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Women, Religion and Leadership in Zimbabwe, Volume 2

Engagement and Activism in Religious Institutions

Edited by
Molly Manyonganise · Ezra Chitando · Sophia Chirongoma

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Praise for *Women, Religion and Leadership in Zimbabwe, Volume 2*

"This second volume focuses on women and religious leadership, which remains a contested area in Zimbabwe and throughout Africa. The writers argue that religions are gendered institutions and that sacred texts such as the Bible and the Koran continue to provide the foundation for women's lack of access to leadership positions. The ordination of women in specific churches does not end women's oppression since they are confronted with a parallel male hierarchy which holds the real power. Various chapters analyse the challenges women face in the church which is both liberator and oppressor. The writers describe ways that women are subverting these gendered leadership structures through a praxis African women's transformative leadership."

—Prof. Susan Rakoczy, *Honorary Professor—School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics—University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa*

"The volume examines women's engagements and activism in Zimbabwe. This leadership and activism runs across religions and denominations. Through a pertinent analysis of women in different religions, places and denominations, the authors have re-ignited the quest to interrogate and challenge patriarchal structures that have stifled the leadership of women, especially in politics. The book confirms the claim that 'women are the roots of the nation' and present to the fore, the leadership dynamics and styles of women that are either overlooked or downplayed within patriarchal settings. The book traces, captures and presents insights of women

in leadership roles, from cultural traditions through to new religious movements. Therefore, it is needful and timely, especially in Zimbabwe and beyond where the patriarchal curtains have closed out women from entering into the corridors of power and leadership."

—Prof. Kudzai Biri, *University of Zimbabwe, Department of Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, Zimbabwe and Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow, Department of Katholische Theologie, Otto-Friedrich Universitat Bamberg, Germany*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Women, Religion and Leadership in Zimbabwe

Molly Manyonganise, Ezra Chitando, and Sophia Chirongoma

Introduction

This volume builds on Volume I and it continues to focus on women, religion and leadership in Zimbabwe. While the first volume engages with thematic areas where women's leadership is either located or absent, this volume intends to make a discursive analysis of women's leadership in various Christian traditions in Zimbabwe, namely Protestantism, African

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Initiated Churches (AICs) as well as Pentecostalism. Such an analysis is crucial in exposing religious attitudes towards women's leadership within and outside religious institutions. In this case, religion is considered a key variable in determining women's leadership in many other spaces such as the home, religious institutions and many other places where decisions are made (Klingorova & Havlicek, 2015; Schnabel et al., 2018). We argue in this volume that religion is central in gendering space, both abstract and physical (See Chitando et al., 2022). Hence, it is appealed to in processes both to include and to exclude women in certain spaces, leadership included. Gender inequality is exacerbated by religion(s) because "religions as social institutions are gendered in different ways" (Schnabel et al., 2018: 83). Klingorova and Havlicek (2015: 9) argue that "the relation between religion and gender equality can be explained by the assertion that societies with higher religiosity accept the authority of religious teachers, who advocate a patriarchal organisation of society." We, therefore, argue in this volume that such attitudes do not only need to be interrogated but challenged to the extent that religion/s need to be accommodative of women's leadership. We envisage that gender inclusive religious policies enable women to be present and effectively take part when decisions that affect their lives are being taken.

Scholarship on religion and gender has demonstrated that religions are gendered institutions, and that different religions have different norms and expectations for distinct ways of accomplishing the same purpose, that is, promoting gendered religious values, expressing gendered religious identities, differentiating between women and men in context specific ways (Schnabel et al., 2018: 83; see also Koburtay et al., 2022; Manyonganise, 2021; Seguino, 2011). Gender norms and stereotypes are embedded in religious doctrines that shape the everyday lives of religious adherents. Within the Zimbabwean context, most religious traditions are hierarchical in nature with men occupying the higher offices. Seguino (2011:1308) notes that in hierarchical structures, a dominant factor in

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shaping gender attitudes is the views held by those at the top of the religious structure at any given point in time. In most cases, women in Zimbabwe have occupied less powerful positions in religions that make Zimbabwe's religious landscape. This is true of religions that use sacred texts as sources of authority. The Christian Bible and the Islamic Koran have been utilised in ways that ensure the subordination of women as well as their exclusion from leadership positions. Zimbabwe's religious turf is largely dominated by African Indigenous Religion(s) and Christianity. Classens (2012: 149) alludes to the "way biblical texts play a key role in forming and sustaining a worldview where the males in society are privileged and thus in power." Klingorova and Havlicek (2015) note that even in cases where the sacred text of a particular religion may advocate equality between men and women, the facts on the ground show that such texts are not given much attention. There is, therefore, discrepancies between what is expected and what is being done. Even then, the use of the Bible in informing gender relations is not homogenous across the different Christian traditions in Zimbabwe. It is only prudent to examine the position of women in these traditions. However, before doing this, there may be need to theorise the discourse on women and religious leadership.

Women and Religious Leadership in Zimbabwe

Women's religious leadership remains controversial in most religions of the world. Scholarship on African Indigenous Religions and gender have noted how the religious space was/is empowering to women as it allows them to subvert patriarchy and exercise agency which they may not be able to do outside of the religious spaces (Cheater, 1986). In this case, "religious roles in traditional belief systems, therefore, afforded and continue to afford exceptional women, who refuse to conform to the standard female 'social personality', an escape route into individualised positions of power as well as authority, based on traditional religion" (Cheater, 1986: 69). Writing on the Punu of Congo-Brazaville, Plancke (2011) argues that for women, spirit possession expresses aspects of domination, agency and self-realisation. From her point of view, these aspects are manifest in most Bantu cultures where women exercise leadership in religion and at times beyond the religious space. In the first volume, we alluded to the Shona woman legend, Mbuya Nehanda as priestess in Shona religion, which empowered her to function as leader in the

political realm as well. The Shona-Ndebele Uprisings (1896–1897) are a case in point. Beyond spirit possession, however, most women were treated as second-class citizens due to cultural beliefs and practices. We make this argument cognisant of how some African gender scholars have tried to dismiss the existence of unequal gender relations in pre-colonial Africa, hence, proffering that gender in Africa was a colonial invention (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 1997). We may run the risk of cultural nationalism if we deny that gender was a crucial social organising tool in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. We also use Mbuya Nehanda's example while being aware of the criticisms that some scholars have brought forward. For example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) rejects the notion that Mbuya Nehanda can be representative of pre-colonial African women. Her persistent presence in Zimbabwe's history is because "she was considered different from other women" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2005: 76). He further argues that

> Her inclusion was part and parcel of the 'great women' as an antidote to the 'great men' of conventional historiography. Nehanda is herself suffering as a historical figure from 'masculinisation' using male standards to measure and judge her activities.
>
> She has never been studied as a woman in her own right. If she was not a spirit medium, she could be suffering from invisibility together with her fellow Zimbabwean pre-colonial sisters.

In Ndlovu-Gatsheni's analysis, Nehanda derived her authority from religion without which she would not have been recognised in history as a historical figure. Other scholars like Anne-Marie Gallagher, Cathy Lubelska and Louise Ryan cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni take note of the tendency among early historians to add key women to men's history. Some of "the accounts that try to present pre-colonial African women as having wielded power tend to glorify individual African female rulers without detailed analyses of the specific historic circumstances under which they lived" (Becker, 1998: 259) cited in Geisler (2004: 18). Hence, Geisler (2004: 259) argues that such accounts uplift outstanding cases over the majority of women who must be postulated to have had much less authority and political power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) raises critical issues about women's invisibility in history itself. However, we argue that women's visibility in history is closely tied to their roles in leadership in the various facets of societal life, religious leadership included. The cherry

picking of a few women in history does not (re)present a Zimbabwean society that is gender sensitive and gender inclusive. It should actually nudge scholars to question the absence of the majority of women from authoritative positions in the public sphere. Such analysis needs to extend from African traditional religious spaces to include other religions such as Christianity and so-called minor religions in Zimbabwe, namely Islam, Judaism, Baha'i Faith, etc. For example, AIRs and Christianity have been accomplices in advocating for the subordination of women and their exclusion from leadership not only in religious institutions but also in homes and national institutions. King (1995) alludes to this fact when she argues that the study of the status of women in religion also reflects the status of women in society as a whole. Volume I has already alluded to the way religion has influenced the genderedness of the political space in Zimbabwe. Since in Zimbabwe the majority of Zimbabweans confess to be Christians, it becomes imperative to analyse the attitudes derived from this religion towards women.

Attitudes Towards Women's Leadership in Christianity in Zimbabwe

Focusing on Christianity, feminist and womanist scholars have critiqued the inferior position of women within. Christianity is categorised as a gender-traditional religion (Burke, 2012: 123). Burke (2012) further argues that it promotes the belief that men and women were created to fulfil different and complementary roles that tend to privilege the status of men. In concurrence, Pui-lan (2000) argues that though women constitute the majority in churches, they are marginalised in the power structure of the church and the life of the congregation. She argues that "colonial and patriarchal denominational polity reinforced by indigenous biases and taboos against women has consigned them to second class membership in the faith community" (2000: 98). In her 2005 publication, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, Pui-lan critiques some of the intellectual projects which for her make the crucial connection between religion and colonialism, but have left out the gender dimension. She also notes that some scholars who have investigated the relationship between gender and colonialism have not taken note of the role of religion in sustaining colonial ideologies. In the light of this, she argues

> Given [the] complex history of what counted as Holy scripture, the Bible cannot be naively seen as a religious text reflecting the faith of the Hebrew people and early Christians. Instead, it must also be seen as a political text written, collected, and redacted by male colonial elites in their attempts to rewrite and reconcile with history and to reconceptualise both individual and collective identities under the shadow of empires. A postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible needs to investigate the deployment of gender in the narration of identity, the negotiation of power differentials between the colonisers and the decolonised, and the reinforcement of patriarchal control over spheres where these elites could exercise control. (2005: 8)

While Pui-lan was writing on the Asian context, her observations are also evident in the African context in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Specifically focusing on Africa, Oduyoye (1997/8: 500) posits that

> Since in the church in Africa, men and the clergy presume to speak for God, and to demand the obedience of women, it is not easy to experience God as empowering and liberating when one is in the church's ambit. Women experience God as the one who orders their subordination, who requires them to serve and never be served. God is the one who made them women, with a body deemed to be the locus of sin and impurity. God is experienced as source of women's oppression and Jesus as the author of exclusion of women from sacramental roles in the church. This is the God the Christian tradition wants women to love and obey.

Scholarship on religion and gender focusing specifically on Zimbabwe has shown how the different Christian traditions within have in one way or the other reinforced the otherisation of women as well as their continued marginalisation from leadership positions. Chagonda-Banda (2014) deals with gender inequality in the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. She argues that the *Rumano* booklet, which is used during the women's Thursday meetings (*China Chemadzimai*), continues to project women as home-makers and house wives. The domestication of women was reinforced by missionary Christianity as it valorised Victorian notions of domesticity in those areas which were colonised by the British, Zimbabwe included. It is important to note that the concept of women's meetings was started by the Methodist Church, but eventually adopted by most protestant churches in Zimbabwe. It, therefore, follows that in most protestant churches in Zimbabwe, women continue

to be taught to focus on being good mothers and wives. In an on-going research (Manyonganise, 2023) engaged women in Protestant churches in order to understand their attitudes towards women's religious leadership. It was interesting to note that even in those churches where women can now be ordained as pastors, a separate parallel hierarchy of power and authority made up of men exists to the extent that the women pastors have to subordinate themselves to this hierarchy. Most women interviewed alluded to the fact that the ordination of women in these churches act as smokescreens for fake women's empowerment yet real power remains in the hands of men. Writing on AICs, Mapuranga (2013a) argues that women in these churches continue to linger on the margins in as far as leadership positions are concerned. This is despite the fact that earlier studies had argued that the religious space of AICs was empowering to women. Scholarship on African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has also shown the pervasiveness of patriarchy within this tradition (Manyonganise, 2021; Mapuranga, 2018).

A book edited by Hendricks et al. (2012) titled *Men in the Pulpit, Women in the Pew? Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa* captures the reality of the church in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Religious patriarchal ideologies from both African and biblical cultures have shaped negative attitudes towards women's religious leadership. Mombo and Joziasse (2012: 184) argue

> In a patriarchal system, gender roles are specifically defined and valued differently, which means that men are socialised to be public figures, while the women are socialised to be in the domestic sphere. When this is applied in the church, the men are ordained and allowed to use the pulpit while women remain in the pews.

This analysis is instructive of the experiences of women across the Christian traditions in Zimbabwe. This may also be applicable to other religions found in the country. The emphasis placed on silence and submission has allowed men to find justification to exclude women from leadership positions in the church more specifically. The appropriation of Pauline passages which emphasise women's silence in church and subordination to their husbands has been central in excluding women from religious leadership in churches. To this, Machingura (2013: 234) avers that "the Bible has been variously used to ridicule, stereotype, demean, vulgarise, demonise, manipulate and fight against women's empowerment." Hence,

African Women Theologians argue that the churches' teachings have promoted women's oppression to the extent that even women oppose the ordination of women (Longwe, 2019: 16). Hence, in Pui-lan's analysis, the misogynist teachings in both the Christian and indigenous traditions deny women equal opportunities to serve and lead (2000: 100). For her, many female parishioners feel more comfortable with men as their pastors and some are against women's ordination because they have internalised the churches' teachings of male superiority. Thus, from Ellison's perspective,

> In patriarchal Christian theology, the male is the presumed centre, the defining norm, and the exclusive representative of the human. He alone bears fully the divine image. The female, defined as secondary and subordinate, occupies an auxiliary place in relation to (and in service to) the male, but never occupies the centre or represents humanity in her own right. (2001: 49)

This often results in the trivialisation of women's concerns. Ellison (2001: 48) argues that patriarchal Christianity sacrifices women's powerlessness and subordination as morally good. Hence, Harrison (1985: 4–5) cited in Ellison (2001: 48) is of the view that we are still a long way before "Christianity acknowledges adequately its complicity in breeding and perpetuating the hatred and fear of the real, full, lived-world power of female persons." However, Ellison (2001) is of the view that such attitudes can only be maintained depending on the compliance of women and men to the norms and ideological assumptions of patriarchal Christianity about gender. For Ellison, it is possible for women to breakdown patriarchy by stopping to comply and conform to patriarchal norms which can enable them to display autonomous self-direction. In other words, women can exercise agency in negotiating, subverting and resisting patriarchy in Christian circles. We turn to this theme below.

Religious Women's Agency: Negotiating, Subverting and Resisting Patriarchy

Scholarship on religion and gender, while noting the marginalisation of women in religions, has contested the view that casts women as victims without the power or agency to change the narrative. Focus has now been shifting to ways in which women in religions are negotiating, subverting

and resisting patriarchy in the religions of the world. For Burke (2012: 123), studying women's agency is interesting in that 'agency is defined through intention and autonomy, yet these characteristics are not typically used to describe religious women. We theorise the concept of agency cognisant of the challenges it poses in both feminist and womanist studies particularly as scholars try to delineate women's actions as either complying with or resisting patriarchy. Le Roux (2019) cautions us to be careful not to interpret religious women's actions through the binaries of complicity or agency while disregarding the religious meaning that the women attach to their actions. It is in the light of this that in order to understand their agency, scholars have focused on women's experiences, thereby shifting from trying to understand women through the eyes of the men who dominate them. In this case, the concept of agency gives voice to women. In an article titled, *Can the Subaltern Speak*? Spivak (1988) doubted the possibility of the subaltern to speak in a society dominated by narratives of the powerful. However, many scholars have responded to Spivak and have challenged her thesis on the silencing of the subaltern. Responses to Spivak have contended that the subaltern have always spoken but the dominant have chosen not to listen. This is true of religious institutions generally around the world and particularly in Zimbabwe. In her study of African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, Mapuranga (2013b) notes how women Pentecostal leaders bargain with patriarchy instead of directly challenging it. However, in 2018, she took note of the fact that the same women had started to be proactive by creating ministries within ministries. For example, she notes how women who are wives of founders of Pentecostal movements had begun to form women's ministries with their husbands' churches. For her, this is agency because these women are refusing to continue lingering under the shadows of their husbands. While agreeing with Mapuranga, Manyonganise (2021) notes that there are some women who have chosen to totally break away from this tradition. Using Memory Matimbire the founder of the Ndadhinhiwa (I am fed up) prayer group, she shows how Matimbire has challenged, subverted and resisted patriarchy. A discussion of some of her sermons revealed the militancy with which she leads her ministry, a characteristic which is deemed to be masculine in Shona culture. Such ministries have brought visibility to women's religious leadership. In African Initiated Churches (AICs), Mai Chaza's Guta Ra Jehovah is the epitome of women religious agency. There are many women in these churches who have also founded their own movements

as a way of breaking away from the suffocating patriarchal control in male-led movements. In the next section, we provide a summary of the chapters making up this volume.

Section A: Women's Visibility in Positions of Leadership

Chapter 2, by the title, "Women's Transformative Leadership and Africa's Holistic Development: The Role of the Churches," is authored by Isabel A. Phiri and Ezra Chitando. The authors of this chapter restate the fact that even though the general picture being painted globally is to associate leadership with men, the reality on the ground is that women have played, and continue to play, significant leadership roles. It is against this backdrop that the chapter critiques the ideology of patriarchy which is bent on undermining women's leadership roles in society, while overplaying men's leadership roles. The chapter also examines the role of the churches in promoting African women's transformative leadership. It concludes by proffering ways in which the churches can tap into African women's transformative leadership in addressing the continent's holistic development.

Chapter 3, by Silindiwe Zvingowanisei, carries the title, "Visibility and Leadership Opportunities for Muslim Women in Zimbabwe." The main argument proffered herein is that more than forty years after attaining political independence, women leadership remains a critical challenge in almost all the major religions found in Zimbabwe, particularly in Islam. The chapter makes use of liberal feminism as its theoretical framework in a bid to explore the extent to which Muslim women are involved in Islam's critical leadership structures. Zvingowanisei begins by investigating the visibility and leadership opportunities for women during the time of Muhammad. She then proceeds to explore the same pertaining to Muslim women in Zimbabwe. Throughout the chapter, Zvingowanisei contends that in terms of leadership opportunities, Muslim women in Zimbabwe are relegated to the realm of insignificance except in cases where they lead other women such as the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation. She also illustrates how the selective use of some of the Quranic scriptures, the institution of patriarchy and culture are the cardinal reasons why Muslim women are subjugated. In sync with Zimbabwe's National Gender Policy, 2017, the chapter envisions striking a balance between men and women in terms of leadership in Islam. It also foregrounds the point that although Muslim women participate in leading other women

and children, there is need for a robust implementation of gender redress instruments to achieve equity in Islam's leadership structures where all the influential positions are occupied by men.

Chapter 4, authored by Simbarashe Munamati, is entitled "Women's Leadership Roles in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (1891–2020)." This chapter echoes a melodious chord to the discourse on women, religion and leadership by examining the extent to which Zimbabwean women participate in leadership positions in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ). To achieve this goal, he presents the history of the RCZ into two unique phases, that is, the pioneering (1891–1983) and the liberal (1984–2020) periods. Peering through the liberal feminism and theological lenses while applying the critical phenomenological and historical methodologies, the chapter discusses women's leadership roles in the RCZ. It provides a trajectory of women leadership trends in the RCZ at the congregation, presbytery and synod levels. While acknowledging the vast gender disparities which were pertaining, especially during the first historical phase, the chapter concludes by appraising a positive shift in women's participation in various leadership positions. According to him, this progressive shift has been made possible through the implementation of numerous gender redress instruments aimed at achieving gender equality between women and men in the church's leadership structures. As such, the chapter propounds for continued progress towards flattening the curve in gender disparities within one of the earliest denominations in the southern part of the country.

Chapter 5, "Gender Dynamics in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ) Leadership Hierarchy" is authored by Terence Mupangwa. Cognisant of the fact that the AFMZ is one of the oldest Pentecostal churches with such a wide following in Zimbabwe, she weaves a strand to the theme of women and leadership by assessing the gender dynamics in the AFMZ's leadership structures. It is her assertion that although the Zimbabwean government and other regional and international organisations have policies that advocate for and aim to achieve gender equality in all facets of life, however, faith-based institutions such as the AFMZ have not yet aligned their structures with such policies. The discussion in this chapter is based on an empirical study conducted in the AFMZ between September 2017 and February 2018. The theoretical framework adopted in this chapter is African women's theology which upholds gender equality in African faith communities. The key findings emerging from this empirical study are the basis of her contention that the

AFMZ is still far from achieving gender equality in its governance structures. Mupangwa lays bare how women are marginalised in the AFMZ governance structures despite all the efforts by the Zimbabwean government to achieve gender equality in both state and non-governmental organisations. The chapter concludes by recommending the inclusion of women in all activities of the church, especially in key leadership and decision-making structures. This conclusion is informed by the fact that women are capable of contributing positively to the growth of the AFMZ as agents of change.

Chapter 6, by Amos Muyambo, is entitled, "Women Leadership in the Guta Ra Jehovah Church: Towards the Construction of 'Soft Masculinities.'" It outlines the several lessons that can be drawn from one of the oldest and widely followed woman-founded African Indigenous Churches, the Guta Ra Jehovah. This is particularly in the light of how the Guta Ra Jehovah is playing a formidable role in addressing gender-based violence (GBV), which is one of the major social evils in Zimbabwe. The chapter also discusses how female leadership in the hands of Matenga (a title for the founder, Mai Chaza (born Theresa Nyamushanya)) is positively contributing towards the deconstruction of harmful masculinities. It illustrates how such initiatives have opened inroads towards creating soft masculinities that are more life giving and positive in gender relations in Zimbabwe. Muyambo places emphasis on how women's involvement has contributed towards solving societal challenges through inculcating positive humanity especially how they are moulding peaceful men. In conclusion, he analyses how female leadership in religion has contributed in formulating soft masculinities, ushering a ray of hope for the future.

In Chapter 7, "Exploring the Status of Women in the Zion Christian Church Since 1913," Solomon Mukora discusses the history of women's contribution in the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), one of the major AICs in Zimbabwe, especially among the female folk. In terms of theoretical framework, the chapter adopts an interdisciplinary approach. It draws insights from the social history approach and intersectionality. According to Mukora, in religious institutions, such as the ZCC, women have mutated into a complex class whose attributes are no longer generalisable since they have confronted the multiple bottlenecks imposed by patriarchal designs to register themselves as critical players in the church. This is despite the subversion by their male counterparts. He explains that while the ZCC women's roles are usually subordinate to men, they are functional and have been an important vehicle in the development of

the church. He argues that the ZCC women in their various capacities, whether as subordinate, or otherwise, have continued to mutate in terms of their qualities in the society, with education being a significant agent in the way women perceive themselves. The chapter beams a spotlight on how the women's ancillary functions in midwifery, prophecy and as wives and mothers have been very critical in shaping the ideology of the church. Hence, it is his conviction that the ZCC women cannot be considered to be static, as they have continued to evolve their qualities responding to the trends of modernity as women consciousness through waves of feminism and womanism which continue to inform their class consciousness. The chapter concludes by restating the argument that women are critical in the historiography of the ZCC.

Section B: Women's Leadership in New Religious Movements and Cultural Traditions

The first two chapters in this section deliberate on the emergence of churches or ministries founded by women in Zimbabwe, starting from the pre-colonial era, moving up to the last forty years of independence while gazing into the future. Besides celebrating some of the women's success stories in religious leadership, these two chapters also reflect on some of the hurdles faced by women leading churches or ministries in Zimbabwe. Chapter 8 by Mpumelelo Moyo has the title, "The Emergence of Churches and Ministries Founded/led by Women in Zimbabwe." Herein, Moyo explores the rise of women to influential leadership positions in the church. He argues that more that forty years after independence, the church in Zimbabwe has not yet fully embraced women's leadership. In his view, although women are the backbone of the church, the harsh reality of the matter is that the church for many women comes across as both a liberator and an oppressor. According to Moyo, this is mainly because women's ministry and contribution are considered secondary and supplementary to that of men. Such a status quo is perceived as very ironic in this chapter, particularly in the light of the fact that the same women who dominate the pews in churches have been perpetually excluded from the churches' power structures. The chapter also illustrates how women access power and religious space through the exercise of spiritual healing, evangelism and leadership in the church. It also interrogates the unholy alliance between cultural and religious biases which have often been used as tools to justify women's silence, subordination as well as denying

them equal opportunities in church leadership. Moyo also acknowledges that African Initiated Churches and Pentecostal Churches have facilitated enlarged avenues for women's participation and leadership. Nevertheless, he concedes that women's participation is circumscribed by cultural, church and biblical controls. The chapter concludes by recommending the urgent need for embracing female leadership, particularly their spiritual role, the legal authority of their ministries, the challenges of patriarchy and the empowerment of women. The vantage point for proffering these recommendations is informed by the undeniable fact that women's contribution and leadership can awaken the Church in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 9, by Canisius Mwandayi, is entitled "Religio-cultural 'clamps' on female leadership in Zimbabwe: towards a liberating hermeneutic in mainline churches and African Initiated Churches (AICs)." Starting off from the ancient times up to the year 2020, the chapter retraces the course of life that has characterised the gendered contours surrounding leadership dynamics in Zimbabwe. It utilises the life course approach to human relations along gender lines. Specific focus revolves on women in Zimbabwe's mainline churches and African Initiated Churches (AICs). The undergirding argument raised by Mwandayi is that the biblical interpretation in churches should not be done in such a way that it promotes misogyny, hatred and patriarchal-based injustice. He, therefore, calls for a liberating hermeneutic which is tailored towards setting women free from the clutches of an androcentric world. In his view, such a hermeneutic is intended to usher in egalitarianism, particularly in gender-related issues, as well as to ignite hope and love for all regardless of gender.

In Chapter 10, by the title, "Zezuru Women's Leadership Roles in the Death Rites of Passage in Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Response," Sylvia C. Musasiwa and Yolanda Dreyer foreground women's leadership roles in the death and burial rituals among the Zezuru, a sub-group of the Shona in Zimbabwe. This chapter highlights some activities which are the preserve for women. The main argument proffered by the authors is that these activities reveal that despite the women's participatory leadership during the death rites of passage, their role is suppressed within the Zezuru culture. The authors also restate the fact that the significant role played by women during these important rites of passage does not seem to have received adequate attention in academic literature. With a particular focus on some practices which impact negatively on the widows within the Zezuru culture, the chapter proposes possible pastoral roles which

the church can offer to ensure that the rituals do not infract the widow's human rights.

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PART I

Women's Leadership Engagement and Activism in Zimbabwean Faith Communities

CHAPTER 2

Women's Transformative Leadership and Africa's Holistic Development: The Role of the Churches

Isabel A. Phiri and Ezra Chitando

Introduction

Images of male leaders abound in Africa. This is because the ideology of patriarchy seeks to reserve the concept of leadership to the male gender. It suggests that only men are leaders and that women are condemned to perpetual followership. Thus, when images of leaders are shown, viewers/consumers are often bombarded with exclusive clubs of men:

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as politicians, in the boardrooms of companies, as religious leaders and so on. Of course, as has been consistently demonstrated by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) in real life, these images are manipulated. Women have led, effectively, in the past, lead now and, we anticipate, in bigger numbers, in future. For example, in one of the volumes, one of the present authors co-edited with Sarojini Nadar (Phiri & Nadar, 2005), contributors effectively demonstrated that women lead in the church in Africa and more must be done to acknowledge this fact more openly and actively.

The failure or refusal to accept women's leadership globally and in Africa is an injustice that the Circle has been challenging through publication and activism. The Circle has demonstrated commitment to women's leadership in religion and society and actively seeks to mobilise women to take up their leadership role. It believes that maximising on women's talents will contribute towards the continent's transformation. However, for progress to be achieved, there is need to challenge the grip that patriarchy has on both religion and society. Recognising the diverse roles of the Circle, the Kenyan scholar of religion/theologian Hazel Ayanga writes:

> The Circle has several other objectives that guide and contextualise the desire to be the voice. These objectives include research and publication on pertinent issues that affect women, coming together at national, regional and Pan-African conferences and workshops to share their research findings and to hear each other's stories. These gatherings provide safe spaces for women to be themselves and to share the experiences that inform their narratives and help create their theologies. The Circle and its members are mentors to one another. The mentoring project helps younger and upcoming women in religion, culture and the academia to begin to understand the importance of their own stories and also the stories of other women. The mentoring programme is essential for the future of the Circle as it brings into the fold new and younger members even as mature and aging ones begin to grow weary. (Ayanga, 2016)

While Ayanga is certainly correct to highlight the importance of mentoring, the reality of the pioneers getting more established in age and indeed growing weary (on the latter dimension, see, for example, Coleman, 2006: 86), she perhaps understates the tenacity of the first generation of Circle activists. Surviving members of the Circle from the pioneering generation continue to call upon the church to embrace

women's leadership and the pioneers remain committed to the struggle. This chapter will highlight the key issues that they continue to focus on. The key point to note here is that Circle activists have really not had the luxury of "growing weary", but have had to continue to be actively involved in the struggle for gender justice. Even as they might have retired from formal administrative or academic positions, they have continued to provide mentorship and to be dedicated to the attainment of African women's rights in church and society. This is not to project African women theologians as self-sacrificing, but to acknowledge their lifetime commitment to the cause.

This chapter seeks to highlight the critical role played by African Christian women's transformative leadership in the continent's development. While recognising that Africa is characterised by multiple religions that include African Traditional Religions, the Baha'i Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Rastafari and others (see, for example, Chitando, 2018), this review focuses specifically on African Christian women's transformative leadership and how it has the potential to change the continent's fortunes. This is motivated by the strategic role that African Christian women (from diverse traditions and denominations) can and do play in leadership on the continent. A cursory analysis of the history of Christianity in Africa confirms that it has played a major role in education, thereby equipping many African Christian women for transformative leadership in the quest to meet the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Separate studies can also examine the contribution of other religions to women's leadership in Africa. What is clear, however, is that spirituality and resilience will feature prominently in narratives of women's leadership in Africa. Reporting on women's transformative leadership in Malawi, Madimbo refers to

> … four roles that spirituality has played in the lives of female leaders: (a) spirituality as a source of strength and hope producing resiliency, (b) spirituality as a source of a sense of calling and purpose for leadership, (c) spirituality producing an optimistic mindset, (d) spirituality as source of perseverance. The women leaders look to God, in challenging times, as their source of strength and hope. (Madimbo, 2016: 104)

While the main focus is on African Christian women's transformative leadership, it is vital to acknowledge that indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) underlie and inform the worldview of African Christian women. In this

regard, concepts such as Ubuntu ("I am because we are"), communal solidarity, ethical leadership, sensitivity to the struggles of others and so on continue to influence the approaches adopted by African Christian women. Indeed, it would be valuable to develop studies that examine the extent to which IKS influences African Christian women's transformative leadership.

Threats to Social Progress in Africa: An Overview

The call for African women's leadership that the Circle is championing needs to be understood in the context of multiple challenges that the continent of Africa continues to face. Emerging from the brutal experiences, Africa has demonstrated remarkable resilience to remain standing. However, there are many challenges that continue to threaten the health and well-being of the continent's citizens. Whereas both the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063 contain a lot of promises, there must be a serious commitment towards accepting African women's leadership if the continent's citizens are going to enjoy these promises (Adeola, 2020). A longer essay is required to discuss the challenges that Africa faces in detail; hence, this section shall summarise them.

While there have been some very effective male leaders in Africa after independence, the sad truth is that most of them have been guided by very problematic leadership styles (Jallow, 2014). Influenced by patriarchy and aggressive masculinities, many male leaders have failed to guide their nations, organisations and communities to prosperity. This is despite the fact that the continent is blessed with abundant natural and human resources. Africa is incredibly rich and does not need to carry a begging bowl to other continents. Whereas there has been progress in improving the quality of life of many African citizens, "lived poverty" is on the rise once again (Mattes, 2020).

