebrating John Samuel Mbiti's Contribution*. Lanham/MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 39-41.

²⁴ Maseno, L. (2021). *African Women's Theology and the Re-imagining of Community in Africa*. HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77(2), a6736. Retrieved on 8th March, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i2.6736>

²⁵ Waweru, H.M (2018). *African Theology in the 21st Century: Mapping Out Critical Priorities* Lecturer of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Kenyatta University, Kenya. <http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.v14n8p213>. Retrieved on 20th December 2022. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/328026239.pdf>

²⁶ Oduyoye, M. (2001). *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

Women Emancipation

The word “emancipation” is defined as a process of freedom for others in society through challenging and changing the existing structures of power. It is inextricably linked to efforts or social schemes aimed at setting women free from all types of bondage and sociopolitical and economic exploitation (Onyx and Leonard 2000:115)²⁷. The term “women emancipation” is thus generally used to refer to the process by which women in general and poor women in particular are made to gain access and control of all forms of resources in a nation (Mutume 2017)²⁸. It is a movement which aims at ensuring freedom for the self-fulfillment and self-development of women, as well as equal access to domestic and community resources (Rochester 2013). Mujungu writes that the emancipation of women is a campaign to give women equal rights and status with men. At one time women could not vote. Now they can. At one time women could not own property. Now they can. At one time men could not be accused of beating or raping their wives. Now they can be accused. At one time women received inferior education and wages compared to men (and now?). At one time a man’s wealth went to his oldest son, not oldest daughter (Mujungu 2015:5)²⁹

An Overview of emancipation according to Lyimo-Mbowe

Lyimo-Mbowe sees that religion can facilitate liberation and development, but sometimes it can be used to reinforce the opposite (Lyimo-Mbowe

²⁷ Onyx, J. & Leonard, R. (2000). Women, Volunteering and Social Capital, in J. Warburton, M. Oppenheimer (eds.). *Volunteers and volunteering*. Sydney: Federation Press, 113-114.

²⁸ Mutume, P. (2017). *Women’s Emancipation in Africa – Reality or Illusion? A Case Study of Mbarara, Western Uganda* by Thesis Pages Theology & Philosophy Series: African Theological Studies / Etudes Théologiques Africaines, Vol. 1, p. 228.

²⁹ Mujungu, K.R. (2015). *The Impact of Women Emancipation and Socio Economic Development of Rwebisengo Sub-County - Ntoroko District Uganda*. A Dissertation submitted to the College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Department of Political and Administrative Studies in Partial Fulfillment for the Award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration of Kampala International University, p. 5.

2021:4)³⁰. She adds that Africans take the Bible seriously as long as they read it daily with high level of commitment following the instructions from the Holy Word of God, with others not only reading but also interpreting and contextualizing. This is supported by Oduyoye that the Africans women theologians, the bible is central in theologizing. However, the bible cannot be the only norm because, any interpretation of the bible is unacceptable if it does harm to women, the vulnerable and the voiceless³¹ (Oduyoye 2001:12). Due to this habit, Ukpong (2001:147-152) expresses reading the Bible in the African context as a diverse, complex and challenging process. His article declares that both the nature of "the Bible" and the nature of "the African context" contribute to the complexity of Bible reading in Africa as they lead to the development of their meaning (explicate), the endorsement of concepts, and the interpretation of them in action (practice). Reading the Bible in the African context is not a monolithic phenomenon.³² He argues that the African context is a "social, economic, political and religious context that is complex, multifaceted, and often vexed." Also, when one uses the phrase "the context", it should be remembered that Africa has different historical periods, different geographical locales, different cultural groups, etc. Drawing a picture of the nature of reading the Bible in Africa cannot be exhausted but what has been said thus far should provide a vivid hint of how complex it is³³ (Ukpong 2001:147-152). This is supported by Lyimo-Mbowe in her article in the book *"It Takes Two"* that;

All the mission societies, which brought the Gospel and established churches in Tanzania, consisted of men. They educated and prepared only men for the Pastoral services. None of them showed interest in the

³⁰ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2021). *Kimpa Vita: Contextualized Biblical Interpretation in Breaking the Silence: A Collection of Research Papers by the Women Theologians on their Participation in the Church* (Printed by Moshi Lutheran Printing Press), Chapter 2, p. 4.

³¹ Oduyoye, M. (2001). *Introducing African women's' theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

³² Ukpong, J.S. (2001). *New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities*. *Neotestamentica* 35(1-2), 147-152. http://reference.sabinet.co.za.ez.sun.ac.za/webx/access/electronicjournals/neotest/neotest_v35_n1_a10.pdf retrieved on 12/22/2022.

³³ Ibid.

ordination of women as Pastors. The whole church was familiar with male pastors only. Therefore, for many Christians, it is against church tradition to include women in the Pastoral ministry. Their former missionaries did not practice, did not even teach, that a woman could be a leader in the church³⁴.

She also quotes an example in the Maasai tradition where men treat women (enkitok) as inferior to men counting them as mere children rather than adults, although most Maasai Churches are overwhelmingly female. She proposes the voice of Maasai women (inkituaak) are not silenced are to be heard in the church³⁵.

Lyimo-Mbowe has many interesting stories of how has been responding to women rights in her work experiences. When she was working in the parishes and districts helped women when resolving family and marriage conflicts because some of them were harassed and bullied. She helped them to follow the right ways to solve their problems without disturbing their marriages. She empowered them to know their rights and how to get them. But also, she attached them with relevant people who can help their related problems. For example, if she found their problems needed a lawyer or counselor, she connects them with those experts. But did not help only women, also had time to educate men for the things went wrong with women, through her teachings men received and appreciated in a result their marriages stood up again and become strong. She do remember one time when she met a woman who had a big problem of injustice from her husband as pastor used her efforts and time to resolve it with some of family members but gained vain. So she took that woman and connected her with human rights staff, which fought for her and at last she got her rights.

But also, she has been advising girls who are interesting with theological studies. She remembers some of the female pastors from the

³⁴ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2008). ELCT/ECD: Encouraging and Empowering those Who are There” in *It Takes Two: The Ordination of Women in the Member Churches of the United Evangelical Mission*, Edited by Gesine v. Kloeden-Freudenberg, Heike Koch, Brunhild v. Local and Sonia Parera-Hummel, Wuppertal: UEM Publisher, 204-209.

³⁵ Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2020). *Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading*. USA: Peter Lang Publisher.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-Eastern and Coastal Diocese had reached the stage of deciding to join the theological studies because of her advice and prepare them to have qualifications for studies. She has been a speaker in many women seminars and conferences concerning women empowerment in the community, their role in church and families. But also herself being a leader she has been a role model in the church, she has been receiving many testimonies from different people who were attracted with the way she was leading people in the congregation because they did not know if women could perform well like men. When she was promoted to be a District pastor she did well in her duties, many parish members wondered the way she was working and performing well on her job description.

Rev. Prof. Faith Lugazia can testify to this: in 2005 Lyimo- Mbowe as Ilala District Pastor was invited to attend the Synod meeting in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-North Western Diocese (Bukoba), to present the topic concerning family and Community issues for two hours. At that time this Diocese had not started and allowed women ordination. The Diocesan leader's, Bishop Elisa Buberwa and others invited her because they wanted the Synod members to know that women can do well as pastors since many of them were opposing the idea. So Lyimo-Mbowe taught them respectively the given topic, and said something about women ordination and motivated them that they are just wasting time for not ordaining women. After finishing the presentation, the synod members decided unanimously that "we have been so late in allowing women ordination!" They admired other Dioceses, which had reached the stage of trusting women to the district pastor position, not only that but also given Ilala District, which was at the Middle of the city of Dar Es Salaam and above all at White house, where potential state leaders attended services to a woman. Since that the synod meeting agreed to ordain women and on 8th January 2006, Alice Kabugumila, a Theologian woman who waited for thirty (30) years was ordained. Also Prof. Faith Lugazia was ordained in that day³⁶.

³⁶ Lugazia, F. (2015). *Historia na Kazi ya Mchg. Alice Kabugumila Katika Kanisa, Yubilee ya Miaka Ishirini na tano tangu KKKK Kubariki Wanawake kuwa Wachungaji 1990-2015*, p. 14.

Her success in a leadership

When Lyimo-Mbowe was appointed as District Pastor at Ilala, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-Eastern and Coastal Diocese initiated the buying of land and they built the office for the district and she also bought land for school purposes. Also, when she went in Kinondoni District, they were hiring offices at Magomeni Parish, so she mobilized people and money and they bought land at Mikocheni area which had an old house, so they renovated it and turn it into an office. She also wrote the project for orphan children and opened the organization called SOWISE which was dealing with orphan children and widows. They did a wonderful job with women at Kinondoni helping children from poor families and orphans. They were collecting and meeting with children at Magomeni Parish where provided food, school materials, clothes, eating together during Christmas and Easter together with street children. They went further where wrote the proposal about having children home as a district where they got land which was donated by one family for orphanage center.

Challenges

Lyimo-Mbowe faced direct challenges like rejection from parishioners: She did not know what was going on, but something happened as Mbowe reports:

One day a person came in my office to confess and apologize that he was speaking bad about me just because I was a woman pastor. He said that he planned to leave the church because of a woman has assigned to lead their parish. He felt as being neglected. He said, "I thought that the bishop has decided to abuse us by posting a female pastor, and not a woman but a girl to our parish. So, I was attending to disturb the worship service. But after following your way of leadership and the way you were leading the Sunday service I was surprise with your ability and at last I realize that I was very wrong to think that women cannot lead a church³⁷.

³⁷ Interview with H. Lyimo-Mbowe on 22 Feb 2023.

So the person asked for forgiveness and he went to the pastor's office being accompanied by the church elder. That day he had a gift for Lyimo-Mbowe. It is special garment for women known as *Kitenge* in Tanzania.

But also, there was a person who decided to leave the parish when Lyimo-Mbowe was sent to one of the parishes in Dar Es Salaam. He decided to be following the affairs of parish from distance, waiting to hear how the parish was collapsing under the leadership of a woman. After one year of Lyimo-Mbowe's leadership, he experienced the opposite, instead of the parish going down as he expected, the parish was flourishing and he decided to go back to the same parish. He also decided to ask his brother to accompany him to the pastors' office so that he can confess and apologize for leaving the parish for one year, due to his negative attitude toward women.

More over when she was working as a district pastor Lyimo-Mbowe says,

I do remember in one meeting one person stood up and said; "when I heard that a female pastor is appointed to lead our district, I thought we are finished! I thought that the Diocese has decided to despise us by bringing a woman to our district. I thought nothing will go on- no more development. But in fact, what you are doing is more than what men have been able to do in our district for many years, and therefore, I would like to say sorry and please forgive me and pray for me that God will not punish me for having such a negative attitude towards women."³⁸

CONCLUSION

Lyimo-Mbowe's emancipatory reading of the bible in the African context is very unique because it researches whether biblical texts are oppressive or liberative to African women. It is a call of her paper that the voices of Christian women are not silenced. It brings forward an interpretation of bible which facilitates the elimination of discrimination against women. Her theology of emancipation demonstrates the potential of reading biblical text both in popular and academic critical contexts. The work also develops its own contextual hermeneutical approach of women liberation from an African cultural perspective. She lays the foundation with social action, which has the goal of bringing Jesus-centered social

³⁸ Interview with H. Lyimo-Mbowe on 22 Feb 2023.

transformation. She adds two important values, unity and solidarity, which result in a participatory approach that brings together the oppressed and oppressors to discuss their challenges from the Biblical point of view and find solutions together. Lyimo-Mbowe has raised her voice for the future generation to know the past and current situation for the women as whole but also women Pastors.

Lyimo-Mbowe emphasizes that the church should stand on its position of being a voice for the voiceless and should intensify efforts toward the emancipation of women and help to stop all socio-cultural structures that oppress them. She encourages the future work by African women Theologians by saying, women still have a long way to go, unceasing prayers for our church, encouragement and empowerment to those who are already in the system in much needed ways. Women in all positions have to work hard and prove to the community, that women are as talented as men. This reality should be revealed through achievement of women in various sectors. All in all, women are able and can perform like men and more than men. The important area is following the regulations, policy and the constitution of the respected institution. A shift in paradigm and strategies is also required from which serious consideration of positive Biblical authorities on gender equality should be taken as powerful tools for the inclusion of women as co-leaders in the church. She insisted on reading the Bible in an emancipatory way without oppressing others as long as we are created on the same image of God as Genesis 1:27.

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11 | **“But What About You? Who Do You Say I Am?”**

Unpacking Nasimiyu Wasike’s Christological Journey

Esther Mombo & Heleen Joziase

Introduction

Anne Nasimiyu Wasike (1949-2018) was born in Kitale (Western Kenya) in 1949 and as a Catholic theologian, throughout her life she taught and embodied the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ who cared for the poor and the destitute, the good news for both men and women. This foundation is explicated in the following quote:

The God of Scripture is a living God who is the giver of life. God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed and joins in their struggle for liberation from forces that rob them of their claim to life and liberty. Christianity has to affirm God's tender love for the poor and to develop an ethic for the option for the poor as springing from the heart of Christian faith. (Nasimiyu, 2001:50)

In 1982 she earned a Master of Arts in Religious education from the Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania and in 1986 she completed her PhD and became a Doctor of Philosophy in Systematic Theology from Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with a dissertation entitled *Vatican II: The Problem of Inculturation*. She was a champion of Inculturation Theology, bringing African Christian Theology from the margins to the center of Christian theological discourse. She also was an active member of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). From 1994 she was associate professor and from 2002 full professor of Systematic and Moral Theology at Kenyatta University, where she also worked as a Dean of students. At the same time, she served as General Superior of the Religious Institute of Little Sisters of St. Francis in Uganda from 1992 to 1998 and again from 2010 to 2016. Anne Nasimiyu was also one of the founding members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and contributed to the inauguration of the Circle in Trinity College, Legon in 1989 (Oduyoye, et al, 1990). As regional coordinator of the Circle in East Africa, she put

efforts in mentoring young scholars to research and publish in the area of African women's theologies. Her publications covered a wide range of topics, e.g. Theology of the Church, Liberation Theology, Inculturation of the Sacraments, African Women's Theology, African Religion, Mariology, Belief Systems in Kenya and Christian Response to Contemporary issues.

The theme of inculturation coupled to the liberation from oppression of all marginalized people, especially women in Africa, appears to be the red thread throughout her theological work. Her publications attest to a rootedness in the lives of grassroots women, as well as a pastoral concern for women and their suffering in church and society. Nasimiyu gave for instance a feminist theological critique on polygyny, arguing that the Christian message of equal sharing in humanity of men and women, and the accompanying radical vision of human mutuality, reciprocity and cooperation, contradicts and rejects polygamy (Nasimiyu, 1992b). Between 1993 and 2001 she was a member of the Executive Committee of the Franciscans International at the United Nations. In this capacity she spoke in 2001 to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session about the effects of HIV/AIDS on Women and Children in Kenya (United Nations, 2001).

Her activism and solidarity with poor and marginalized women brought her eventually in conflict with the Vatican. From 2004 she was censured by the Roman Catholic Church for her alleged views on abortion. After renunciation of these views, she was eventually reappointed as Superior General of the Little Sisters (Western, 2006). Sr. Nasimiyu's sudden death was described in the obituary as the outcome of a *short illness*. This made another influential Kenyan woman theologian and former colleague at Kenyatta University, Theresia Hinga, to suspire: "... her sudden passing reminded me that the possibility of fair, just, affordable and efficacious healthcare as human right is still a pipe dream for many in Kenya, Africa and indeed globally" (Hinga, 2018). Her plight for justice and mutuality is exemplified in the way Nasimiyu contributed to the construction of African women's Christologies. In what follows we will highlight the method she advanced and the sources she used, to give the contours of what we call a "lived Christology" of African women.

Contours of an African women's Christology

Christology is the core of Christian faith. Nasimiyu defines African women's Christologies as Christologies of liberation, focusing on the experiences of women, and of inculturation of the gospel (Nasimiyu, 2005:107). Hence, characteristic for Nasimiyu's work is the merger of the liberation and inculturation paradigms, whereby she regards the incarnation of God in Jesus as the paradigm for both inculturation and liberation. She states: "By Jesus' redemptive incarnation, the humanity of Jesus is united to every other human being, granting everyone dignity, which mandates justice for all" (Nasimiyu, 2005:112). Further on she writes: "Clearly, incarnation or inculturation of the gospel has not taken place sufficiently, which creates the urgently call for new approaches to evangelism and catechization in Africa" (Nasimiyu, 2005:112). According to Nasimiyu liberation follows from "inculturation or incarnation of the gospel"; she seems to equate inculturation with incarnation and argues:

In following the way of Jesus, we are called to care and to be committed to the suffering neighbour, to critique and call for changes of the systems which cause suffering, and to endeavour to uncover the logic that is used to keep people in oppressive situations (Nasimiyu, 2005:112).

Nasimiyu, schooled in Western Roman Catholic tradition and making this tradition relevant to the African context and culture, gives fresh interpretations of Systematic theological themes, for instance of the Trinity:

The historical Jesus is manifested as the oppressed one whose earthly existence was tied up with the oppressed of the land. Jesus' sole reason for historical existence was binding the wounds of the afflicted, setting the captives free, giving sight to the blind, preaching the good news to the poor etc. (Lk 4:18-22). The historical Jesus is the life of the Trinity in words, actions and attitudes (Nasimiyu, 2005:105).

The question of Mark 8:29 "And you, who do you say that I am?" is central in African women's Christologies, while the answers women are given, provide a source for formulating Christologies. Fundamental for Nasimiyu is that African Women's Christologies are not primarily found in publications (Nasimiyu, 2005:125); rather, she argues that women live their lives in union with God and "their theology is not one which is

written and articulated but one which is lived and practiced in everyday activities and experiences” (Nasimiyu, 2005:130). Therefore, Nasimiyu ultimately locates Christology in the lives of women. Hence, since incarnation is the key, the Christology from the perspective of African women is an embodied Christology.

Method of constructing women's Christologies

African women theologians, likewise Prof. Anne Nasimiyu Wasike, employed and further developed the feminist theological methodology as construed in Western feminist theology. This methodology, based on “the hermeneutical circle”, consists of three steps: The first step is attending to the experiences of patriarchy and androcentrism by listening attentively to one’s own experience and that of other women and/or subjugated men. However, this listening is not solely targeting women’s experiences of oppression. Elsewhere Nasimiyu writes regarding the dialogue between Western and African theology:

African theological reflections must begin by critically pondering the experience of the marginalized, their struggles, their dreams, and their visions. The African theologians must also analyze the colonial experience in order to root their theological reflection into the painful memory of the colonized. These indeed are the historical realities of our people that continue to influence the present. Mutuality means entering into the others' experience and trying to journey together to bring about transformation (Nasimiyu, 2001:48).

The second step in this hermeneutical circle consists of bringing these experiences into dialogue with a feminist reading of the Bible and/or other Christian texts, while the third step contains a development of strategies for transformative action or praxis that are liberating (Mwaura, 2015). In line with this methodology Nasimiyu mapped the context of African women (Nasimiyu, 2005:125). In her description she highlights the great variety and diversity of life experiences of women in Africa:

(...) the life styles vary according to poor or rich, single or married, with no children or with ten children, with husband present or absent, participating in domestic or commercial career, traditional or modern, rural or urban, at peace or at war, of social chaos or order, with a family

system that is patriarchal or matriarchal, with opportunities for education and self-direction or not (Nasimiyu, 1989:124).

However, based on her experiences in Kenya and Uganda, she considers the struggle for the bare necessities of life a common denominator. Women in rural sectors, with or without education, work tremendously hard while their main concerns are physical needs: "food, water, clothing, shelter, medicine for themselves and their children, and school fees" (Nasimiyu, 2005:124). These challenges are situated in marital/family relations, amidst poverty and poverty related issues. Hence, limited education, lack of school fees, unemployment, gender-based violence, and lack of health/well-being, fashion women's experiences with Jesus.

Nasimiyu also describes the cultural hardships faced by African women, such as suffering from restrictive taboos and an inferior position. According to Nasimiyu, women are primarily looked upon as child bearers and servers, and when a woman does not fulfill these roles, either because of bareness or because of death of a child, she is "often cruelly oppressed" (Nasimiyu, 2005:124). She signals that women have learned to endure and accept these conditions as part of life. Throughout her writings, Nasimiyu describes the experiences of women as being second class citizens and second-rate members of the church, who are denied human dignity, equality, and mutuality in relations. In conclusion: the lived experience of women in Kenya are characterized by survival and oppression.

Sources of Christology rooted in Bible and tradition

The next step in formulating a contextually relevant Christology for women is to bring the experiences of Kenyan women in conversation with the Bible. In line with the next step in the liberation theology methodology, Nasimiyu brings the lived experiences of women in conversation with the Bible and identifies two crucial themes for Christology, e.g., the incarnation of Jesus and Jesus' interaction with women. Nasimiyu considers incarnation to be the paradigm for both inculturation and liberation from socio-political, cultural, and gendered oppression. In her interpretation of the New Testament parables, she highlights Jesus' concern for women - for their being and well-being - ,

and his restoration of the true worth and dignity of women in all spheres of life. Jesus acts counter-culturally by giving women equal status to men, more so, by erasing all lines of superiority and inferiority (Nasimiyu, 2005:127). Jesus used both men and women's (cultural) everyday experiences to explain and teach his message of liberation and equal worth. The gospel stories show how Jesus acted counter-culturally for instance by feeding the five thousand or washing the feet of his disciples (Nasimiyu, 1989:127).

Part of Nasimiyu's publications on Christology consists of a critique of the European, male-centered Christologies that were brought to Africa through the missionary movement. In line with other first-generation feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Nasimiyu holds that whereas Jesus taught equality between men and women, later Christian teachings tended to underscore male dominance. The 'new doctrine' of Jesus about equality between women and men, was gradually changed in the history of the Church proclaiming that the human nature of women is different from men's nature. Moreso, the introduction of the symbol of Logos and other references for defining Christ became androcentric, while in theological thinking in relation to God, male qualities were over-emphasized: man was created in the image of God, woman created in the image of man. Another distortion was the teaching that through man a woman finds her salvation. Nasimiyu indirectly critiques the Roman Catholic doctrine that considered Jesus' maleness (rather than his humanity) to be an essential aspect of the incarnation (Nasimiyu, 1989:129). Consequently, she challenges the implication that only biologically male persons can represent Jesus Christ in the priesthood. According to her, the fundamental equality and equal dignity of women and men is anchored in creation and Christology: both men and women were created in the image of God and both are in need of, and have a share in the redemption by Christ. Nasimiyu finally observes that in the tradition of the church Christology became predominantly philosophical and abstract, at the expense of attention to the existential Jesus of the Gospels. In relation to the missionary teachings concerning Christology, Nasimiyu writes that in the missionary teachings these distortions in Christology became even more pronounced:

In some African minds this Jesus was imaged as an imperialist, racist, cultural and religious colonialist, who was hierarchical and patriarchal in his relationship with people. The Euro-American theological debates were brought wholesale to Africa (Nasimiyu, 2005:103).