Male leaders at different levels have not succeeded in taking Africa forward. Whereas women featured prominently in anti-colonial struggles (Maloba, 2007), "strong men" tended to rule in many African countries. Informed by patriarchal ideologies where power is acquired and exercised for its own sake, they concentrated on accumulating wealth at the expense of advancing their nations. Instead of promoting "power with", they have prioritised, "power over". As the chapter shall highlight below, the Circle seeks to offer a different, life giving, model of power. According to

Loreen Maseno, African women's theology aspires for a community as the sphere where there are "…relationships that embrace reciprocity, mutuality, partnership and denounce hierarchies that promote power relations between men and women" (Maseno, 2021).

The insistence on exclusion and oppression by the majority of African male leaders has given rise to seemingly endless cycles of violence on the continent. Warlords have exploited divisions created by colonialism, while other merchants of violence have used religious differences to justify violence in Africa. This has led to calls for religion to promote human security in Africa (Chitando & Tarusarira, 2019). What is clear, however, is that poor leadership has generated frustration, with young people not seeing themselves prospering on African shores. This has led to the unfortunate and avoidable deaths of young people as they try to reach Europe in anticipation of greener pastures.

Related to the leadership failure is the attendant subservience and commitment to economic systems that do not benefit Africa. It is tragic that Africa has been reduced to a laboratory for trying out all forms of economic experiments. The net effect has been the creation of economic systems that condemn many Africans to unemployment or to the informal sector. Although some proponents of decoloniality maintain that there is a lot of promise in the informal sector, the COVID-19 shutdowns in many African countries underscored the precarious nature of the informal sector. Overnight, the livelihoods of many families were threatened as it became clear that it is difficult to save a considerable amount of cash and that most participants in the informal sector struggle to be viable. Thus, the challenge here is to generate economic systems that are pro-poor and enable the full participation of all citizens, particularly women. In the face of globalisation (House-Soromekun & Falola, 2011), Africa must come up with creative solutions for the continent's flourishing.

Another threat to social progress in Africa can be detected in the systematic minimisation and denial of African women's rights due to appeals to culture and religion. While there have been progressive global, continental, regional and national pieces of legislation that have been passed to promote women's rights, many women in Africa continue to struggle to enjoy these rights. This is due to the impact of culture and religion, particularly as these are deployed by those who seek to gain advantage. Due to the influence of patriarchy, culture and religion are often interpreted in ways that oppress women. This has resulted in situations where culture and religion appear to be in a covenant against

women in Africa (Rwafa, 2016). As noted above, most male leaders have struggled to promote and uphold women's rights in Africa. Thus:

> Although African states have ratified several human rights instruments protecting women's human rights, generally the severe political, economic and social difficulties facing African states have had a negative impact on the efforts to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women. The prevalence of prejudicial traditional practices and customs that legitimize women's inequality in rural areas of most African states hamper the effective implementation of human rights generally, and of women as a vulnerable group in particular. Although obstacles to the realization of both the civil and political rights (CPR) and the economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) of women, traditional practices and customs disproportionately affect ESCR since traditionally this category of rights has been often marginalized rather than prioritized. (Ssenyonjo, 2007: 41)

As Ssenyonjo outlines in the foregoing citation, traditional practices and customs are deployed to promote women's inequality in Africa. This is not to condemn Africa's cultures and religions, but to acknowledge that patriarchy has used this template to prevent women from accessing and thriving in leadership positions. In fact, the coming of Christianity pushed African women, who enjoyed leadership roles in African Traditional Religion, into the periphery (Phiri, 1997). Patriarchy uses religion, culture and gender socialisation (Maluleke & Nadar, 2002) to prevent African women from availing their talents and gifts for the continent's sustainable development. This is a sad loss, since African women have much to offer, as the following section highlights.

This has been expressed forcefully in the following citation:

> The history of the Christian church, since its inception, has denied women, their rightful place. This is notwithstanding, the critical reading of scriptural text…reveals multitudes of women, who played a significant role in church history, but remain unacknowledged. The liberative and leadership role played by these women…remains obscured and continues to be inaccessible, because of the deep-rooted male-centred construal of the biblical text, which reduces the role played by women…. (Dweba et al., 2020: 1)

The Churches, African Women's Transformative Leadership and the Continent's Transformation

Faced with the challenges outlined in the foregoing section, the churches in Africa are called upon to act creatively and courageously in order to contribute towards transforming the situation of women and to the continent's transformation. They are strategically placed to do so for a number of reasons, including the historical factors. From the missionary period to the present, the churches in Africa have contributed to education, including owning schools, health institutions and universities. Some African institutions of higher learning, such as the United Methodist-related Africa University in Zimbabwe, Solusi University, Reformed Church University and the Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU), are demonstrating the role of faith-based organisations to sustainable development in Africa/Zimbabwe. The churches have to be committed to the struggle for transformation in Africa as this is part of their mandate. Thus:

> Instead of continuing as mere recipients or conduits for development aid, the church in Africa needs to bring itself into the centre-stage of the development agenda of the continent as part of its cultural mandate to ensure in its membership hard work, discipline, saving and a culture of investment towards the future. (Haigbe, 2015: 177)

African Women's Transformative Leadership

Although the churches in Africa have struggled to embrace women's leadership at the highest levels, it is critical to acknowledge that Christian women have nevertheless proceeded to provide transformative leadership in society. They have sought to embody and express alternatives to oppressive forms of power and leadership that have been exercised by many male leaders on the continent. As the Circle has demonstrated, African women bring a different leadership style (Njoroge, 2005). As we saw above, the dominant leadership style that has contributed to misery in Africa is the patriarchal and oppressive one. African Christian women seek to express a new way of leading that recognises the rights and dignity of all. Transformative leadership seeks to promote working collaboratively so that change is a result of a collective effort and the leader is a facilitator (Preece, 2003).

The investment by African Christian women leaders is critical for Africa's transformation. Refusing to buy into patriarchal and oppressive leadership, they place emphasis on leadership as facilitation. For them, power must be deployed to enable less privileged members of society to have access to resources and dignified lives. Whereas patriarchal leadership places emphasis on one "big man", African Christian women's transformative leadership is more inclined towards the collective. The following citation expresses this conviction quite clearly:

> Whilst the achievements of Africa's women Parliamentarians, Presidents and business leaders cannot be underestimated, a focus on building individual women's leadership and capacities alone risks reinforcing narratives of increasing equality of opportunity, success and power for all … but only as long as individual women work hard enough, sacrifice enough – and continue to meet their family and care responsibilities (which remain largely hidden or deliberately ignored). (Brown et al., 2019: 29)

The foregoing citation highlights some of the key principles of African Christian women's transformative leadership and its role in the continent's transformation. It recognises the importance of individual African women leaders in politics (Parliament and government), including those who rise to be Presidents. It also appreciates the significance of African women who take up leadership positions in business. However, it draws attention to the danger of being preoccupied with individual African women leaders. Patriarchy tends to allow only a few women to rise to the top and use them as evidence of women's advancement, while continuing to deny the majority of women their rights. Further, it ignores the contribution and leadership of women to the advancement of their families, communities, organisations, nations and the continent.

The transformative leadership style espoused by African Christian women is key for the emergence of cultures of peace. Whereas the patriarchal, selfish and oppressive style adopted by most male leaders results in citizen dissatisfaction and violence, African Christian women's transformative leadership has the potential of inculcating cultures of peace on the continent. By adopting a leadership style that is accommodative, consultative and respectful of diversity, African Christian women are providing a sound platform for the transformation of the continent. Indeed, a peaceful Africa promises to be a prosperous Africa. In

the following section, we explore another strategy employed in African Christian women's leadership, namely liberative readings of the Bible.

Liberative Readings of the Bible for African Women's Transformative Leadership

Although the Bible has been used to marginalise African Christian (and other) women from leadership (see, e.g. Kügler et al., 2019), the Circle is calling for new and liberating approaches to be applied to its reading in African contexts of patriarchy. African women biblical scholars, theologians and scholars of religion have promoted positive readings of the Bible to challenge the patriarchal interpretations that have been used to justify the exclusion of women from leadership in church and society. Dube (2001) and Togarasei (2016) offer valuable information on African women's interpretation of the Bible. Other Circle activists have also questioned the deployment of the Bible to terrorise single women (Biri, 2021).

Liberative readings of the Bible serve to authenticate and promote African Christian women's transformative leadership. For example, drawing from the Bible and an analysis of women's leadership in the church in Tanzania, Kategile (2020) argues that there is a need to address inequality in society if we are to recognise the leadership of women in society. This is consistent with the Circle's insistence that women must be integrated into leadership in church and society. The Circle rightly maintains that by embracing progressive interpretations of the Bible, various actors can promote women's transformative leadership.

The turn towards positive and liberative interpretations of the Bible confirms the potential of sacred texts to spur women's participation in leadership in religion and society (for the Qur'an, see, e.g. El-Ali, 2022). It shows how adopting life giving interpretations of the Bible provides a viable platform for pursuing a women's liberation agenda. Crucially, such interpretations will expose and confound patriarchal interpretations that seek to reserve leadership for men and to constrain women. While she formulated the following reflections in the context of responding to HIV and AIDS, Pillay's views remain relevant:

> It is a tragedy that the church does not always respond theologically to societal needs. One major concern in this regard is the interpretation of the Bible. Women unfriendly readings of Scripture contribute to views of

> women as weak, subservient, seductive and sinful. Responsible re-reading/s of Scripture with the view of retrieving its liberative and transformative potential is therefore a challenge to the present-day church. Feminist hermeneutics and the approach of African women theologians offer ways of reading Scripture that would reflect positively on women by challenging androcentric readings. (Pillay, 2005: 452–453)

Working for Economies that Work for All

Alongside liberative readings of the Bible, African women's transformative leadership has been seen in the call for economies that work for all. We have outlined how the estranged and estranging nature of Africa's economies has emerged as a major threat to human flourishing on the continent. African women's transformative leadership can serve as a veritable solution to this challenge due to its emphasis on upholding the dignity of all and striving to promote the well-being of all, including the marginalised women. The underlying philosophy of African Christian women's transformative leadership is that African economies must work for all, so that all citizens (can) have their basic needs met. This is a radical departure from the dominant economic approaches that prioritise the survival of the fittest and death for the weakest. While the following citation relates to women in the Asia and the Pacific region, it applies with equal force to the region of Africa:

> Women's transformative leadership moves beyond business as usual to help realize the potential of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] to bring about systemic change. The region needs transformation, and women's transformative leadership is a key means of achieving this end. (United Nations, Economic & Social Commission for Asia & the Pacific, 2019: 3)

According more space to women's leadership will enable Africa to make a giant leap for the continent's economic fortunes. The current model is not sustainable as it continues to favour the rich and the powerful at the expense of most citizens. In the first instance, women's transformative leadership promotes gender equality, which in turn brings more women into the mainstream economy. This contributes to narrowing income inequality and facilitates greater economic diversification. To this end, therefore, the continent needs to embrace women's transformative

leadership in order to jettison the patriarchal and cut-throat economic model that is subsisting.

While African Christian women have championed the call for and practice of transformative leadership, it must be conceded that they do not have a monopoly over it. There have been some notable male African national leaders such as Nelson Mandela of South Africa, Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso and a few others who have demonstrated transformative leadership. Indeed, many women activists in Africa yearn for compassionate and effective male leaders. Such leaders do not follow economic blueprints from outside the continent uncritically. Further, they are dedicated to the full economic participation of all their citizens and for the citizens to enjoy a sustainable high-quality life. Thus:

> While it is not easy to establish direct causality between leadership development strategies and socioeconomic transformation, a long-term association between a country's leadership and strong socioeconomic performance is compelling. Among the case study countries, Rwanda stands out in showing the strongest association between its leadership and the country's socioeconomic transformation. Rwanda is in its third decade of uninterrupted economic growth and social progress, which has been mediated by the leadership's strong commitment to rapid transformation. (The African Capacity Building Foundation, 2019: 9)

Enhancing African Christian Women's Transformative Leadership: The Role of the Churches

Given the importance of African Christian women's transformative leadership, it is crucial for churches in Africa to invest in strategies to popularise and enhance it. This will contribute immensely towards sustainable development in Africa. However, for this to happen, churches need to undergo transformation themselves. In the first instance, churches in Africa need to be converted to cherish and celebrate women's leadership. This goes way beyond appreciating women when they clean church premises or engage in effective resource mobilisation for church programmes. It means recognising that women are the church and that they are citizens, not aliens, in the household of God. There must be a paradigm shift in the way churches understand the place of women in churches and society.

Churches in Africa must take Mulambya-Kabonde's protest in the citation below very seriously:

> Women, just like men, are human beings, created in the image of God, but, in many cases, women are treated like objects. For instance, whenever the church wants to use them, they are called upon. After accomplishing what they would have been asked to do, the women are forgotten. This trend emanates from the home and social contexts and extends into the Church. (Mulambya-Kabonde, 2022: 141)

Women's leadership training should feature highly on the agenda of the churches in Africa. One of the most common defences by patriarchy/men for excluding women from leadership in church and society is to claim that there are no or very few qualified women to take up the leadership positions when they become available. Investing in leadership training for women at various levels will silence this excuse permanently. For women who are already utilising spirituality at their workplaces (Mayer et al., 2017), additional exposure to leadership theories and handling challenges in the contemporary period will be valuable. Church-owned institutions of higher learning in Africa can be more intentional about rolling out leadership training for women at various levels. Investing in equipping the next generation of African women leaders is, therefore, critical (Muchena, 2021).

In order to counter death dealing interpretations of the Bible and overcome theologies of women's subordination and the deployment of culture to exclude women from leadership, churches in Africa must deliver theological education to women. African women continue to experience major challenges when seeking to access theological education (Mwale & Njobvu, 2022; Phiri, 2009). Ensuring that more women access theological education will deepen their leadership capacities and equip them further in their quest to promote sustainable development in their communities and nations. Promoting African women's theological education must become a key deliverable for churches on the continent as they seek to achieve justice, peace and sustainable development.

Ecumenical bodies operating in Africa, including national, regional, continental and global ones are well placed to coordinate their activities and promote African Christian women's transformative leadership. For example, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) must intensify efforts to multiply

African women leaders in church and society. The ecumenical movement has the advantage of having greater flexibility than particular denominations, although it too must balance diverse interests when playing an advocacy role in the context of women's leadership. It is vital for ecumenical bodies to promote African Christian women's transformative leadership and address toxic masculinities that sponsor violence against women, tolerate the denial of women's rights and are casual about the marginalisation of women from leadership.

Finally, it is important for churches in Africa to equip boys and men to embrace African women's transformative leadership. Men do not become less when they accept women's leadership. One of the learnings from the Transformative Masculinities engagements that the WCCs have been running in Africa (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012) has been the need for gender equitable men in churches and society. Men who support women's transformative leadership are needed in the struggle for gender justice. The following reflections are cited at some length below due to their relevance to the discourse on positive male engagement for women's flourishing:

> Men's partnership is required in addressing issues that hinder women's political engagement, including: structural barriers, discriminatory practices and violence that prevent women from exercising their right to vote; unequal access to education, networks and resources; discriminatory institutional practices and laws that prevent women from being recruited, nominated for standing for office, or getting elected; institutional discrimination against women in office resulting in their not being appointed to committees where they can have influence; violence, sexism and harassment against female candidates and female elected officials, and negative gender-based stereotypes perpetuated by the media.
>
> Men can lead the charge with women in enacting legislation that promotes women's rights, repealing laws and policies that discriminate against women and limit opportunities. They can also support the advance of women in decision making bodies by advocating for temporary special measures. In political parties, men and women can work together to champion women's participation including nominating more women, having hard targets or quotas for women in leadership roles in the party, and ensuring women have the same professional development opportunities as men to enable their advancement within the party. (iknowpolitics, 2017)

Conclusion

Africa stands on the threshold of reclaiming its greatness, with a young and dynamic population ready to propel the continent forward. However, there are serious challenges that the continent must grapple with if the vision of a prosperous and peaceful Africa are to be met. This chapter has outlined some of these key challenges. It has proposed African Christian women's transformative leadership as a highly strategic resource that should be utilised to facilitate the transformation of the continent. The women of Africa refuse to be written off. Equipped with liberative readings of the Bible, drawing from indigenous knowledge systems and inspired by their participation in the heroic struggles for liberation, they are already providing transformative leadership to achieve sustainable development for Africa.

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CHAPTER 3

Visibility and Leadership Opportunities for Muslim Women in Zimbabwe

Silindiwe Zvingowanisei

Introduction

Gender inequity continues to feature prominently in discussions on governance, human rights, education, economy and development issues globally. Nowhere is the inequity more pronounced than in Africa where proponents of the unequal status quo advance reasons based on biological determinism or culture to perpetuate the existing structures. Decision-making in the private and public domains is still skewed in favour of one gender and power, consequently, resides with those who hold it, namely the men. Scholarship on women and gender issues in Africa has moved from 'footnotes' to exploring gender as a veritable area of research. The question of women's place in society remains a subject matter of debates across human societies and cultures, and at different historical epochs.

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Although there has been a significant rise in women leadership in the political, economic and social spheres in Zimbabwe, Islam still experiences vast gender disparities in its leadership positions. This chapter seeks to interrogate the exclusion of Muslim women from their faith community's leadership structures at a national level. In line with the country's national goals on attaining gender equality in all sectors of life as enshrined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 targeting gender equality and women's empowerment, the chapter concludes by advocating for gender parity in Islam's leadership structures in Zimbabwe.

Feminism and Gender Discourse

Gender can be defined as 'the societal beliefs, customs and practices that define 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes of behaviour (Dube, 2003). It is not a naturally ascribed attribute nor is it divinely sanctioned. Rather, it is a culture specific construct that can be reconstructed and transformed by society. Gender overlaps all other social departments be they economic, cultural and political, because people are always socially constructed as men and women in politics, governments, schools, churches, villages, cities, homes, work places, conversations and even in their sexuality' (Dube, 2003: 86). From this definition, it can be construed that gender refers to the economic, socio-cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. The way males and females relate in the family, in religious organizations, public places and other social institutions and gatherings reflects society's understanding of men's and women's appropriate behaviours and characteristics. Society, therefore, defines how men and women should behave and this means that gender is a social construction and not determined by one's biological makeup.

This status quo was rejected by some scholars, most of them feminists. Feminism, a modern movement and an ideology, questions the notion of the superiority of men over women. Its aim is the emancipation of women from their unfair domination by men. What feminists fight for or stand for is the equality of men and women in society (Kendall, 2001: 359). It is an effort by men and women critical of sexism to dismantle the cultural hegemony of males over females, as well as masculinity over femininity in both male and female identities (Russell, 1996: 257). Feminism, thus,

questions and seeks to correct injustices brought about by the hierarchies in the sexes, assuming that men are at the top and women at the bottom.

Agitations by the feminists further generated interest in issues on women as the question of women's rights took centre stage in public discourses and social thoughts. Increasingly, women activists demanded for women's rights and inclusion. Accordingly, Ruth Sheila (1980) noted that:

> Feminism seeks to overthrow class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex- a system consolidated over thousands of years, lending archetypal male and female roles an undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence. (Sheilla, 1980: 23)

The feminists, claiming to speak for women across cultures and societies, demanded for the liberation of women from the constricting socio-cultural space, a view which also gained currency in feminist writings. From the standpoint of feminist movements, the world has not been fair to the female gender. History has been written by the men from men's point of view, and the woman, 'the Other,' excluded. Feminism, therefore, propounds for a re-writing of history.

Feminism, however, was viewed with suspicion in some quarters. Some African-American and African women criticized white feminists' attempt to generalize on women's subordinate condition. According to Oyewunmi (1997), the rejection of Western-oriented feminism is informed by its inseparable connection, to biology, or what she terms 'biologic.' Torn apart by identity crisis, it was not long before feminism began to suffer both implosion and explosion, leading to different strands and schools of thought in the feminist theorizing, such as radical feminism and liberal feminism *inter alia*.

For the African-feminist scholars, feminism as a school of thought lacks both the epistemological and ideological frameworks that capture the experiences of the African woman which are anchored on the African realities. Concepts such as 'womanism,' 'afro-centricism,' among others, became options for the African feminists. More importantly also, many African women activists and researchers are conscious of the fact that most structural imbalances that undermine women's space and visibility in contemporary African society are products of colonial incursion

into the continent. Employing Western-oriented theoretical and epistemological instruments to investigate the diverse socio-cultural, political and economic underpinnings unfavourable to the African woman's survival challenges certainly cannot adequately capture their marginality (Chinyere, 2016: 3). Besides, gender issues, being products of culture, are bound by time and space, and as products of culture, they change with time. As culture is dynamic, so are gender issues.

Be that as it may, cross-cultural studies on women demonstrate that power asymmetry remains a major issue that women, across cultures and societies, grapple with, though at varying degrees. Thus, the actual treatment of women and their relative power and contribution vary enormously from culture to culture, and over different periods in the history of particular traditions (Ortner, 1974: 65). While the universality of female subordination is, therefore, not in doubt, its manifestations and degree vary across cultures and societies.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This chapter employs liberal feminism to investigate the visibility and leadership opportunities for Muslim women in Zimbabwe. It also utilizes Ortner's three-tiered theory on how to evaluate gender and leadership criteria. Ortner identified three major considerations as indications that women are undervalued in any society. According to her, these are (1) 'elements of cultural ideology and informants' statements that explicitly devalue women, according to their roles, their tasks, their products and their social milieux less prestigious than are accorded men and the male correlates; (2) symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as implicitly making a statement of inferior valuation; and (3) social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participation in or contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside (Ortner, 1974: 69). In other words, for Ortner, to determine if women are subordinated in a particular culture, the researcher should look out for first, 'explicit cultural ideology devaluing women- tasks, roles, products *etcetera*, second, symbolic indications such as defilement, and third, female exclusion from the most sacred rite or highest political council' (Ortner, 1974: 65).

This chapter refers to Ortner's three indicators and proffers the argument that in terms of visibility and critical leadership opportunities, Muslim women in Zimbabwe are relegated to the realm of insignificance,

except in cases where they lead other women such as the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation or children. But, when it comes to leadership at the mosque and in other major Islamic Organisations such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, the umbrella body which oversees Islamic affairs in Zimbabwe, women are conspicuously absent. Apart from that, women cannot become Sheikhs or Imams, as these positions are strictly reserved for men.

The chapter, however, further argues that despite the seemingly oppressive elements of Islam towards women, gender issues are not always bad news to Muslim women. The chapter, therefore, rejects the general categorization of all Islamic practices and teachings as denying Muslim women in Zimbabwe visibility and leadership opportunities. There are some liberating and affirmative aspects which are found within the Islamic religion and culture. The onus is on Muslim women to tap into these rich resources and liberate themselves from the oppressive shackles of patriarchy whenever opportunities avail themselves and whenever possible. It has to be made clear that the vast differences among Muslim societies make most generalizations too simplistic. There is a wide spectrum of attitudes towards women in the Muslim world today. These attitudes differ from one society to another and within each individual society. For example, the way Islam is practised in countries like Iran (which is an Islamic republic with 99% Muslim population) is different from the way it is practised in countries like Zimbabwe (which is a secular country where Islam is a foreign minority religion constituting 3% of the total population).

By looking at visibility and leadership opportunities for Muslim women in Zimbabwe, this chapter argues that Muslim women in the country have defied all odds and are claiming their rights in both the private and public arenas. The women have capitalized on three factors to their advantage. First are the affirmative aspects of Islam. Second is Zimbabwe's liberal stance which advocates for freedom of religious affiliation and worship in addition to Zimbabwe being a signatory to the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. Third is the social context of the Muslims in Zimbabwe where they find their Christian and traditional sisters visible and in leadership positions, including even the highest levels in the political, religious, economic and social sectors of the country. For instance, Dr Joice Mujuru, the ex-Vice President of Zimbabwe, Prophetess Memory Matimbire, visionary and founder of Daughters of Virtue (DOV), a flourishing Pentecostal Interdenominational movement in Zimbabwe, Jane

Mutasa, founder of Women in Business (WIB), Professor Hope Sadza, founder and visionary leader of the Women's University in Africa (WUA), and Tsitsi Masiiwa, a philanthropist and founder of Higher Life Foundation (a non-governmental organization which offers educational assistance to orphans, vulnerable and underprivileged children in Zimbabwe from primary to tertiary levels).

The chapter, therefore, proffers that Muslim women in Zimbabwe should be motivated by the factors mentioned above and be spurred on to register their visibility and to assume leadership roles in all spheres of life. However, in order to appreciate this changing significance of women, the study notes that women generally suffered due to an oppressive background borne out of certain patriarchal and colonial attitudes within selected societies, which more often than not are stumbling blocks hindering women from assuming critical leadership roles in the public spheres such as developmental initiatives. Nevertheless, the study seeks to explore the liberating dimension of Islam that has catapulted selected Muslim women in Zimbabwe to positions of leadership and visibility.

In order to achieve this goal, the study adopts the Africana Womanism theory, which draws the attention of women to the importance of rejecting the status of victim and propels them to consider themselves as victors and sisters in charge of their own destiny. In doing this, their primary obligation will be to make progress in their cultural way of life through the stability of family and commitment to community (Hudson-Weems, 1993: 24). Utilizing this theory, the study contends that the patriarchal oppression of women when and where it occurs is not consistent with the values of Africana Womanism (Hudson-Weems, 2000). This is because Africana Womanism acknowledges and celebrates the key position of women in Africa within cultures, families and other institutions (Mapuranga, 2016: 154). As such, this study celebrates the life of one renowned Muslim woman in Zimbabwe. This woman has been a voice that exudes the significance and value of women in society. The next section examines the status of Muslim women in Zimbabwe. However, for an appreciation of the status of Muslim women in Zimbabwe, there is need to briefly trace the history from pre-Islamic times (*Jahiliyyah*), to the era of the Prophet Muhammad and to the contemporary period.

The Status of Women in the Pre-Islamic Period (*Jahiliyyah*)

The period before the advent of Islam is referred to as the *Jahiliyyah*. According to some Muslim scholars, the *Jahiliyyah* period extends from the creation of Adam down to the mission of Muhammad. However, in this chapter, the *Jahiliyyah* period will be used to cover the century immediately preceding the rise of Islam. The term *Jahiliyyah*, usually rendered 'time of ignorance' or 'barbarism' in reality, means the period in which Arabia had no dispensation, no inspired prophet and no revealed book (Hitti, 1970: 87).

During the *Jahiliyyah* period, women had no rights at all. The extended family had one head or leader, the father or senior male, who controlled and guided the family unit. In other words, the tribe was the main unit of society and the system was patriarchal in nature. The family consisted of the father, his wife or wives, unmarried sons and daughters and married sons with their wives and children all of whom had specific roles within the family structure. It served as the basic social and economic unit of the tribe within a male-dominated (patriarchal) society.

In this set-up, a woman was regarded as little more than a possession, first of her father and her family and subsequently, of her husband and his family (Esposito, 1988: 96). Women's lack of rights and the paramount position of males were reflected in family matters such as female infanticide, marriage, divorce, polygamy and inheritance.

Female Infanticide

There is no doubt that pre-Islamic Arabs committed female infanticide and young girls were usually victims of their dreadful practice (Hitti, 1970). Girl children were buried alive. The practice was prompted by fear of disgrace and fear of poverty which was associated with the frequent famines caused by lack of rain. The Arabians feared the poverty that would result from providing for girls who were viewed as less productive than boys. Consequently, fathers were afraid that they would have 'useless' mouths to feed.

Another reason for female infanticide was a perverted sense of pride on the part of the fathers who wanted to avoid shame and disgrace, should their daughters be captured by an enemy in war (Hitti, 1970). Female infanticide was also committed on the consideration that boys would pass

on the family name and were capable of generating more income. Thus, girls became dispensable. Boys were also valued because they would be fighters in times of war.

However, with the advent of Islam, the issue of women's rights was revised with much emphasis put on family law. The special status of family law reflects the Quranic concern for the rights of women. The Quran introduced substantial reforms affecting the rights of women by creating new regulations and modifying customary practice (Esposito, 1988). The next section, therefore, investigates the role of Islam in the restoration of women's rights. It examines whether Islam hinders women from registering their visibility and assuming leadership positions or whether it promotes them to do so.

Women's Visibility and Leadership Opportunities in Islam

Although not mentioned in the Quran, one hadith of the Prophet Muhammad is interpreted to justify the claim that he made women ineligible for the position of head of state. The hadith referred to is roughly translated, 'A people will not prosper if they let a woman be their leader.' This limitation, however, has nothing to do with the dignity of the woman or her rights. It is rather related to the natural differences in the biological and psychological makeup of men and women (Muttahari, 2016). Thus, any fair investigation of the teachings of Islam into the history of the Islamic civilization will surely find a clear evidence of women's equality with men in what we call today 'political rights.' This includes the right of election as well as the nomination to political offices. It also includes women's rights to participate in public affairs. Both in the Quran and in Islamic history, there are examples of women who participated in serious discussions and argued even with the Prophet himself (Surah 58:14; 60:10–12).

Besides granting women political rights, Muslim women are also free to assume leadership roles in the public arena. This is evidenced by the fact that since the inception of Islam, women have assumed such roles. For example, Aisha, Muhammad's wife, led the Muslim battle against Al Zubyar. Globally, in our own era, Benazir Bhutto, popularly known for her remarkable leadership qualities, served as the Prime Minister of Pakistan since 1988. Similarly, Tansu Ciller, a Muslim woman, was elected to head Turkey in 1993.

Muslim Women's Visibility and Leadership Opportunities in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, Islam affords Muslim women the same leadership opportunities as their male counterparts, for example, in politics. However, in an interview with Mrs Dee,[1] she noted that women's assumption of leadership roles in such spheres is regulated by their role as homemakers. She argued that certain aspects of politics are not in keeping with a woman's psychological and physiological nature. Hence, they would not be willing to take up political careers even when given the chance (Mrs Dee, interview: 2019). In concurrence, Mrs X, a Muslim woman who preferred to remain anonymous, lamented the sad reality that politics in Zimbabwe is always a nightmare, riddled with all sorts of human rights violations such as gender-based violence, sexual abuse, rape, torture and murder, *inter alia* (Mrs X, interview: 2019). Munando echoes the same sentiments when she identifies some of the factors that continue to make women absent from the political process in Zimbabwe. These include 'violent political environments, sexual abuse and harassment, the media, reproductive health issues and HIV and AIDS' (Munando, 2010: 122–125).

Consequently, Muslim women shun politics especially at the level of visibility and leadership. However, they have registered their presence and visibility by assuming leadership roles in other palatable but critical development sectors such as the socio-religious and economic spheres. Clearly, they have done a commendable job in these sectors. The next section, therefore, explores visibility and leadership opportunities for Muslim women in Zimbabwe in the socio-religious and developmental sectors. Although there are many facets of women visibility and leadership opportunities, this chapter explores only two due to space constraints and these are women's status in the home and the Fatimah Zahra Women's Organisation.

[1] For confidentiality purposes, except when citing Hajar Makwinja who is the main focus of this study (she gave consent for her name to be revealed), the rest of the study participants are referred to using pseudonyms.

Woman as the Queen in the Home

In Islam, the woman enjoys absolute equality as an equal member of the family unit. In certain ways, her position as wife and as mother is unique and of great honour and distinction. As a wife, she is the Queen and mistress of the household and the status of the husband is determined by the way he treats her (Esposito, 1988). This status of Muslim women is founded on one of the popular and oft-cited statements made by the Prophet Muhammad which states that, 'The best among you is the one who is best to his wife and I am the best among you to my family.' In the Muslim set-up, the woman is the focus of all family members. She enjoys profound esteem and respect from everyone. Her opinions and suggestions carry immense weight in all family matters. According to one Islamic tradition, 'Even paradise lies beneath the feet of your mothers' (Waines, 2003: 5).

The very special place of mothers in Islam is eloquently described in the following statement uttered by the Prophet Muhammad:

> 'A man asked the Prophet: whom should I honour most?' The Prophet replied: 'Your mother.' 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother.' 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother!' 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your father'. (Bukhari and Muslim)

It, therefore, goes without saying that the woman reigns supreme in the home. They take over the roles of managers and homemakers (Azeem, 2012). Thus, with all his masculinist dissection of the anatomy of woman, Chinweizu (2005) recognizes the power of the woman as he believes that the man suffers a form of oppression at the hands of the woman. For him, the woman has exploited her biological superiority and has consolidated her power by taking over the role of mother, cook and nurse in the household. He also sees marriage as a source of man's oppression. Of course, one knows his stance—men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world (Chinweizu, 2005).