Four Christological models and imageries

Characteristic for the Christology of Nasimiyu is that she locates these "reflections" of Jesus Christ not primarily in literature, neither in one cultural model, as is a common approach in African inculturation theology. Contrary to the dominant Christological discourses of her time, Nasimiyu locates her Christology in the daily lives, in the lived experiences of women, and in the lived experiences with Jesus. Therefore, before constructing contextual models or advancing certain imageries, Nasimiyu conducts some interviews with individual women to map women's experience with Jesus (Nasimiyu, 1989:125). She first fashions her Christology based on a small exploration of the faith experiences of six women, answering the question "Who is Jesus to you". The interviewees named several images: "Jesus is my strength, savior, hope, model, helper, teacher, my everything and my God." "Jesus is kind and generous and shares in my sorrows when I am in trouble" (Nasimiyu, 1989:125). Her conclusion is that women use the church tradition and the teachings from catechism as their reference. Their Christologies mirror a holistic view of life, whereas Jesus affects their whole life. Hence Christology is not only involving the spiritual realm, but also the psychological and material. Moreover, women in this small scale interview hold that Jesus saves them from witches and evil powers. Finally, in the midst of suffering and hardships, Jesus gives women courage and the hope that everything will be restored to wholeness in Jesus Christ (Nasimiyu, 1989:126).

Based on these interviews and in line with Biblical accounts, Nasimiyu constructs four Christological models accompanied by different imageries, which respond to these varied experiences of women. With this proposal she attempts to re-dress what she considers to be distorted images of Jesus, since these models, apart from Christ the liberator, appear to be contextual interpretations of traditional models in Systematic Theology. The underlying premise which is likewise voiced by other African women theologians is that: "This God, the Christ, is the one who

takes on the conditions of the African woman - conditions of weakness, misery, injustice and oppression” (Nasimiyu, 1989:130) Similarly, the Cameroonian Thérèse Souga wrote: “In the light of Christ, if Jesus is the God who has become weakness in our context, in his identity as God-man, Jesus takes on the condition of the African woman” (Souga, 1988:28).

The first model she proposes is the *eschatological model* in which Christ (as the New Human Being) is depicted as one who through suffering, death, and resurrection, restores the God–human relation, and thus opens a future for a new humanity. Nasimiyu emphasizes Jesus Christ as the victorious conqueror of all evil spiritual forces, and the revealer of God’s ultimate victory over death. While death is defined as the absence of relation and community, Jesus Christ is the redeemer of relationships. This model has important implication for the position of women:

In His suffering Christ took on the conditions of the African woman and conditions of the whole of humanity, and in His resurrection the African woman is called to participate in the *restoration of harmony, equality and inclusiveness* in all human relationships in the family, society and Church (Nasimiyu, 2005:131).

The second model, the *anthropological model* is developed in most detail, while this model appears to be most influential in the development of African women’s Christologies (Oduyoye, 2001:61). In this model Nasimiyu articulates the images of Jesus as Nurturer, Protector and Mother, referring to old Christian traditions in which Jesus is depicted as a pelican feeding her children. She demonstrates that the gospels bear numerous accounts of Jesus’ protecting, life giving, and nurturing acts, and she argues that: “In his own life Jesus clearly lived a well-defined feminine “lifestyle” (Nasimiyu, 2005:108). Moreso, she reframes Jesus’ death on the cross as a form of childbirth; through immense pain, life was enhanced and new life envisioned. Through this act, both men and women are called to exhibit the qualities of a mother; a lifestyle of loving your neighbor, putting others first, and giving life (Nasimiyu, 2005:108).

In this anthropological model Nasimiyu again underscores the intertwinement of divine life and daily life. Women participate in the divine life by giving birth, maintaining, and nurturing life. Notably, Nasimiyu emphasizes that Jesus does not reduce women solely to their role as “child bearers” or nurturers of life. Instead, Jesus recognizes

women as responsible persons and as full participants in the church, restoring "the Church and humanity to the initial inclusive, holistic and mutual relationships between women and men" (Nasimiyu, 1989:131). Jesus suffers in women, men and children in Africa and he works in and through them to give birth to new human conditions. Both men and women are called to give birth to new and better human relationships.

Nasimiyu qualifies the nurturing role more generally as "promoting life" and she applies the model of Jesus as nurturer not only to relations in family and church, but also to the society at large. Promoting life is demanded in the face of growing dependency and poverty due to the neo-colonial economic trade policies. Being nurturers of life means that African women and men together seek their true African identity; shaking off the burden of neo-colonialism and foreign and alien ideologies of democracy. Becoming nurturers of life implies thus the creating an African democracy in which African peoples, – their wisdom, their cultural values and religious heritage – are respected (Nasimiyu, 2005:110). Nurturing is also required amidst the HIV/AIDS pandemic: Nasimiyu identifies polygyny and African rituals, e.g. widow cleansing and wife inheritance, as some of the main causes of the spread of HIV (Nasimiyu, 2005:109). Moreover, nurturing and promoting life is needed in view of the civil wars, ethnic cleansing, natural disasters and environmental degradation. Here, Christ is the restorer who through suffering, death, and resurrection, opens a future for a new humanity: Jesus Christ is the victorious conqueror of all evil spiritual forces and reveals God's ultimate victory over death. Whereas death ultimately means the absence of relation and community, Jesus Christ opens a future for redeemed relationship. Simultaneously, Nasimiyu suggests the model of Jesus as mother as a critique of male dominated authority and power, e.g. criticizing a system where a patriarchal spirit and doctrine - exercising dominant power - thrives. She argues that in the face of multiple injustices, the nurturer-model displays a spirituality of justice (Nasimiyu, 2005:117).

In the third model, the *liberation model*, the image of Jesus Christ as liberator is core. Nasimiyu holds that all women and men are called upon to name personal and structural ills, and to identify with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, towards the liberation of everybody.

Following Jesus implies naming the evils, the personal ills and the structural ills, and being enabled to identify with the disadvantaged in the society. Nasimiyu herself identifies numerous evils in the immediate context of women, e.g. domestic violence, the accumulation of wealth in the face of abject poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the marginalization of women in the church. She describes the oppression of women as follows:

These [marginalized people in Kenya] include petty traders who walk the city streets to find customers for their fruits and vegetables and are often harassed by the police; girls who are forced to drop out of school because their parents cannot afford to pay school fees; women who are forced to enter into polygamous unions because of economic reasons and cultural beliefs; and traditional rural women who are faced with all types of hardships and oppression. These women are always poor and hungry because they have to produce enough food to feed their families and sell the surplus in order to educate their children (Nasimiyu, 2005:132).

Other areas where liberation of Jesus is required are cultural injustices such as polygamy, female circumcision, and bride wealth. According to Nasimiyu, marginalized African women should not accept their hardships and pain as their fate - an attitude of acquiescence – which is often promoted for women in the churches. Rather, Nasimiyu emphasizes that God's struggle for a new world is reflected in the struggle of women. The struggle of the African woman becomes God's struggle; Christ suffers in her and works in her to give birth to new and better human relationships.

In her perception Christ the liberator affects all parts of life including human relationship. In the gospel stories Jesus portrays that women and men have equal spiritual potential and they are called to the same spiritual life. There are no virtues demanded exclusively of women or of men (Nasimiyu, 2005:127). For Nasimiyu this also implies that both men and women are equal partners in marriage, both deserve mutual respect and responsibility in building and maintaining the relationship. Concurrently, she sharply critiques polygamy:

The original will of God for humanity was equal partnership and mutual relationship between women and men – polygamy is a distortion and came about as a human response to social, economic, religious and personal needs and was based on distorted human relationships between women and men (Nasimiyu, 1992b:116)

The fourth model is the *cosmological model*, with the imagery of Christ as Healer. Through his liberating power, Jesus restores individual people, societies, and the universe to wholeness. Here she refers to the publication *Hearing and Knowing of Mercy Amba Oduyoye: Christology from the perspective of women* can be designated by the title: "Jesus the Savior" (Oduyoye, 2000:103). Nasimiyu asserts that Jesus saves to wholeness; he brought and continues to bring physical and spiritual healing to people. Men and women are called to be a witness of Jesus' restoration through active participation in healing, casting out demons, and creating a new world. Hence, healing is holistic.

Evaluation:

Nasimiyu's Christology as a lived Christology

The influence of Sr. Anne Nasimiyu Wasike as a pioneering female liberation theologian in the Roman Catholic Church in Kenya and her influence on the development of African Women's Theology cannot and should not be underestimated. She was among the first Kenyan women who got a PhD in Theology and who taught at universities in Kenya and in the Minority World, developing a relevant, African, inculturated and liberating theology. Together with Teresia Hinga (1955-2023), another Kenyan pioneer in African Feminist Theology, she was a founding member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle). Nasimiyu's publications focus on unraveling the structures of women's oppression in society, culture, church and theology, and promoting liberation. At the same time, Nasimiyu was very active in the church and in the promotion of justice on national and international level in. Hence, she contributed to the development of an African theology at the university, while her theological reflection was firmly rooted in the lived experiences of women. Nasimiyu formulated a Christology which Heleen Joziassse coined as a "lived Christology", a Christology in which experiences of women with Jesus Christ in their day to day life, result in new contextual interpretations of the being and meaning of Jesus as the Christ; the one who saves, gives life, liberates and transforms (Joziassse, 2020). These African women's Christologies are inculturated Christologies, rooted in the Biblical witness and the Christian tradition.

Moreover, the lived Christology as proposed by Nasimiyu is a holistic Christology, away from hierarchical dualisms of spiritual and material/physical, natural and spiritual, man/woman. The same holistic approach and the rootedness of theology in the lived experiences, Nasimiyu also discerned in the African initiated churches:

The Euro-American churches in Africa could learn from these African initiated churches in terms of contextualization of the gospel, in self-reliance, and in creative methods of propagating the Christian faith. It is true that African initiated churches lack theological clarity and structures. We have to realize that theirs is a practical, lived theology rather than a speculative theology. Their theology arises from the context of their existential and experiential reality. God speaks through their own medium and experience and affirms their uniqueness (Nasimiyu, 2001:52).

Hence, on hindsight Nasimiyu developed the method of doing theology of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians, starting from the varied lived faith experience of women “at the grassroots” and her own experience, while at the same time correcting a male, metaphysical approach to Christology. Her approach is further elaborated by other African women theologians such as Loreen Maseno (Maseno, 2014).

Nasimiyu’s main contribution and prospects for future work

It can be argued that by writing a “lived Christology” in 1989 Sr. Nasimiyu was her time well ahead. The empirical turn in Religious Studies and Systematic Theology which in the Minority World is perceived as a 21st Century phenomenon, can be located earlier from the 1980s onward in African Theology. In the lived Christologies of women, the diversity in faith experiences in connection to the various and particular lived experiences of women, results in a multiplicity of imageries and Christological expressions. Nasimiyu’s Christology implies a systematizing of reflections concerning the being and meaning of Jesus Christ and at the same time navigates between systematization and the messiness of everyday life experience. Hence, she proposes a considerable variety of imageries, described and structured in four unifying Christological models.

As a theologian Nasimiyu explicitly advocates for the image of Jesus as nurturer/mother and she applies this image to different categories, e.g. Socio-cultural, economic and political. Her christological interpretation of the nurturing and mothering roles of Jesus is a further qualification of the relation between Jesus and believers and at the same time a "humanization of women". Her application of these "mothering" qualities to all people in all realms of life, is acknowledged by other African women theologians as a significant contribution. The critique of Pemberton that these models reflect the stereotype role modeling and are ultimately not liberating for women, seems to be an example of Western white feminist hegemonic interpretation. We concur with the remarks of Martha Frederiks that the significance of African Women's Theologies primarily should be evaluated by African women theologians (Frederiks, 2007:195).

Loreen Maseno, while building on the methodology of Nasimiyu, critiques her for not taking the diversity and particularity of women's experiences into account (Maseno, 2014:235). Maseno argues that the category "women" is essentialized; women are depicted as a single group, and the intersection of multiple oppressions of women is not taken into account (Maseno, 2014:237). She holds that often feminist theological reflections don't deal with particular women's experiences as "a concrete place for the marginal theological voice which defies the closure of universal categorizations" (Maseno, 2014:237). Therefore, Maseno in her research of Christologies of Kenyan women, explicitly maps the lived experiences and the lived faith experiences of Abanyole widows, as specific group. She uses in-depth interviews and life-stories of widows to map their Christologies. In her research she concludes to several new metaphors with Jesus as "breath" as the fundamental experience in relation to Jesus: "In general, Jesus Christ to widows is substance, essence, both something and everything, everywhere and in all things" (Maseno, 2013:206). Other metaphors which Maseno constructs or identifies are Jesus Christ as "skin" (offering protection), "medicine" (healing), Jesus Christ as helper and provider and Jesus as friend. The new "unbounded" imageries provide indeed a deeper insight in the lived Christologies of Kenyan women, although the similarities with earlier formulated women's Christologies by Nasimiyu and Hinga are evident.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the Christology of Nasimiyu is that her Christology provides a critique on the oppression of women in culture and religion. This critique and the demand for justice and mutuality is rooted in the Bible and the liberating praxis of Jesus. Nasimiyu's Christology challenges the one-sided or singular models, common in inculturation Christologies in Africa. She introduced a new methodology for constructing African women's Christologies based on the lived experiences of women in Church and society in Kenya. In her Christology which is rooted in the Bible and the Christian tradition, she depicts Jesus as the one who supports both men and women, who transforms and gives life to the whole of humanity. Her lived Christologies stand out in contextual approach and meaning, with Jesus Christ as holistic liberator and the giver of life in fullness.

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SECTION FOUR



Ecclesiology and Pastoral Theology in East and Central Africa

12 | In the Theological House of Faith Lugazia

Witness Issa

Introduction

Faith Lugazia, a wife to Mr Jeoivan Kattaraia and a mother of two, is a Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and a professor of systematic theology, mission, and gender studies. She was born in 1964 in Bukoba, Kagera one of the regions around the Lake Victoria. Her mother was Bertha Kokulolwa and her Father was Lugazia Katariaia. She was born in a middle-class working family where her father was a medical doctor and her mother was a clerk in a government company. She spent most of her childhood in the village with her grandmother and grandfather. This is because during those days it was the tradition to take children after breastfeeding to their paternal grandparents. This was believed to be necessary for the parents to have another child. So, she stayed in the village until the time she had to start school, she joined her parents in Dar es Salaam to start her schooling there.

In 1979 her father died. This made all her family including her mother move to the village and into her paternal grandparents' household. Everything they had accumulated in the city with their father was sold off. It is very important to mention her grandmother because that is where she was molded into whom she is today. She owes a lot to her grandmother. From nurturing to influencing changes and participating to make changes she wants to see.

After completing primary and secondary education, in 1988 she joined Makumira theological college for a certificate in theological training. She was the only girl in her class, and she happened to score very high grades. In the year 1998, she came back to the same intuition for the bachelor's degree of divinity which she completed with high credits. In the year 2001, she got a scholarship for a master degree at Luther Seminary Minnesota, USA. She was privileged due to her credibility and determination. She got

a scholarship for a Ph.D. in systematic theology at Luther Seminary, Minnesota, USA in the year 2010.

How her background influences her as an activist?

Yes, she said. “First; Being raised by my grandmother who had five female children and only one boy child has contributed much to whom I am. Under the influence of my grandma, my grandpa gave the right to education to all children regardless of their gender” she insisted. According to her, since she grew up seeing her uncles going to school and working and employed in different both government and private sectors the issue of the right to education for both girls and boys was a must. She takes education as a tool for liberation. She can hardly imagine the liberation of a woman without a quality education. This is the reason she also got access to education even when her father passed away. The grandparents took over to support her education.

Another thing to do with her background is the influence of culture in undermining or exploiting women. When her father died and the whole family had to leave the city for the village. Her mother had to give up her work in a government company. The family sold all their belongings including the house and all that they had to move to the village, assuming a mother cannot take care of the family after the death of her husband.

Her father was a teacher by profession employed by the government. Faith’s childhood even after moving to the village nothing really changed. This is because her grandfather was able to provide, she and her siblings needed. Since her father was the only son of her grandparents, after his death all his belongings were placed under her grandfather. The family also was doing agricultural activities in the village something that made the family to have enough food and surplus for generation income.

Faith never felt this as a challenge before going to the theological college. After going to the college and facing being discriminated because she was a woman is when she started to recall about the situation of her mother back home. She felt that she lost her economic freedom the day her husband died. Because she did not want to remarry, she had to be taken care of by her father-in-law. Even when she wanted to buy a small thing she had to ask from her father-in-law. She was never economically free.

They thought they were helping her, but Faith started questioning the cultural practices of the Haya from that tender age. *Bahaya* people are the people from North-West Tanzania living in the area around Lake Victoria, in Kagera region, one of regions in Tanzania. As many African cultures they are very strong patrilineal society. She placed her mother as every African woman, especially in the Bahaya cultural setting, where they do not have right to inherit their husband's belongings after the death of their husband. In Bahaya's mode of production is small scale farming and animal keeping. Usually women participate fully in these activities. During the harvest women have tendency to visit each other with the products from their farms.

Her mother like other widows were not having the freedom to take anything from the harvest as they visit friends or relatives because they do not have control of anything. Everything is under the control of their in-laws and they were like other children, they should ask if they need anything. She has been challenging the African patriarchal system in most of her works. She is determined to realize cultural transformation in her society. She addresses this many of her works particular *Continuity and Discontinuity of Haya Traditions on Charismatic Teaching on Human Sexuality in Tanzania (2020)* where she raised a lot of issues in Bahaya tribe including the denied right to sexual satisfaction to women and *Naweza: Kitabu cha Masomo ya Biblia kwa Wanawake (2015)*, she shows the strength of a woman and the power of trying something. She uses example of women in her own contexts who went beyond limits by trying to do things that community for so long believed they are not for women eg the first woman in Bahaya to study theology and the first woman to own and drive a car.

Her education journey positively molds her to be a gender and women's rights activist as well. She recalls girls to be minorities in most of the classes she was registered. As she started her journey to theology in higher education, she was the only woman in the class. Being a minority in the class, she faced a lot of discrimination and rejection from her male classmates. They could even question her intellectual capacity especially when she became among the best students in the class on exams. As the saying goes what doesn't kill you makes you strong. All the situations she

encountered from her childhood to adulthood strengthened her and made her the phenomenal lady she is today.

This paper will be discussing the work of Faith Lugazia from different perspectives including theological context, her motives, purpose, and the source of her both inspiration and aspiration

Theological contexts

She is an African woman scholar; her theological context is as much as African Christianity and as well as in wider perspective of Lutheran Theology as well as part of the global community. She is a third generation of Christian in her family as her grandfather studied in Uganda and met Anglican missionaries and being baptized. After the studies in Uganda her grandfather and his fellows came back as missionaries for Christianity. On his wedding day there were Lutheran missionaries in Karagwe area, therefore her grandfather was converted to Lutheranism. So, she was born in Lutheran family and being baptized when she had five months.

Since her entire family was religious and close to the church, Faith grew up wishes to work in and for the church. When she was in secondary school, she shared her ambition with the student pastor at that point she wanted to study something that would made her working with the church and for the church. Since she had never seen any woman pastor and even heard about a woman theologian (even though Alice Kabugumila the very first woman theologian from same diocese had completed her theological studies), nursing was in her mind. It is the student pastor who introduced her to the so-called theological education and motivated her to that. So, after passing the interview, she was enrolled to Lutheran Theological collage Makumira where she started her theological journey.

She embodies the struggle for women to be recognized in their cultural context. Struggle against abusive powers and seeking for recognition, and dignity. The right for power to lead and be fully faults of community experiences with God. In relationship with the Church, her writings This paper will be discussing the work of Faith Lugazia from different perspectives including theological context, her motives, purpose,

and the source of her both inspiration and aspiration are opening the eyes of Churches in Africa to look for Christ who is beyond our culture and who is liberating and a reconciler. His role is to empower both men and women for the mission and evangelization work. Hence, contextual, and Biblical hermeneutics has been applied to support liberating and transformative concepts in the work documented.

Sources for her Theology

We glean from Faith her sources for theology. One source is her experiences as an African woman in Tanzania. Her work is also full of her own experiences with the Lutheran Church. She even had to wait for about two decades after the completion of her theological training for her church under the patriarchal culture to accept women's ordination. All these years she was working hard in different positions like Diocese director for women and children, teaching bible knowledge in schools, being the head of education desk in the diocese as well as serving the entire church as director for women and children for Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. She also used her time very wisely to continue with education whenever there was possibilities. So, went back to Makumira for bachelor's degree, and by the time the church agreed to ordain women in her diocese she was already in Minnesota for her doctoral studies in Luther seminar. She works her talk when she tells young women to thrive for education, hard work and determination.

According to her, Biblical narratives are one of the important sources in her rich house of theology. As Lutheran Christians, we all affirm the authority of Scripture in our theological formation. The Word of God is the fundamental source of theology. Faith has been in discussion with creation narratives if a woman is also *imago Dei* (created in the image of God). She answers this question in some of her works including, "Priesthood of All Believers: A Reformation Legacy for Gender Parity in Lutheran Churches in Africa." In *Martin Luther's accounts and Africa: Reflection on the Reformation and Christianity in Africa* (2016) and in *Theology of Presence* in *African Christianity: A Transforming Missiological Factor for Women in Contemporary Pentecostal Churches in Africa* in *International Review of Mission* (Lugazia, 2017).

Cultural Narratives as well as those from the experiences of other people in their relationship with God are said to be among her source of theological formation. In her works “Naweza, Kitabu Cha Masomo ya Biblia kwa Wanawake” (2015) and “Continuity and Discontinuity of Haya Traditions on Charismatic Teaching on Human Sexuality in Tanzania” in *Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*” (2020). In *naweza*, she shares the successful life journey of women who happened to go beyond cultural boundaries to do things women were not expected to do. Their achievements become inspirational to the younger generation and those still in cultural lockups.

In *Continuity and Discontinuity of Haya Traditions on Charismatic Teaching on Human Sexuality in Tanzania*, “*Genders, Sexualities, and Spiritualities in African Pentecostalism: Your Body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit*” she explores how Haya tradition addresses women’s sexuality. It seems to her that African traditions do not allow women even those who are married to discuss their sexual desire something that is also being promoted in African Pentecostalism and Spirituality. She took this as a challenge to be confronted with the reality that women too deserve sexual satisfaction in marriage.

Also, she is writing from her experience and people’s experience and relationship with God. This is seen in her different works with subjects like Women and culture, Christ beyond Culture, and God’s inclusion of women in God’s oikos. Ecumenism, Theology of presence among Pentecostal Christianity. Although my work is situated in African Christianity, some examples are borrowed and recognized from another context in the world.

The purpose of Faith’s theological thinking

It is clear that Faith has a purpose for her thinking and writing. She is passionate for Women’s rights, recognition, voice, representation, and being given space are one big purpose she has been addressing in many of her works. Using her intellectual and theological position to advocate for women’s rights and to claim for active participation of women in the life and work of the Church by claiming the importance of Women in the Church’s “God -Talk”. Furthermore, she strives for women’s Rights to

education and their opportunities to participate in decision-making in the church and community larger.