Women as the First Teachers

The argument that men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world stems from the idea of women as first teachers. A child is first taught by women in the form of a mother and whatever that child grows into would be a reflection of the mother as the first teacher. The

Shona proverb *musha mukadzi* which literally means a woman is the pillar of the home clearly demonstrates the leadership role of women among the indigenous Muslims. As Bourdillon (1987: 52) puts it, 'Women have more influence in the homestead than men.' Similarly, Taringa (2014: 402) restates that the understanding of the proverb *musha mukadzi* is that a home cannot be a home without a woman or a wife. Such an understanding gives women an influential and leadership role in society. This proverb is quite similar to *mukadzi mutsigo wemusha* which means that the woman is the anchor of the homestead/village (Gelfand, 1973: 170). Sekuru Phiri summed it up when he noted that:

> '*Munhukadzi akakosha pamusha, kuti musha umire mukadzi, kuti pamusha paratidzike mukadzi. Kushayikwa kwemunhukadzi, musha unoparara. Naizvozvo varume vanofanira kuziva kukosha kwemunhukadzi*' (The woman is a critical figure in the home. For a home to be good and decent, it is because of a woman. The absence of a woman in the home brings disorder. For that reason, men ought to understand the importance of women). (Sekuru Phiri, interview: 2020)

The foregoing remarks from a man (a patriarch) clearly demonstrates the esteemed position of women in society. The English proverb which says, 'behind every successful man is a woman,' also corroborates the argument that mothers are the first teachers who mould children into what they would grow up to be. Thus, whatever a man will grow up to be, whether a Sheikh, Imam, President of state, Businessman, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), etc., all emanates from a woman. According to one hadith, 'the whole world is valuable but the most valuable thing in the world is a good woman.' And to crown it all, there is a well-known Arabic saying 'al-ummu-madrasatun' translated as 'the mother is a school' (Azumah, 2008). Islam, therefore, does not sanctify the oppression of women but reveres them. What this means is that in Islam, the woman is a subject and not an object. She does not occupy the periphery where she is acted upon.

It is from these arguments that this chapter maintains that Islam in Zimbabwe has always recognized the leadership potential of women in all spheres of life such as the religious, social and economic. In writing this chapter, I am cognizant of the fact that a significant number of Muslim women in Zimbabwe have made it to the top, having registered their visibility and demonstrated impeccable leadership qualities. However, for

the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on one indigenous Muslim woman in Zimbabwe who seems to have soared above the rest. She is non-other than Hajar Makwinja and the focus of the next section in this chapter is to explicate her life story.

Hajar Makwinja and Fatima Zahra Women's Organization

Hajar Makwinja is one of the most renowned Muslim women in Zimbabwe who has registered her visibility and demonstrated impeccable leadership skills in both the public and private arena. She is arguably the face of Islam in Zimbabwe. She is the visionary and founder of the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation. Hajar Makwinja founded the organization in 1984 when she embraced Islam. She discovered that Muslim women in Zimbabwe lacked correct and sufficient Islamic teachings as compared to what she had learnt. She, therefore, became keen to share and to teach Muslim women the basic teachings of Islam which she had learnt. Initially, she engaged in congregational teachings in mosques in Harare. She tapped into her Christian background to teach Muslim women after discovering that they needed guidance. In her view, Muslim women are not different from women of other religions and societies. The problem she noted was that most Muslim women do not know their rights as embodied in Islam. Such a realization therefore motivated her to teach them their rights and expected practices. This eventually inspired her to establish the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation in 1984. The main aims and objectives of the organization are:

a. To conscientize Muslim women of their rights as embodied in Islam.
b. To teach Muslim women in Zimbabwe to become practising women of Islam.
c. To teach Muslim women the significance of the Muslim attire.
d. To train Muslim women in Zimbabwe to become self-reliant.

The organization is located in Hatfield, Harare, and is involved in various activities for which it had a lot of achievements. Since its establishment, Muslim women have increased numerically and they have improved their identity through wearing the proper Islamic dress. The Islamic dress

code instils in the women a sense of belonging. Other Muslim organizations, for example, in Mbare and Epworth, were established as a result of being inspired by the accomplishments of the Fatima Zahra Women's Organization. The organization has helped Muslim women to start income-generating projects such as poultry, peanut butter making, tailoring and candle making, to mention a few. Some of the women are given equipment such as candle making and sewing machines. The organization also sponsors some underprivileged children who cannot afford to pay for their school fees. Sponsorship runs from pre-school to tertiary level. The organization is mainly self-funded; they fundraise through their internal activities, especially from the operations of a pre-school that was opened in 2001. Some of the funds may, however, be sourced from embassies like the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Presently, the organization has some students on scholarship in countries like Tanzania and Iran. It also helps its members on occasions such as funerals, illnesses and weddings.

Membership of the organization is national. Any Muslim woman is free to join the organization. However, there is no specific number of members who have joined because more members continue to join. Membership is specifically for women, and if there is need for helping non-Muslims, the organization is always ready to help. For instance, it has previously accommodated the University of Zimbabwe students who were evicted from their halls of residence following some disturbances on the campus. The accommodation was offered at Fatima Zahra Centre in June 2008. At first, only Muslim students were accommodated, but the organization eventually extended its hand to non-Muslims. The issue was brought to the attention of the founder and leader of the organization, Hajar Makwinja, by the University of Zimbabwe Muslim Students Association. The Fatima Zahra Women's Organization has branches throughout the country, for example in Kadoma, Gweru, Kwekwe, Masvingo, Bulawayo, Mutare, Marondera, Harare and Shurugwi, among others. Hajar Makwinja often features on Zimbabwe's television programmes and book fairs and she also collaborates with other non-Muslim organizations like the Women in Business (WIB).

Fatima Zahra Women's Organization is neither a Shiite nor Sunni (the main Muslim groups) organization. Nevertheless, basing on the fact that its leader and founder is Shiite, some people prefer to refer to it as a Shiite organization. Otherwise, it is just a Muslim Women's Organization open to both Sunnis and Shias. However, Hajar Makwinja, the leader of the

organization, pointed out that the majority of their members are Sunnis. The organization helps in the growth of Islam by giving help even to non-Muslims who then appreciate and embrace Islam. There are smooth relations between Fatima Zahra Women's Organization and Islamic countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, the establishment of the organization was inspired by the Islamic revolution of Iran. This is evidenced by the fact that Hajar Makwinja, the founder and leader of the organization, was inspired by the teachings she got from Iranian women. She noted that Iranian women were the ones who practically encouraged and inspired her on how to dress properly as a Muslim woman, though she knew about it from the Quran. The Islamic revolution taught the Iranian Muslim women to wear the proper Islamic attire, and in turn, they inspired other Muslim women elsewhere, including in Zimbabwe (Hajar Makwinja, interview: 2019).

Hajar Makwinja disputes the fact that some people perceive the *hijab* worn by Muslim women as an expression of the oppression they are subjected to. Instead, she argues that Muslim women are free. She reiterated that the *hijab* is simply a way of dressing recommended by the scriptures. It is also an expression of respect for their bodies and dignity as religious women. She also restated that Muslim women are respected and loved by their husbands because of the dignity expressed by their dressing. As a way to encourage moral uprightness and Islamic principles for girls between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, the organization accommodates three or four girls at its premises, teaching them the Islamic way of life expected of them. This continues for six months before another group is enrolled (Hajar Makwinja, interview: 2019). Mrs Makwinja also trains women in different skills such as cutting and designing, hair dressing, candle and peanut butter making *inter alia*. She emphasized that her aim was to empower women and to make them economically independent and self-reliant.

Fatima Zahra College

The information on this institution was received in an interview with Hajar Makwinja as well as Sheikh Abdullah Makwinja, who is the director of the college, in January 2017. The college was the initiative of the Fatima Zahra Women's Organization which has been discussed in the preceding section and it is situated at the premises of the Organization in Hatfield. It was founded in February 2009. The founder and visionary

of the college, Hajar Makwinja, assigned her husband Sheikh Abdullah Makwinja to head it.

Hajar Makwinja noted that the college was opened in response to the problems encountered during the humanitarian crisis years in Zimbabwe. Many parents could not send their children to school due to financial constraints. In response to this crisis, the college enrolled quite a number of students from disadvantaged families and catered for their welfare. She also recalled that during the height of the crisis years (2007–2008) in Zimbabwe, the college assisted fifteen University of Zimbabwe students who were homeless and could not continue with their studies since they could not afford to pay fees. The college paid for their tuition fees and provided them with accommodation. The students graduated in 2010 and some were now 'paying back' by assisting the college in various ways. There are both Muslim and non-Muslim students and staff members at the college.

At the time of writing this chapter, the college had eighty students and fifty of them did not pay fees, the rest just paid a token fee. The reason for charging very low fees as compared to other colleges, according to Sheikh Makwinja, was that they wanted to accommodate almost every child. He also explained that the college was there to assist the community and not to do business. Besides offering academic education (Form One to Six), the college also teaches Religious Education, specifically Islamic Studies. The college is an approved centre for the Zimbabwe Schools Examinations Council (ZIMSEC).

Sheikh Makwinja further noted that the college was sponsoring a number of students who were studying at universities in and out of the country. For example, two of the students were studying at the Chinhoyi University of Technology and both were studying Business Administration. Some students were at the University of Zimbabwe and they were studying different disciplines such as Economics, Urban and Rural Planning (RUP) and Business Administration, among others. Others completed their undergraduate studies at the University of Zimbabwe and they were now pursuing their doctoral studies in South Africa. Sheikh Makwinja further stated that they were planning to send four students who successfully completed their 'A Level' studies at the college for further studies at the universities in Ghana, Iran and Lebanon.

Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation Orphanage

Muslims in Zimbabwe have been involved in supporting orphans and vulnerable children. Islam emphasizes the importance of taking care of orphans. In Islam, it is the right of every child, orphaned or with parents, to be protected, taken care of physically, psychologically and emotionally. The Prophet Muhammad himself was an orphan. Thus, the Quran and Sunnah emphasize the importance of treating orphans with love and compassionate care. This attitude is guided by the Prophet Muhammad's statement that, 'whoever caresses the head of an orphan (in affection), solely for the sake of Allah, a good deed will be written to his account for every hair over which he passed his hand.' Like in other religious traditions in the world, Muslims believe that there is a great reward for those who take care of orphans. This is substantiated by the words of Prophet Muhammad who is reported to have said, 'I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him, will be in paradise' (Abdalati, 1998).

In response to the need for addressing the plight of orphans, Hajar Makwinja also established the Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation Orphanage. It is situated at their premises in Hatfield. This children's home was established in the 1990s, and at the time that this study was conducted, it catered for about sixty orphans who were drawn from all over the country. They enrolled the children who were still be in primary school, and upon completion, they were transferred to the secondary school, that is, the Fatima Zahra College.

It should be noted that the Islamic teaching does not encourage the institutionalization of orphans. Rather, they advocate that whenever possible, orphans should be taken care of in their respective extended families. However, because of the economic challenges in Zimbabwe, some extended families could not afford to take care of orphans. Hence, Muslims came up with the idea of children's homes and Fatima Zahra Orphanage was one of them. Hajar Makwinja explained that if a child was referred to them for consideration, they would first track down the nearest of kin to get in touch with them. While they could provide the educational, moral and physical needs of the child, they believe that they could not fully play the role that the family plays. In order to maintain the family bond, they encouraged the next of kin to fetch the child during school holidays so that they could spend part of the holiday with them.

Fatima Zahra Orphanage and other Muslim orphanages in Zimbabwe provide alternatives to foster care or adoption by giving the orphans

community-based settings in which they can live and learn. Some of the orphans ere individually sponsored and this assistance provided the much needed support to the children. This helped them to concentrate on their schooling without having to roam the streets where they would be vulnerable to the more sinister members of the public. Alongside supporting orphans, Hajar Makwinja's leadership is also seen in her efforts to counter the effects of climate change. The chapter turns to this theme in the next section.

International Summit on Religion and Climate Change

Climate change presents an unprecedented threat to global socio-economic development in the twenty-first century. Developing countries have very different individual circumstances, and the specific impacts of climate change on a country depend not only on the climate itself, but also on the country's geographical, social cultural, economic and political situation. As a result of global warming, the climate in Africa is predicted to become more variable, and extreme weather events are expected to be more frequent and severe with increasing risks to health and life. Thus, globally, human societies experience direct and indirect as well as actual and potential challenges. Extreme weather events include severe floods, intense and prolonged droughts, and severe heat and cold waves and lead to declining agricultural productivity and food security, and severe water shortages and diseases. As Chitando and Conradie (2017: 311) put it: 'There is ample evidence that various regions of the African continent will be adversely and disproportionately affected by climate change.'

The threat of climate change and global warming, however, needs a multi-sectoral approach, religion included. Global debates on climate change often underestimate the role of religion in climate mitigation and adaptation. This is largely a result of the tendency to adopt technical terms that alienate non-experts (Chitando, 2017: 425). Alternatively, when there is a focus on religion and climate change, the role of African women tends to be overlooked. As is almost always the case, women are treated as an afterthought. Women are often projected as a footnote in discussing human history, issues and concerns. Yet, arguably, any discourse on religion and climate which excludes women is bound to yield incomplete results if not suffer total failure. To evoke Chitando:

> Another narrative is required to try to map out how African religious leaders can work with women to address climate change. While women constitute the majority of adherents of religion in Africa, most leadership positions are occupied by men. There is growing pressure for women to access top leadership positions, although patriarchy continues to resist that. However, women in faith communities in Africa must play a leading role in the response to climate change. The discourse must shift from a focus on the vulnerability of African women facing climate change to a focus that appreciates their capabilities. (Chitando, 2017: 434)

In response to this call, Hajar Makwinja represented Muslims in Zimbabwe at the International Conference on Climate Change held in Benoni, South Africa, in November 2019. Commenting on the conference, she explained that:

> '*Kuconference kwakasangana nhume dzaimirira zvitendero zvakasiyanasiyana zvakaita sechiKristu, chiMusirimu, chivanhu, chiJudha, chiBhahai, Chirasita nezvimwe zvakawanda. Nhume dzakabva kunyika dzakasiyana dzepasi rose. Ini ndini ndoga ndakamirira chitendero cheIslam muZimbabwe. Takadzidza zvakawanda zvinosanganisira dzimwe nzira dzekubika uchisevenzesa kupisa kwezuva panzvimbo yehuni*' (The conference was attended by delegates representing different religions and Faith-Based Organisations such as Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religion, Judaism, Bahai Faith, Rastafarianism, *interalia*. The delegates came from different parts of the world. I was the only one who represented Islam in Zimbabwe. We learnt different things such as cooking using the solar energy instead of using firewood). (Hajar Makwinja, interview: 2019)

Since her return from that conference, Hajar Makwinja has been travelling to different parts of the country, holding workshops and training women both urban and rural on this new method of cooking. This has gone a long way in terms of alleviating the plight of women when it comes to the burden they endure since they are mainly responsible for securing firewood for cooking. This has also helped to mitigate against the problem of deforestation in the country.

This and many other exploits, discussed earlier in this section, arguably demonstrate that Hajar Makwinja is a Muslim woman who has defied all odds to free herself from the shackles of patriarchy. She has assumed and demonstrated impeccable leadership qualities, in some contexts matching her male counterparts, while in others even surpassing them, in the private and public arena, locally and internationally.

Conclusion

As illustrated in this chapter, a considerable number of Muslim women in Zimbabwe have registered their visibility and assumed leadership roles in various sectors of the nation. Some Muslim women have refused to be cry-babies waiting to be given freedom by their male counterparts on a silver platter. While avoiding confrontation, they have capitalized on their biological and natural superiority as well as many other affirmative Islamic religio-cultural resources to free themselves from the oppressive shackles of patriarchy. It is critical, however, to note that the number of women who have made it to the top in terms of visibility and leadership is still low as compared to their male counterparts. The Islamic religious traditions and culture stand as some of the major reasons responsible for this status quo. On the one hand, religion and culture have, in a way, been blamed for relegating women to the periphery in terms of leadership. On the other, a more positive interpretation of the same religion and culture has availed opportunities for women to be visible and to take up leadership roles. More than forty years after Zimbabwe attained independence, there is still a pertinent need for the patriarchally dominated leadership in the Muslim religion to partner with women in ensuring that there are systems that are put in place to facilitate the inclusion of more Muslim women in leadership, not only within their faith community, but in all sectors of life.

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CHAPTER 4

Women's Leadership Roles in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (1891–2020)

Simbarashe Munamati

Introduction

Women's leadership remains a critical challenge to most mainline churches that operate in Zimbabwe, including the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ). The point of departure in analysing women leadership as compared to their male counterparts in the RCZ is that there are few women in the RCZ church's critical leadership positions, which include

Initially, the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe was called the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1977, it adopted the name African Reformed Church. Upon Zimbabwe's attainment of independence in 1980, it adopted the name Reformed Church in Zimbabwe.

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ministers, deacons and elders. Although there has been a rise in women's leadership in the political, economic and social spheres of Zimbabwe, the RCZ still experiences vast gender disparities between men and women in its leadership positions (RCZ Synod Minutes, 1980–1999). The thrust of this chapter envisions reflecting on the need to strike a balance between women and men in leadership structures of the RCZ. In the light of gender equity as enshrined in the feminist tenets, women are not adequately represented in the leadership structures of the RCZ where most influential positions are occupied by men.

Gender imbalances in leadership positions have been prevalent in the RCZ since its establishment in 1891 under the banner of the (then) Dutch Reformed Church. The RCZ has always been characterised by male dominance in its governance, spiritual supervision and guidance (RCZ Synod Minutes, 1980–1999). This is supported by the fact that of the two hundred and nine (209) people trained by the church's only theological training institution, Murray Theological College, from 1936 to 2019, one hundred and ninety (190), which is 90.9%, are males. Only nineteen (19), constituting 9.1% of the total RCZ ministers, are females (RCZ Synodical Committee Minutes, 2019). In addition, of the twenty-nine student ministers under training in 2020, twenty-four (82, 76%) were males and five (17, 24%) were females (Murray Theological College Register, 2020). Furthermore, the offices of elders and deacons in the RCZ were also male dominated during the pioneering phase which stretched from 1891 when the church was established in Zimbabwe until 1983. The gender parity in leadership roles only improved with the advent of the liberal phase which was kick started with the resolution of the 1983 Synod which inaugurated the women elders and deaconesses. According to RCZ Rules and Regulations, elders are RCZ members chosen to supervise the conduct of church members as well as safeguarding church doctrine. In addition, elders are supported by deacons who collect church offerings which they distribute according to the members' needs. Both the elders and deacons convene three times a year in the Church Council meeting chaired by a church minister (RCZ Rules and Regulations, 2010).

In addition, at the time writing, of the one hundred and ten (110) congregations, which are local church assemblies, six (6) congregations were led by female ministers whilst one hundred and four (104) congregations were under the leadership of male ministers. Here, the percentage is 5.45 and 94.55%, respectively. Furthermore, the RCZ had only male

moderators since 1980 to the time of writing. The church's supreme governing body, the Moderature, which consists of eight members, has been male dominated since 1980. This body had one female member in its composition for the 2010 and 2012 committees only. The committee which was in place from 2016 to 2018 had no female representation (RCZ Synod Minutes, 2016). The committee which was running from 2018 to 2020 had one female member and seven male committee members (RCZ Synod Minutes, 2018).

This scenario painted above is not surprising because the RCZ had no single female minister until the first one, namely Reverend Ndakarwirwa Mubwandarikwa, was ordained in 2007. According to the RCZ procedures, elders and deacons serve for a maximum of two years and can be re-elected up to four years when they are to be relieved of their duties for one year (RCZ Constitution, 2010). From 1891 when the RCZ was established in Zimbabwe, the above-mentioned offices were consistently occupied by men until in 1984 when the supreme body revised the resolution. Most women were reluctant to take up the senior posts within the RCZ because of numerous reasons, which include the inferiority complex mentality and gender imbalance, to mention a few (RCZ Synod Minutes, 1981–2016). Today, this inferiority mentality still affects many women and it seems men are propagating the mentality through some covert tendencies that stigmatise women. Given this background, there is a pertinent need to reflect deeply on women's leadership roles in the RCZ. Doing so will present an opportunity for assessing the extent to which women are involved in the church's critical decision-making structures so as to reflect on women, religion and leadership in Zimbabwe. In order to have an effective theoretical framework, the chapter has adopted the perspective of liberal feminism to appreciate the theme of women's leadership in the RCZ.

Liberal Feminism Lenses on Women's Leadership

Feminism is a fresh form of theology of liberation which is anchored on the quest for women's emancipation. Feminist theology is a discipline that attempts to describe, explain and analyse the rights of women as human beings (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2005). This is in line with the concerns of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (commonly known as "the Circle") who seek solidarity with all those who suffer marginalisation of every kind and try to understand, analyse and change the

systems of domination and abuse of power (Labeodan, 2016; Phiri & Nadar, 2010). In addition, the theoretical framework proposes strategies for activism and action to ameliorate the conditions in which women live and work. The designation "feminist" is generally used to denote those who seek to eliminate women subordination and marginalisation. Whilst some African women theologians are hesitant to embrace this category due to its close association with white women theologians, this chapter adopts it as it is consistent with its overall objective.

First and foremost, the feminist theology of liberation has three typologies, which are: radical, conservative and liberal. Nevertheless, the chapter adopts a liberal stance which fosters the discourse towards self-actualisation of women in as far as the church leadership structures are concerned. Liberal feminism, as argued by Kolmar and Bartkowski (2005), propounds for equal rights for women, proportional representation and equal access of females and males, changing attitudes, women's participation in the public sphere, reorienting women into crucial decision-making positions to foster an end to women discrimination. Haralambos and Holborn (2000) suggest that liberal feminism enjoys greater support than the other perspectives for it is moderate and its views pose less of a challenge to existing values. This is supported by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians who view African women's theology as a form of liberal feminism which is life affirming, socially sensitive and geared towards dialogue (Fredrick, 2003). They posit inequality as entrenched not only in structures of society but in culture and attitudes of individuals (Labeodan, 2016; Matope et al., 2011) and that is why the author embraced this theory as it is applicable to the overall agenda that he is pursuing. The chapter seeks to forge a way forward in changing people's mind-sets and the RCZ's culture relating to women's leadership roles.

Liberal feminist praxis in conjunction with the Circle methodology regards the notion of patriarchy as a major hindrance to women's ascendancy to the church's leadership positions (including those in the RCZ). Patriarchy has different backgrounds, but in Western discourses it can be traced back to the influential Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E) who described the natural organisation of society as a hierarchy of graded subordinations. Aristotle argued that according to nature, it is fitting for the soul to govern the body, the master to govern the slave and the male to govern the female. Patriarchy is a socio-cultural system that propagates male superiority, power and control over the female as

natural to the extent that the female counterpart is exploited (Matope et al., 2011).

In this context, Bazili's (1991: 9) insight is justified when he says that patriarchy is an ideology of male supremacy that results from the social construction of gender which in turn justifies the social, economic and political distinction between men and women. In all patriarchal societies, it must be noted that leadership roles, control of valuable resources and decision-making are a male preserve. This is against the backdrop of the fact that the institution of patriarchy draws a clear demarcation line between males and females. Moreover, patriarchy creates a unique social stratification which favours male chauvinism and deprives women of gender justice and access to "safe spaces" for them to reflect on and discuss diverse issues that are of paramount importance to them (Labeodan, 2016). In the light of Meena (1992)'s observations, even the weakest man has a woman to oppress since women are perceived as perpetual minors. It is, therefore, evident that the RCZ is a patriarchal church fostering male chauvinism at the expense of women who are in turn pushed to the periphery. In this context, when women wish to be promoted to top leadership posts within the RCZ, it represents the yearning feminist voices whose thrust is to emancipate women. Hence, the focus of this chapter resonates with the vision of the Second Republic in Zimbabwe which emphasises that attaining gender parity by 2030 is one of its major goals.

In order to appreciate the challenges at stake, it is important to reflect on how the Bible, a foundational text within the RCZ and many other churches, is read, interpreted and applied. Those who oppose women's leadership often appeal to some biblical texts to support their position, whilst those who endorse women's leadership also have their supporting texts. Therefore, in the following sections, the chapter goes into some detail in analysing various Old and New Testament passages that have a bearing on women's leadership in the RCZ, other denominations and the wider society.

An Analysis of the Bible and Women's Leadership

This section presents an analysis of both the Old and New Testaments' teachings on women and their place in leadership. The thrust is to discover the extent and instances where women are both esteemed and marginalised.

Old Testament Perspectives

The point of departure is to discover instances in the Bible where women are both esteemed and marginalised. In a number of instances, the Old Testament depicts women as both leaders and servants. First and foremost, the creation story of the Old Testament is pivoted on the fundamental equality between men and women (Gladson, 2017). The creation story records women as equal to men. Humanity's creation in the divine image as male and female can be regarded as laying the basis for equality. Thus, sexuality is not just procreative but a part of what it means to be like the Creator. This notion of gender equality between men and women is further pursued by Nowell (2017) in (www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/document/…/) who views women through three mirrors: firstly, women appear in at least as many different kinds of roles as their counterparts, secondly, women often appear together depicting a bond between them as their lives are woven together and lastly, women play a significant role in the biblical story functioning as an image of God.

Women as Religious Leaders

The Old Testament presents women as religious leaders, as exemplified by Deborah and Miriam. When the Israelites were crossing the Sea of Reeds, Miriam relived earlier Israelite successive life through leading the song of praise: "Sing to the Lord who is gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot God has cast into the sea" (Exodus 15:21). The preceding song, which has the same refrain, is sung by Moses and the Israelites and Miriam is identified as the leader of the song (Exodus 15:1). Miriam continues in a leadership role in the "wilderness community." The relationship among leaders eventually becomes a problem, especially when Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses' leadership. The ostensible cause is Moses' choice of a wife, as argued by Brueggemann (1997). More so, Miriam's leadership is genuine and her challenge to Moses' leadership is punished. It must be noted that her challenge is not turned back because Miriam is a woman for in the prior event Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their followers were severely punished for speaking against Moses (Numbers 16). God's statement in response to Miriam's challenge does not deny the presence of other prophets for in the wilderness, Moses is the leader and all other leaders are second to him (Brueggemann, 1997).

The second woman who assumed a key religious duty in the Old Testament is Deborah who functioned as both a judge and prophet (Judges 4:4). Within the Israelite society, judges functioned as both religious and political leaders whose responsibility was to free the people from enemies by military means. Deborah managed to fill the role of judge alongside her male counterparts such as Jephthah and Gideon. Deborah was influential to the extent of appointing army generals and would make critical military decisions which would be heeded by Israelite soldiers on the battlefield. In addition, Deborah functioned as a prophet and arbiter of disputes for all the Israelites came to her for judgement (Judges 4:5). During the pre-monarchic period, Israelite prophets functioned as the mouthpieces of Yahweh to his people and vice versa. Prophets were spiritual overseers who maintained justice and moral righteousness in tandem with the Mosaic Law. Deborah played all these roles alongside her male counterparts. Taken together, both Miriam and Deborah functioned in positions of religious leadership, with Miriam as a secondary leader who was responsible to a man in the top position and Deborah as a primary leader with a man responsible to her.

Women as Hero-Saviours

Another role in which we find women of the Old Testament is the role of the hero-saviour (www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/document/…/). Two such women appear in the book of Judges and the other two appear in post-exilic books. In the book of Judges, two women saved their people by killing the oppressor. Firstly, in the story of Deborah (Judges 4–5) that we considered earlier, the hero is Jael who was the wife of Heber. When Sisera, who was the enemy's general, flew to the tent of Jael after he was defeated by the Israelite army, Jael invited him to come in and she soothed him with extravagant hospitality evidenced by the fact that when Sisera asked for water, Jael gave him milk (Judges 5:25). When Sisera went to sleep, Jael took a tent-peg and hammered it through his head. Thus, the enemy was defeated by the hand of a woman and the Israelites enjoyed peace for forty years (Brueggemann, 1997).

Furthermore, an anonymous woman in the book of Judges also killed the enemy leader. This is traceable when Abimelech, the (illegitimate) son of Gideon, took the kingship at Shechem and begun to oppress the people. All the people of the city of Thebez flew into a tower in the middle of the city. The anonymous woman cast the upper part of

a millstone down on Abimelech's head and it fractured his skull. Abimelech immediately called his armour-bearer and instructed him to draw his sword and kill him to avoid being killed by a woman. His attendant ran and pierced him with the sword and Abimelech died (Judges 9:53–54). This event was relived centuries later during David's reign, and after the death of Bathsheba's husband, David's army general Joab commented in his report of Uriah's death that it was a woman who killed Abimelech when she threw a millstone down on him from the wall (2 Samuel 11:21).

In the Old Testament account, Esther is yet another woman who saved her people from genocide (www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/document/…/). She risked her life by approaching the king without being summoned and invited both the king and the archenemy to two banquets (Esther 6–8). At the second banquet, she revealed the enemy's plot to the king. The tables were turned and the enemies suffered what they had planned to inflict on her community (Esther 9:1–19). Thus, Esther functioned as a hero-saviour who saved the Israelites from imminent death.

Nowell (2017) records that there are many other women in the Old Testament who deserve attention and these are: wives and mothers like Eve, Hannah and Moses' mother. In addition, Nowell (2017) is conscious of political leaders like Bathsheba, Jezebel and Athaliah. It is impossible to narrow the vision of the Old Testament to a few images and roles (Nowell, 2017). A few constants should be noted that women appear together for good. In all the mentioned stories, both women and men functioned as images of God. It can be concluded that women were highly valued, extolled and counted as equal partners with men in the Israelite community.

Although the Old Testament has vast portions in itself where women are highly esteemed and regarded at par with their male counterparts, there are also many areas where the same part of the Old Testament view women as inferior to men. This latter insight is illustrated in the section below.

The Inferiority of Women in the Old Testament Presentation

In general, the inferiority of women in the Old Testament is precisely captured in the Chinese rule of the three obediences (Gladson, 2017). In part, the rule says: "when young she must obey her father; when married,

she must obey her husband; and when her husband is dead, she must obey her son." In line with the foregoing insight, it is interesting to realise that the patriarchal form of family existence in the Old Testament as argued by Gladson (2017) and Brueggemann (1997) assumes that a woman lived in the "shadows rather than in the light of life." Firstly, the woman lives under the authority of the father. Secondly, the woman lives under the authority of her husband after marriage. Lastly, the woman lives under the authority of her husband's brother or her son after the death of her husband. This subordination of a woman in all aspects of her life symbolises the fact that she lived in that covenant community as a second-class citizen. This notion is supported by the fact that she possessed no sign of it as did the male in circumcision (Jewett, 1975). This inferiority complex, as argued by Gladson (2017), is associated with women in the Old Testament Israelite community which belittled their essence as human beings and perceived them merely as men's companions.

The first subjugation of women in the Old Testament is epitomised in the institution of marriage. To the Israelite woman, marriage was necessary for a complete life (Brueggemann, 1997). The marriage arrangements were made by the father, who had almost absolute authority over his children, and in some instances, this was done by the groom's father in conjunction with the bride's father (Judges 14:1–2). In any case, the girl must have been consulted (Genesis 24:5, 8; Numbers 36:6). The Hebrew terms, *habereth* (wife, consort) and *berith* (covenant), imply a potential closeness between Hebrew men and their wives. More so, Gladson (2017) further argues that marriage meant that the Hebrew woman was essentially possessed by her husband who was called both *oedn* (Lord) in Genesis 18:12 and *bl* (master) in Exodus 21:22. This subordination surfaces in many implicit ways in the Old Testament, like in Isaiah's prophecy of seven women taking hold of one man for support in the day of Yahweh's judgement upon Israel (Isaiah 4:1) and in Jeremiah's prediction of the return from Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 31:22). Women subjugation is explicit in the practice of polygamy as evidenced by the graphic description of the Persian harem in Esther 2:12–14 where women were regarded as the king's property.