Her main works, intend to decolonize Western male-dominating theology which has been muting women in religious space and African men scholars whose ideas are in line with patriarchy and oppressive culture which define women as “others” For example in her papers like *Theology of presence*. She agrees with Western Feminist theology, because of its liberating nature. Agreeing does not mean she is buying the politicizing feminism from God-Talk for liberation, repentance, and getting home to Human rights ideology which bleaches individual ethics accountability before the Lord and impose human will/efforts to obtain salvation and sanctification.

Its strength is its liberating nature and so focus on bringing transformation and change. The contribution is that it calls the Church universally to move from the comfort zone and afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

Faith, patriarchy, oppression, and women’s agenda

Advocacy for women’s rights and equality, justice, and fair treatment, as well as mutual respect for women not just those doing theology but all women in the church and entire society, has always been dear to her. She desires that every woman, facing abuse, violence, humiliation, poverty, diseases, or political mistreatment to be included in her intervention initiatives. Those who have been around her can bear witness to the thirst in her to be quenched by justice and transformative masculinity. I can still remember when we got information about the death of one of our fellow women pastors in Tanzania when she was the chairperson of the forum. This pastor was found dead and it was said she was killed pitilessly but those committed this crime were yet to be known. So, Faith on behalf of other women theologians wrote a letter to the President of the Republic of Tanzania, asking justice to prevail during the investigation and judgement of the case. She also asked the state through ministry for Health and social welfare to assist upbringing of the children of the deceased as she was the breadwinner of the family.

This also can be seen through her works like *Theology of Presence In African Christianity: A Transforming Missiological Factor For Women In Contemporary Pentecostal Churches In Africa*, she argues that women in missionary churches should be free from any exploitative and oppression systems acknowledging the theology of presence which affirms God's physical presence with us through the incarnation of his begotten son. She says: "Women need intervention skills to break the silence. Since although they have much freedom, they are still silent to some of the oppressive powers and violence to the fear of hurting someone or not being faithful to God".

In her theological formation she claims women's rights as human rights and therefore, women must be treated with dignity as they are created in the image of God. Her works unpack all injustices done against women in the name of Christianity and call for repentance and reconciliation. Remind the call of the Church to proclaim reconciliation and freedom to all of God's creation. It further connects the historical part of women of faith in action from the beginning of her story, reformation to the twentieth-first century where women are celebrating achievements that women have accomplished by the grace of God.

Faith and green theology

In her work *The Holy Spirit, Eco-Justice, And An African Lutheran Response To Ecological Peril* (2017), she talks about how Africans relate to the rest of creation and why environmental conservation is so very important to African indigenous culture. She presented the world view of Africa as a continent of nature, forests, waters, animals, and biodiversity of most world's flora and fauna. She Agrees with African writers like Mbiti, Mazrui, and Niwagira who show the respect Africans have for nature as a source of food, rain, sanctuary places for worship, materials for shelter, and land that unites the living, the dead, and ancestors. For these Indigenous Africans had respect and care for the environment and nature.

According to her, it is an awful situation that today African Christians have little or no respect for the environment. Those who claim to be born-again do not consider care for nature as part of the mission of Christianity.

She uses Luther as a good example when she says even if the world will collapse tomorrow, I can still plan an apple tree today.

In her pneumatological understanding, she brings the idea of the Holy Spirit as the life giver who brings life to everything including our surroundings. She calls for Lutherans to not only use Holy Spirit when we need physical healing or to acquire wealth and to prosper in material things. Instead, she insists that our understanding and engagement with the holy spirit should enable believers to care for the environment and do justice to all the creation and by so doing will be able to demonstrate our faith as Christians and humanity as Africans who initially have so much relationship with the environment.

Faith and Charismatic, Pentecostalism and Spirituality

She has written much about Charismatic, Pentecostalism, and Spirituality, especially in how they influence our social, political, and spiritual well-being in Africa. Religion has so much impact on Africans. Most African worldviews are in one way or another shaped by the way one's religion leads.

Faith is showing how these interpretations may mislead people of a certain cultural background especially when cultures may be used as the tool to justify or interpret spirituality. In some of her works, she has shown the positive side of Pentecostalism in Africa, especially in explaining the idea of the Holy Spirit and how they encounter and utilize the power of doing things like healing. In her work titled *theology of presence* she agrees with Harvey Cox and Hollenweger who are of the opinion that, Noe Pentecostal has bringing spiritual transformation. Its theology is not built in the ability to make an arguments or logical and scholarly skills but through testimonies and touching lives. It is experiencing the power of God through dancing, songs, proclamation of faith, fellowship with others and sharing of testimonies.

Faith and Reformation Legacy

In her paper titled *Priest of All Believers: Reformation Legacy for Gender Parity in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania* she is in dialogue

with Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as our reformation legacy. She agrees that Luther was not in favor of women's ordination to pastoral positions in the church as she considered them weaker sex compared to men. Although Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was intended to address the medieval church hierarchies Faith acknowledges the later development of the church especially when this doctrine is used to address gender parity within the church. There are some challenges as she has shown yet the success is proof that ELCT is valued and acknowledges the equality that both men and women in the church and before God who created both equally.

She has not just gone to school and got an education just for herself. Her education has placed her in the spotlight as one of the very first women theologians. Her critical thinking and questioning of anything require explanations. Those who happened to work with her can testify to her courage and outstanding personality that will always say: what is our agreement or resolution on this? Can we do something instead of just lamenting? Can we discuss this with authorities? Pastors, this is not something we should remain silent about. She is always a loud thinker!

In her position and status, she could remain in the offices, instead, she opted in giving a supporting hand and showing a way to go to the youngsters especially women in theology. As a pioneer, she reintroduced a circle of concerned African women, A Tanzanian chapter to all Tanzanian women theologians. This becomes a platform for all of us the rising stars to start our first step in the journey to good authors and scholars. She is one of the very selfless women theologians who will always look for others, to uplift and encourage others.

CONCLUSION

Faith Lugazia together with other pioneers of women theologians in Tanzania have done a lot in paving the way for emancipation of women theologians in the aspects of education, leadership positions, serving in ecumenical organization like Lutheran World Federations (LWF), United Evangelical Mission (UEM) to mention but few. She is a role model to many, inspiring many and continuing to nurture and mentor others in

her position as university professor and coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Tanzania Chapter. We continue learning from her hardworking spirit and zeal for success.

Generally, her contribution to African women theology can be summarized in advocacy which she does through dialogues whenever given the chance, presentation, writing, and day to day life as continue address different injustice issues around her society. Another thing is empowerment which she does in her capacity as university professor through teaching, mentoring, guiding, counselling, advising, and supporting students including young women theologians. She is true definition of a leader as she leads by example. Very courageous and phenomenon woman, she plays a role of uniting, aspiring, and networking women in Tanzania with other women in Africa and beyond.

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13 | Grace Nyonyozi Ndyabahika's Post-Conflict Pastoral Theology and Liberation Ethics

Joy Isabirye Mukisa & Christine Nakyeyune

Introduction

This chapter is about Grace Nyonyozi Ndyabahika's post-conflict pastoral theology and liberation ethics. It aims at examining her commitment to women emancipation based on her calling as a female priest. The ideas contained in this book chapter are influenced by the two feminist theologians' honest search for freedom to lead their own life liberated from the ecclesiastical roles imposed on women in the Church of Uganda.

Ndyabahika was born in Kyanamira village in the present day Kabale district. Ndyabahika's childhood life and education (Isabirye interview, 2023) influenced her decision to train for church ministry at Bishop Tucker Theological College. In 1969, Ndyabahika formally entered the theological space dominated by men at Bishop Tucker Theological College for a Certificate in Biblical Studies & Pastoral Theology. Men and women in the Church of the Province of Uganda (hereafter Church of Uganda) are usually understood as called by God to perform sacramental roles. This calling during Ndyabahika's time was never extended to women; instead they were only commissioned to religious life. While at Bishop Tucker Theological College, whenever an opportunity arose to talk about the role of women in the church, Ndyabahika would question a quasi-clerical status women were relegated to. She would always remind her male college mates who were not in the minority that women make up the majority of members of the Church of Uganda.

Ndyabahika graduated in 1971 and in the same year, August 14th she got married to the Reverend James Francis Ndyabahika with whom she had three children. Ndyabahika is one of the first 3 Ugandan women to be ordained priest in the Anglican Church of Uganda. However, she was

not ordained a priest in the Church of Uganda until 1983.¹ Her ordination into priesthood was characterized by official opposition from the Church of Uganda. In the absence of female role models, Ndyabahika was forced to forge out her own path to becoming a theological thinker. In 1973 Grace embarked on a Bachelor of Arts degree focusing on Biblical Studies & Social Ethics, at Trinity College, Deerfield, Illinois, USA. Her interest was to see how liberation theology, like other historical Christian movements, is based on the Old and New Testament teachings that are mostly concerning with the coming of the Kingdom of God. During her biblical studies, she came to learn that the Bible can be understood only when seen from the perspective of the oppressed. It was from Trinity College that Ndyabahika began to clearly appreciate a liberal theological stance that tends more to accommodate current intellectual movements.

In 1991 Ndyabahika was enrolled for a Master of Arts degree focusing on pastoral theology & liberation ethics at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, USA. At the Episcopal Divinity School, Ndyabahika came into contact with Katie Geneva Cannon who was Associate Professor of Christian Ethics. Cannon was not only widely regarded as a founder of the Womanist movement but also a well-known liberation theologian and Christian ethicist. Cannon became an influential figure in Ndyabahika's life. She taught her the importance of critical thinking in regard to the injustices endured by women. It was at the Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA that Ndyabahika began to search for freedom according to her own understanding, and to fight for the liberation of other people, especially women. Asked why she chose to go for Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, Ndyabahika said she wanted to study in a school that was well known for its progressive teaching. Episcopal Divinity School was well known throughout North America and the entire Anglican Communion for its progressive theological teaching on issues of social justice.

Today, as an ordained priest Ndyabahika is considered to be one of the well-known women liberation theologians in the East African region. She has excelled in pastoral theology, liberation ethics, leadership and conflict

¹ She was ordained in December 1983 together with Deborah Micungwa Rukara and Margaret Kizanye Byekwaso.

resolution, biblical studies, and social ethics. However, her areas of specialization are pastoral theology, liberation ethics, and counselling. She tackles the role of women in church and society, women discrimination from mainline church leadership positions and the fundamental role played by women in the peace and conflict resolution process. She examines human sexuality from the perspective of African Christian moral ethics. Ndyabahika identifies herself as a feminist liberation theologian and boldly shares the pain of women's exclusion from both theology and positions of power in the church, as well as the legitimization of the subordination of women in society. Ndyabahika's arguments focus on the premise that women should not be discriminated against in the theological, social, and civic responsibilities basing on gender; rather their potential should be harnessed for a better society. Ndyabahika's journey is as well a journey of those Christian women who seek equality in public and private spheres. She is passionate on the discourse about the woman's condition specifically the African woman. An Africa a woman has always been imagined within the context of the family. For instance, she is expected to accept marriage and have children because marriage is assumed to be her end goal in life. During her studies in the United States, Ndyabahika came to learn about African women who were freedom fighters during pre-colonial and independence movements. She believes that African feminist theology ought to primarily promote equal participation of both man and woman in church and society as God's children. Ndyabahika's theological interests in African feminist theology therefore can only be appreciated in the light of African male theology. Ndyabahika's ecclesiastical status became the door to freedom by breaking away from her African cultural expectations that place women solely in the domestic sphere.

Sources for her theological ideas

Ndyabahika rightly observes that much of Africa has misconceived feminist theology as entirely militant, which should not be. There are various categories of feminist theology some radical but there are others, like much of African feminist theologies that pay attention to the needs of Africans regardless of genderkj. The first source of Ndyabahika's

theological ideas is the Bible. However, her argument is that while women need to recognize the Bible as their final and permanent authority, theological engagement itself is based on the need for reformation. She argued that the church's teaching on the status of women has historically owed more to the social nature of the church than to biblical revelation. Within the Christian church, especially in Africa, Ndyabahika argues, there have been several women and men who have discovered the seeds of equality within the Bible and yet they have not perceived the equal status of man and woman as an idea intrinsic to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ndyabahika's second source of her theological ideas is feminist liberation theology from Latin America. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, women theologians from Latin America began to experience the patriarchal oppression that existed within the church. The patriarchal oppression within the church forced women liberation theologians to develop their own theological transformation. Feminist liberation theology gained momentum as female theologians from Latin American thought out a unique way of doing theology as a form of resistance against the oppressive systems both in church and state. Their theology focused on the daily realities of the poor and the oppressed in society. Ndyabahika is disheartened at the fact that all of feminist theology is thrown out of the window in Uganda with no minimal effort to understand what it is about.

Another source is women's experiences. Despite the challenges and constraints women face in society, Ndyabahika strongly states that relying on the saving power of God will sustain them and they will live fulfilled lives. She believes it is the same favor that has carried her throughout her ministry and in times of trouble. It was that favor, she states, that touched the whole Church of Uganda's Provincial Assembly in Uganda to lift the ban on ordination of women. The resistance to ordination of women was majorly based on religious and cultural grounds (Anglican Consultative Council, 1971:39; Byaruhanga, 2017:2).

Some specific features and uniqueness of her theology

Ndyabahika has grappled with theological issues, pastoral theology, liberation ethics, and conflict resolution. This section will pay attention to her theological reflections which are connected to the Ugandan civil and

liberation war period. The 1970 to 1986 were years of civil and liberation war that was chaotic, dominated by violence, civil conflict, and catastrophic economic and undemocratic governance. The civil and liberation wars in Uganda radically impacted on Ndyabahika's role as an educator within the Church of the Province of Uganda. During the period of the civil and liberation war, Ndyabahika was employed as a Social Worker/ Evangelist by the African Evangelical Enterprise, Nairobi, Kenya (1982-1984) and later transferred to Uganda and worked in the same position to 1986. During her time at the African Evangelical Enterprise African Evangelical Enterprise, belief in a God of justice that sided with the poor formed part of her discourse. She believed that bringing this message to the population was one of the Church's greatest contributions to the refugees and war-displaced people in Uganda. For Ndyabahika, it was very important to learn how to do theology through both listening to and observing people's lived and yet neglected experiences. For instance, Ndyabahika was disappointed with the Church's resistance to transformation, and she was also increasingly uncomfortable with the feminist movement from the United Kingdom and North America because it was not clear about the issues raised by feminist liberation theologians. Ndyabahika charged liberation theologians in the Church of Uganda of being blind to the patriarchal power relations existing among the church workers.

The patriarchal views of most male liberation theologians influenced Ndyabahika's theological perspectives in the opposite way from what many have expected. Ndyabahika quickly noticed the scars that war left on many women in Uganda. This economic and political turmoil caused pain for everyone and more especially women who, compared to men, suffered multiple layers of suffering. Ndyabahika understood the centrality of her priestly calling as a redemptive change agent and used her privileged position of an ordained priest in the Church of Uganda to help the disadvantaged. Seeing herself as a redemptive change agent, Ndyabahika developed healing solutions that came from intimate acquaintance with people and their problems. Right after the civil war, Ndyabahika helped address the struggles of refugees in Kenya on her return from the USA. She joined effort with several key women in politics like the current first lady in Uganda, Janet Museveni, and formed UWESO, and a prayer

ministry, and later with Miria Matembe, and Sarah Kingi and together they would lead prayer meetings in parliament and individual high-profile offices. In her interactions with women politicians, Ndyabahika insisted that those who served in government should live among the people they serve, rather than sending instructions and guidance from the safety, comfort, and security of the city center, Kampala. She would cite the example of Jesus Christ living among those he came to redeem. She encouraged them to emulate Jesus carrying out the following tasks:

- I. By identifying problems faced by the ordinary women in Uganda with the aim of finding the proper solution.
- II. By identifying deeply with people and finding practical solutions that are practicable.

From 1997 to 2002 Ndyabahika was a lecturer in the Department of Women and Gender Studies, at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. Working as an educator became a form of experiencing freedom for Ndyabahika. Through her teaching, Ndyabahika also learned from the experiences of particularly the female students she educated. Being a university educator was a methodologically central dynamic that would critically inform her later work. At Makerere University, Ndyabahika was more interested in listening to her students' real-life stories of sacrifice than engaging in academic philosophical arguments. Through her students' real stories, Ndyabahika began to notice how women's suffering in Uganda went unnoticed by her fellow academic staff members at Makerere University.

In July of 2002, Ndyabahika was engaged in a peace and conflict resolution conference to address the suffering of women during war and argued alongside others that these women's "involvement in the peace processes is not a luxury, *sic* [but] an absolute necessity (Adrian-Paul et al, 2002). Peace making requires dialogue between all parties involved. In speaking about dialogue, Paulo Freire makes a vital point that "...dialogue is an encounter among men and women who name the world, *sic* [therefore] it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others (Freire, 2000:89). "Consequently, no one can say a true word alone-nor can she *sic* [or he] say if *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words" (Freire, 2000:88). In this instance, denying women who are victims of war to participate in this peace making process consciously

or not-by fundamentally believing a woman essentially has no agency, is dehumanization. Freire emphasizes that dialogue ought to consist of (1) profound love for people and for the world; (2) humility; (3) intense faith in humankind, leading to mutual trust; (4) hope; (5) critical thinking (Freire, 2000:89-92).

In her contribution to a book called, *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, edited by Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge, particularly in part one of the same book, *Women's Participation and Inclusiveness: Searching the Scriptures*, in her title *Women's Place in Creation*, Ndyabahika explores the place of a woman in creation. She rightly argues that the woman is not to be subjugated but to be considered an equal partner in doing life. Even in her divine assigned role as helper, she (the woman) is not to be a "subordinate or servant, but as a colleague, counterpart or sustainer" (Ndyabahika, 1996:24). The above contexts have shaped the kind of theology that Ndyabahika espouses. As a parish priest and counselor, Ndyabahika has worked tirelessly and continuously to better people's lives.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ndyabahika has carried out her work as a spiritual counsellor, preacher, teacher, instructor, and theologian. Her vocational life defies the traditional theological anthropology advocated by the Church of Uganda, which holds that only men are suited to represent God's work in society. Ndyabahika's theological method led her to:

- I. Critically engage with her civil and liberation war context.
- II. Re-read the Bible through a feminist liberation lens and
- III. Deconstruct knowledge from a woman feminist theological perspective.

Ndyabahika's feminist theology is not only grounded in the daily needs of the oppressed groups and individuals but also has the potential to transform women's theological thinking, depending on the specificity of their social and cultural contexts.

End Notes

Freire speaks against the banking system of education where the teacher is the only one with knowledge and the student is only a receptacle. Such education, banking, regards students simply as objects in which knowledge is simply dumped into. Freire states that: “Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry” (Freire, 2000:72).

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14 | **Re-imagination of an inclusive and liberating Church in Esther Mombo's Theology**

Exploring the inclusion of single women ordination in Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

Nagaju Muke

Introduction

The chapter begins with a description of who Esther Mombo is, it highlights her main strengths and contributions to the larger world knowledge and terms how her inclusive and liberating theology can be applicable to the Rwandan context especially in the Presbyterian Church which is still struggling with persistence of patriarchy and gender inequality that deny single women ordination. This is a qualitative study that used questionnaires method. Seven (7) respondents were purposively selected from the seven presbyteries (two presidents and two deputy presidents of presbyteries, one ordained pastor one who is doing pastoral internship and one lay theologians). The main findings emerging from this study revealed some strengths and weaknesses of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda towards the inclusion of single women in the pastoral ministry.

Who is Esther Mombo

Professor Esther Mombo was born in Biringo village of Kisii County, Kenya. She is a Kenyan theologian who was born into an 'ecumenical environment in East Africa'. Her father was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and her mother was a member of the Religious Society of Friends. She was brought up by a Quaker grandmother whom she considers to be her first pastor, and theological educator. Esther attended St Paul's University, formerly known as St Paul's United Theological College in Kenya and got a Bachelor of Divinity (BD). She did her Master at the Irish School of Ecumenics, an Institute of Trinity College Dublin,

and in 1998, she got her PhD from Edinburgh University. In 2007 she was given an honorary doctorate by Virginia Theological seminary in honour of her role in supporting women in Theological Education.

Mombo' Contributions of an inclusive and liberating Church and gender equality

After completing her PHD, she joined the St Paul's university and worked as a lecturer in 1999. The same year, she was appointed as academic dean and was responsible for all the academic programs including curriculum development and admission of students. In her responsibility to develop curriculum, she introduced courses like gender and theology, African women's theologies, Law and society, to name but a few. The aim of these courses was to bring issues of marginality into the centre of Theological education. The introduction of these courses was also about engendering theological education. By introducing gender to theological education, it was about interrogating power issues in theological education which marginalized those that the system did not approve of like women.

It is important to note that when she joined the university, there was only the faculty of theology with one hundred students of whom 85 % were men. So, the number of female students in theology courses was fewer than men. Mombo's great achievement is the way she enabled the increased enrollment of female students into theology. The process of engendering theological education provided for an increase of women's enrolment. This was because of de linking theological educating from ordination, Theological education was to be provided for to all the people of God. The reasons for this was to help women from the churches that were not ordaining women to have women theologically empowered as the debates of ordination go on.

For Mombo theological education must not be held captive to clericalism. That is, it must be available to those who are not seeking ordination. Second, theological ordination must have a "gender sensitive" curriculum that includes experiences of women, particularly, those on the margins (Mombo, 2016 cited by Corey, 2021:219).

In 2006, I was one of the female students and I always remember her statement which said "why do our churches have more women in the

pews than at the pulpit”. In her search, she found that the reason of having more women in the pews than at the pulpit was the exclusion of women in the study of theology and their subsequent ordination. Theological education according to her was an investment, and churches invested in men. Some churches also were not open to ordination of women, so they had no reason to send them to study.

In this regard, Esther Mombo was not concerned about having a big number of women only, but her main concern was liberating women from a culture which exclude them from pastoral ministry. Therefore, she advocated and raised her voice to building an inclusive Church where both men and women will see themselves as children of God. Her passion for gender equality has opened new space for female students and continues to transform the curriculum to impact both men and women as future church leaders.

She encouraged women including myself to undertake studies that could help them take positions of leadership. Esther Mombo is reputed for her exemplary academic ability in the fight of gender justice as observed in Virginia Theological Seminary awarding her an honorary degree in 2007 for her efforts in bringing gender inequities and gender justice to the forefront of church and society.

Mombo worked in top management at the same university for fifteen years, rising from academic dean to Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs (DVCAA) from 2007 to 2013. Being involved in various administrative posts at St. Paul’s University, helped the institution to move from a theological college to a fully-fledged private ecumenical university with good infrastructure and many faculties. This position gave her more power to transform many things at the university. She was involved in different activities such as fundraising both locally and internationally, which enabled many more women to join the college. Consequently, the numbers of women increased from 10 when she started in 1999, to over 100. These women are found in many churches and serve as senior leaders and academics in theological education and I am one of those women who currently work as lecturer and dean of the faculty of theology at the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS) in Rwanda. So, I consider her my role model and her

legacy is like a seed planted in different countries of the world that will produce fruits for the future generations.