The idea of viewing women as men's property is exemplified in a particular story drawn in the book of Judges 19:22–30 which points to the low estate of concubines. When the man of the house was attacked by base men who were pursuing his overnight guest, the host offered them his virgin daughter and his guest's concubine (Gladson, 2017). When the

intruders failed to accept his offer of a virgin and a concubine, the man then gave them his concubine whom they raped and abused. The base men then left the concubine dead at the host's door step. The fact that the host did not face the mob himself but was rather prepared to offer his daughter and his concubines to satisfy the wild mob shows that women were only expendable property.

Just as marriage was essential to the Hebrew woman, so the bearing of children was even more for it was the basic purpose of wedlock. Human beings are referred to as born of a woman as in Job 14:1; 15:14; 25:4. This notion is an expression which keeps the original forecast in Genesis 3:16. Hebrew women frequently served as midwives (1 Samuel 4:20) and children were so highly regarded that childlessness was considered a curse (Genesis 29:32–30:1–23; 1 Samuel 1:5). In the light of the above, the marriage institution subjugated women in the view that it perceived women as property acquired through payment of *mohar*, the bride price (Exodus 21:32, Leviticus 27:1–7). In addition, the wife was to perceive her husband as her master and her personality was merged into that of her husband (Deuteronomy 12:12, Numbers 18:11, 19) (Gladson, 2017). Therefore, in this context, marriage was a particular institution in the Old Testament which was manipulated by men to marginalise women, and ever since, this is how women have experienced the feminisation of poverty even in the contemporary Christian churches.

Apart from being viewed as property of men in marriage, women were also of aesthetic value in men's lives (Gladson, 2017). This view is supported by the notion that throughout the Old Testament, the woman's beauty is always extolled. Examples in support of this view include: Tamar, the daughter of Absalom who was described as a woman of beautiful appearance (2 Samuel 14:27) and Job's daughters who stood out as more beautiful (*yepheh*) than all the women of the earth (Job 42:15). It is interesting to note that in this regard, the Persian harem in the days of Esther regarded women as sex objects greatly prized for their beauty who were supposed to delight the king (Esther 2:14) and win his favour (Esther 2:9). In addition, the most extensive Old Testament love song in the Song of Solomon has amorous and sensuous tones for lovers to converse and sing of their love for each other. The love song adores the beloved woman with eyes like those of a dove and whose hair is likened to a flock of goats. The beloved woman is further perceived to have teeth which are like shorn ewes engulfed with scarlet thread lips and pomegranate-like cheeks (Song of Songs 4:1–7). The woman is to desire

her lover (Song of Songs 3:1–5) whilst her lover desires her (Song of Songs 4:8–15). Gladson (2017) views this portion of the Old Testament as the highest expression of the male–female relationship where physical attraction and sexual consummation appear as normal and beautiful. This revelation points to Genesis 1:26, 27 understanding which depicts the man as made for the woman and the woman for the man. More so, in Ezra-Nehemiah, the problem of Israelite marriage to foreign women flares up on a mass scale (Ezra 9–10; Nehemiah 13:23ff.). These wives were finally put away together with their children because they had corrupted the purity of the race (Ezra 9:2; 10:11).

Just as the Old Testament in general sees women in both a positive light and a negative light, it presents two types of women in symbolic imagery. This basic ambiguity should not be surprising, because it shows the important effect that both good and bad women had upon society (Brueggemann, 1997). The imagery of the unfaithful and harlotrous wife pointed to Israel as the unfaithful wife of Yahweh. Ideally, the prophetic symbolic use of the woman also took a positive turn in Isaiah where Zion was a desolate and forsaken woman whose fear was allayed by Yahweh her husband (Isaiah 54:5–6). Gladson (2017) views Jeremiah's feminine imagery which perceives Jerusalem as the daughter of Zion who is a comely and delicately bred woman (Isaiah 6:2). Similarly, Micah likens Zion to a daughter in travail facing Babylonian exile of which Yahweh will soon rescue her (Micah 4:9–10). Likewise, the five chapters of Lamentations bring in symbolic voices which are heard lamenting the fate of the fallen city of Jerusalem. In this context, Zion appeared as a desolate woman mourning her fate (Lamentations 1:17). Jewett (1975) points out that the symbol of God as male or female is not to be taken literally. It is rather to be understood analogically since the Old Testament was bequeathed to a patriarchal society which prioritised masculine imagery. However, both male and female characteristics are needed to express the *Imago Dei* although they are ultimately inadequate to fully disclose the hidden nature of God.

It is interesting to note that most references to women in the Old Testament are incidental to the main point in the text, except in instances where women play critical roles in the described action, as in the case of Ruth, Esther and Sarah. This fact, together with specific examination of women's place in Israelite society, has shown that women were regarded as subordinate to men. This subordination of women is to be placed alongside the creation narrative which portrays Eve's equality at

the beginning and then her subsequent fall (Gladson, 2017). Thereafter, women who were regarded as second-class citizens were prized by men for their beauty, virtue and procreative abilities. The polarities of the feminine position are acutely apparent in the wisdom texts. Such polarities are also exemplified by the book of Proverbs which describes women as virtuous, industrious, sinful and evil. More so, prophetic literature demonstrates this feminine ambiguity in its symbolic portrayals of women, as both the faithful and apostate people of God. However, in various Old Testament instances, women's roles are secondary. In most cases, women stood behind their husbands, assisted in worship and handled domestic chores. Only rarely, as in the case of Deborah, did women attract national prominence.

New Testament Nuances of Women's Leadership

Women are given preference which is at par with their male counterparts in the New Testament. Jesus sets the pace of women's liberation in the book of Luke 4 verse 18–19 where he says that: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people." This pericope of the New Testament is cardinal in the mission of the universal church. The mission of the church to the world according to Luke 4:18–19 postulates nuances of liberation of all humanity. Many Christian churches, with the RCZ included, fall short of the essence of mission as prescribed in this command of Jesus Christ despite the fact that the need to promote women in the leadership circles of churches is inevitable.

More so, on a related note, the nuances of the liberation of women in the church are recorded by Luke who is conscious of this notion. This insight can be exemplified in Luke's writings to Theophilus as presented in the book of Acts of the Apostles. During the Pentecost event (Acts of the Apostles 2:12), the Holy Spirit entered all people present, women and men included. Again in Acts of the Apostles 9:36, Paul refers to a woman called *Tabitha* as a Christian disciple. This incident is helpful to illustrate that women also had critical positions in the structure of the early church period (www.religiontolerance.org/nfe^bibl.htm). Furthermore, the foregoing insight can also be nuanced when Paul picks a couple, Priscilla and Acquilla, who both acted as pastors to Apollos (Acts of the

Apostles 18:24–26). As far as we can tell, the position of women in the structure of the early church period is almost clear in Paul's writings to the church in Rome. Again, in Acts of the Apostles 16:3, Priscilla is a fellow worker of Paul in Christ. In addition, Paul picks Andronicus and Lunia as some of the male and female apostles of the early church period. Finally, no one has a superior status to the other, which gives the impression that both had equal responsibilities. It must be noted that in these examples, there is no discrimination based on either sex or gender.

Other instances in the New Testament where women are promoted to critical leadership positions are found in Paul's letters to the churches in Corinth, Galatia and Philippi. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul relays the message that the Holy Spirit gives both men and women its fruits (1 Corinthians 12:4–7). More so, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The reference to "anyone" is meant for both men and women together. Furthermore, in Galatians 3:28, Paul says that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In this text, Paul views both men and women as equal in the church of God. In the light of this notion of equality between men and women, as recorded in Philippians 4:2, Paul refers to two women, namely Euodia and Syntyche, as his co-workers in the ministry. These two women were active evangelists who partnered Paul in the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ during the early church period (www.religioustolerance.org/nfe^bibl.htm). However, other passages have been used to justify the exclusion of women in leadership in church. We turn to these below.

Inferiority of Women in the New Testament

The New Testament has many texts which undermine women's liberation and freedom. Such texts include: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, 1 Corinthians 14:33–36, 1Timothy 2:8–15 and Ephesians 5:22–24. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul exhorts women to wear head gear when leading in worship (1 Corinthians 11:2–16). This pericope inhibits the right of women to lead in the worship of God (Scroggs, 1977: 44). More so, this text seems to be regulating the conduct of women dressing in worship services. In addition, Paul seems not to enforce a rigid distinction between male and female roles in worship services (Fiorenza, 1983: 223). Women subjugation comes in verse 3 where Christ is referred to as the head of men and men are depicted as heads of women. In this context, the head

points to the ruler which is *kephale* in Greek which means creator or source of something and this implies that Christ is the source of man whilst the man is the source of the woman, argues Fiorenza (1983). God is the source of life for both men and women. It fails to balance if the latter creation which is woman is to submit to an earlier creation, which is man.

Another New Testament pericope which subordinates women is 1 Corinthians 14:33–36 where Paul exhorts women not to speak in church meetings. Like in the previous exhortation, Paul is prohibiting women from active participation in public church gatherings. Although Preagent (1995: 47) and Sroggs (1977: 406) argue that this text is an editor's later interpolation into the original text, it continues to silence women at public church meetings. Furthermore, Paul subordinates wives as subjects to their husbands in Ephesians 5:22–24. In this text, Paul is exhorting wives to submit to their husbands. This wife-husband relationship is also ascribed to Christ-Church relationship and the exhortation is only for women, not for men.

Contested Interpretations of the Bible and Women

To some extent, the Bible has been engaged within the church or mainstream society as a tool of either oppression or liberation. All societal and ecclesiastical instances where women are oppressed or are at par with their male counterparts have biblical justification. This notion is complemented by Rodney (1981: 29) who envisaged that both the Old and New Testaments advocate for the traditional and subservient role of women as supported by Ephesians 5:22–24, 1 Corinthians 14:33–35 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–36. However, as alluded to earlier, there are other texts in the Bible that support the inclusion of women in critical leadership roles like Deborah who was a female judge as mentioned in Judges 4:4–24 and Miriam who led the Israelites with Moses as recorded in Micah 6:3–4. This notion of women's involvement in critical leadership positions is echoed by Loades (1990) who recorded women as critical leaders during the first four centuries of Christianity on earth.

More so, even if the Bible has mixed views on the status and role of women in the church, some church groups adopt the selective use, as is the case in the RCZ (Keener, 1992: 11). Some churches appeal to selected biblical passages which support women's subordination ignoring texts which advocate for the equality of all humankind. In addition, Paul

seems to oppose the norm when he appointed Phoebe as a deaconess in 1 Corinthians 16 and preached the universality of the gospel as envisaged in the acceptance of gentiles in the church. These gentiles were both male and female. Biblical authors were chauvinistic, coloured by masculine prejudice and ignorance. This tendency was Jewish; hence, the RCZ is propagating the Jewish culture to its members which was heavily patriarchal. Having examined the status of women in the Bible, the following section examines leadership trends in the RCZ. These trends have been influenced by the dominant interpretive paradigms at specific historical junctures.

Women's Leadership Trends in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

In this section, we analyse the two main phases in the development of women's leadership in the RCZ. We begin with the pioneering phase.

The Pioneering Phase: 1891–1983

When Andrew Louw and the seven evangelists landed on Chief Mugabe's Mountain on the 9th of September 1891, it took them three years to have their first convert who was a woman (Van der Merwe, 1981). As the numbers grew, congregations were established at Jichidza, Alheit, Makumbe and Pamushana missions as recorded by Van der Merwe (1981). At these earliest DRC mission stations, for instance in 1925, out of a membership of 695 at Morgenster Mission, 426 were women whilst 269 were men (Morgenster Mission Church Register, 1925). More so, out of a membership of 476 at Pamushana Mission in 1930, 317 were women whilst 159 were men (Pamushana Mission Church Register, 1930). Since the majority of the members at various mission stations were women, the church's male ministers and evangelists could not meet their spiritual guidance and teaching demands.

Although women were instrumental in the spiritual and financial development of the RCZ, they were excluded from the church's critical decision-making structures. This spiritual yearning of women led to the formation of a women's association in 1933 which was called "*Sungano Ɣemadzimai*" under the leadership of Mrs Cinie Louw, the wife of a white missionary (Mutumburanzou, 1999: 59). The women's association was actively involved in the activities of the RCZ and later spread from

Morgenster Mission to other congregations with leadership structures at congregation, presbytery and national level. The association nurtured its members for spiritual counsel and stewardship in their homes and families. More so, the association, in wider context taught poverty alleviation skills to women for them to embark on income-generating projects. The main focus of the association was to allow women to share the word of God as well as life experiences for their spiritual edification. The current author observed that *Sungano Yemadzimai* was led by women who were wives of the white missionaries. This development promoted white monopoly which deprived black women the taste of leadership.

It has to be noted that women never functioned as either elders or deacons in the RCZ during the period 1891 to 1983. The conservative interpretation of the Bible, which we referred to in an earlier section, contributed to this state of affairs. This trend was supported by most respondents to the questionnaire and interview questions. Some interviewees went to the extent of referring to women leadership as "…a taboo which cannot be incorporated in the church structures." In addition, women were not trained for ministerial duties; hence, their training focused on duties which cater for spiritual care of children who were still in the catechism classes. Women functioned only as youth counsellors who are inferior to ministers in the governance of the RCZ. This practice of subordinating women to their male counterparts within the RCZ leadership structures is in tandem with the tenets of their Shona culture which is replicated in the church. The idea of perpetuating the Shona culture in the RCZ was mainly echoed by most female and male respondents in the interview schedules administered by the researcher. Most female interviewees made it clear that the RCZ church is a replica of the Shona culture, particularly in terms of how they relegate women to the less influential duties of the church governance. Some even said, "RCZ is like a Shona society institution……," implying that females in the RCZ view their church as an extension of the Shona culture. Perpetuating this rigid tradition not only has a direct negative impact on the church's growth in securing new female converts, but it threatens the national goals of attaining gender equity by 2030 in Zimbabwe.

Leadership Positions Which RCZ Women Were Denied During the RCZ's Pioneering Phase

It has to be noted that during this pioneering phase, RCZ women could not be elected as elders and deaconesses and they were not accepted to train as ministers of the Word of God.

The Office of the Elders

The RCZ has the office of the elder accountable to each and every ward (Vischer, 1992: 23–25). Elders in the RCZ have a threefold function which includes: governing and disciplining of the members, supervision of fellow office bearers and conducting regular house visitation in the ward they are in charge of (RCZ Rules and Regulations, 2010: 41). From 1891 to 1983, no woman was mandated with the eldership duties in the RCZ. These duties were only ascribed to men, a tendency which is in tandem with the Shona culture and supported by the ambiguity of some scriptures of the Bible, as discussed previously.

The Office of the Deacon

The office of the deacon in the RCZ encompasses collection and distribution of gifts (RCZ Rules and Regulations, 2010: 42). Deacons have to do their duties of gathering gifts for the church and distribute them accordingly. In distributing the gifts offered by church members, their focus has to be on those church members who are in real need. This fosters the prevention of poverty among the church members. The current author has observed quite clearly that since the RCZ was implanted in 1891 until 1983, no woman was mandated to carry out deaconate duties in the church.

Ministerial Training

The RCZ believes that ministers of the Word are called by God. After their call, such people will receive theological training which is offered by the church at its theological college which is based at Morgenster Mission. Ministers of the Word in the RCZ preach the Word, administer baptism and Holy Communion, carry out house visitation and exercise discipline over the members under their jurisdiction (RCZ Rules and Regulations,

2010: 40). In addition, ministers of the Word in the RCZ preside at church council meetings, solemnise marriages and conduct funerals for the church members. Nevertheless, the observation noted is that from 1891 to 1983, no woman was trained as a minister, a tendency which is justified by some of the biblical texts, as mentioned earlier on in this chapter.

The yearning of women in the RCZ to assume leadership roles was witnessed when they requested to be elected as elders and deacons in the church as well as to train as ministers, but their requests were rejected at the 1978 and the 1981 Synod Sessions (RCZ Synod Minutes, 1981: 432).

The Liberal Phase: 1984–2020

The liberal phase witnessed unique experiences in relation to the involvement of women in leadership roles within the RCZ. The church became both liberal and proactive to some of the demands of their women membership. At the 1984 Synod Session, women tabled their request for inclusion in the church's leadership structures for the third time. Their demands on leadership opportunities were in line with the national cry of women inclusion in leadership roles which the new black government was also facing (Rutoro, 2007: 112). At this 1984 Synod, for the first time, it was eventually accepted that women could be elected for leadership roles in the RCZ. For example, they were now allowed to lead Sunday worship services, read the liturgy, be elected as deacons and elders, as well as train as ministers (RCZ Synod Minutes, 1981: 631). The 1984 Synod resolution of including women in the RCZ's critical decision-making structures was attacked by men for they thought that it was not acceptable in their Shona culture. Men verbally attacked such women who wanted to train for ministerial posts. On the other hand, in many congregations, women were chosen as elders and deacons, but no woman trained as a minister until 2006 when the first one, Reverend Ndakarwirwa Mubwandarikwa, was trained and ordained in 2007 at the Hatcliffe Congregation in Harare.

Table 4.1 shows us that the number of women who were elected to posts of deacons and elders was lower than that of men. The table shows that from 1984 to 1990, only 20% of the elders and deacons for the whole of the RCZ church were women, whilst 79% were men. The low number of women in the "1984–1990" period might be attributed to

the fact that it was a transition period where women were first included in the church leadership structures. Moreover, although the 1984 Synod resolution of allowing women to be elected as elders and deacons was now effective, most men were reluctant to choose them to such posts because of the effects of the Shona culture and their selective use of the Bible which to some extent promoted patriarchy. In addition, as gleaned from most of the female and male respondents, some women could not vote for women since they looked down upon themselves as inferior to men. It can be observed that women in the RCZ were victims of the labelling theory which stereotyped them to view men as superior than women in all facets of life. The labelling theory posited women as weak beings who cannot take up life challenges to an extent which is at par with men.

The current author also observed that the number of women elected to the posts of eldership and deaconate increased from 20 to 37% in 1991–2000. More so, the findings reveal that the number of men chosen to eldership and deaconate posts was reduced from 79% in 1984–1990 to 62% in the 1991–2000. The improvement in women involvement can be attributed to various reasons which include: societal adaptation to women leadership as proved by government departments, increase of women membership in the church and growth in trusting women leaders. It has to be noted that the Zimbabwean government has supported massive training of women as teachers, doctors, lawyers and nurses and the church could not afford to be left behind in the promotion of women leadership.

Furthermore, the number of women elected as deacons and elders increased from 37% in 1991–2000 to 46% in 2001–2020. Similarly, the number of men elected to eldership and deaconate posts was reduced from 62% in 1991–2000 to 54% in 2001–2020. The twist in leadership structures of the RCZ in terms of eldership and deaconate posts can be attributed to feminist pressure which the world agreed to. The

Table 4.1 Number of women and men elected as elders and deacons in the RCZ from 1984 to 2020

Sex	*1984–1990*	*%*	*1991–2000*	*%*	*2001–2020*	*%*
Female	1302	20,66	4500	37,45	9200	46
Male	4998	79,34	7500	62,55	10,800	54
Total	6300	100	12,000	100	20,000	100

Source RCZ Congregational Minutes (1984–2020)

government of Zimbabwe had female ministers and a female vice president. Women had also penetrated various pockets of society in education, health, law and agriculture, to mention a few. Here, the current author is making reference to these insights to illustrate the fact that developments within the church in general and the RCZ in particular were in sync with national developments in civil society in Zimbabwe.

Women in Ministerial Training

The 1984 RCZ Synod resolution which allowed women to train as ministers was never implemented until in 2006 when the first female minister, Reverend Ndakarwirwa Mubwandarikwa, was accepted for ministerial training.

From Table 4.2, it can be noted that out of 209 ministers trained by Murray Theological College from 1936 to 2020, only 19 (9, 09%) were women and 190 (90, 91%) were men. It can be deduced that this is so because only male ministers were trained by the church for ministerial work since 1936. The training of women for ministerial work commenced in 2006. In addition, it has to be noted that most women who complete theological training take more time than their male counterparts to be called by congregations to take up the ministerial position. In the light of this, some congregations would take up to three years or more without a minister if they are left with female candidate ministers of which to call from. Furthermore, some congregations have more women elders and deaconesses than men but will not opt to call women ministers. This might be so because women at times are their own enemies, due to their socialisation which makes them to envisage leadership as a preserve for men; some female congregants are the ones in the forefront to resist female leaders.

Table 4.2 Number of men and women who were trained as ministers at Murray Theological College from 1936 to 2020

Sex	*1936–2020*	*%*
Female	19	9, 09
Male	190	90, 91
Total	209	100

Source RCZ Ministers' Register (1936–2020)

Women in Church Boards

The RCZ has eleven boards which are elected at each and every synod session. These boards help the church in superintending various RCZ departments. These are: Evangelism Board, Murray Theological College Board, Reformed Church University Board, Education Board, Health Service and Community Development Board, Audit, Business Units, Youth, Music, Human Resources and Finance Board. Women involvement in these boards is insignificant, as shown by the following table.

As shown by Table 4.3, out of 110 board members of the RCZ's 11 boards from 2000 to 2010, 5 (4, 55%) were women and 105 (95, 45%) were men. This can be attributed to various reasons which may include: Shona culture, selective use of the Bible and lack of confidence in women leadership capabilities by both women and men. This tendency of subdued women participation in critical leadership structures for the period 2000 to 2020 in the RCZ is in tandem with the leadership trends in Zimbabwe for the same period where women were yearning for participation but they were side-lined. The notion is supported by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation News item of 1 May 2017 which reported that out of 350 members of the Zimbabwean parliament, 125 (35, 7%) were women whilst 225 (64, 3%) were men. More so, out of 1635 ward councillors in Zimbabwe's rural and urban councils, 323 (19, 75%) were women whilst 1312 (80, 25%) were men. The promotion of the institution of patriarchy in the RCZ is replicated in Zimbabwe's government departments of Zimbabwe where critical ministerial and decision-making posts are occupied by men. In this light, the inferiority of women pertaining in the Zimbabwean nation is cascading to its churches. Ideally, fighting this cannot be the duty of the church alone but needs concerted effort of the government and civil society as well.

Table 4.3 Number of women and men in the RCZ's eleven boards from 2000 to 2020

Sex	*2000–2010*	*%*	*2011–2020*	*%*
Female	5	4, 55	12	10, 9
Male	105	95, 45	98	89, 1
Total	110	100	110	100

Source RCZ Synod Minutes (2000–2020)

Women in the Moderature of the RCZ

The Moderature of the RCZ is the church's highest decision-making board which exercises the duties of the Synodical Committee when it is not in session. The Moderature is constituted by eight members who are: moderator (minister), vice-moderator (minister), general secretary (minister), vice-general secretary (minister), actuary (minister), synod secretary (lay person), vice-synod secretary (lay person) and treasurer (lay person) (RCZ Rules and Regulations, 2010: 7–8). Since 1952 when the RCZ Synod was weaned from the DRC of the Cape Synod, men were chosen as Moderature members up to 2010. It was only at the 2010 and 2012 synod sessions when one woman was elected at each of the sessions to be part of the RCZ's top decision-making board as shown in the following table.

Table 4.4 is clear testimony of the lack of instruments which support promotion of women leadership in the RCZ. This notion is supported by the fact that because of lack of women empowering instruments in the RCZ, the 2016 synod session elected only eight males into the Moderature. The overarching question arising from such a status quo is as follows, "Why are women not elected into this top decision making board?" The answer to this question demands a closer look at a wide spectrum of issues relating to women's leadership in the RCZ and in Zimbabwe. At the 2018 Synod Session, one woman was elected into the Moderature which proved that the RCZ lacks gender empowering instruments in all its policies covering election of elders, deacons, ministers for training, members to the church's boards as well as the Moderature, which is the church's top decision-making board.

Table 4.4 Number of women and men in the moderature of the RCZ from 1952 to 2020

Sex	*1952–2020*	*%*
Female	3	1, 22
Male	244	98, 78
Total	247	100

Source RCZ Synodical Minutes/Reports (1952–2020)

The Future of Women's Leadership in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

The future of women leadership in the RCZ lies in the following five basic principles, namely gender-balanced biblical interpretation which puts men and women at par, leadership formation for women membership, as well as creation of leadership spaces for women to have improved access to the church's leadership structures, men-women solidarity in the quest for women's participation in the RCZ leadership structures and women-women unity in the gender-balanced leadership representation of both women and men in the church structures.

Gender-balanced biblical interpretation points to use of gender-balanced lenses in exegesis, hermeneutics and worship. If gender-balanced lenses become the status quo of the church's life, then women will enjoy all the church privileges which men have been monopolising since the RCZ was formed in Zimbabwe, in 1891. More so, RCZ women need to be exposed to rigorous leadership formation trainings for them to be motivated to take up strategic leadership positions in their church. In addition, the RCZ as an institution should open up leadership space for their female membership. This can be so through creating women quota system whereby some leadership posts will be reserved for women membership which can also be achieved through creation of proportional representative posts which might end up giving more posts to women than men for the women are more than the men in terms of numbers in the church. In the same perspective, men and women should work together in the quest for improved women involvement in church leadership. The ultimate game changer, though, is solidarity among women themselves in lobbying for improved women involvement in the church's leadership structures.

Conclusion

Women's participation in leadership roles in the RCZ is a phenomenon which has evolved for decades since the church's inception in Zimbabwe in 1891. It started with the Pioneering Stage (1891–1983) whereby no women had an opportunity to attain any leadership position in the church. The trend, however, shifted during the next phase which I referred to as the Liberal Phase (1984–2020) which witnessed tremendous transformation of the church's theology which brought in gender-balanced

understanding of God's Word. The period witnessed women assuming numerous positions such as: eldership, deaconate, board membership as well as some positions in the Moderature which is the church's highest decision-making executive of the Synod. However, I believe that the future of women's leadership in the RCZ church is a mixed bag which includes: declaration, acceleration, as well as static changes. It is my sincere hope and prayer that as Zimbabwe's Second Republic works towards the realisation of Vision 2030 couched with promises for gender equity on the national political arena, the RCZ will also continue to implement changes in its leadership policies to ensure that women are equally and fairly represented in all sectors of the church's leadership hierarchy.

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CHAPTER 5

Gender Dynamics in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ) Leadership Hierarchy

Terence Mupangwa

Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to unravel the gender dynamics in the leadership hierarchy of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ). I argue that the prevalent patriarchal attitudes in Pentecostal churches such as the AFMZ are impacting negatively on gender dynamics leading to the exclusion of women from leadership, especially when it comes to top leadership positions. Such attitudes are disempowering or dismembering to the womenfolk as they nurture attitudes of the marginalization of women in the church's power hierarchy and the complexities therein. The chapter, also discusses the roles played by women in the AFMZ.

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Such a discussion provides fertile ground for examining the disempowering attitudes that militate against safe spaces for women, and at the same time placing men in a dominating position. Despite playing critical roles, women in the AFMZ are still at the periphery of the power hierarchy. I argue that women are agents of change, therefore, they have to be given equal opportunities to occupy the top leadership hierarchies of the church.

I also pay attention to what the government of Zimbabwe has done in order to promote gender equality in comparison to what the AFMZ has done. In so doing, I will illustrate how the AFMZ is still lagging behind on this journey of gender equality. While Pentecostal teachings are said to empower women in the home and in Christian service, I argue that these teachings continue to entrench patriarchy because the church's perception of the role and status of women is largely sourced from patriarchal biblical texts. Consequently, this results in contradicting scenarios that militate against the total liberation and empowerment of women.

The Shona culture has painted a picture that women are weak and should be followers of men. It is, therefore, imperative to argue that women are agents of change. This is despite the fact that there has been a negative picture that has been created over time as a result of cultural perceptions, however, women are agents of change. In this chapter, I also explain how research has proven that women are capable leaders. This chapter will highlight evidence that the AFMZ is still marginalizing women in its power hierarchies despite the effort by the Zimbabwean government and the international fraternity to promote gender equality. The Zimbabwean government has made great strides in promoting gender equality. Besides having a constitution which is life-giving to women, Zimbabwe is a signatory of both regional and international policy instruments on gender equality.

The main thrust of the chapter is to proffer that, as a prophetic organization, the AFMZ is expected to have been in the lead toward fulfilling the expectation of the government on gender equality. However, it is really sad that it is the one that is lagging behind and is promoting patriarchal tendencies that are not life-giving to women. Women are very capable of taking up leadership positions and are agents of change.

African Women's Theology and Feminist Ecclesiology as a Theoretical Framework

This chapter analyzes the issue of improving the participation of women in leadership in the AFMZ from the perspective of African Women's Theology. It addresses the religious and cultural injustices that African women encounter in an African milieu (Sprong, 2011: 10). African women's theology focuses on promoting equality in all dimensions, including power sharing. African women theologians recognize men and women as equal because they are both created in the same image of God (Amoah, 1995: 2). Hence, they challenge patriarchal hierarchical structures and the subjugation of women. The Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians are the major proponents of this theology. They argue that worldwide, women have been treated as 'outsiders' in the church. According to Sprong (2011) and Kanyoro (2001), God's original intention at creation was for men and women to reign as equals in their dominion over creation. In like manner, Njoroge (2014) avers that power inequality between sexes should never be tolerated as it is perpetuated through culture and religion. She reminds everyone that "It is sinful, and injures the creation in God's image. It violates human dignity, and diminishes life" (Njoroge, 2014). For this reason, Njoroge (2009: 5) persuades churches to "provide effective and collaborative leadership that leads to changed lives and changed communities."

The work of African women theologians emphasizing gender parity in ecclesiastical structures is relevant to this study in that it seeks to investigate ways of improving the participation of women in church leadership. It advocates for the liberation of women in relation to decision-making in the church. Hence, African women theologians' advocacy for a gender-inclusive church provides a solid foundation for this study because it is premised and rooted in African culture and worldview which is seemingly a principal driver of the treatment of women in the AFMZ.

Methodology

The study is predominantly qualitative in the sense that interviews and focus group discussions were the main data collection tools. This study was carried out in the cities of Harare, Mutare and Bulawayo targeting 60 members of the AFMZ. All the participants were purposefully sampled. Interviews using unstructured interview questions were conducted with

10 women pastors and 10 male pastors, 2 deacons, 2 elders, 3 elderly women beyond the age of seventy and youths in the AFMZ. Four focus group discussions were conducted with four committees of four departments in the AFMZ, namely, the Sister's Union (Ladies department committee), a local church assembly board (constituted by married men), the boys fellowship (boys youth group) and girls fellowship (girls youth group). I saw it appropriate to have a discussion with the Sister's Union because it was also important to include the views of married women in the study. In addition, the main church board of a local assembly was an important source of information in that it provided the perspective of married men as well. More so, the views of the youth were also imperative, therefore, data were also collected from the boys' fellowship and the girls' fellowship.

History of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

It will not be possible to provide a comprehensive history of the AFMZ within the confines of this chapter, but I will highlight some of the key developments in order to facilitate an appreciation of women's contribution. The Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe is the mother of Pentecostalism and arguably one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, even as it is facing stiff competition from churches that broke away from it, such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) and the United Family International Church (UFIC). The AFMZ was first introduced in Zimbabwe by miners who were working in South Africa. It is believed to have been started by Zacharias Manamela in Gwanda. According to historical sources, Manamela was the first migrant to have brought the Pentecostal gospel in Zimbabwe through his preaching in Gwanda, his hometown in 1915 (Hwata, 2005). Notably so, Manamela did a tremendous and effective job in Gwanda. The AFM in South Africa then sent him support through Reverend G.J Booysen from Louis Trichardt who tried to seek registration of the church with the Zimbabwean colonial government (Togarasei, 2016: 3). It took long before the AFMZ was officially registered. After registration, the AFMZ was handed over to black Zimbabweans to lead, with Reverend Kupara as the first black President in 1983, although he was given the title of superintendent instead of president at the time. He was succeeded by Jefries Mvenge, who was subsequently succeeded by Steven Mutemererwa. Enos

Manyika took over the reins as the president after Mutemererwa had retired. Upon the retirement of Manyika, President Asapher Madziyire was elected into office in 2003 (Madziyire & Risinamhodzi, 2015: 82–94). It can be noted that, all these presidents have been male. It can also be noted from the history given by the different scholars that the absence of women in leadership and their contribution in the establishment of the AFMZ is historical. Although they were involved in the church's establishment and expansion, their contribution was not recognized and written down. Hence, this chapter echoes the Circle of Concerned African Theologians' lament on "the absence of women in the religious history of Africa" which they describe as a "grave concern" (Phiri et al., 2002: 4). Similarly, Fiorenza, citing Watson (2002: 17–21) points out that although women have always been in church, 'their experiences, contributions, or achievements have generally been marginalized, trivialized, or ignored.'

The Roles of Women in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

Despite the restrictions put upon them when it comes to actively participating in church decision-making, women in the AFMZ have contributed a lot that has led to the development of the church. As capable agents of change, they have accomplished a lot, which makes this chapter to argue that women need to be included in leadership for them to fully blossom in their leadership skills and help the church to develop even more.

Women in the AFMZ have played a significant role, particularly when it comes to fundraising for the church. They have raised funds to buy furniture, trucks, generators and kitchen utensils that are being used at national level by the church. Such ability to raise a lot of money can only be exhibited by people who have the ability to lead. It is, therefore, mind boggling why the AFMZ is not putting on board the leadership type and caliber of women in the top leadership hierarchy. According to Kwaramba (2004: 61), it has been observed that when it comes to the issue of fundraising and buying of church assets, women in the AFMZ perform much more than the men. However, despite women exhibiting such leadership skills, men in the AFMZ are still dominating and they are the key decision-makers. Expressing the same sentiments as Kwaramba (2004) and Oduyoye (2001: 82) laments that very often, women work in the church while men take credit for the outcome.

Besides fundraising, women in the AFMZ are also involved in praying and offering intercession for the church. Women have specific days when they meet to pray for the church. This is a sign of commitment on the part of women. As a Christian organization, the AFMZ believes that prayer changes things for the better. Every good leader should aim at changing the environment of an organization for the better. Men in the AFMZ do not meet on a weekly basis for prayer as women do. This is evidence that women are agents of change and if they are to be involved in leadership, they will certainly deliver and turnover the organization for the better. Prayer only without actual involvement in the hierarchies of power is not adequate.

A good leader always seeks to engage in activities that are life-giving to his or her followers. On top of what has been mentioned above, women in the AFMZ also engage in welfare activities. They have exhibited compassion to those that are in need. Kwaramba (2004: 62) acknowledges that women in the AFMZ are contributing immensely to the welfare of the Bible College, Manhinga orphanage, and addressing the needs of the various widows. Such activities of welfare are life-giving to the church members especially those in need such as the orphans and widows and struggling student pastors. Kwaramba (2018: 81) highlights the capacity of women to lead by bringing to light that women in the AFMZ organize and intercede for conferences both at provincial and national levels. All this reveals good leadership qualities on the part of women.

Furthermore, women have also organized ladies' conferences at local, provincial and national levels. These conferences have led to the conversion of many women, leading to the numerical growth of the church. The fact that the majority of membership in the AFMZ are women can be attributed to this phenomenal work the women are doing. Besides contributing toward the church's numerical growth, these conferences organized by women are also helping in the spiritual growth of the church members. Men in the AFMZ have begun to attend these meetings that women are organizing, thus leading to the spiritual growth of both men and women.

The prophetic ministry is another pivotal role that the AFMZ women have been playing. This is a ministry that governs the church's growth as God will be directly communicating God's desires for the church. In making use of their prophetic gift, women in the AFMZ are helping in the edification of the church. Findings from the field study conducted in order to come up with this chapter also revealed that some of the church

leaders have been seeking advice from the female prophets. An overarching question emerging from such a status quo is, "Why not involve them in the power structures so that they can make decisions for the church as well?" It is in light of such incidences that my argument in this chapter is that the AFMZ will need women of such caliber in their leadership structures.

Some women in the history of the AFMZ operated as midwives, though the practice has really reduced over time. This may be as a result of the effect of the establishment of more hospitals throughout the country. The late Mrs Murape, popularly known as 'Gogo' Murape, used to have women file at her homestead for both prayer and midwifery services (Kwaramba, 2004: 65). Women also participate in the music department of the church. They sing in the praise and worship services and choirs. This is also a ministry which transforms the lives of many people. Women are also involved in the Sunday school ministry and are impacting the lives of children in a profound manner.

However, as Oduyoye (2001: 74) highlights, women would agree that to be caring and helpful, to share with, provide for and to minister to the needs of others, is the crux of being fully human. But to be made to do it, to be taken for granted when you do it, is to be treated as less than human. Choice is the essence of humanness. Consequently, according to Oduyoye (2001), the lack of respect for women's feelings and perspectives should be seen as lack of recognition of women's humanity. Oduyoye (2001) further highlights that disrespect and marginalization of women is in fact disrespect to all humanity and indeed disrespect to God who made us women and men. She argues that this world needs an anthropology that will enable it to benefit from the diversity of gender, race, language and nationality.

Women's Attributes and Leadership

There is a possibility that some people may question whether it is worthwhile to argue for the inclusion of women in leadership. They may question whether women even possess the qualities expected of a leader. In this section, I will bring to light what research has proven with regard to women's attributes in relation to leadership.

There is a general belief that women are not capable of leading, but research has proven otherwise. Men have been considered to be natural leaders. Therefore, what is 'normal' is to have a male as a leader while

women are the followers. Although they were dealing with HIV and AIDS issues, Mtshiselwa and Masenya (2016: 1), argue that in patriarchal African cultures, women are prevented from exercising leadership. They claim that there is a general belief among Africans that if women are to lead, the result will always be detrimental to the society. Rakoma (1970: 222) echoes similar views, stating that there is a belief that the society is likely to be in turmoil under female leaders because women are uninformed and weak. In this section of the chapter, I would like to illustrate that research has proven that women have the capability to lead and have all the necessary qualities expected of a leader.

Elmuti et al. (2009), writing about women leaders in the education sector in selected schools in Matabeleland South, concluded that women employ a more interactive approach and in general they encourage community building and participation. In the same vein, Batliwala (2010) in O'Neil et al. (2015) note that women leaders are often described as empathetic, supportive, endowed with relationship-building, power sharing, information sharing, cooperative, collaborative, fair, team-oriented, task-oriented, committed, honest, good communicators, consultative and conciliatory. In like manner, Zulu (2007) argues that women tend to adopt more democratic and participative management styles than males. Furthermore, women are believed to be good at sharing power and information, as well as supporting and encouraging subordinates. As such, women managers are believed to be persuasive, influential and charismatic and they usually make extensive use of interpersonal skills to their advantage. Women's nurturing attributes place them in a better position than men to exercise these soft skills alongside the tougher skills already expected of managers in a male-defined managerial world. The soft skills involve motivating staff, creating co-operation, redefining organizational values and beliefs and re-aligning management focus. These feminine characteristics of being moderate and tolerant are important in that they allow women principals to understand their subordinates, create a friendlier atmosphere by spending more time listening to their personal problems. Furthermore, they are mostly not as authoritarian as men. Consequently, most female leaders have the capacity to raise their subordinates' morale rather than to demoralize them, thus allowing women leaders to be more effective than their male counterparts (Oplatka, 2006). If women have such qualities, what would make women in the AFMZ exceptional not to possess such qualities?

Wakshum (2014) postulates that the leadership qualities of women are linked to empowerment; consequently they lead by talking to people and allowing them to decide. Many women, according to Wakshum, are not "bossy," but rather they lead by inspiring and empowering people to find solutions to problems. In like manner, Lad (2000) cited in Ndenisa and Tshabangu (2014) discovered that female principals are better at communicating school goals, supervision and evaluation of instruction, coordinating curriculum, maintaining high visibility, promoting professional development and providing incentives for learning much better than males. More so, Diehl (2014) cited in Alomair (2015) found out that female leaders bring their interpersonal styles into leadership. They are better at fostering inclusion, dependence, compassion and concern for others, and they implement a transformational leadership style that is more future-oriented, participative and democratic. Moreover, female leaders inspire young women by serving as role models and mentors for them. Because women typically occupy a position where equality would be beneficial, they tend to embrace egalitarian values (Whitehead, 2012).

Society benefits because in most cases women are hardworking, take a motherly approach, they are also more understanding, and are more tolerant than men. Additionally, they are good listeners and hence prudent in making decisions. Most women also have passion, expertise and skills that can benefit society other than being mothers; hence, when women assume management positions, society can benefit a lot since it can shift from seeing women as second-class citizens. In most cases, women leaders are good role models for the youths and society would benefit from them; and as custodians of culture and its teachers, women are best suited for leadership. Cognizant of the unique gifts that women bring to leadership, the government of Zimbabwe, like other governments and institutions globally, has been investing in getting women on board. This is strategic for the AFMZ, since it operates in a specific socio-cultural, religious and political context.

The Zimbabwean Government and Gender Equality

Since this chapter is focusing on gender dynamics in the AFMZ, it is worthwhile to draw our attention to efforts of the Zimbabwean government in trying to achieve gender equality. Since the attainment of independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government has made huge

strides in terms of improving the status of women in its power hierarchies. The government of Zimbabwe has taken measures to include women in the Parliament. Although the women Parliamentarians may be few, however, their presence is evidence of the fact that the government is making an effort to redress the apparent gender inequity. Soon after attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe was governed by the Lancaster House constitution, which was drawn up for the most part to make way for the transfer of power from the white minority to the majority black population. This constitution did not cater much to the needs of women and lacked conceptual clarity on women's rights (Dziva, 2018: 21). According to Zanhi (2013), the Lancaster House constitution was regressive with regard to best practices in gender equality. As a result of these inadequacies, the Lancaster House constitution was replaced by the 2013 constitution which addresses the needs of women and issues of gender equality in a democratic way. This constitutional reform implemented best international and national human rights standards calling for member states to reform supreme laws and policies to ensure gender equality and no discrimination. The 2013 Zimbabwean constitution obligates the government to fully promote gender balance in the Zimbabwean society. For instance, Section 17 (ii) emphasizes the importance of ensuring equal representation between women and men in all its institutions and agencies of government. In the same vein, Section 17 (d) (ii) calls for women to "constitute at least half the membership of all commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established or under this constitution or any act of parliament" (Dziva, 2018: 27).

Besides adopting a new constitution that addresses gender equality, the Zimbabwean government is a signatory of both international and regional protocols on gender and development such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development (SADC Gender Protocol) (Dziva, 2018). The UNDP (2000: 120) observed that an equitable society puts the value and worth to each human being's contribution to the development and well-being of society at all levels. Notwithstanding such a remarkable observation by

the UNDP, the AFMZ is still excluding women from the top positions of its power hierarchy. The following section presents and analyzes the findings relating to women's leadership within the AFMZ.

Findings and Discussion

Following the interviews and focus group discussions that were conducted in 2017, the findings were transcribed and analyzed under the following themes.

The Majority of Women Do Not Vote

It is really unfortunate that more than forty years into independence, it is only female pastors who are allowed to vote for leaders and to be voted as leaders in the AFMZ. All other women who are not pastors do not participate in the voting process and they are not eligible to be voted into leadership. This puts women in a disadvantaged position because the AFMZ has very few female pastors. Of the 720 pastors in the AFMZ at the time of writing in August 2020, only 46 were female pastors. If only female pastors are permitted to vote, this also gives the impression that only members of the clergy are the true church. Clericalism brings divisions in the church. Everyone can be a member of the church, as the African women theologians advocate for. Women are the church, whether ordained or not. The partnership of women and men, ordained or not, is the true image of the church of Christ (Oduyoye, 2001: 86).

It is surprising and disturbing that a church organization which is prophetic is barring women from both voting and from being voted into power hierarchies and yet the government which is considered to be secular has made strides toward achieving equality with women in its power structures. Dube (2003: 213) argues that among other things, Jesus' earthly ministry was characterized by "prophetically denouncing oppressive social structures." Moyo and Banda (2001: 59), though they were focusing on issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS, also contend that "the church, by its very nature should seek to call its members to become healing communities." This means that the church should neither exclude nor discriminate against its members on the basis of gender or any other distinguishing features. In like manner, Ackermann (2006: 236) makes it clear that when marginalization and discrimination continue to exist, the very character of the church as the body of Christ is undermined. Echoing

the same sentiments, Oduyoye (2001: 86) asserts that the church is more often than not a part of the oppressive culture. Often women experience more recognition of their humanity outside the church.

Women are also blamed usually for their lack of ascendancy into positions of power. The general belief is that women do not vote for each other. Sande avers that women are said to be their own enemies and do not support or vote for each other into leadership positions (Sande, 2017: 55–57). Similarly, Chitsike (2011: 181) affirms that many women are reluctant to vote for other women to take on leadership positions as they have been socialized to believe that women are not capable leaders. The dominant misconception in the AFMZ is that women are not willing to vote for each other into positions of power. However, the contention of this chapter is that if only women were to be given the opportunity to vote, since they are the majority, they would vote for other women and this would lead to them being included in the church's hierarchies of power. Furthermore, Muringa and Makaudze (2014: 1548) remind us that women in the traditional African culture supported each other and even criticized each other with love. They maintain that women do not pull each other down in the African culture. It is, therefore, possible that if they were to be given the chance to vote, women in the AFMZ will have the opportunity to prove that they support each and reflect the true African culture.

Women should at the very least be able to vote for the people they want in leadership positions. The current leadership structure in the AFMZ represents the voice of a few people who are mostly male. Such a structure perpetuates a gender disequilibrium in the church's leadership hierarchy. This makes it an institution devoid of justice, which is an antithesis of its mandate since one of its major roles should be to advocate for the rights of the marginalized. African women theologians critique such disparities within the faith communities. For instance, Oduyoye (2001) calls for equality and justice in the church. Being the majority, women would have a good chance of voting their own into leadership positions if allowed to vote. In a true communion, no voices are left unheard. By not allowing the women to vote even though they comprise the majority of the laity, the AFMZ is taking away the women's voice. Women cannot refer to themselves as the church when deprived of the privilege to participate in crucial activities in the church activities, such as the elections.

Encouraging Husbands of Female Pastors to Become Pastors as Well

The focus group discussions revealed that if a woman becomes a pastor in the AFMZ, then in most cases the leadership would encourage her husband to train as a pastor as well, even if he did not have a calling. It was noted that their reason for doing so was to find a way of pushing the female pastor out of her post because the tradition in the AFMZ is that if both husband and wife are ordained pastors, then the wife has to step down and hand over her post to the husband. The study participants also mentioned that in most of the sermons preached by male pastors, there is an emphasis on encouraging the husbands of female pastors to become pastors as well. Furthermore, it also emerged that in many instances, the language of the church puts women down. This seems to suggest that the church has double standards with regard to women.

Be that as it may, it is possible that the AFMZ can change for the better and redress the gender injustices by drawing some insights from both Christianity and the traditional Shona culture. Such a transformation is also surmised by African women theologians such as Oduyoye (2001: 86) who upholds that even though Western Christian culture is experienced by women as a tool for domination, however, there are aspects that can be liberative so they do not undertake a wholesome condemnation of it. Furthermore, Muringa and Makaudze (2014) are of the opinion that the Shona culture appreciates the fact that all people were created in the same image of God, therefore, one's humanity holds more weight than their gender. They illustrate their point by explaining that this is the reason why the Shona people use terms '*mwanasikana*' (girl child), '*mwanakomana*' (boy child), '*munhurume*' (male being) and '*munhukadzi*' (female being). The terms '*mwanasikana*' and '*mwanakoma*' emphasize on the fact that they are both children ('*mwana*,' meaning child) first before one's gender is looked at. That is the same with '*munhukadzi*' and '*munhurume*,' the emphasis is on the fact that one is a human being ('*munhu*') before one's sex/gender is considered (2014: 1549). This may suggest that by continuing to uphold gender-based discriminatory policies, the AFMZ leadership is either not aware of the whole package of the Shona culture or they are simply adopting a selective application of the indigenous culture. They have a single story of the African culture, as Adichie (2009) argues. According to her, the problem with a single story is that a man should always lead, as culture dictates (Adichie, 2009).

Doubting That Women Are Also Called by God to Become Pastors

Another recurring issue raised by the study participants is the fact that the AFMZ leadership continues to raise doubts regarding the call of a woman to becoming a pastor. As such, women are expected to prove that they have been called, while men are not expected to do so. One of the male pastors mentioned that the moment a man mentions that he has been called, no one questions the call. However, if it is a woman, the opposite is true. The implication is that there are no men who fake their call. This is naive in the sense that with the prevailing economic hardships and the high unemployment rates in Zimbabwe, one cannot rule out the possibility that many are joining the pastoral ministry as a way of raising money for survival. One of the elders highlighted that there are a number of male pastors who are now causing problems within the church by demanding money from the members, which could be evidence of the fact that they mainly became pastors because of the love of money and not due to a response to a genuine calling.

Pentecostalism was generally hailed by scholars such as Mwaura (2008), Kalu (2008) and Alexander (2009) as liberative to women, but what is happening in the AFMZ is evidence that it is also restrictive. By doubting the call of women, the AFMZ is restricting women from exercising all their gifts. Gabaitse (2015) avers that Christianity in the form of Pentecostalism promises more than it delivers. What is happening in the AFMZ is evidence that what diminishes women is perpetuated and enhanced by Christianity. Concurring, Machema (1990: 131) stated that "Although Christianity has long been experienced in Africa, and has preached that Jesus Christ came out to liberate everybody irrespective of sex, race, strength or financial status, African women have been locked up in a safe compartment together with their good ideas." Women should be given the liberty to articulate their charisma in power hierarchies for the AFMZ to be a real *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is a community of sharing and participation. In its operations, women should find power to exercise their charisms for the general health of the community. According to Oduyoye (2001: 86), in a true communion, no voices are left unheard and no God-given charisms are demeaned or glossed over.

The birth of the AFMZ is associated with the Holy Spirit experience or encounter that took place in Kansas in the United States of America at number 312 in Azusa Street in 1906 (Nhumburudzi, 2016: 29–30). The AFMZ also firmly believes in the baptism of the Holy Spirit of all saints.

By embracing the concept of 'all saints,' I believe that includes women as well. By being called into ministry, it is evidence that the Holy Spirit is working among women as well. By doubting their call, it simply means that the AFMZ will be doubting the work of the Holy Spirit, otherwise it is just a political gimmick which the AFMZ is employing in order to exclude women from its power structures.

Women Are Just Given Ceremonial Titles

The AFMZ functions under the Presbytery type of governance in which the Board of Elders runs the affairs of the church (Madziyire & Risinamhodzi, 2015: 143; Nhumburudzi & Kurebwa, 2018: 7). The Board comprises the pastor, deacons and elders (AFMZ constitution Chapter 4 Section 4.10). Women, who hold the designation of deaconesses—which is the equivalent of deacons for men—do not form part of the board. Moreover, 'deaconess' is the most senior position a woman can hold, apart from becoming a pastor. Men on the other hand can hold senior positions such as that of an elder or being in the provincial and national committees. Furthermore, according to the AFMZ constitution, the local board exercises jurisdiction over all the affairs of the church and its administration. Deaconesses, therefore, are expected to work under the oversight and control of the pastor and the board (AFMZ constitution Chapter 4 Section 4.1.6.4). It follows that a deaconess cannot make decisions that have anything to do with the running of the church. All major decisions, even those impacting directly on the deaconesses' work, are made by either the pastor or the board, a rule that does not apply to deacons—despite the two positions being at the same level. This demonstrates the entrenched patriarchy and male supremacy held by the AFMZ which gives men more authority over women, just by virtue of them being men. There seems to be a ceiling over lay women in the church that does not apply to men. Although it may appear that women have leadership roles such as deaconesses, it is evident that they are conferred titles and responsibilities without the commensurate level of authority. This relates well with what Biri (2013: 230) observed in the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), namely, that women in leadership positions are nonetheless expected to be under the authority of men, therefore, no real power is in their hands. Biri (2013) highlights that in ZAOGA, there is a belief that God is not democratic. Concurring with Oduyoye (2001: 86) who argues that Christ during his ministry prophetically denounced

oppression in the social structures of his day, in this chapter, I argue that God is democratic and requires justice for all humanity. This is also corroborated by one of the major themes of the Old Testament prophets' messages which emphasized social justice. Prophets like Isaiah, Hosea and Amos were consistent on this theme.

Though it has been generally made to appear as if men are better leaders (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014: 1), this chapter presents another perspective, namely, that women are equally good in decision-making. Besides, scholars such as Kanter (1977), Nieva and Gutek (1981), have argued that there is no difference in the leadership styles of men and women (though, as I argued above, women have a different ethos). Their argument is that certain leadership roles require particular types of leadership, fundamentally restricting men and women in the same position to perform in identical ways. Resonating with these scholars, Eagly (2007: 4) observed that this argument has some validity "because women and men have to meet similar requirements to gain leadership roles in the first place." She went further to state that as soon as a leader assumes the role, the expectations associated with leadership shape his or behavior in particular directions. Eagly (2007: 4) is of the opinion that the demands of leadership make it more likely that there will be very little if any difference in the leadership styles of both men and women. I have chosen a different interpretation, namely, that women do actually bring a qualitatively superior approach to leadership and should be given the opportunity to lead in church and society.

The Constitution Is Discriminatory

The marginalization of women in the AFMZ is further demonstrated by the language used in the church's constitution which clearly shows that the highest positions of Overseer and the President are a preserve for men. The pronoun 'he' is used wherever there is reference to the positions. For instance, when referring to the election of an overseer, it states that "He shall be elected by the provincial council on equal representation from assemblies" (AFMZ constitution chapter 9 Section 9.4.1). Even when specifying the duties of an overseer, the pronoun 'he' is used to emphasize that it is a position for men. The same applies to the position of President (AFMZ constitution Chapter 13 Sections 13.2 and 13.3). Using such pronouns inevitably excludes women from these positions. This practice puts into question Madziyire and Risinamhodzi's (2015: 146) claims of

gender neutrality in the AFMZ leadership. It was also discovered through the interviews that the current constitution was drafted by men only. In light of this, it is fundamental to ensure that women are also involved in the writing of the constitution. That is one way of giving women a voice.

There Has Never Been a Female President Nor Overseer in the AFMZ

Closely related to the abovementioned themes is the exclusion of women from key leadership positions in the AFMZ. Leadership roles influence decision-making. As much as women are capable of being agents of change and transformation as has been illustrated above, unfortunately, they are often neglected and left out of the mainstream discussions and considerations. Their needs are not identified, therefore they are not catered for. This resonates with the mantra, "nothing about us, without us." The leadership of the AFMZ must be deliberate in engaging women to ensure that they speak for themselves, instead of being spoken for or about as if they are dead! Churches cannot serve as effective agents for change and transformation toward gender justice and equity if they fail "to remove the logs from their own eyes before pointing at the speck in other people's eyes (Matthew 7:3–5)." The AFMZ must lead by example and be more intentional and practical, particularly in some instances where key church leadership positions such as elders, overseers, president remain strictly confined to masculine traits.

The ceiling placed on women leaders can clearly be seen in their absence in the most senior positions such as President, Overseers and the Apostolic Council, which is composed solely of overseers. According to Nhumburudzi and Kurebwa (2018: 5–6; Madziyire & Risinamhodzi, 2015: 82–86), the position of President and Overseer has never in the church's history been held by a woman, even though the AFMZ has been ordaining women since 1999. There is a feeling among a section of the church that there are female pastors who meet all the qualifications for those positions but they have never been elected. By being excluded from the overseers' position, women are automatically excluded from the post of the president, hence, they cannot participate in the Apostolic Council, which is the highest governing body of the church.

In this chapter, I agree with Oduyoye (2001: 82) who said that while the Church delights in being in the world, but not of the world, it fails to set a good example for the world such that it ends up trailing

behind the world in some fundamental issues, such as its failure to uphold gender justice. Further, Oduyoye (2001: 83) states that where the church falls behind society in its appreciation of women, its leaders claim that the justice and equality demanded by women in the church is a "worldly" agenda. As a result, the church does not feel bound to reexamine its attitude, teaching and treatment of women. The secular society in the form of the government seems to be putting into practice the justice that God expects to be in the world because they uphold human rights and justice. The inclusion of the gender balance clause in the Zimbabwean Constitution has resulted in positive outcomes as some government agencies endeavor to have gender balance in their senior management. As of July 2017, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC), Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) had gender balanced Commissioners, with ZEC and ZGC being headed by women Chairpersons. Likewise, women representation in public service rose up to 33% from the pathetic statistics before the promulgation of the 2013 Constitution (Gender Links, 2013). The government, which the church regards as the 'world,' appreciates that women are agents of change and has enshrined the rights of women in both local and in international laws. However, it was noted by Dube and Dziva (2014) that there was a decrease in female representation in the 2013 cabinet. Only three women made it in the 26 member cabinet (Herald, 2013). This was also the case in the 2018 election and there was no longer female representation in the presidium in the government at the time of writing (Herald, 2018). Even when the Church has the institution and mechanisms for the participation of women, it has not made effort for it to be a reality.

Conclusion

The key findings emerging from this study illustrate that the AFMZ is still far from achieving gender equality in its governance structures. The study concludes by advocating for the inclusion of women in all activities of the church, especially in governance structures. This conclusion is informed by the fact that women are capable of contributing positively to the growth of the AFMZ as agents of change. More than forty years after Zimbabwe attained independence, it is peremptory for the AFMZ to be reminded to honor the expectations of the government as well as to practice constitutionalism in relation to gender parity, lest the church forgets

the significance of its commitment to full gender parity. The AFMZ has a divine or biblical mandate to uphold gender justice, alongside seeking to emulate the government. The challenge is that the government itself, despite having policies that encourage the inclusion of women, is failing to execute them as is expected. The church is the light and salt of the world and is expected to set the pace, with government following, not the other way round. By showing unwavering commitment to women's leadership, the AFMZ would be demonstrating the capacity of faith communities to lead the way in the quest for gender justice.

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CHAPTER 6

Women's Leadership in the Guta Ra Jehovha Church: Towards the Construction of 'Soft Masculinities'

Amos Muyambo

Introduction

Notwithstanding the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 that recognises equal rights and opportunities for men and women in all economic, social, cultural, civic and political arena, women in contemporary African society still face

The other version of the church's name is 'Guta Ra Mwari.' However, in this chapter, the name 'Guta Ra Jehovah' has been used exclusively because this is the version preferred by the key informants who participated in the study conducted in order to collect the data which compiled this chapter.

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discrimination and unequal opportunities. Many religious and cultural institutions in Africa have promoted male dominance through structuring their organisations to allow exclusive male leadership while pushing women to the domestic arena (Chitando & Biri, 2013: 36). This has created a gap where most of the indigenous and mainline churches are male-dominated in their leadership. The Guta Ra Jehovha, henceforth referred to as GRJ, however, is a different story as it is woman-founded and through feminine leadership, it has managed to transform the gender outlook and leadership of the Church. The chapter explores and analyses the role of women leadership in shaping scriptures. It interrogates how men are shaped, defined and identified. It also articulates how this has influenced gender relations in the church and proffers how this can be exemplary to the larger society that has been crippled by gender inequalities and GBV, especially in the contemporary African society. The chapter's major focus is on how women leadership in the GRJ Church has helped in the construction of soft masculinities.

The second section of this chapter discusses why it is important for us to reflect on Zimbabwean women's important contribution in religion. The third section discusses the gender inequality crisis in Zimbabwe. The fourth section concludes by presenting an analysis of how female leadership in the GRJ religious institution has contributed in formulating soft masculinities, offering a glimmer of hope for the future. The data used in the study came out of a textual analysis of the GRJ texts; The Book of the Holy Spirit that chronicles the founder's healing works, the GRJ Constitution, Men's and Women's fellowship cards, Hymn book and experiences in an ongoing qualitative research on Masculinities and African Independent Churches (AICs).

Women and Leadership in African Communities: An Overview

Lack of women leadership in most African communities has been a cause for concern (Report on the 10th Annual Africa's Women in Leadership Summit, 2005). With colonial structures favouring male leadership in industry, commerce and religion, women leadership is a rare occurrence. Although with the coming of independence there has been a transition, but cultural influences instilled by colonial constructs are resilient which poses a major barrier for women leaders (Phakeng, 2015: 10). The political and religious arenas also remain very restrictive with few or no women

Bishops, few pastors and a very mediocre representation of women parliamentarians in the House of Assembly in Zimbabwe. The dominance of male leadership makes the founding of the GRJ an African Independent Church a unique feat.

This accomplishment refutes the stance by scholars such as Trebilcot (1982) who proffered that, "it is for the sake of maximizing well-being that there should be sex roles; society should encourage individuals to make 'correct' role choices. If there are natural differences between the sexes in the capacity to perform socially valuable tasks, then it is sometimes argued, efficiency is served if these tasks are assigned to the sex with the greatest innate ability for them" (Trebilcot, 1982: 40–59). In most cases, myths and preferences have been used to relegate women to the domestic arena while men are exposed to formal sectors and viewed as the breadwinners. As more women take on the role of breadwinner, it comes with a cost of marginalisation and working many hours at home and at work. "Traditional gender stereotypes remain resilient in many cultures. Thus, we have to recognize that while there is some evidence of a shift in attitudes to family and domestic roles by some men, dominant discourses of masculinity do not sit easy with these practices".

Like most countries in Africa, Zimbabwe has got a male-dominated leadership owing to colonial constructs of society coupled with previously male preferences in education. This has created a gap and leadership imbalances in all aspects of society. Such a status quo makes it critical for the nation to prioritise gender mainstreaming as a way of celebrating the feminine contribution to nation building. This is in response to the harsh reality of the fact that most women have remained as unsung heroines particularly because of the inequalities perpetuated by the limited numbers of women leaders. The Togolese politician and former presidential candidate, Kafu Adjamagbo-Johnson, sums it up by stating that, "African women's restricted access to quality education, knowledge and resources is preventing them from gaining leadership positions on the continent" (Kuwonu, 2019: 9).

A Background to the Gender Inequality Crisis in Zimbabwe

Gender inequalities have created problems in contemporary Zimbabwean society as evidenced by the fact that there are very few women leaders, the prevalence of GBV especially targeted at women, as well as the overt marginalisation of women and children. As a result, men hold

more social and economic power in the homes, churches and workplaces. According to Dube (2007: 354), gender inequality is another form of violence against women and "a major effect of violence on human beings is the growth of insecurity and fear" (Churches in Manicaland, 2006: 178). These inequalities inflict a lot of fear, insecurities and violations against women and they have ripple effects on families and the nation as a whole. The patriarchal nature of society where men dominate women have become a breeding ground for moulding violent men (Maitse, 2000: 204). Maitse (2000) further states that violence against women occurs within the framework of a male-dominated society. She also adds that the manner in which men perceive women is the main reason why there is rampant male violence against women. Society has conditioned men to see women as inferior and subordinate to men and this has led to men violating women as women are rendered powerless. The superiority of masculinity is seen in all the spheres of our society and "the material inequalities that arise from gender politics and dominant understandings of masculinity are explicit, unapologetic and deeply embedded in the social relations and nationalisms of most African countries" (Hatty, 2000: 40). Suzanne Hatty added that another cause of violence in intimate relationships emanates from the fact that men are angry, lack integrity and responsibility and there is a rise in men abandoning relationships (2000: 3).

Often times, gender inequality and violence against women are two inseparable entities. This is articulated by Musa Dube (2007) who points out that "this is so because in these inequalities men have been legitimized to violate women" (2007: 354). Women are the ones who mostly suffer from these acts of violence. The societal setting allows men to use women as objects of desire and makes them to use violence as an instrument to advance their dominance and desires (Dube, 2007: 355). What seems to complicate the whole violence scenario is the fact that gender inequalities that exist in society have been normalised by culture and religion. The patriarchal gender constructions, therefore, serve as a breeding ground for harmful masculinity that is at work both in domestic violence and sexual harassment (Dube, 2007). Despite this argument, statistics and research have shown that in the contemporary Zimbabwean society, gender inequalities exist and GBV is a cause for concern. Getecha and Chipika (1995: 135; 137) contend that the Zimbabwean society protects men and the abuse of women is linked to inequalities

and traditional practices such as *lobola*. More so, the gender inequalities have increased the heterosexual transmission of HIV and AIDS since men hold more power when it comes to sexual issues (Chitando, 2007: 47; Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012: 1). GBV is rife in Zimbabwe; it affects all women irrespective of where they live, status and education. One in three women has experienced some GBV since the age of 15 at the hands of men (Zimbabwe Demographic Health Report, 2015: 2; Mapuranga, 2012). The factors that have been attributed to GBV in Zimbabwe include economic decline and gender inequalities. The effects of GBV on many Zimbabwean women can be seen in emotional, physical and social well-being that has been compromised and it is the mission and purpose of religious organisations to foster justice and peace to all (Churches in Manicaland, 2006: IV).