Despite her commitment to serve students and to hold the position of being deputy vice chancellor of academic affairs, she faced many challenges from both men and women who did not think women could lead. This was due to the stereotypical roles identified with women which were accepted as ideal. In order to overcome the mentioned challenge, Esther worked hard to prove to both men and women that the position of leadership in the university was not a gendered position, but one that was based on skills and qualification.

Mombo has contributed in the liberating theology by empowering students with the knowledge that became appropriate means to liberate themselves and to stand on their own feet. Her main strength is inclusion of women and other marginalized groups and made St. Paul's University an inclusive community for men and women, lay and ordained, young and old. Mombo challenged various communities to expand their borders and make room for those who are outside and she made space for others (Corey, 2021:118).

Esther Mombo and Ecumenical involvement

In addition to her theology and academic involvement, Esther is a member of numerous ecumenical committees and boards, including the World Council of Churches' Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation where she served as co moderator until the 11th assembly, and the All Africa Conference of Churches' Advisor on Education. She has served both the Anglican Church and the Quaker church in different boards including the Inter-Anglican Doctrinal and Theological Commission, Theological education in the Anglican Communion. She has served the Project for Islam and Christian Muslim Relationship as both a council member and Trustee. She has served the boards of Friends World Committee of Consultation and the American Friends Service Commission.

She is a founder member of Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians St. Paul's chapter in Kenya. This chapter started among students of theology has grown to be a national chapter. Esther was

installed as a Lay Canon Theologian at the Southwark Cathedral in 2017. She has also served the university as the Director of International Partnerships and Alumni Relations at St. Paul's University. As a teacher, her courses have been known to embody both academic knowledge and the lived realities on the practice of theology. In her academic leadership she stresses using differences lenses to do theology. The lenses of HIV, COVID-19, violence and others. Her leadership is holistic such that she brings others on board. Mombo is a gender activist, working with religious groups on issues of gender and patriarchy in as far as the later affects women's full participation in church and society and has made footprints in her written work.

Esther Mombo as scholar and her contribution to the world knowledge

Professor Esther is known to be a theologian and scholar who has many publications, to mention few:

- (1) A Conversation about COVID-19 and the Ecumenical House, 2022. *The Ecumenical Review* 74(3):463-474.
- (2) *Society and Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities for People with Disabilities*, 2012. In book: *Disability, Society and Theology* (pp. 157-168).
- (3) *Missiological challenges in the HIV/AIDS era: Kenya*, 2005. *Theology today* (Princeton, N.J.) 62(1):58-66.
- (4) *Doing Theology from the Perspective of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, 2003. *Journal of Anglican Studies* 1(1):91-103.
- (5) *Decent care and HIV: A holistic approach*, 2000. In book: *Restoring Hope* (pp. 96-101).
- (6) *Reflections on Peace in the Decade to Overcome Violence*, 2011. *The Ecumenical Review* 63(1). Other recent publications include:
- (7) "I banged the table three times." *The empowering Spirit and Women in the AINC in The Holy Spirit in African Christianity*, Editors David Ngaruiya and Rodney L. Reed. Langham London 2022 (pp. 91-104).
- (8) Damaris Parsitau and Esther Mombo 'Mama I Can't Breathe! Black/African Women of Faith Groaning for Social Justice and Gender Equality: *Brill Mission Studies* 38 (2021) 448-469, 2022.
- (9) *Integrity in Higher Education A Feminist Perspective*. Editors: Christoph Stückelberger, Joseph Galgalo, Samuel Kobia. *Leadership with Integrity Higher*

Education from Vocation to Funding. Globethics.net Education Ethics No. 8 (pages 55-68) 2021.

- (10) In search of Women in the Archival Sources: The case of Maria Maraga. In *Christian Interculture Texts and Voices from Colonial and Post-Colonial Worlds*. Eds. Arun W. Jones. Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania University Press (pages 63-80) 2021.
- (11) Et al. Religious Fundamentalism and Attitudes towards Sexual and Gender Minorities and Other Marginalized Groups among Religious Leaders in Kenya. *Pastoral Psychology* <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-021-009429> 2021.

The list of her publications goes on but before I end this section, it is important to note that the journey to inclusive and liberating church was not easy according to Esther. It meant dealing with myths about women and church leadership, such as the fear about women in positions of leadership. It also involved redefining feminism, which had a negative connotation. In a male-dominated institution, most of whom were clerics, Esther, as a lay woman had to lobby among colleagues to support the inclusion of women. She also stated that she was inspired and encouraged by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. It became a very important source in terms of dealing with the triple patriarchal heritage of African women. Those who have written about Esther and her theology describe her in poignant words as in these texts. The issues raised are these of Esther commitment to create a community that is inclusive of all the people of God. A space where gender justice is felt by all.

Gender equality in the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda

Rwanda is probably best known for being the first country in the world to achieve the target of 50 per cent of parliamentarians being women (currently women in parliament are 61.25%). The government is committed to gender equality, the empowerment of women and promoting the rights of women (Abbott and Malunda 2016:561). In the same way, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (EPR) is one of the Protestant churches in Rwanda which promotes the gender equality, because in EPR men and women have the same right in leadership position and decision making. The EPR constitution said that the delegates of the General Assembly are men and women who are equal in number (50% of men and 50% of women) and participate equally in

expressing their view points. So, EPR promotes gender equality because both male and female have to be represented in all its organs. When asked how EPR promotes gender equality especially in pastoral ministry, respondents stated that:

The EPR has promoted gender equality than any other church here in Rwanda said the respondents. In leadership and decision making, EPR is a church which is led by elders in collaboration with a pastor with various commissions and department and both women and men participate. Like men, women hold some high positions. Today the deputy president of EPR is a woman. Out of 7 presbyteries leaders, 1 is a woman and 2 deputy presidents of presbyteries are women. Among elders and deacons both male and female are chosen even though women have a small number due to their illiteracy.

In the pastoral ministry, many years ago, EPR accepted the ordination of women, this is why it has a good thirty (30) ordained women (pastors) and eleven (11) theologians who are doing internships to become pastors. When it comes to the selection of pastor's candidates to join theological studies at Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences (PIASS), each presbytery has to select 2 candidates (male and female) who will do entry test. Among those who succeed the test, the female candidates are selected before and given priority than men candidates. In the rural parishes, women pastors are appointed in the parishes which are accessible than men pastors. Therefore, EPR has a large number of women in ministry. Women and men are offered the same opportunities to attend theological education, allowing them to pursue ministry later. Many women are pastors in different parishes. Like men, women are appointed in different positions of the church, they are part of delegates to represent the Church in different international organizations or meetings and are paid the same salaries.

Women ordination and inclusion of single (unmarried) women in the pastoral ministry

The debate over whether or not females should be ordained into the pastoral ministry seems to be a matter of concern in Christian denominations for some time now. Though some people have views that

affirm female ordination, others are strongly opposed to the whole notion of female ordination (Osei-Bonsu 2015:32). But women ordination in the Presbyterian Church is no longer an issue because the first woman was ordained since 1981 her name is Renate Nzayizaba and the second was Josephine Mukagasana who was ordained in 1987. It is clear that EPR supported and promoted equality of men and women in pastoral ministry. However, in the Presbyterian Church there are still visible influence of patriarchy system working strongly from the parish to the headquarter level. When asked why EPR excludes single women in the pastoral ministry, respondents confirmed that single women are allow to join theological studies but they are less considered and cannot be ordained before marriage, hence, they are discriminated and excluded from the pastoral ministry. This exclusion is due to Rwandan culture which portrays that unmarried women are more exposed to many temptations and sexual harassment while married women are protected by their husbands and more honored in the society.

In addition, participants of this study stated that EPR does not exclude single women in the pastoral ministry only, but both single male and female are excluded in pastoral ministry. This is EPR's policy and church discipline which highlight that it is good to do pastoral ministry while one is married. In this regard, it is believed that two persons (wife and husband) may share ideas, joy and pains. A single pastor either male or female may face various problems in pastoral ministry due to lack of a partner in the ministry. Parishioners of opposite sex may feel excluded by their pastor because it will be difficult for them to be welcomed in her compound (house) due to suspicious myth or mistrust. Other reasons of excluding single people in pastoral ministry are based on Bible text where Jesus commissioned two by two disciples (Luke 10:1). The assumption is that two are better than one in pastoral ministry but the question is: what about Paul in I Corinthians who discusses the commitment to ministry when one is single and we do not know if Paul was married or not. The theology of marriage and ministry is good but is also discriminatory since even Jesus at thirty-three years old was not married. We see many women in the New Testament wanting to follow Jesus leaving their marriages. So one needs to problematize this cultural specific issue of marriage and ministry. The Catholic nuns and sisters are not married but they serve.

Furthermore, EPR is also influenced by Rwandan culture which describes unmarried persons as people who are not mature enough for taking big responsibilities such as pastoral work, hence, they cannot handle marriage issues. Therefore, doing pastoral work by a married person is better because the pastor will share at some extent pastoral difficulties with his/her spouse, joy, and various thoughts and feelings when it is necessary. It is believed that the realities in ministry can be better handled when one is married. For instance, offering pastoral counselling to couples requires one to be married because couples would feel more comfortable with a pastor who relates to marriage settings.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of EPR in building an inclusive community

The focus in this section is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of EPR in building an inclusive community where men and women are equally treated in the ministry. Respondents affirmed that the strength of EPR is mainly visible in the way it offers equal chance and right in education and leadership positions to both men and women. No gender segregation or discrimination is practiced, so their structures and systems are well established. Women pastors are favored in many cases for scholarships, studies, working places or placement sites, etc. The EPR constitution considers women and men equal by policy and legally and some church leaders understand and well appreciate the role of women in ministry. Other strengths point that EPR is among the top, if not the first in Rwanda, to welcome women in the pastoral ministry. This is encouraging, and positively impacts other churches that are still on the way. Both women and men are trained and ordained when meeting the criteria.

Although participants mentioned strengths of EPR, they also outlined some weaknesses including the influence of Rwandan culture which remains a problem especially in some parishes' perception toward building an inclusive community where men and women are not equally treated in the ministry. Some parishioners have misunderstanding of women capacity of leading the Church and their leadership in general. Due to the influence of patriarchy, some parishioners perceive women leadership in a negative ways. This may be one of the reasons why EPR

still has a small number of women in pastoral ministry when comparing to men. Another weakness relies on the factor that more than hundred years of mission, EPR did not think on changing or reviewing its policy of ordaining single women and men for pastoral ministry. Unfortunately, on this journey, flexibility is non-existent. If the regulations were set years ago, they were never reviewed to check their relevance in the current period.

Challenges faced by single women in EPR

In this study, many challenges were described. Respondents confirmed that single female theologians lived in fear of being excluded during ordination while waiting for a fiancée. Often, these women rush into marriages to meet the criteria for ordination. This means, they can get married without giving it much thought and preparations. The culture does not support women courting, and so if the woman does not have a fiancée the case is even more complicated, not to mention the pressure from their families and society. This pressure of the society create in her, the feelings of guilt and shame, she thinks that she is not beautiful reason why she doesn't have a spouse, she thinks that she is unworthy, hence, self-stigmatized.