Masculinities and Gender Relations

Physical strength or how man is biologically built has always been an issue in GBV (Connell, 2005: 44). Many people agree that the way men are biologically formed poses a potential threat to others (Van Klinken, 2010: 3). Even as evidenced by structures in the homes and religion, men are given the manual jobs or the strenuous roles. Unfortunately, this has resulted in this strength being used to harm others in some instances. Women's efforts to stop GBV are bearing no fruit, hence, it is time to engage and bring men to be involved in dealing with GBV. Religion and culture play a crucial role in societal transformation. There is need for intensifying teachings within and without the Churches so as to uproot attitudes, behaviours and cultural teachings that are harmful and promote GBV. A pastoralist background in traditional society also defined the status of men; hence, owning more livestock meant that one had more power and influence.

Hegemonic masculinities are the source of harmful behaviours in men, hence, the need to construct soft masculinities (Dube, 2013: 327; Jewkes et al., 2015: 112; Morrell, 2001: 9). What are hegemonic masculinities? Hegemonic masculinities refer to the dominant ideas of what a "real" man is in a particular society. They are not necessarily violent, although across most cultures globally, hegemonic masculinities tend to sponsor problematic ways of expressing maleness. Ezra Chitando and Kudzai Biri in their analysis of Pentecostal masculinities in ZAOGA Church in Zimbabwe state that hegemonic masculinities reflect resilience, toughness and being

physically strong (2013: 38). For an example, within the Shona culture in which the ZAOGA Church is entrenched, hegemonic values show controlling behaviours where men control the women, children and property among other things (Chitando & Biri, 2013: 46). Closely linked to this behaviour is being in charge of the house as head of the household whilet demanding women subordination. Hegemonic masculinities are, therefore qualities of masculinities that are dominant and possess harmful traits while soft masculinities are those qualities of men that are peaceful, liberative and life-giving (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012: 1). Each society can influence its own masculinities in a way that shares power and affords well-being to all its citizens (Nkomazana, 2005: 31). Connell (2005: 45) added by stating that masculinities are changeable, true masculinity proceeds from male bodies and the body directs action, for example, masculinities are more aggressive than femininities. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity is "a successful claim to authority." This authority is often underpinned by violence, legitimising patriarchy and guaranteeing male domination and female subordination (Connell, 2005: 77). While hegemonic masculinity is dominant and reflected in most men, it can be resisted and opposed consciously or unconsciously by some men through transgressive or transformative behaviour (Morrell, 2001: 9). This transformative behaviour to create soft masculinities can be evidenced in the moulding of men through the women-founded GRJ Church.

The biblical concept of masculinity has influenced the definition of manhood in many societies over generations with its patriarchal nature that advanced the position of men as powerful, dominant and aggressive. Referring to men as *shumba* (lion) has literal and Biblical connotations according to Tat-Siong Benny Liew who states that, "the lion has been a Greco-Roman symbol for masculinity" (2003: 97). The lion's dominant qualities such as bravery, courage, arrogance and strength are present in many men. However, in the GRJ, these harmful masculine qualities have been deconstructed to form soft masculinities.

According to Chitando and Chirongoma (2012: 1), "masculinities refer to the aspects of men's behaviour that fluctuate over time," and soft masculinities refer to those men's behaviour that are peaceful, and conducive for positive interpersonal relationships, also referred to as liberative masculinities. Masculinities dominate in society due to the patriarchal outlook of society and in contemporary Africa; men have been

more violent and aggressive than women (Connell, 2005: 44). "The independent existence of patriarchy is based upon the social construction of men and women into two separate but unequal categories. Masculinism naturalises male domination. Male domination is not only about the appropriation of a woman's labour power, it is also about the appropriation of her sexuality, her body" (Brittan, 1997: 117; 119). Sex roles have been so resilient in African society due to cultural influence and this has affected most women and disadvantaged them as they put more hours of work than men. This crisis of roles and myths has also contributed to GBV as society transforms, with more women becoming breadwinners and taking on traditional male roles and professions. On the other hand, men are being relegated to traditional women only roles such as caring for children, cooking and housekeeping. In view of this, masculinity becomes definably inclusive of not only the political, economic and social position of men but also about sexuality and gender (Brittan, 1997: 119).

Although not much literature and study has been presented on African masculinities, the available information leads to the conclusion that African masculinities are a social construction and each society has formulated its desired men (Dube, 2013). That is the reason why in this chapter, the use of the term masculinities is preferred, as opposed to masculinity (Dube, 2013: 334). Culture plays an influential role in shaping masculinities such that its influence is seen in all spheres such as the political, historical, economic and religious spheres (Nkomazana, 2005: 31). According to Afolayan Funso, "Africans regard culture as essential in peoples' lives and future development, culture embodies philosophy, worldview, behaviour patterns, arts and institutions" (2004: ix). Societal structures are very influential in the construction of masculinities, making institutions such as religion very important in shaping masculinities. Religion is very important in the African traditional society as it is seen as a way of life. Religion provides checks and balances in society and it becomes a moral barometer producing self-controlled men. While the Zimbabwean society has been portrayed as one that usually constructs aggressive, dominant, competitive men even in some religious institutions, conversely, the GRJ has made inroads in constructing soft masculinities (Chitando & Biri, 2013: 38). Hegemonic masculinities are deconstructed to formulate men who are humble and life-giving. This liberation of harmful masculinities has resulted in the nurturing of peaceful men (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012: 1; Jodamus, 2017:

68). As a result, this positive construction of men has proved to create conducive environments in gender relations.

Matenga and the Guta Ra Jehovha Church

In discussing the work of the GRJ Church, it is important to highlight the role of African Indigenous Churches in Zimbabwe, also referred to as African Independent Churches (AICs). The AICs emerged through social, political, cultural and economic factors in Zimbabwe (Daneel, 1974: 7). One of the major factors that drew many Africans to these creative African religious institutions was healing (Daneel, 1974: 187). Many people have been healed and many continue to seek healing from these churches such that there is a tremendous growth of AICs in the contemporary Zimbabwean society. Some of these AICs have died, others split and new others have been founded which gives these churches a majority following in Zimbabwe. Better known as *Chechi dze Mweya* (Spirit churches), these AICs are founded in Africa by Africans without foreign sponsorship and administration. The GRJ belongs to this category of AICs.

The GRJ was founded by Amai Chaza (born Theresa Nyamushana), popularly known as Matenga by her followers in the 1950s (Scarnecchia, 1997: 82). Matenga means one who possesses the Holy Spirit of God that came from heaven and heals the people of God (Mutambanashe, 2010: 7). According to Matenga, she was given powers and mandate to evangelise in Africa by Jesus (Mutambanashe, 2010: 7; 153). According to the GRJ cumulative tradition, Matenga died and while dead, she met God and Jesus in a vision where she was instructed to complete Jesus' unfinished work to the African people, then she rose from the dead (Mutambanashe, 2010: 163). For the GRJ followers, Matenga's work is considered the fulfilment of the work of the Holy Spirit in Africa. Hence, Matenga is perceived as part of the work of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). According to Mutambanashe (2010: 153), this is why Matenga is often referred to as *Baba*, derived from the Shona word meaning "father." The understanding within the GRJ is that since at ascension, Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit will come and complete the evangelistic work in the world, therefore Matenga fits into the picture by virtue of fulfilling the work of the Holy Spirit to the African people. Matenga began work in Buhera in Chief Chitsunge's village in Manicaland province

of Zimbabwe. Ironically, it is in Manicaland that most of the prominent AICs originated from such as the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church. Wherever Matenga went, permission was always sought from the local African chiefs and the colonial Administrators of the local governments (Mutambanashe, 2010: 159). This acknowledgement of her authority made it easier for Matenga to establish healing centres and to heal people throughout the country. Coincidentally, Matenga performed the first healing act by healing Chief Chitsunge's wife (Mutambanashe, 2010: 11). That brought local support and authentication of her work by chiefs and local authorities, although she faced criticism from her original mainline churches. Matenga was able to win respect and acceptance from the chiefs and abroad through her healing acts such that they even regarded her as an equal (Mutambanashe, 2010: 11; 22; 44). This kind of recognition highlights the status quo in patriarchal African societies that accept women as equals only when they perform extraordinary acts. According to Lilian Dube (2008: 91), Matenga "emerges as a prominent woman who transcends the socio-cultural hierarchy, defying the imposed status of "perpetual minor" to become an elder, commanding respect and occupying a position of power and prestige…".

Matenga personally experienced GBV in the form of marital abandonment and emotional abuse while she was sick (Dube, 2008: 91; Mutambanashe, 2010: 9). Consequently, her experiences made her to transform masculinities as she acknowledged that some masculinities possess harmful and dangerous behaviours that needed deconstruction (Mutambanashe, 2010: 9). When the GRJ was founded, the structures of the Church were favourable for the construction of soft masculinities. This was not an easy task in a masculine-dominated field and culture. However, through her charismatic leadership, faith and healing powers, many people believed in her and men in the Church realised the need to be subordinates, supportive and accept women as equal partners. Matenga was able to transform gender into a fluid concept such as the traditional notion of gender where masculinities could cross gender lines by embracing feminine attributes and vice versa. This is evident in the fact that although Matenga was female, she, however, adopted the designation of a male such that she was referred to as *baba*, meaning father (Mutambanashe, 2010: 133). In the GRJ, Matenga was no stranger to masculine behaviour; she always emphasised that some masculinities have harmful qualities. Lesson 2 of the sacred text, *Bhuku ReMweya Mutsvene* (Book of the Holy Spirit) chronicles how Matenga suffered

GBV in the form of spousal neglect and when she founded the GRJ Church, these harmful aspects of male behaviour were transformed into soft masculinities (Mutambanashe, 2010: 133).

Women Leadership and Masculinity Construction

Women's role in constructing masculinities is often overlooked. Women in the African family play an important role in caring for, teaching and nurturing children. Mothers teach boys masculine roles and the caring and soft side of humanity. However, this has not been helpful in many ways as women usually teach boys and girls about the roles that are prescribed by a society that is mostly patriarchal and is riddled by unequal societal structures. This has resulted in mothers teaching their children about roles and attributes that advance male dominance and gender inequalities. Women play an all important role in shaping masculinities especially in the family through the boy child; however, this has both positive and negative effects.

A man is identified by different names according to the texts of the GRJ. Among others, the commonly used one is *murume* which is another version of the word 'man.' The other word that refers to masculinities is soldier (Mutambanashe, 2010: 106). All men in the Church are referred to as *masoja* (soldiers), even boys. What is interesting is that women can also cross boundaries such that on the one hand they will be soldiers while on the other hand having female identities. A soldier in the GRJ Church is not one who is trained for physical warfare but spiritual war against evil or the Devil. The term soldier denotes virility which is a masculine attribute (Liew, 2003: 97). The ideology of male leadership and men as householders is promoted in the GRJ Church; however, they always leave room for feminine support. This ideology is also influenced by the Shona culture which the Church ascribes to.

Apart from the cultural formation of masculinities, the creative models of the GRJ theology also shape the formation of manhood. These models include wearing of the church uniform at all times as a reminder of one's purpose and character building. One avoids sinning most of the time through wearing of the uniform because it is sacred (Lesson 53). When a man joins the GRJ Church, a process of cleansing and demon exorcism is undertaken as a means of cleansing one of evil or bad influences in a healing process that has resulted in promoting soft masculinities. This healing process moulds a man who is conscious about the concept of

sinning, one who is humble, exercises self-control, is loving, peaceful, law abiding and obedient. In addition, the Book of the Holy Spirit (*Bhuku re Matenga*) also plays a major role in the construction of men as words and works of the founder are revered, influencing all members to follow the instructions and tradition of the Church and its practice. This includes how men should behave and conduct themselves as men. Coupled with the sacred book is the Men's Card which provides a guideline and code of conduct for all male members of the church. This card serves as a manual, it shapes one's character and it defines a GRJ man. All masculine behaviours are guided by the principles listed in the men's constitution, Card and the GRJ Constitution.

Although the texts do not challenge patriarchy directly, they indicate that male dominance is not allowed, as seen by how they make ample room for women leadership. Through the text, it is evident that a GRJ man has to follow a certain behaviour pattern and that separates him from other non-GRJ men. Character and behaviour are an important part of the GRJ spirituality. Drunkenness, violence, adultery, lust (Lesson 12; 53) are not allowed. They are actually viewed as sins deserving punishment. This serves as a deterrent because being punished as a man in the GRJ is something that causes shame since the punishment involves suspension and removal of the uniform. The texts state that moral character is important as it provides a code of conduct for the members. They stipulate the behaviours that men should follow. They are clear in ways men should behave and this has had a profound impact on gender relations. The GRJ men are expected to exercise self-control; they must marry one wife and desist from being unfaithful. Adultery and fornication are punishable in the Church (Lesson 43). If one is unfaithful, membership may be revoked or one is not allowed to participate as a full member for a given time. When one becomes a member, all bad influences are healed, making men to be healed from dominant masculine behaviour such as anger and selfishness (Lesson 12). Through the GRJ Church teachings, men are influenced to be loving and respectful of others, irrespective of gender.

According to the author's textual analysis of the GRJ teachings, the construction of masculinities in the GRJ Church has proved to be favourable. Hegemonic masculinities are deconstructed among the GRJ membership, while violent and dominant behaviours are denounced as evidenced by the church constitution, the men's code of conduct and sacred text (Mutambanashe, 2010). This makes men to strive to uphold

lifestyles which minimise cases of GBV. The use of the word *Baba*, Father, in the texts referring to the founder who was female indicates the fluidity of gender and acceptance of female leadership. Matenga founded the Church in a strong colonial hierarchical structure where female leadership was unheard of (Dube, 2008: 91). During worship service, she would sit on a chair while men sat on the ground. This is an antithesis of the Shona culture whereby women sit on a lower ground and men sit on higher ground. Such a status quo is aptly illustrated through the set up in a traditional Zimbabwean hut where men sit on the stoop, *chigaramakomucha*, while women sit on the floor preparing meals. Matenga was very respectful to the authorities such as chiefs (Mutambanashe, 2010: 44). She was also highly respected by authorities and ordinary men. Her adoption of the colonial type of uniform in colonial Zimbabwe as part of the Church's uniform for men is a manifestation of colonial resistance.

The acceptance of Matenga's work and leadership encouraged women leadership not only in the church but in the families. The treatment of women as equal partners in the GRJ Church moulded male members to be accommodative. Matenga's influence has been seen in the acceptance of women as equal members by men in the GRJ Church. For instance, during worship time, women are accorded opportunities to lead and preach. However, men still have more visibility, especially in other offices that are only reserved for men such as Evangelists, *Mukoma, Sekuru* (Chief Evangelist) (Mutambanashe, 2010: 64). Although the GRJ congregants have a sitting arrangement whereby men and women sit separately during worship time, this does not denote a segregatory separation of sexes. According to the congregants, this sitting arrangement is for convenience purposes during healing performance services, that is, it allows men and women to enjoy some privacy during healing sessions in the presence of the same sex.

Revering of Matenga the founder of the GRJ Church and her teaching becomes a model for construction. What Matenga said and recorded is greatly valued by members and the power of her words shapes masculinities and femininities. Constant exhortations against infidelity and bad behaviour make one think twice about sinful ways (Lesson 12). Matenga is revered alongside the Trinity as the work of the Holy Spirit to Africa. This is evident during worship time, as members preach, they always say, "*hareruya Jehovah ngavakudzwe, Hareruya Mambo Jesu ngavakudzwe Hareruya Musiki/Matenga ngavarumbidzwe*" (Hallelujah Praise God, Hallelujah Jesus be Praised, Hallelujah Matenga be praised), making

Matenga part of the Trinity doing the work of the Holy Spirit and completing Jesus' work to Africa. The GRJ man thus is constructed through a process of being obedient through a series of church traditions, worship, teaching biblical influences of Jesus' person as an ideal man and personal convictions through prayer and participating in worship.

The GRJ Church managed to do away with the traditional use of a staff (*tsvimbo*) used in some AICs because this is perceived as a symbol of masculine power and male leadership as it is only carried by male members (Achtemeier, 1996). Culturally, a staff is passed on to the male heir at the death of the father in the family. Biblically, a staff shows leadership, authority and also protection. The overarching question then becomes, "do women need protection or if given the space they can protect themselves?" This protection concept has made women to rely on male protection such that it has caused GBV in some instances. The GRJ Church has also used symbolism in the construction of soft masculinities. Symbolism of the body (Connell, 2005: 45); deconstructing masculine bodily features such as the beard, allowing long hair for men and removing the staffs for men which is a symbol of male leadership, power and dominance. Instead of using a staff, all church members carry a palm leaves-woven *Chigurangu* (guardian angel)[1] as their protector (Mutambanashe, 2010: 112). The introduction of *Chigurangu* (Mutambanashe, 2010: 112) for both men and women assures all members that they can protect themselves while relying on God. The traditional aspect of masculine leadership symbol of *tsvimbo* (staff) was deconstructed leading to the construction of soft or liberative masculinities in the process (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012: 1; Jodamus, 2017: 68). An approach to a life of meditation and a strict lifestyle devoid of worldly pleasures such as alcohol intake and media restriction has helped in moulding a sober and 'soft' man. This has a great impact in creating healthy intimate relationships in a world of materialism that has brought rifts and violence in relationships.

The emphasis on wearing uniforms as a reminder of one's holiness and holy living has proved to be effective in men's self-restraint (Lesson 53). The uniform is worn at all times and even at work if the employers permit. The uniform not only acts as protection but makes men to practise good behaviour at all times. My own experience with the church uniform is that whenever people see an individual wearing it, they respect the one

[1] The word *Chigurangu* is the name for palm tree leaves in heavenly language according to the GRJ tradition.

wearing it and expect good behaviour and humility from such a person. With the uniform, one becomes more vigilant in living out the Christian life. It is a uniform for spiritual warfare with the devil, therefore, one does not leave room for temptation or doing bad things as doing bad makes one to take sides with the devil. The uniform depicts the wearer as a soldier, a spiritual soldier who is always ready to fight evil. Additionally, one is expected to be soft and peaceful all the time and this requires self-control. The uniform is a spiritual armour (Ephesians 6: 1–17). According to the GRJ text, the following, Lesson 53 summarises the reason behind men wearing the uniform:

> 13 "You have worn these spiritual Clothes/ uniform meant for spiritual warfare not in flesh. 14. It is not allowed to commit adultery with it, to steal, practice witchcraft, disagreeing, drunkenness, smoking, and doing all other evil works, beware and be warned when wearing it. 15. It is only meant for war with Satan. 16. This uniform is sacred and holy; you must leave all evil deeds from this day and forever. 19. These clothes are for entering into the home of Jerusalem, where milk and honey flows, and only sermons are heard. 20. If we heed what Matenga says and keep the laws, we will enter into the Holy home that we have all been prepared for. 21. If we keep on persevering, the Lord will not leave us in His holy kingdom". (Mutambanashe, 2010: 64)

While an increase in GBV has been noted both in Zimbabwe and in the African society as a whole, the GRJ Church with its spiritual nurturance can be an example to society in constructing soft masculinities, moulding men who are responsible and caring in gender relations. Men are taught self-restraint, discipline and to be gender-sensitive in worship and through the texts. This self-control produces characteristics such as "faith, knowledge and steadfastness" (Achtemeier, 1996: 994). "For Paul (1 Cor. 9: 25), self-control is not only a human achievement but linked to love, joy and peace, as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22–23)" (Achtemeier, 1996: 994). When one is disciplined and exercises self-control, then violence and use of excessive power is averted. These behaviours or characteristics promote harmony and love in gender relations. Consequently, acceptance of each other and diversities is promoted which results in minimising aggression and exclusivity in relationships. The GRJ men have been groomed to appreciate culture such as virginity testing (itself a contested practice) but not to use it to dominate and violate women and children

(Mutambanashe, 2010: 166). Marriage is entered into as a sacred institution where spouse-beating is prohibited; instead, the teaching on love and respect is emphasised. Members are taught the value of the institution of marriage. Adultery and pre-marital sexual relationships are not allowed in the GRJ Church (Lesson 43). Likewise, the practice of polygamy is prohibited in the GRJ. Therefore, the religious teachings (Mutambanashe, 2010) of the GRJ form the basis for moulding good character and reinforcing good cultural practices. The foregoing discussion on the GRJ Church has shown that harmful masculinities can be deconstructed and "the struggle for justice and the resulting peace between all peoples is at the heart of our Christian Faith and mission" (Churches in Manicaland, 2006: IV).

Conclusion

Woman leadership in the GRJ Church through its founder opened up doors towards gender mainstreaming in worship and religious organisation. Acceptance and creation of spaces for women's voices can also be noted. Through its female leader, Matenga, the GRJ Church was able to challenge dominant masculinities and cultural practices that marginalised and oppressed women. The GRJ Church became a role model for many women within and outside the church and it proved that women leadership is possible and equally effective. In the process of transforming structures, it provided a means to construct soft masculinities and an acknowledgement that dangerous masculinities need to be deconstructed. Retracing the footsteps that the nation of Zimbabwe has traversed from the colonial era till the contemporary post-colonial times, the chapter has reiterated that gender policies in leadership and development must be inclusive in religious bodies and society as a whole. It has also been reaffirmed that gender mainstreaming and empowering women for leadership to close the gap in gender inequalities in society are a must. Lastly, it must be remembered that we can learn a great deal of lessons from the example of the GRJ Church and its feminine friendly leadership and that societal socialisation processes need to shape men that are life-giving in view of the GBV that has become endemic in contemporary Zimbabwean society.

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CHAPTER 7

Exploring the Status of Women in the Zion Christian Church Since 1913

Solomon Mukora

Introduction

The Zion Christian Church (ZCC) under the leadership of Dr. Nehemiah Mutendi has the greater percentage of its population on the feminine side.[1] It is, therefore, a paradox that even though the greater percentage of its patronage is made up of women, very few women are visible in the upper echelons of power and the administrative offices of authority in the church. Thomas Kurian (2012) observes that the vocabulary of the church and the Bible is androcentric, thus making theology a male

[1] According to the Gweru urban Register for 2020, Gweru urban has 4 Coordinators each overseeing not less than 3 *tabheros* (parishes); in a total population of 12,000 church members, women constitute close to 300 with the remaining figures made up of men and *masvohwani* (ZCC youths).

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preserve and God himself a father figure. This chapter argues that, firstly, the absence of women in offices of influence in a narrow sense does not reflect the parochial character of the institution but rather it is a product of missiological scholarship's approach in analysing the African gospel to Christianity. In recent years, literature has been abound with revisionism as a leading lens in analysing institutions with the objective of situating women, driven by the ideology of feminism. Secondly, women themselves driven by the same spirit of feminism in recent years developed an appetite for reviewing their contextual value in the functioning of social institutions. In light of this, the chapter traces the role played by women in the rise and development of Mutendi's ZCC from the time of its establishment. In line with the Zimbabwean Second Republic's thrust on gender parity, the chapter explores the ZCC women's experiences and expressions as they seek for some space in the terrain perceived to be male-dominated.

The Zion Christian Church: A Historical Perspective

Sundkler traces the history of Zionism from America to South Africa in 1896 through the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion (Sundkler, 1961: 4). Aquina (1969) and Daneel (1970) used empirical research to link the Zimbabwean Zion Christian Church to South African origins through Samuel Mutendi who got the spiritual ordainment in 1913 while he was working as a police officer in the then British South Africa Police (Mutendi, 1959). *Rungano rweZion* documents significant aspects of Samuel Mutendi's early life. It traces his descent through the royal ancestry of Makuwa, Mudengedzerwa and Chirume Mushavi to the famous Rozvi Mambos (kings), Dyembewu and Chirisamuru. However, *Rungano rweZion* as a source of history for the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) has been criticized for being replete with errors (Daneel, 1971). It is recorded that as a former police official in the then Southern Africa's British South Africa Police force, Samuel Mutendi had encounters with the Holy Spirit while on duty in Hartley (corrupted as Hakireni in vernacular), now Chegutu (Mutendi, 1959).

Samuel Mutendi eventually resigned from the police force in 1921 after the recurrent spiritual sieges were causing him to violate the official protocol in the police. When he resigned from the police, Samuel Mutendi retired to his home in Bikita where he became a lay preacher in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), but he was subsequently expelled

after the spiritual manifestations resurfaced. After having been dismissed from the DRC, Samuel Mutendi joined the band of migrant labourers to South Africa, some of whom became contemporaries with him in establishing religious brands in the then Southern Rhodesia, including Andreas Shoko and, later, Masuka.[2] In Zimbabwe, Samuel Mutendi got spiritual ordainment but he was only officially baptized with water when he joined the Zion Apostolic Faith Mission (ZAFM). The ZAFM religious outfit grew out of a schism from the Zion Apostolic Church (ZAC), initially under Le Roux up to 1908 and later under Mahlangu who is credited for baptizing Engenas Lekganyane.[3]

Another school of thought in the narrative of the ZCC posits that Samuel Mutendi was a core figure in the registration of the South African ZCC, the premises which the Zimbabwean version of the ZCC uses to dispute the usual ascribed inferiority by their South African counterparts to date (Morton, 2016).[4] According to Roberts (2018), Samuel Mutendi's spiritual pedigree flows from independent divine guidance, rather than any kind of derivative authority from Lekganyane, the founder of the South African ZCC. Mutendi was the ZCC leader in Rhodesia, until splitting with Engenas' successor, Edward, in the 1950s due to increasing logistical difficulties (Daneel, 1971). Meanwhile in the then Rhodesia, Mutendi established a unique theological brand that revolved around his divine gift as a miracle worker, a prophet and a healer. He became popular for his ability to contextualize the biblical message to an African worldview (Daneel, 1971). Using the word of God as a tool, Mutendi was also an advocate of democracy in an environment constricted by colonial overtones, especially racialism in the provisions of services and amenities. Preoccupied with human well-being, Mutendi focused on exorcist healing and agro-economic development, contributing towards a strong emphasis on this worldly salvation: schools,

[2] Both later on led unique religious institutions, with Shoko leading the adopted name ZAC from SA while Masuka adopted the name ZAFM from South Africa. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, 1987.

[3] Morton, B. (2018), Engenas Lekganyane and the early ZCC: An unauthorized History, Books mango.

[4] Barry Morton in his paper entitled *Mutendi's Biography Cannot be true* (July 2016) disputed the sequence in Mutendi's sacred text, *Rungano rweZion,* providing empirical evidence to dispute some of the claims in the *Rungano rweZion* despite its wide usage as an important source document on the history of Mutendi and the ZCC.

church and a faith-healing "hospital" (Daneel, 1971). The colonial authorities were very desperate to impede Samuel Mutendi's work that some legislative pieces were cited out of context but applied, for example, the draconian Ordinance Number 7 of 1912 (Govere, 2003). Karanga chiefs, being colonial officials who advanced the agenda of the colonial administration, were antithetical to Mutendi for his thrust and criticism of traditionalism and its sacred rituals as a centre of power, especially rain-making ceremonies. The conflict revolving around ethnic rivalry between Chief Mukanganwi and Samuel Mutendi due to perceptions that had been built around his personality as a mischievous element in society were possibly fanned by the mainline religious outfits and they resulted in Samuel Mutendi being banished to Gokwe in 1965 (Daneel, 1971). In Gokwe, Mutendi established his new administrative head office at Defe where his remains are interred after his demise in 1976. Upon his passing on, the church leadership passed on to his son, the current (at the time of writing) Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi who has taken the church to greater heights in terms of developmental focus, with pilgrims in different parts of the world. The church branch network is all over Zimbabwe and in different parts of the world, with significant inroads having been made into former Islamic strongholds such as the United Arab Emirates, as well as China. Having briefly presented the early history of the ZCC, the next section proceeds to focus on the role of women, with a specific focus on Samuel Mutendi's wives.

Samuel Mutendi's Wives

Beyond their household chores such as household care as wives and mothers, Mutendi's wives had critical utilitarian evangelical functions in the church. Mutendi had many wives, at one point numbering up to 15. These included, Mai[5] Tsungi, Mai Joleka and Mai Solomon. They were the first group of women to be in contact with the church from its formative phase. Among other responsibilities, they gave lessons on the management of a polygamous household, a common set up in the ZCC family, dancing and they provided leadership to Ruwadzano (ZCC Women's Association) (Daneel, 2001:23). They also provided counselling to women who came to seek assistance regarding their barrenness and

[5] Mai means, "Mother of," as well as, "Mrs" in Shona.

those that were subjected to physical abuse by their husbands. Mutendi's wives cultivated a sense of belonging among women followers. Their contribution had a considerable value to the membership because it provided divine validation and guidance for female behaviour, and they provided supportive communities in which women's daily struggles for healing and well-being could take place (Robert, 2006).

Samuel Mutendi's wives participated beyond being custodians of the ZCC culture. They were a stabilizing force, particularly after the passing on of Samuel Mutendi in 1976. They all chose to continue living with their children in the Zion city founded by Bishop Mutendi, continuing with the legacy of their late husband, that of prayer and preaching (Daneel, 1971: 276). This confirms Mwaura's conviction that women are animators of the church and society, not only during times of crisis, but even in times of stability. Samuel Mutendi's wives, therefore, constitute the earliest class of women in the church by virtue of their proximity to the founder of the church, hence, they were and they still remain the custodians of the ZCC culture. Perhaps, this justifies Dana Robert's assertion that Churches are the chief form of social organization for southern African women and women are considered the backbone of the church (Robert, 1996: 2).

Prophetesses and Midwives in the Zion Christian Church

Faith healing and deliverance are critical elements in the ZCC. One of the specialties for Bishop Samuel Mutendi, the founder of the ZCC, was *kurapa chibereko* (the ability to end barrenness). Testimonies of miracles of childbirth after having been healed by Mutendi were an important contributory factor in the growth of Zionism, making it one of the largest indigenous churches in Zimbabwe (Daneel, 2001: 321). The ancillary function to the process of midwifery rested on *vana mbuya nyamukuta* (midwives). One of the most popular midwives in the entire church was Mbuya[6] Yanisai Brenda Musvavi Mutevhure from Zaka. Her popularity was of international repute. She is famed for having attended to the wife of one former leading state official as she sought answers to the issue of her fertility. Mbuya Pasi, Mbuya Guda and Mbuya Gonani were also

[6] Mbuya means, "Grandmother," a title of respect.

popular midwives—birth attendees who have played a very important role in the birth stories in the church guided by the Holy Spirit. Against the background that studies on religion in Africa have predominantly centred on the role of men, both expatriate and local researchers have generally been silent on women's involvement (Phiri, 1997:45). It is, therefore, pertinent that special attention be paid towards unpacking midwifery as a critical tool for healing in the ZCC which has had a significant impact in drawing new converts to the church.

Samuel Mutendi and his successor, Nehemiah, were able to contextualize Christianity to make faith relevant to the African milieu. Omoyajowo (2017) notes that if Christianity is to survive in Africa, it must be relevant to the cultural context of the people. Child-bearing and the transition process from virginity to motherhood are problematic bio-cultural issues. However, there is a belief that some child-bearing problems are a product of an accrual of curses during stages of development towards womanhood. In this regard, virginity tests are deemed critical for they are seen as safeguarding the purity of girls. While the system of virginity tests is common in the Johane Marange church, the midwives in the ZCC also conducted them during early times. An incentive to the operations of the ZCC midwives is the regularization of their practice through acceptance by the medical health practitioners.