Furthermore, respondents mentioned other challenges are related to instability in the ministry. Lack of spouse implies denial of ordination. So, they said that the instability is due to the fact that she is not sure if tomorrow she will get a spouse. As result, there is a risk of receiving any candidate without true love; risk of bad marital family due to conditional marriage and risk of being adultery due to effort of trying to find her spouse on due time of pastoral internship. This often results in future complications in the rushed marriage. It causes distress and discourages the individual because she feels as she does not deserve to be a minister, hence, loose of pastoral interest. Single women who are denied ordination due their marital status feel humiliated, confused and oppressed by her own Church (EPR). They regret and think why they wasted time when they decided to go for theological studies. They feel low self-esteem and questioning God's calling. They were looked down by society starting from their own families and sometime they can be depressed.

Respondents also stated that single women in particular, feel frustrated because culture does not allow them to approach men for courting or say “please would you like to marry me”? If a woman take a step to approach a man for courting, it will be a scandal because men will laugh at her by thinking that she is a crazy woman. So, women stay in a dilemma and don’t know what to do since they are not allow to look for the persons to marry them, therefore, they have to wait until the persons (men) come.

Like single women, men who are denied ordination because of being single in EPR also face challenges and feel frustrated, ashamed and dishonored. They are guilty of not fulfilling their duties and responsibility required by the society. They feel rejected, discriminated and they see that there is no place for them in pastoral ministry. In African communities, it follows that failure to get married is like committing a crime against well-established community beliefs and practices (Mbiti 1975 cited by Maseno 2021:1). So, in order to fit into the community, the woman must be married because a young person’s maturity is fully recognised with marriage (Oduyoye 1993 as quoted by Maseno 2021:4). In Rwanda, respondents of this study affirmed that not getting married became like a crime, offence and wrongdoing while it is a choice or lack of a partner. For the man who in a patriarchal society, people blame him and think that it is his fault of staying single at the age of maturity. There are many sayings to describe their faults such as “*bavuga ko arwaye, ari ikiremba, atazi gutereta, ari ikimara*”. These saying portray a single man as a sick person and inactive sexually. But for a woman, it is a big issue “*abavuga ko ari igishagabo, iwabo batera umwaku ariyo mpamvu adasabwa, ari mubi, baramuroze, arwaye intinyi n’ibindi*” She is described as dominant, her family is cursed, witched and she fears sexual intercourse. All these sayings related to cultural norms make the single people to be marginalized in the society and even in the church. In this regard, Petria Theron (2015:56) warns us when she says that “culture could be an obstacle in the realisation of gender equality with the effect that people, especially females, can neither reach their full potential, nor experience their inherent dignity as people created in the image of God”. She suggests that the church could be instrumental in the transformation of cultural norms and practices which promote discrimination against women.

From the above statement we see that the status of being single person is a challenge to the Rwandan society and particularly to the church. This view is similar to what was reported by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR 2012:3) which said that in Rwanda, marriage was considered a sacred social obligation for each man and woman vis-à-vis their family in order to perpetuate the lineage. Moreover, the NISR shows that things have changed with time. Formal education, through the monetarised employment and financial autonomy has served to reduce the role of marriage as a determinant step toward adulthood and social consideration and integration. Furthermore, the report stated that due to studies and unemployment many young nowadays tend to delay their marriage and therefore, remain single to a higher age than in the past even if this is not their choice and despite the negative perception of this on the part of society. With time, we are even observing people who never get married, a status traditionally unacceptable but now more and more widely accepted (NISR 2012:4).

In this regard, if then the Rwandan society is changing its perception in such a way it accepts single people at some point, thus, the EPR needs a double action to address the issues faced by both single men and women. Many of them are not stable and confident in the single status. They seem to be uncomfortable and feel underestimated and try to find alternative ways. Church discipline and structure systems lead them to be involved in marriage without being prepared but to meet ordination conditions. Consequently, they will have dysfunctional marriages that end up in conflicts or divorce.

Solutions on how can EPR build an inclusive church

The last question asked to the respondents was to propose solutions on how can EPR build an inclusive church where single women will fully participate in the pastoral ministry. Most of the respondents suggested that EPR should annul rules which prohibit single person ordination. In this regard, Faith Lugazia said that although the African culture has some elements that were oppressive to women, Christianity as a new religious culture was supposed to be gender inclusive. That is why she stated that much work still needs to be done, hence, reformation to African

women is relevant in order to provide fully participation of women in the ministry (Lugazia 2017:11). Thus, open ordination of single men and women should be accepted and marriage can be done after ordination, no limit of years. The church discipline and rules that deny ordination of single persons need to be reviewed and reformed. It is not wise to limit people based on a single aspect because single women have potential for ministry and can be of a good impact in many areas.

One of the respondents replied that to include the single men and women in EPR pastoral ministry will be a long process that requires to review the theology of pastoral ministry in Presbyterian Church and the admission of single women and men ordination for pastoral ministry has to be voted as a decision of General Synod of EPR. He stated that there is also a need of changing mindset process which requires training of ministers, church leaders and lay people to recognize the pastoral ministry of single women and men in Presbyterian Church.

Therefore, it is proposed that EPR review its practice and policy of ordination of married people only. It happens to keep something standing for years but only to find out that, depending on the period, it is no longer relevant or it is doing more harm than good. Also, it would be helpful to see what is to gain from this policy. The church should look at both equality and equity. The EPR should allow single people to be ordained because other churches are doing so. It has to learn from others churches that share the same doctrines like the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA). Consequently, the church is supposed to be a safe place for all its members, which means that it should be a place where women (single) feel that they are accepted as who they are. This also implies that the church must become a safe and inclusive space where women feel that they are an integral part of the community of believers.

They must neither feel judged, looked down upon nor discriminated against (Mupangwa and Chirongoma 2020:2). Therefore, all respondents proposed that in order to be an inclusive community, the Church (EPR) should know that marriage is a gift and call from God not everyone is made to be married. So, single women should be ordained and do the pastoral ministry like others.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the exclusion experienced by the single (unmarried) women within the EPR. This was a qualitative research using questionnaires, in which the study found some of the challenges faced by single women of being ordained as a pastor. The main findings emerging from this study reveal some strengths and weaknesses of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda towards the inclusion of single women in the pastoral ministry. Its strengths relies on the fact that EPR is among the top, if not the first, to ordain women for the pastoral ministry. However, it was realized that EPR still struggle to include single persons especially women in the ministry. The denial for ordination is mainly related to culture norms that considers single as non-mature person and stereotypes put on women, hence, they feel excluded, discriminated and marginalized in the Church. The study proposed that EPR should review its practice and policy of ordination and allow single persons to be ordained. Therefore, the study on the topic of re- imagination of an inclusive and liberating Church in Esther Mombo theology posits that Esther Mombo contribution to liberation and inclusivity in her theology has made an impact not only to women but also to men as it aims at transforming the church to be an inclusive and liberating community. So, her theology is applicable in the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda in the way it will build an inclusive church where both women and men, single and married can serve God with their full potentials.

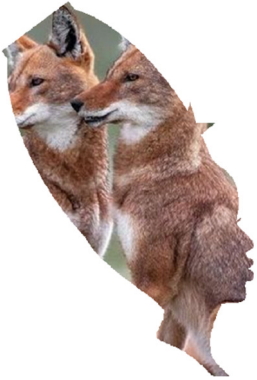
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AFTERWORD

Die Königin von Saba und andere Ikonen der Weisheit

Ein deutsches Gleitwort zu den drei *CIRCLE JUBILEE VOLUMES* (BiAS 39–41/ ERA 13-15)

Joachim Kügler

Es ist für die Bibel-in-Afrika-Forschung der Universität Bamberg eine besondere Ehre, dass der wichtigste Zusammenschluss theologisch forschender Frauen in Afrika, der *Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians* (in der internationalen Forschungsszene gemeinhin kurz *Circle* genannt) seine Bände zum 35-jährigen Jubiläum in Kooperation mit dem Bamberger BiAS/ERA-Team herausgibt.

Das hängt mit dem Renommee zusammen, das eine lange Reihe von afrikanischen Gastwissenschaftlerinnen (zumeist Stipendiatinnen der Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung) der Universität Bamberg als Standort für religionsbezogene Afrika-Forschung erworben hat, aber auch mit den kontinuierlichen Forschungsk Kooperationen, die sich inzwischen zu einem selbstwachsenden Netzwerk stabilisiert haben. Das beste Beispiel dafür ist wohl Musa W. Dube, die als Humboldt-Preisträgerin in Bamberg geforscht hat – damals noch Professorin in Gaborone. Inzwischen ist sie in den USA tätig und fungiert als internationale Koordinatorin des *Circles*. Mit der Bamberger Bibel-in-Afrika-Forschung ist sie dauerhaft verbunden. Zu unseren Jubiläumsbänden hat sie jeweils ein Vorwort verfasst und gehört inzwischen selbst zu den ‚Matriarchinnen‘ der afrikanischen Bibelwissenschaft.

Für deutsche Ohren mag der Begriff der ‚Matriarchin‘, der in den Jubiläumsbänden häufiger vorkommt, etwas irritierend sein, weil wir uns die Verehrung der Vergangenheit nach den verheerenden Erfahrungen von zwei Weltkriegen und den Gräueln der Nazi-Diktatur weitgehend abgewöhnt haben. Allerdings müssen die unheilvollen Resultate männlicher Herrschaft die Vergangenheit keineswegs generell abwerten.

Es gilt aber eine andere Sicht auf die Vergangenheit zu entwickeln, die sich weniger an den Machtmännern orientiert, sondern an deren Gegenmächten. Dazu gehört besonders der Widerstand von Frauen und deren Versuch, Dinge anders zu sehen und zu machen. Indem die Beiträge der *Circle Jubilee Volumes* die wichtigen Beiträge von Frauen zur Entwicklung afrikanischer Befreiungstheologie erinnern und würdigen – einschließlich ihrer Kämpfe und Leiden – entwickeln sie so ein neues Geschichtsbild, und der Begriff der ‚Matriarchin‘ markiert keine Verklärung großer Frauengestalten, sondern die realistische Einschätzung ihrer Bedeutung und ihres Einflusses, sowie ihrer Widerstandskraft. Dabei wurden für die jeweiligen Regionalbände drei Ikonen – eine biblische und zwei außerbiblische – gewählt, die als Integrationsfigur für die jeweilige Leitidee fungieren. Bei der biblischen Gestalt handelt es sich um die Königin von Saba (BiAS 40), die in der Hebräischen Bibel ebenso wie im Neuen Testament, in jüdischen Quellen und im Koran vorkommt, und auf diese Weise eine religionsübergreifende Anerkennung genießt. Ist sie in der Salomo-Erzählung (1 Könige 10,1-13 und 2 Chronik 9,1-12) noch die weise Frau, die der Weisheit Salomos Tribut zollt, so wird sie in der weiteren Rezeption zur Personifizierung weiblicher Weisheit, und in äthiopischen Quellen sogar zur Urmutter der königlichen Dynastie.

Daneben sind zwei weitere, nichtbiblische Weisheitsikonen ausgewählt worden. Dabei handelt es sich zum einen um den weiblichen Sankofa-Vogel (BiAS 39), der in der ghanaischen Akan-Kultur als weisheitliches Symbol für Zukunftsgestaltung durch den angemessenen Rückgriff auf die Vergangenheit steht. Zum anderen wird auf Nehanda, eine prophetische Gestalt der simbabwischen Schona-Tradition Bezug genommen (BiAS 41). Damit ist aber nicht nur die simbabwische Freiheitsheldin des 19. Jahrhunderts gemeint, sondern darüber hinaus die überzeitliche Nehanda, eine spirituelle Macht, die immer wieder Gestalt gewinnen kann, um die widerständige Flamme der Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung weiterzutragen.

So wünsche ich diesen Bänden ein interessiertes Publikum, das bereit ist, das einzigartige Projekt des *Circle* zu würdigen. Und dem *Circle* selbst gilt natürlich der Wunsch:

AD MULTOS ANNOS!



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