A medical practitioner at Gweru General Hospital who preferred anonymity is famed for referring complex deliveries to the ZCC Wellness Centre at Windsor Park in the same city. In Zaka, expecting women with delivery complications are referred by the medical staff to Mbuya Mutevhure. A seasoned midwife at Ndanga (name withheld to protect confidentiality) confirmed that Mbuya Mutevhure was capable of transforming deliveries destined for caesarean section to normal deliveries. Secondly, the Registrar of Births and Deaths accepts confirmation from the ZCC as a condition for accessing birth registration certificates. This critical role played by midwives in the AICs in general and the ZCC in particular invokes the need for the revision of a history that has been written from a male perspective; one which merely depicts women as helpers, totally absent in shaping African Christianity, to a balanced historiography that must integrate women's perspectives and experiences (Mwaura, 2007).

The appeal of the ZCC's faith-healing ministry had premises in both colonial, and spiritual and cultural foundations. Firstly, the colonial government had a centralized system of providing health care.

Throughout the period of colonialism and the entire period of Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953–1963), the government prioritized urban centres in medical provision. For that reason, only major cities and towns had referral medical centres. Probably, this was driven by the need to centralize medical provision to areas of the colonial commercial interest while neglecting rural areas, especially those areas that had no value to the colonial economy. As a result, the ZCC midwives and birth attendees appealed to the black majority who were not capable of financing journeys to urban centres for medical attention. Secondly, the ZCC midwifery section appealed to cultural and non-medical concerns which were a source of birth complications. A villager in Chief Nhema's area who preferred anonymity pointed out that even government ministers and other high ranking government officials came for consultations for answers to issues of their fertility-related concerns. Mbuya Mutevhure was also said to be capable of assisting couples who wished to shift from conceiving children of a particular gender to the opposite sex, for instance, some may be having girls only and may have wanted boys (*kuchinja nyoka*). Thus, the services provided by the ZCC midwives are an important tool for contextualizing Christianity so that it responds to the African worldview.

Ruwadzano: A Complex Mix of Women in the Zion Christian Church

Mwaura's (2007) assertion that women's presence in the church has not been congruent to their presence in the power structures of the churches which are male-dominated is contestable in the ZCC. From the simple assemblage of women in the ZCC that was led and mentored by Samuel Mutendi's wives, the ZCC Ruwadzano has literally taken over the church running from behind to influence major decisions, as well as the church's developmental process. To respond to the feminist and gender scholars who interrogate the fixation of women behind men, this chapter shares Kurian's (2011) observation that generally, Christianity has confirmed rather than weakened traditional patriarchal social structures. In light of this observation, the fact that the ZCC's leadership and decision-making forums have remained largely masculine is not necessarily a church problem, instead, the AICs have continued to mirror the traditional society which was masculine in character without watering down the utilitarian value of women. In addition, Okeme (1999) observes that

the debate around the absence of women from top decision-making levels is a product of a wrong lens having been used to analyse the African social institutions. Okeme (1999) believes that the agenda by Western feminists prioritizes African women as they fight on their behalf although they do not understand or are willfully ignoring the African context, hence, Western feminism has always regarded African women as oppressed by men.

While the feminist scholarship considers women to be struggling to access leadership or to have been pushed to the periphery through patriarchal arguments, Salim (2014) observes the presence of transformational models of organizational leadership in analysing the leadership roles of women according to which women are considered to be the force that develops future generations in smallest organizations such as the family, especially considering that the ZCC essentializes the family unit (*tabhero yemumba;* family parish). The model further argues that women are coming up in social scenarios where they are taking up leadership roles that match or even exceed those of men in the same roles. The unique roles of ZCC women as midwives and prophetesses are striking examples. During the colonial times, men were regularly in transit as they sought waged labour in urban areas to sustain the demands of the colonial economy. In a census on the church membership conducted by Aquina (1967) comparing the three districts which were then, Fort Victoria, Chilimanzi and Zinyaningwe; Fort Victoria which is an urban centre was found to have the least members, as if to confirm the point that it was composed of men who had gone to town for waged labour. This, therefore, saddled women with the responsibility of leading the church in the absence of men, thus confirming the value of women as they could establish leadership structures even in the absence of men while establishing functional collaboration with men when it was necessary.

Michael West (2002) analyses the rise of African women in the mainline churches and argued that the rise of the Ruwadzano was an attempt to seek expression outside the usual environment of colonial oppression. In the same fashion, the Ruwadzano, a concept common in mainline churches, gave the ZCC women a platform for expressing themselves outside the realms of the usual male domination. In the ZCC, the Ruwadzano has been a vehicle for women's empowerment. Under the leadership of Mai Matunya (at the time of writing), the ZCC Ruwadzano has been able to turn their numerical superiority to challenge men in

revenue generation for the church. At parish (*tabhero*) level, the proportion of male to female population is by a fraction of 1:3. This strategically places women in positions of influence in revenue compared to their male counterparts. West (2002) has analysed the rise to prominence of women in terms of elitism. The Ruwadzano platforms have been viewed as centres for scaffolding the rise of some women to power.

In the context of the ZCC, the women's league, Ruwadzano, has had their own fundraising projects and programmes that were exclusive to them. These included *Chipoto* (small pot) which is symbolic to all women who have the desire for an improved home environment. *Chipoto* is a special tithe in the ZCC where women present this offering to God, requesting that God blesses their homes, marriages and their families. Ruwadzano was also responsible for the popular *Inozara Chete* (it shall be filled, against all odds), a programme which began after the completion of the ZCC Complex at Mbungo in 2010. At the inauguration conference in April 2010, the Bishop thanked the church members for contributing towards the majestic church. He went on to proclaim that the Lord was delighted with such practices but he would be happier to see the church being filled with items to make the Lord happy. Following those proclamations, the Ruwadzano embarked on various fundraising campaigns that led to the purchasing of items such as sugar, cement and others.

Besides designing fundraising projects for the church, the Ruwadzano is also a vehicle for women's empowerment as they embark on women's empowerment projects. They initiate several projects, including confectionary, soap making, gardening, poultry and others. All these undertakings derive from the Ruwadzano women's aspiration to mould a well-groomed ZCC woman who has resources that can be committed to the house of the Lord; a self-sufficient woman and mother who is capable of adequately providing for her family.

Deconstructing the Myth of Patrilineal Dominance in the Zion Christian Church

Feminist scholarship appears to have been less balanced in its evaluation of AICs. Aquina (1967: 19) notes that as early as 1963, women were allowed to preach and the bishop's wives provided mentorship to the preachers. Despite this finding which is backed by empirical research, she continues to characterize AICs as marked by gender contestations emanating from diversity in the interpretation of divine laws (Aquina,

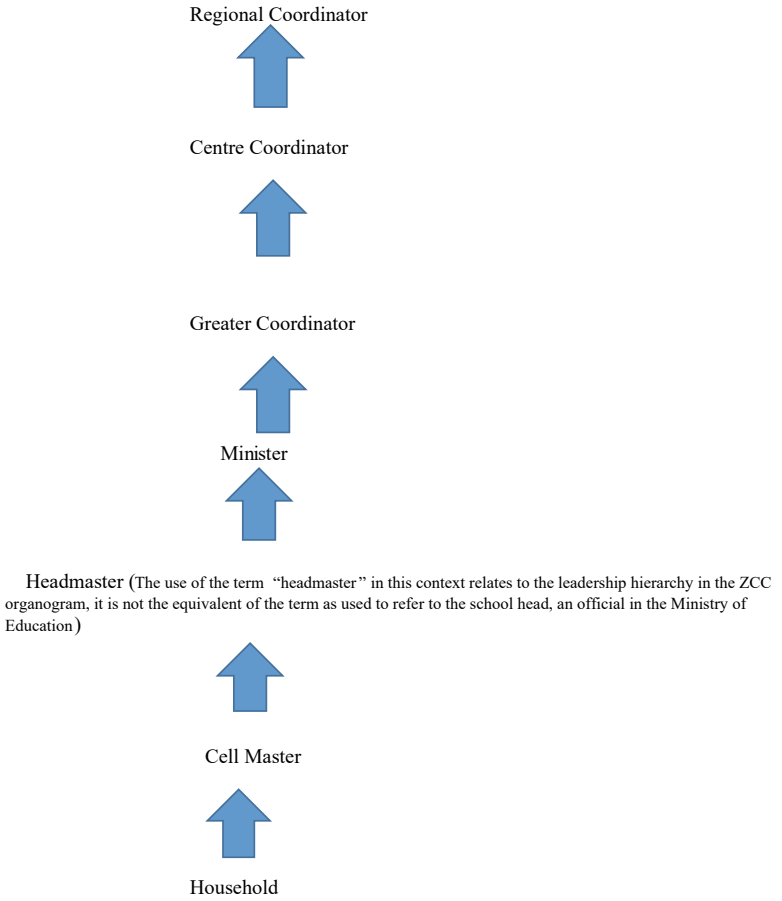
1967). Similar observations were made by Robert who noted that the indigenous churches typically restrict women's leadership roles, and forbid the formation of women's organizations, while allowing exceptional women to become healers (Robert, 1996). These remarks are unfortunately contradictory to content and context as they do not reflect the realities in the ZCC and are probably driven by the failure to understand the African context where women have always been leading from below (Bourdillon, 1987).

Secondly, Mookgo Solomon Kgatle (2019) reflects on the history of Christina Nku's leadership in St John's Apostolic Faith Mission to demonstrate the capabilities of women leadership, gendering the leadership of the AICs. In doing so, he raises critical challenges affecting African women's membership in the church. Firstly, he notes that women are victims of gender stereotypes inscribed by society. They face the challenge of patriarchy, however, this is not necessarily the AICs' problem, but a societal problem. Secondly, he raises the challenges which are theological in nature, for instance, the prohibition of women from actively participating in worship services while menstruating. In light of these prohibitions, biological restrictions and limitations to women's participation in religious worship and rituals are not necessarily a ZCC problem but a societal problem.

Women in the church have been able to circumvent this hurdle by expressing themselves through the structures designed to represent women, such as the Ruwadzano fellowship group. In a similar fashion, a man who has accidentally released sperms is deemed unfit for the pulpit until a certain period of time, hence, the ZCC should be credited for creating parity in the application of Leviticus laws. However, more importantly, women in the ZCC have designed strategies of circumventing biblical prohibitions rooted in the Levitical laws. There is a pre-church session (*dare*) which is open for the participation for all. During the *dare*, Levitical laws that sideline the participation of women due to certain biological processes do not apply. For that reason, women, including those who will be going through their menstrual cycle, are given room to actively participate. Thus, considering divine laws as prohibitive as basis for patriarchy in the ZCC is not in sync with reality. In addition, while women cannot perform such duties as the laying on of hands, they are authorized to carry administrative functions parallel to those of their husbands. In the ZCC, the wife of a minister conducts similar duties to

those of her husband on women congregants, just as the wife of a bishop has been playing the role of moulding the women in the church.

Besides leadership roles by attachment, in the year 2020, the ZCC promulgated a twelve member commitment in its management. Below is the pyramid of authority in the ranks of the ZCC.



As illustrated in the leadership pyramid above, the household is the smallest unit in the ZCC which feeds into all other authority levels. The household ranges in size from a single person to single parent families

headed by either the mother or father, or to a newly married family up to mega families, especially those in a monogamous set up.[7] This household unit allows for situational leadership roles thus women can still lead in the absence of men in this unit. Household units form what is called a Cell led by the Cell Master. Up to 8 households form a Cell. A cell is under the leadership of a Cell Master who is responsible for cascading down the communication passed down to him by the headmaster.

The headmaster is in charge of the local parish. The headmaster who leads a parish is either a deacon or an Evangelist. A local parish (*tabhero*) is made up of up to 4 Cells. However, in his operation, the headmaster works with a twelve-member committee which constitutes his secretariat. In the twelve-member committee that is presided over by the headmaster, some posts are reserved for women. While members can still vote to choose an official, they are chosen from the pool of women. These include the teacher for the Local Parish Women's League and her vice, the Sunday school teacher and her vice. According to the 2020 census, there are 1500 local parishes in Zimbabwe. This translates to 1500 headmasters and 3000 leaders of the Women's League at local parish level guaranteed and others who may be voted to other portfolios which they can compete for against their male counterparts.

From the local parish level, the next level is that of the Minister. The Minister oversees headmasters. In some cases, the Minister is in charge of up to three headmasters or even more. The Minister may however have a *tabhero* in his constituency. Just like the case of the headmaster, the Minister also works with a twelve-member committee including women who are automatic members. This includes the Women's League Teacher and her vice, as well as the Sunday School Teacher and her vice.

From the *nyika* which is under the leadership of a Minister, the next level is that of a Greater which is headed by a Coordinator. The position of Coordinator is fairly recent in the hierarchy of the ZCC authority. Since then, the post of Coordinator has expanded to a three-tier level to include the Greater level Coordinator, the Centre level Coordinator and the Regional level Coordinator. The Greater Coordinator oversees the Greater and gets the line of communication from the Centre

[7] Polygamy used to be common among church members in the ZCC since it was directed by traditional patterns as well as some biblical verses. However, Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi outlawed it and instead introduced white wedding systems that emphasize monogamous marriages in the church.

Coordinator. The Greater Coordinator, just like others, operates with a twelve-member committee with automatic positions reserved for women. From the Greater Coordinator, the next level is that of the Centre Coordinator. According to the 2020 census, there are 41 centres and each is under the leadership of a Centre Coordinator. A Centre is made up of Greaters and it serves as the reception point for Communion. The centres combined together make a Region or a province. In the ZCC, there are 17 regions. A region is led by the regional Coordinator which functions just as other lower-level committees described already.

The leadership and committees' description of the ZCC has distinct lines of leadership designs which appear very patriarchal but opportunities for equal participation have been opened. The face of patriarchy has been diluted by broadening the base and opening up avenues for an all-inclusive participation. The utilitarian and functional value of women has been narrowly interrogated because the analysis of the debate on women involvement has been restricted to their presence in the hierarchy of power. The absence of women from the ordained posts and duties of responsibility can no longer be the solid and solitary foundation for labelling the ZCC masculine and gendered because women's opportunities for leadership are abundant, considering the opportunities they have to influence decisions. They are present in the executive posts in committees that make things happen in the ZCC, especially in view of the transformational models of leadership which appreciate leadership as not necessarily phenomenally premised on attachments in front posts. Kurian (2011) observes that women's biological frailties have been exploited to consign them the permanent subordinate status while their biological strengths have been harnessed to benefit patriarchy. In light of this, women's biology has not necessarily been hindering their participation in the church as in the traditional convictions in the mode of Augustine, Aquinas and Aristotle (Davies, 2019), but their biology has been useful in shaping the theological definitions and patterns in the church, particularly its sacred values. ZCC women have made significant inroads in the past forty years as they have accessed authority and power at various levels of administration in the church as the hierarchies of power in the organograms of the committees confirmed.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the role of the ZCC women in leadership. While their roles are usually subordinate to men, they are functional and have been an important vehicle in the development of the church. Women in their various capacities, whether as subordinate or otherwise, have continued to mutate in terms of their qualities in the society, with education being a significant agent in the way women perceive themselves. This has also transformed the way they respond to their duties and responsibilities in the church. Their ancillary functions in midwifery, prophecy and as wives and mothers have been very critical in shaping the ideology of the church. The ZCC women cannot be considered to be static, as they have continued to evolve their qualities responding to the trends of modernity as women consciousness through waves of feminism and womanism continue to inform their class consciousness. As individuals or as the general assembly, *Ruwadzano* women continue to generate and oversee meaningful developmental programmes for the church, particularly though fundraising programmes such as *Chipoto* and *Inozara chete*, among others, while those women that are close to the Bishop's family continue to perform the role of giving orientation to new church recruits on the culture and expectations of the church. Women have continued to inform the sacred components of the church; hence women are very critical in the historiography of the ZCC from its inception to the present. They play significant leadership roles that have been detailed in this chapter.

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PART II

Women's Leadership in New Religious Movements and Cultural Traditions

CHAPTER 8

The Emergence of Churches and Ministries Founded/led by Women in Zimbabwe

Mpumelelo Moyo

Introduction

Women's role and contribution to the growth and development of Christianity has been grossly undermined by scholars of African Christianity. Women congregants make up the majority of worshippers in Christian churches in Zimbabwe. However, women continue to be considered as clients in the churches. Their roles are often considered secondary to those of men. The situation is worse in rural communities where patriarchal structures are dominant. However, traditional African societies have always acknowledged the spiritual role of women as powerful spiritual mediums and healers. Although the coming of Western missionaries did a lot to empower women, the Victorian mindset had an indelible contribution towards hindering and discouraging women's progress. Women felt suffocated within the missionary churches, where they were barred

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from any positions of real power. This was particularly true of single mothers, divorced and separated women who were rarely given positions of authority in mainline churches.

African Initiated Churches presented an opportunity for women to participate in leadership. According to Philomena Mwaura (2005: 417), "they reclaimed the pneumatic and charismatic experience that was suppressed in mainline Christianity and this resonated well with African spirituality." African Initiated Churches changed the face of Christianity in Africa, by their enlarging of religious space for women (Mwaura 2005: 416). These included personalities and movements such as Mai Chaza of Guta RaJehovah Church (Dube, 2008), Christina Nku of St John's Faith Mission of South Africa (Landman 2006; Kgatle, 2019), Alice Lenshin of the Lumpa Church (Kaunda 2012; Roberts 1972), Captain Abiodun Akinsowon of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church (Babalola, 2016; Omoyajowo 182) and Gaundencia Aoko of Legio Maria (Kustenbauder 2009, 2012). The emergence of women founders has paved way for women's full participation in the life of the church.

Pentecostal churches have opened up opportunities for women leaders as mobility is determined by both charisma and educational achievement (Biri 2012, 2014; Gabaitse 2012; Machingura 2013). In Pentecostal theology, both men and women are equal channels of God's power. The attitude towards women's leadership has been more positive. Women in these churches have more ministerial freedom than in African Initiated Churches. Women are not just spiritual mothers, but they exercise legal authority in executive administrative positions. The women-founded churches have been able to address specifically women's concerns and challenges such as infertility. In Zimbabwe, women's leadership in Pentecostal churches was associated initially with the rise of wives of charismatic Pentecostal leaders, for instance; Apostle Eunor Guti (wife of Ezekiel Guti, of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, ZAOGA), Apostle Petunia Chiriseri (wife of the late, Charles Chiriseri, His Presence Ministries), Dr Faith Wutawunashe (former wife of Andrew Wutawunashe, Family of God Church), Prophetess Ruth Makandiwa (wife of Emmanuel Makandiwa, United Family International Church) and others founded ministries alongside their husbands.

However, in more recent years, there has been a rise of a new breed of women, who are founders of churches in their own right, such as Bishop Patience Itai Hove, the founder and president of Elshaddai Ministries; Apostle Florence Kanyati, founder of ZOE Life Changing Ministries;

Apostle Lillian Bwanya of the Spirit Filled International Ministries, Prophetess Tecla Gutsa, founder of God's Power House International Ministries and Prophetess Memory Matimbire of the Daughters of Virtue Ministries. These women have experienced a calling to ministry. They have undergone a religious experience where they felt God inviting them to ministry. Their roles are different from those of the pastors' wives who became leaders in ministry by virtue of their relationship with their husbands, not because of some transforming religious experience. However, the status of women remains contested due to patriarchy which is promoted by historical, cultural, theological and socioeconomic factors.

This chapter focuses on the emergence and status of women as founders and leaders of new religious movements. It especially seeks to examine why women leaders have tended to focus on women's ministries and why some women leaders continue to promote patriarchy and biblical hermeneutics that subordinate women, instead of empowering women. The chapter, therefore, concludes by advocating for the need for women who are already in leadership to do more to promote and empower fellow women to participate fully in church life.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The methodology used for this research is a combination of desktop literature review of the life history of female founders/leaders of churches and ministries, as well as telephonic interviews with some of the leaders and congregants. In terms of theory, the research is guided by the liberal feminist theory, such as has been expressed by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. It conceives of freedom as personal autonomy. Liberal feminists hold the view that women should independently make important decisions about their own lives. It places emphasis on the inclusion of women in all sectors of life including leadership in the workplace, church and society. The chapter also examines the laws, policies and strategies pertinent to women's inclusion and participation in leadership within the church. Tapping into the liberal feminist theory will, therefore, help the discussion in this chapter to pay close attention to the power structures and the social context which shape the lived experiences of women church leaders. The main contention raised in this chapter is that African women, with particular reference to Zimbabwe, have been overwhelmingly disadvantaged in relation to decision-making, planning and policy formulation in the church. The chapter also underscores the fact

that women church founders/leaders have a lot to offer, such that given access and a chance to freely contribute, women can make a whole world of difference in transforming the church in Africa (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 2005:5).

Leadership in the New Testament and Early Church

Scholars have not consistently acknowledged women's contribution in the propagation of the gospel and spread of Christianity. In the Early Church, while male leaders may have been more prominent and numerous, women such as Priscilla (Acts 18:26), Junia (Romans 16:7), Phoebe (Romans 16:1–2), Nympha (Colossians 4:15), Appiah (Philemon 2), Eudia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2–3), Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11) and many others feature among prominent leaders in the New Testament. Women were subordinate to men in Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman society because of the androcentric framework. Jesus called both men and women to service in his Church. In the first century, both men and women exercised the ministries of discipleship, they also served as apostles, prophets, deacons, proclaimers of the gospel and leaders of worship, despite their "unequal status." Stanley Grenz notes that the gospel "radically altered the position of women, elevating them to a partnership with men unparalleled in the first century society" (Grenz and Kjesbo 1995:78). The gender as well as the marital status of the minister seemed relevant for ministerial office. The New Testament outlines conditions necessary for ministry such as faith in the risen Jesus and gifting by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:11). The primary model for New Testament ministry was one of service. The Christian leader was to serve both God and the people through total self-offering even unto death.

In the New Testament, there is evidence pertaining the participation of women in various positions within the church as disciples, deacons, prophets, teachers and apostles, with the sole exception of the office of the elder which was rooted in patriarchal tradition. The position of elder eventually ceased to exist and it was merged with other offices. Junia is referred to by Paul as an outstanding Apostle (Romans 16:7), Philip's daughters were highly respected as prophets and leaders in the early church (Acts 21:9). The fourth-century historian Eusebius mentions Philip's daughters and their fame several times (Eusebius, History of the Church 5.17.3). Women were also evangelists responsible for preaching the gospel. The

New Testament mentions Euodia and Syntyche of Philippi who were co-workers of Paul (Philippians 4:2–3), together with Phoebe, whom Paul describes as both a *diakonos* and a *prostatis* (literally meaning "one who stands before") a leader (Romans 16:1–2) (Giles, 1995). Paul uses the term *diakonos* to refer to a minister with a sacred commission. Phoebe was a deacon and leader or patron of the church at Cenchreae who travelled the world as an evangelist (Ellis, 1993). The New Testament lists a number of women who were leaders of local churches, such as Priscilla (Acts 18:24–26, Romans 16:3–5, 1 Corinthians 16:19), Lydia (Acts 16:14–15, 40), Nympha (Colossians 4:15) and Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11). These women ministered as pastors and teachers.

The Old Testament Levitical model had developed connotations of power and status, sexism and patriarchy. The ministerial model of Levitical priesthood found in the Old Testament is absent from the New Testament pages, nor should it be applied to contemporary Christian ministry, where women exercise various ministries. However, in the second century onwards, the preoccupation with patriarchy, hierarchical status and power often played a significant role in the motivation of Christian leaders. Women scholars such as Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1983), Musa Dube (1997), Teresa Okure (1988, 1992, 2002) and Madipoane Masenya (1995), have long realized that the interpretation of scriptural texts about women was largely influenced by the androcentric orientation of male commentators. It is also apparent in historiography, methodology and conceptual tools which express the marginality and invisibility of women. These studies have predominantly centred on the role of men and have generally been silent on women's roles and participation in church life. It is not surprising that the New Testament provides no discussion of the role of women in the ministry of Jesus or the Early Church, but only occasional and limited information.

The responsibility for ministry or service was shared by all depending on diverse charisms as attested in I Corinthians 12: 28 and Ephesians 4:11. Through a historical–critical reflection of the New Testament, there is no evidence that indicates that one group controlled or exercised all ministries in the Church. Women were instrumental in the founding of churches (Acts 18:2, 18–19, I Corinthians 16:19 and Romans 16:3–5). Women also exercised leadership roles (Romans 16:1–2, 6, 12; Philippians 4:2–3).

It is also important to note that in the New Testament, there are no texts which address the specific question of women and Church leadership

positions. Only three epistolary texts address the issue of women in the assembly, and these are no more than disciplinary regulations to proper conduct. The exclusion of women from Church leadership positions can hardly be deduced from these passages. Jesus did not ordain the Twelve, according to the gospels. He appointed them on the model of the patriarchs, who were sons of Jacob, to "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" in the new age (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). It is only this eschatological role that is exclusive to the Twelve. To use the example of the twelve as a norm for excluding women from leadership would be a misreading of the text and experience of the early church. One would have to appeal to other historical and logical grounds (because the circle of the Twelve ended with the death of the last one). In the early Church, the Twelve were part of a wider circle of leaders and did not constitute a separate leadership hierarchy. The term apostle initially associated with the Twelve, has a broader usage to include many others such as Paul, James, Barnabas and Junia.

Western Missionaries

Women in Africa were instrumental in the growth, development and shaping of Christianity in Africa. However, until recently, scholars placed little or no attention on the contribution of women in the propagation of the gospel and the growth of Christianity. Elizabeth Isichei (1997) and Bengt Sundkler and Steed (2000) emphasize that women were often the first converts and the most enthusiastic local evangelists. Women even sacrificed their own resources in the spreading of the gospel. It is noted by Sundkler and Steed (2000) that though women appear invisible, women are the pillars of the parish, they take care of the local church and its worship. Women dominate the religious space in Africa, although they are absent from the echelons of power in the churches. Women are the protagonists of the Church in Africa.

According to Adrian Hastings (1989: 38), a number of factors contributed to the conversion of women to Christianity. First, the message of equality of sexes in Christianity was attractive. Women were taught that they were equal, free and responsible individuals. Secondly, African women experienced Christianity as empowering. It empowered them to challenge the patriarchal world and traditions such as the killing of twins and views on witchcraft. The vulnerable women such as widows found solace in the Christian message and the interest of missionaries in the

girl child assured the girls that they too were important. According to John Baur (1994: 410), the Roman Catholic Nuns enhanced the human dignity of women and hastened her emancipation. Thirdly, missionaries exaggerated the marginalization of women as beasts of burden in traditional communities and wanted to do away with customs such as *lobola* (bride price) and polygamy in order to liberate the woman.

Sundkler and Steed (2000: 679) point out that "the introduction of the cash economy served to emphasize men's superiority and women's inferior position as obedient minors." The decline in women's status was weakened as economic and cultural forces turned against her. The Victorian missionaries were from a largely patriarchal society and their attitudes seemed to find resonance in African traditional society. Sundkler and Steed (2000: 681), attest to the ambivalent role of the church in being catalysts for women's liberation and her complicity in their subordination. They also state that:

> On the one hand, the Church had opened up new opportunities for women through education for girls and through roles for local leadership. On the other hand, there operated, in and through the Churches, discriminatory practices upheld by divine authority. (Sundkler & Steed, 2000: 679)

Women were restricted by the role attributed to them by the androcentric and patriarchal society and Church. Women in missionary Churches were at the bottom of the rung. However, it must be stated that women did not take this oppression meekly, but soon found expression in women's capacities to assume leadership in the Church.

Manyano/Ruwadzano

Many scholars have written on the contribution of African women to the growth of Christianity through the *Ruwadzano/Manyano* like Barbara Moss (1992), Fannie Solomon Mkhwanazi (2002), Beverly Haddad (2004) and Madise M. & Lebeloane L. (2008). It was in the *Manyano* that women in Africa first experienced liberation and power in mainline churches. The *Manyano* brought women from the shadows into the forefront of church life. The *Ruwadzano/Manyano* were originally a Methodist and Congregationist sorority. In Zimbabwe, the *Manyano/Ruwadzano* is the name given to a prayer movement dedicated

to Church women who meet for prayer, fellowship and common social concerns. These women's groups are found in mainline churches such as the Anglican Mothers' Union, Lutheran Prayer Women and in the Roman Catholic Church they are referred to as *Ambuya* Anna and *Chita CheHosi Yedenga*. Women in the *Manyano* attended to the supportive functions of the Church: housekeeping, teaching of children and the youth, secretarial, fundraising, parish outreach and renewal and the choir. The *Manyanos* became very powerful women's forums or organizations, through which women could air their grievances and concerns to the church leadership. Women in these organizations became a force to reckon with and the male-dominated leadership could no longer ignore such a formidable force. The two world wars forced women to assume many of the jobs formerly held by men and women began to enter professional fields such as law and medicine. Resultantly, women began to ask for more participation and authority in the Church. Regrettably, mainline churches in Africa did not provide women with leadership or ministerial roles in their churches.

Women in African Initiated Churches

These are autonomous groups with an African leadership and membership. These churches arose as a response to Western Missionary evangelization. They are the product of the interface between Western Christianity and African traditions and religion. They have given Christianity a distinctively African flavour. These African Initiated Churches have provided women with a chance to recover their traditional status and positions that had been undermined in mission churches. In African religions, women functioned as *masvikiro* (mediums), *izangoma* (diviners), *n'anga* (herbalists), prophetesses, and priestesses. These traditional roles became a resource for women founders of churches to draw from. The AICs empowered women and accorded them spaces for participation and leadership.[1]

[1] This concurs with the perspective raised in a chapter appearing in this volume authored by Canisius Mwandayi entitled "Religio-cultural 'clamps' on female leadership in Zimbabwe: towards a liberating hermeneutic in mainline churches and African Initiated Churches (AICs)".

Women in African Initiated Churches and Neo-Pentecostal Churches have experienced a measure of ministerial freedom and equality unparalleled in mainline churches. Women in polygamous unions who had experienced rejection in mission churches found liberation in AICs (Mwaura 2005). In AICs, women found opportunities for participation in worship and leadership. AICs addressed women's needs with women's specific ministries dealing with problems such as infertility, maternity care, motherhood and marriage. The founding of churches by women has been an act of liberation and self-determination (Bourdillon, 1976; Daneel, 2000; Dube, 2008; Hackett, 1995; Mwaura, 2005; Sibanda, 2017). Women founders of churches are not a recent phenomenon in Africa. One of the most famous among African founders was Kimba Vita, popularly known as Dona Beatrice of the Kongo, who in 1704 founded the Antonian movement. She had an ecstatic experience and she claimed to have died and resurrected, she also claimed that she was the reincarnation of St. Anthony. She proclaimed an anti-colonial gospel and held that the messiah would come to restore the Kongo to its former glory. Her "attempt to organize an African church with black saints and an indigenous hierarchy presented a challenge to the Portuguese Roman Catholic Church" (Anderson, 2002:48). She was accused of heresy and was burnt on a stake in 1706. To many Africans, she became a national heroine and a martyr.

Although Donna Beatrice broke the glass ceiling in the foundation and leadership of a New Religious Movement, other women would only follow suit two centuries later. In Zimbabwe, Mai Chaza (1914–1960) was that woman who founded *Guta raJehovah* (City of Jehovah) in 1954 (Lillian Dube, 2008). Like many other women founders such as Dona Beatrice and Alice Lenshina Mulenga Lubusha of the Lumpa Church in Chinsali District of Zambia, she had a death and resurrection experience. She left her husband claiming to have had revelations to lead a celibate life, preaching to and healing, particularly barren women, the infirm and blind. Her fame as a healer spread in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa. Initially, she operated within the Methodist Church where she was a member, however, due to challenges from the church authorities, she eventually created a separate organization, the Guta RaJehovah Church. She conducted herself as a traditional woman ritualist, drawing upon traditional methods of healing among the Shona. She died in 1960 bequeathing leadership to a Malawian man, Mapaulos, who is alleged to have been possessed by the spirit of Mai Chaza.

The AICs provided opportunities for many African women founders such as Maria Lalau who founded the Deima Church in the Ivory Coast, Grace Tani founded the Church of the Twelve Apostles in 1918 in Ghana, Christinah Nku of St John's Apostolic Faith Mission in 1933 in South Africa, Alice Lenshina who founded the Lumpa Church in 1954 in Zambia and Gaudencia Aoko who started the Legio Maria in 1963 in Kenya. There are many other less prominent women founders of AICs who too have contributed to the development of Christianity in Africa.

The road, however, has not been easy because women in AICs face the challenge of patriarchy which is deeply embedded in African culture. Women are not afforded equal opportunities to their male counterparts, they are at the centre of all activities and thus they make immensely significant contributions to the life of the church (Mapuranga, 2013). Ordinarily, women in the AICs do not hold any office, whereas men can move up the hierarchy. According to Sibeko and Haddad (1997:85), women are excluded from performing baptisms and distributing Holy Communion. There is also a pervasive attitude arising from a complex interplay of cultural practice and the Levitical texts that women are "unclean" as a result of menstruation. In AICs, when women are going through their menstruation cycle, they are not allowed to perform some religious duties such as serving in the ministry of healing, but they are allowed to prophesy. Women prophets were not part of the established male hierarchy. Women did not present a threat to the status quo and could freely challenge male hegemony.

Mwaura (2005) notes that although women were excluded from positions of decision-making and leadership structures, women prophets and healers had spiritual power, and authority in dealing with women's gender-specific problems of infertility, sickness and family problems. In some instances, they would override male decisions in their spiritual capacities. Oduro attests that while churches planted by Western missionaries were debating on the scriptural appropriateness of ordaining women, the AICs were placing more emphasis on the giftedness of women rather than their gender. As a result, thousands of people, including men, followed female founders of AICs (Oduro, 2008: 67). AICs acknowledged women prophetesses and healers with spiritual authority.

The administrative roles for women were within women's organizations. In most cases, women held positions of influence as wives of leaders and exerted tremendous influence in decision-making. Many of these women worked alongside their husbands and provided leadership and

empowerment to fellow women. Through their fundraising activities or financial contribution, women exert a lot of power in the church, which becomes a platform for them to contribute towards decision-making. AICs accorded women the dignity they deserved despite being perceived as backward by Western missionaries by acknowledging women's charismatic gifts as healers and prophetesses. AICs became a source of validation for women, especially those living with disabilities, divorced or separated, the ones enduring the plight of childlessness and those accused of witchcraft. The AICs provided a platform for them to actively participate, gave them positions of responsibility as well as ministering to their specific needs, something rarely possible in mainline churches. As noted by Daneel (2000) and Mapuranga (2013), unfortunately, women do not always receive the credit for their contribution to the development of the church.

Women as "spiritual mothers" and charismatic leaders had tremendous influence and they could challenge patriarchy in their specific roles, as prophetesses, they could heal the sick and deliver demons. It is lamentable that many women founders and leaders of AICs established institutions where they remained ceremonial heads like Mary Lalau, Grace Tani, Christianah Abiodun and Christina Nku. Furthermore, it is unfortunate that others like Mai Chaza instead of transferring leadership to a fellow woman, she instead appointed a men to take over after her. Some women religious leaders such as Gaudencia Aoko have fought male hegemony and patriarchy, and they have done a lot to empower fellow women.

Unfortunately, many African women religious founders and leaders had their accomplishments usurped by men like Simeo Ondeto in the Legio Maria of Gaudencia Aoko, Moses Orimolade in the Cherubim and Seraphim Church and Masango in St John's AFM. The charismatic women founders remained as the soul and backbone of their churches, their positions were acknowledged as "spiritual mothers" with spiritual authority, which did not often translate to legal authority. Some charismatic leaders like Aoko fought hard to establish themselves in their own right, to the extent of appropriating a traditional male role as a "female husband" to three women in a society that excluded women from positions of power. According to Matthew Kustenbauder (2012), women like Aoko continued to challenge the sexist and ageist prejudices prevalent in her society. AICs afforded women like her an opportunity to transcend patriarchal norms that continued to marginalize women.

Many of these women founders, healers and prophetesses experienced their calling to ministry at a very young age, where they began to have religious experiences, some were married and others had to renounce all sexual relations and marriage for the sake of ministry. These women transcended the sociocultural hierarchy and rose to positions of power and prestige, as spiritual leaders, healers and prophetesses.

Women in Pentecostal Churches

The rise of global Pentecostalism in the 1970s led to the proliferation of churches in cities, where everything from informal and makeshift prayer houses to multimillion dollar mega churches thrive. These new churches are influenced by Pentecostal movements in America and the United Kingdom. In Pentecostal churches, charisma is the most important qualification for leadership. These churches offer an encounter with God in which healing from sickness and deliverance from evil are achieved by God's spirit. They attempt to speak to people at the most rudimentary level of their existence and proffer solutions to barrenness, witchcraft and poverty.

The Pentecostal movement has to some extent had a positive attitude to women's leadership compared to traditional churches. Women in these churches have been able to experience ministerial freedom as found in the Early Church, not possible even in the AICs. Women in these churches have power and authority similar to that of their male colleagues. They are not restricted by the Old Testament purity codes used in AICs to subjugate women. This is due to the Pentecostal theology which acknowledges the gifting of the Holy Spirit despite one's gender. This is unlike in the AICs where women's leadership was associated with their spiritual powers (spiritual mothers) and their authority came from ritual power.

Asamoah-Gyadu (1998) notes that the emerging role of women in these churches is indicative of their theological position, where God's call to them is not passive but a compelling call to participate fully in Christian mission at all levels. Since the 1970s in Africa and the 1990s in Zimbabwe, ministries founded and led by women have increased exponentially. These women have become role models to other women. These women leaders are renowned for faith healing, pastoral care that is gender-specific, motherly concern, empathy, the capacity to inspire and support other women in ministry (Mwaura, 2003).

Calling Versus Title

In Zimbabwe, most Pentecostal women have assumed power as "helpers" of their husbands and as leaders of their own ministries. According to Mapuranga (2018), Pentecostalism has ushered in a new phenomenon where women are accorded space as leaders and helpers for their husband's ministry. Unlike in mainline churches and AICs where wives of leaders are accorded respect and given roles as leaders of women's groups in their husband's parish, ministry or church, women in Pentecostal churches exercise more authority. According to Matikiti (a study participant interviewed by Mapuranga), the wife of an elder in the Faith of God Ministries International, "the wife of a Pastor is an intercessor and should support her husband in his ministry. As such, once your husband is a leader in the church, as a wife, you also automatically become a leader as well, in support of your husband" (Mapuranga, 2018: 144). Women are presented alongside their husbands in many advertisements and church logos, for example, Apostle Ezekiel Guti and Apostle Eunor Guti of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa and Prophetess Ruth Makandiwa of the United Family International Ministries (UFIC), Bishop Tudor Bismark and Pastor Chichi Bismark of the New Life Covenant Church. According to Mapuranga, these pastors' wives have been given so much space that they become leaders in their own right, instead of always being seen as appendages to their husbands (Mapuranga, 2018: 145).

Mapuranga also argues that pastors' wives have outgrown just being helpers and have become leaders in their own right. This view is attested by Dete when she reiterates that in Pentecostalism, women are not only being leaders through their husbands, rather, women have taken it upon themselves to lead some sections of the church and creating their own sub-ministries (Dete, 2011). The pastor's wives have been able to create ministries within ministries, as seen in some of these sub-ministries led by Pastors' wives; Apostle Eunor Guti of Gracious Women's Fellowship, Prophetess Apphia Clara Manjoro of Women of Virtue Ministries, to mention but only a few. Wives and daughters of charismatic leaders play prominent roles in the church, partly because these churches, are run like family businesses, with outsiders having limited power (Togarasei, 2013:105). Zimbabwean Pentecostalism has brought pastors' wives out of the shadows. These women have done a lot to support their husbands' ministries. In some instances, they have taken over the running

of the church. Although, these women are given positions of authority and power, they share in their husbands' calling (vocation), but have not personally experienced a religious calling to ministry. Their rise is associated with keeping "the business" in the family, hence they tend to hinder access to leadership positions for outsiders.

Furthermore, some pastors' wives in their various leadership roles have done very little to empower fellow women in the church. They have promoted a theology of domesticity of their fellow women, in the household as well as in their churches. Women leaders teach fellow women to be silent and subordinate in church and society. Rekopantswe Mate (2002) argues that the Pentecostal discourse of femininity in Zimbabwe tends to promote male dominance and female subordination. The predominant message is that the wife should be obedient and submit completely to the husband. They have literally embraced the household codes of the New Testament. This is exacerbated by the fact that most women pastors have been propagating a male-centred theology which promotes the domesticity of fellow women. This is confirmed by Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003: 229) who states that:

> …women in African societies sometimes contribute, directly and indirectly, to the sustenance and resilience of patriarchal oppression. One of the ways through which women continue to sustain and perpetuate patriarchal oppression is by 'domestication' of each other in their daily lives.

Hence, some pastors' wives have perpetuated patriarchy. Instead of promoting women's empowerment, these pastors' wives have done little to empower fellow women. Some of the women have done little to push others up the ladder. There is need for women to empower other women and to create positive change. Christian leadership is a calling. Bishop Patience Itai Hove affirms this fact when she contends that "A calling cannot be sexually transmitted! It's not automatic for a woman to become a pastor because she is married to a pastor" (Manzvanzvike, 2017). Many women founders and leaders in AICs were acknowledged as leaders because of their charismatic and spiritual gifts or charisma. However, in Zimbabwean Pentecostal churches, few women leaders who are pastors can confidently attest to what Pastor Dhlakama said; "I am a pastor and a preacher in my own right. I have no husband; my husband is God. I do not need any man to direct me except the one who sent me" (Mapuranga, 2018: 146). Pastors' wives have become leaders and

assumed positions and titles without a calling to ministry. It is not because one has accepted Jesus Christ as his personal saviour and baptized that one assumes a vocation to lead the people of God.

Female Founders of Women's Ministries in Zimbabwe

God calls men and women to ministry to serve God at all levels of the Church. Many women founders and leaders have experienced this calling to serve God in ministry like Bishop Patience Itai Hove of Elshaddai Ministries, Apostle Florence Kanyati of Grace Unlimited Ministries, Prophetess Memory Matimbire of Daughters of Virtue Ministries, Pastor Victoria Mpofu of Women Weapons of Warfare, Pastor Virginia Shumba of Amazing Grace Ministry and International Church. Like Mai Chaza of Guta RaJehovah before them, these women have been called to found either churches or ministries. The role of husbands is often overshadowed unlike in ministries founded by men, unless the husband is a Pastor as in the case of Apostle Kanyati. These men have been a pillar of support although very much in the background of their wives' ministries.

What is common to all founders is that each one of them had a deep religious experience, some at an early age that transformed them and gave them the resolve to serve God in ministry. Mai Chaza had a death and resurrection experience. While for most contemporary founders of women's ministries, the experience was less dramatic, but significant. For instance, Prophetess Memory Matimbire narrates how she got on a bus to Bindura where she had an encounter with God. She narrates her commission as follows: "God visited me, Baba Guti came down while in (the vision of) the sun and spoke to me and told me that I had been given grace for prayer. The instruction I got was, 'go and teach the nation to pray, go and do all night prayers'" (Bulla & Mutayiwa, 2019). This experience inspired Prophetess Matimbire to start a women's prayer group which has since developed into a popular ministry.

At the age of 26, Bishop Patience Hove felt a calling to break the bondage of patriarchy in society through teaching alternative socioeconomic activities to women who were generally marginalized. As arguably the first woman founder of a Pentecostal church in Zimbabwe, she felt the need to empower and encourage women to break from patriarchy and become financially self-sustaining. Bishop Hove has built a centre to empower marginalized women in Ruwa, Harare.

Apostle Florence Kanyati, founder of the Grace Unlimited Ministries, discovered her calling when she was barely a teenager in 1986 in Glen Norah, Harare while she was in Grade Seven. She was able to overcome many obstacles in her journey to found her ministry. Like many women founders, she is also passionate about women and children's welfare. Many women founders of churches and ministries have experienced a calling, an encounter with God.

Like many women founders in AICs, women founders of ministries in Pentecostal churches have felt a special calling to minister to fellow women, who are marginalized because of patriarchy. Many have developed special programmes to empower women socially and economically. For instance, Bishop Hove and others like Prophetess Matimbire have focused on women's specific problems such as infertility or unemployment, marriage or family problems and the economic empowerment of women. Some of the ministries have developed beyond just being prayer groups or solely focusing on women's issues to full-fledged ministries.

Focusing on Women's Experiences in the Ministries

Apostle Hove, Apostle Kanyati, Prophetess Rutendo Wutawunashe and Prophetess Matimbire have embarked on women's empowerment ministry, through the development of female Christians across the board by promoting socioeconomic activities to encourage women to be self-reliant. The focus has extended to girls and single women. According to Prophetess Wutawunashe, it is important to resource women and girls spiritually, mentally and physically so that they can overcome the storms of life. Prophetess Matimbire's all night prayers with women have drawn crowds, as she prays for women's deliverance from barrenness, failure to find a life partner, etc. She has been dubbed by her congregation and the media as "Prophetess Ndadhiniwa" because of her popular all night prayers for deliverance such as "*Ndadhinhiwa-Operation Munhu ngaaroorwe*" (Operation time to get married) (Gwaze, 2018). In one incident, about 700 women who were failing to fall pregnant gathered to pray with the prophetess for deliverance (Mpofu, 2019).

It is also important to note that there are numerous obstacles to women's full participation in church leadership, we turn to a discussion of some of the common challenges.

Obstacles Faced by Female Founders of Women's Ministries in Zimbabwe

The rise of women as founders or leaders of women's ministries has been froth with social and economic challenges and struggles. Some of the impediments are outlined by Bishop Hove in the following citation, "the biggest challenge was other women. Women in leadership pull each other down, and being the only woman founder of a ministry at the time, it was very lonely and challenging" (Manzvanzvike, 2017). Many women founders of ministries have found it difficult to establish ministries because as women, they face many challenges from other women. Bishop Hove also reiterated that women face many challenges in ministry as they are actively involved in many roles as church leaders, wives and mothers. Factors such as socialization, discrimination, marginalization and patriarchy have done much to undermine the rise of women as founders of ministries and churches. They do not often get support from fellow women whom they seek to empower.

Male-chauvinistic attitudes deeply embedded in a patriarchal culture constitute another major impediment. One of the female pastors who participated in this study highlighted that even husbands find it difficult to accept their wives as pastors. This is due to stigma and stereotypes about women. This is worsened by cultural practices that consider women to be unclean because of mensuration. This often makes it difficult for women to be accepted as ministers and founders of ministries.

Another major obstruction is the fact that female leaders have not always provided mentorship to girls and other young women. There appears to be ingrained attitudes of jealousy and competition among some women. There is, therefore, need for women to complement each other and to work towards breaking the bondage of patriarchy. According to Gwaze (2019), very few women find themselves commanding respect of such a huge following, especially in traditional church institutions due to doctrinal teachings, which prevent women from taking leadership roles in the church.

Pushing the Frontiers Against All Odds

The period from the year 2000 has witnessed a growing number of female founders and leaders of churches. They still face many challenges and obstacles, but generally the attitudes are slowly but surely becoming more

positive to women in ministry. Even amidst all the challenges, most of the female pastors have not crumbled under pressure. They have continued to push themselves more than their male counterparts in terms of educational advancement. They are empowering themselves by acquiring higher degrees in theology and business. Some of the women founders have been awarded honorary doctorates, in recognition of their leadership. Women have had to prove that they belong to ministry. Women have founded ministries and churches to offer something more to the church; a concern for women and the marginalized. Women leaders bring the lost humanity of Christ, through their motherly love and concern to the church.

However, more still needs to be done in the mainline churches, including in churches that have accepted women's ordination. It is time that the churches opened up to women as deacons, pastors, priests, bishops, presiding bishops, and other executive positions within the churches. It is time the church acknowledged the contribution of women and bring them into the mainstream of leadership, especially those stigmatized and demonized, particularly the single mothers, the widows and unmarried women.

Conclusion

As noted above, the example of Mai Chaza has been an inspiration to many church women in Zimbabwe. She was able to break the glass ceiling and to do something that was considered impossible, by founding the Guta RaJehovah Church. It has taken more than five decades for women in Zimbabwe to emulate her example and found and lead churches. Christianity for women has been experienced as both liberating and oppressive. The Bible and culture have been used to perpetuate women's oppression.

Jesus called both men and women to ministry. There is evidence of women church leaders in the New Testament, such as Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9) Priscilla (Acts 18:26; Romans 16:3–5), Phoebe (Romans (16:1–2, 1 Timothy 3:8, 11), Junia (Romans 16:7), Euodia and Synthche (Philippians 4:2–3) and many others. Women did function as ministers and leaders in the New Testament and Early Church, even though these roles of women are mentioned briefly in the Bible. However, too much attention has been placed by some churches and leaders on these two verses 1 Corinthians 13:34 (where women are forbidden to speak) and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 (women are admonished not to teach but to be submissive and silent), to deny women positions of leadership in the

Church. And yet the New Testament has evidence to the contrary, women prophesied at worship (1 Corinthians 11.5) and exercised the ministry of teaching (Acts 18:26). Nowhere does the Bible suggest that church leaders should only be male.

Although the Western missionaries did a lot to empower the African woman, they fell short because of their colonial mentality and patriarchal attitudes. The AICs gave rise to women's participation and empowerment. Women exercised some authority in the AICs as "spiritual mothers," prophetesses and healers. However, women continued to be bound by traditional and biblical taboos. Their spiritual positions were uncontested and often gave them authority over their male counterparts. It is in the Pentecostal movement where women founders and leaders have experienced more freedom as religious leaders. Unlike in AICs, women in Pentecostal churches enjoy more dignity and respect. Since 2000, a number of women have emerged either as founders or leaders of churches in Zimbabwe. However, patriarchy in the church is still a challenge as women continue to face many obstacles and challenges to ministry due to deeply entrenched male-chauvinistic attitudes.

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CHAPTER 9

Religio-Cultural 'Clamps' on Female Leadership in Zimbabwe: Towards a Liberating Hermeneutic in Mainline Churches and African Initiated Churches (AICs)

Canisius Mwandayi

Introduction

The life course approach in general is quite an enveloping one in that it is a perspective that attempts to: (1) understand the continuities as well as the twists and turns in the paths of individual lives; (2) it recognises the influence of historical changes on human behaviour; (3) it sees

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humans as capable of making choices and constructing their own life journeys within systems of opportunities and constraints; (4) it recognises the linkages between early life experiences and later experiences in adulthood (Hutchinson, 2005). When the life course approach is narrowed down to human sexuality, one is able to understand that sexual beliefs and behaviours result from an individuals' lifelong accumulation of advantageous and disadvantageous experiences, and adoption/rejection of sexual scripts within socio-historical contexts that they got exposed to during the course of their lives. In the Zimbabwean context, one can safely argue that the actions of women aspiring for leadership roles in churches is a result of their lifelong accumulation of disadvantageous experiences and rejection of sexual scripts within their socio-historical context. Generally, women tend to be more disadvantaged when compared to their male counterparts. At most they are poor; experience violence; have higher rates of illiteracy and are often labelled inferior to men by the society. These drawbacks are more likely to persist throughout women's and girls' lives and, more often than not, intensify with older age.

Focusing specifically on Zimbabwean women, it is apparent that they have since begun to reject the sexual script that views them as inferior and unworthy to take up any leadership roles. Not only had this erroneous teaching been culturally engrained in the society but it has since been entrenched in churches as well to such an extent that in certain quarters, it is still being regarded as divinely ordained. While so much has been said and done by women to assert their ability to lead alongside their male counterparts, clearly, their path towards taking up leadership positions, especially in Church is still quite bumpy. Often times, their aspirations are frowned at and little, if any, is done to address them. In an endeavour to fully appreciate women's aspirations to lead as well as adequately addressing the issue of barricades that still stand in their way to become Church leaders, the chapter shall start off by foregrounding the plight of women in the traditional society and then move on to reflect on the changes that came as a result of consciousness to women's rights. The chapter shall discuss the status of Zimbabwean women in both mainline and AICs at some length and conclude by advocating for a liberation hermeneutic that can serve as a catalyst for unbinding women from the religio-cultural clamps that still barricade them.

The Plight of Zimbabwean Women in the Traditional Context

The traditional history of Zimbabwean society, just like that of any patriarchal society, shows that the sexuality of women was largely controlled by men. As she developed, a woman belonged to the male members of her family and only to be passed into the hands of other male persons at marriage. All a woman knew, in other words, was that she was a daughter of somebody and was bound to be a wife of somebody at marriage. This finds echo in an observation made by Maureen Kambarami when she stated that:

> In the Shona culture, once a girl reaches puberty, all teachings are directed towards pleasing one's future husband as well as being a gentle and obedient wife. Her sexuality is further defined for her, as she is taught how to use it for the benefit of the male race. Furthermore, these cultural teachings foster a dependence syndrome, this is why most African women depend heavily on their husbands for support. As a result, once a husband dies, the woman quickly remarries so as to find another pillar of support to lean on. (Kambarami, 2006: 3)

While indeed some 'escaped' the hook of marriage, it was usually not out of their own volition, rather, they were incapacitated either due to physical or mental challenges and a few who were dedicated as *mbonga-svikiro* (a virgin spirit medium) and virgin girls called *mazendere* (wives to be) who assisted the *mbonga-svikiro* in looking after the Matonjeni shrine (Mataire, 2014; Mukonyora, 1999).

One area which clearly bears testimony to the male domination over women in the Zimbabwe of old was that of courtship and marriage. Not all traditional ways of marriage, however, violated the will of the girl. An ideal way which was used and which did not portray an explicit male dominance was a system called *kutema ugariri* (barter trading manual labour in exchange for a wife) whereby the 'husband to be' worked for his 'future wife' at her parents' homestead for a certain period of time before he was given his wife. Such a form of marriage arrangement, as noted by Bourdillon (1976), used to be the normal way in which most men got married since cattle were scarce. However, this marriage practice has practically died out now since most men are now able to earn cash in wage employment (Bourdillon, 1976). Quite oppressive, however, was a system called *musenga bere* whereby a man simply had to ambush the girl he loved. If he managed to drag her home even against her wish, that girl automatically became his wife. Since this was recognised as a valid

system of marriage, the girl's parents did not object to the bride price which usually followed the ambushing of their daughter.

Equally pointing to the free hand of men over the female gender, especially their offspring, was when there was a case of drought. A starving family man could give away his daughter to a rich man or one who had a better harvest of crops in exchange for a certain number of bags of maize or sorghum so as not to starve his entire family. If the starving man had no daughter, he could even pledge to hand over a yet unborn female child. Even though there are some scholars who try to sanitise such a practice by arguing that no one could force the girl to enter into the marriage contract if she happened not to like her 'allotted' husband, however, most young girls were coerced to accept such pre-arranged marriages because doing so earned her a lot of respect from her family for having saved them from starvation (Bourdillon, 1976: 44; Gudhlanga & Makaudze, 2012). Hence, the limited or no social power for women in the traditional society meant that in most cases, neither the mother nor the girl could object to the arrangement made by the father figure in that family. As such, the husband controlled not only the sexuality of his wife but even also of his daughters.

Another case worthwhile mentioning, which shows how the women folk were subservient to the male gender concerns the payment of *ngozi* (avenging spirit). Among the Shona in particular, it is a recognised tradition that if a member of the family is murdered by a stranger or a known assailant, then that person should pay for the loss of blood by handing over his daughter to be married by one of the surviving members of the deceased's family if the murdered person was a man and if it was a woman, then a small boy was used as compensation (Mawere, 2014). If the spirit of the deceased person is not appeased in this way, it is believed that it will come back and cause havoc in the family of the murderer. Customarily, once a girl has been designated to act as co-payment for the loss of blood, she is not expected to object to the decision made by the male authorities but to act accordingly.

While one can hardly deny the chances of finding some women who could have objected to tailoring their acts to suit the dominant customs favouring the male gender, most elderly women, it appears, resigned to the fate of their traditional customs and tended even to support them. Such a fact of reality finds support in the words uttered by Hazel O. Ayanga who bemoans how, "women have contributed to their lowly status through general acceptance of their prescribed social role and

position [...] and because women despise each other" (Ayanga cited in Gunda, 2009: 258). Such women would act as the instructors to younger women, teaching them in the first place to accept the reality of them being women in a particular religious and cultural set up and instructing them not to challenge the traditional system but rather to press on as courageous women. Any young woman who happened to go against the advice of these elderly women was ridiculed and regarded as a social misfit.

Although most women resigned to the fate of the oppressive social system, there were also a few who managed to occupy positions of influence in their respective societies. As noted by Bourdillon (1976), some women acted as headwomen over subject territories, mediums to senior spirits, while others could even preside over a ceremony when the men appropriately related to the spirits were absent or reluctant to perform the necessary rituals. Explicating further their influential role, he asserts that some men who publicly asserted the prerogative of men to make decisions and control the economy could regularly in private consult their wives on key issues and more often recourse to the wives' judgements on those important matters.

The Era of Women's Rights

With the dawn of Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, notable changes began to be seen in terms of addressing the plight of women. The important role which they had played during the war of liberation helped to change their status in the society (Bourdillon, 1976). Such an official recognition saw the launch of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development in 1980 (Guvamatanga, 2014). Of worth to note also in improving the status of Zimbabwean women was the passing of the Legal Age of Majority Act in 1982 (Bourdillon, 1976). The Bill officially gave all people of Zimbabwe, including women, full adult status on reaching the age of eighteen. What this implied was that women were recognised as being at par with men and hence they could enjoy the same freedom with men or enter into any employment sector without much hindrance. Education was made open to all; hence, focus was no longer only on the boy child but girls too enrolled in schools in their numbers. As all people now had equal access to education, some women began to openly challenge several facets of tradition which they felt were oppressive to the women folk. With broader access to higher

education, some men too began to see some of the pitfalls of their traditional customs and hence they began to listen with sympathy to women's voices of discontent.

What brought a lasting revolution to the status of women in Zimbabwe was the historical Beijing Conference held in China which took place in September 1995 under the theme 'Action for Equality, Development and Peace' (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995). On the human rights of women, the Conference began by noting that many women face various barriers to the enjoyment of their human rights because of such factors as their race, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability or socioeconomic class. Other factors leading to them being disadvantaged and marginalised include their general lack of knowledge, failure to know their human rights, the hindrances they face in trying to gain access to information, as well as their failure to know what recourse mechanism to take in cases of violation of their rights (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995). As part of the mechanisms to address such challenges, the Conference reaffirmed that:

- The human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of the universal human rights.
- Every person should be entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy cultural, economic, political and social development.
- Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. It also includes their right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence, as expressed in the human rights documents.
- Any harmful aspect of certain traditional, customary or modern practices that violate the rights of women should be prohibited and eliminated. Governments should take urgent action to combat and eliminate all forms of violence against women in private and public life, whether perpetrated or tolerated by the State or private persons (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995).

While the outcome of the Beijing Conference was received with mixed feelings by men, to most women it sounded like a triumph in their call

for recognition. Those who resented the outcome of the Conference criticised in particular the clause that women too had the right to decide on the number, spacing and timing of their children, as well as the clause that women had the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence. Knowingly, some men decided to brush aside anything that had to do with Beijing, but this was not without consequences as some women decided to walk out of their matrimonial homes in pursuit of the Beijing spirit of equal rights. During their leisure-time discussions in the contemporary society, some men often make reference to Beijing with a note of disdain as they view it as a time-wasted occurrence in history which is eroding their grip on the women folk which was passed on to them through bygone generations. Even some States which were signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Cairo (1994) and the Beijing Declaration (1995), are known to be at the forefront in obstructing women's and girls' rights to make choices on their reproductive health.

The Zambian government, for example, is said to have suspended a television advertisement campaign which was promoting the use of condoms, especially among the young as a fight against AIDS (Kanyengo cited in Hellum & Knudsen, 2007: 347). This fact is underscored by Hellum and Knudsen who contended that: "Women and girls' rights to reproductive choice is often a site of contestation between international human rights law and co-existing social, cultural and religious norms" (Hellum & Knudsen, 2007: 363). Echoing similar sentiments pertaining inheritance issues, Julie Stewart and Amy Tsanga aver that: "The quest for women to have equitable, let alone equal inheritance rights in the African context is frequently highly contested" (Stewart & Tsanga, 2007: 408). The deep-seated cultural norms and traditions still have a greater binding on the people, hence, the uneasiness felt by other conservative folks whenever they hear of the 'free-range' kind of lifestyle for women.

Women as Masters of Their Own Destiny

Parallel developments within the Zimbabwean society have seen some changes in the status of women. Though the changes so far can hardly be characterised as total emancipation of women, it is undeniably true that women are slowly gaining mastery over their own sexuality. Added

to the conditions leading to the improvement of the welfare of women was the opening up of the legal profession at independence. With the advancement in education, it meant that many lawyers came to join the legal profession. Consequently, many women began to have access to legal representation as well as legal information, some of which was and continues to be provided by women legal practitioners. Helping to disseminate legal information were also some nongovernmental organisations which have been established to advocate specifically for women's and children's rights. Such an environment has enabled ordinary persons to know either the different aspects of state law which impact on people's lives or know, as noted by Stewart and Tsanga, at least someone who knows something about the law (Stewart & Tsanga, 2007: 423).

Education has enabled many to stand up for their own rights as advocated by the Beijing Conference and some have taken a step further in helping other women to know what recourse mechanisms are available and which may be followed in cases of the violation of their rights. Among those taking a lead in helping other women to find their way is the Girl Child Network led by Betty Makoni (Casper-Milam, 2013). Currently in Zimbabwe, an abused girl child, for example, can be helped to rebuild her life once more by those very organisations which are dedicated towards defending the rights of women. The same applies to a divorced woman.

As a further sign of women gaining control over their own lives, particularly their sexual and reproductive health and rights, there has been an increase in the number of women who are opting to become single mothers. Taking advantage of the declarations of the Beijing Conference, they argue that it is their right to make a free choice in the area of reproduction; free of any coercion, discrimination or violence. For them, being single mothers leaves them with the freedom to do what they like without bowing to any male voice as their counterparts in marriages. Though not a Zimbabwean woman herself, Mary Mohler at least summarises the general sentiments expressed by most single mothers across the world when she says:

> As a single parent, you are free to indulge all those little idiosyncrasies that you try to rein in when you live with someone else. If you're a neatnik, you can give in to your compulsions and hang things in military order by color, size, or type of garment; if you're not, you can wallow in disarray. You can sleep late or retire early, eat crackers in bed, watch old movies,

> leave all the windows open, let the dog sleep next to you. After years of tenuously maintained compromise, you get to do what you want when you want. (Mohler, 2020: 1)

Not only does single motherhood leave them free from any male coercion, they see it also as a passport to venturing into any form of business, any form of lifestyle or partnership with other people of their free choice. Influencing too the desire to lead a free single life is the new technological age that the Zimbabwean society has been exposed to. Films and literature from other cultures which extol sexual freedom have, as noted by Bourdillon, had a role in changing the nature of Zimbabwean society (Bourdillon, 1993: 42). Such films tend to portray the comfort of life when one is unmarried and the ease with which one can accumulate as much wealth one may dream of through going out with different men without any constraints and this for sure is emulated by many.

As women gain control over their sexuality and are attaining the same educational qualifications as men, there have been indeed some surprises in the once male-dominated Zimbabwean society. Hardly is there any employment sector now that does not have women representation. From taxi drivers to haulage truck drivers, women have continued to show their presence. Even managerial positions that were once the preserve of men have seen some women taking up those roles. 'What one person does, another person can do (better),' whether publicly announced or unsaid, has been the philosophy of these high aspiring women.

Women's Leadership in Zimbabwe's Mainline Churches

While women appear to have successfully ventured into most fields that were once deemed the preserve of men, it has not been so the case in church circles. In those churches where some inroads have been made to recognise women, such as the Methodist Churches and the Lutheran Church, there appears not to be so much to celebrate as those few in leadership positions still feel that they are under the surveillance of male leadership. In her undergraduate dissertation submitted to the Midlands State University, one of the few female bishops in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Evermay Nyabonda, argues that it is not easy for women

to get appointed as a Presiding Bishop of the Church due to the male-dominated control of the Church (Nyabonda, 2018). Similar sentiments were expressed by another female pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ), Betse Ndlovu (2013) who argued that despite women being allowed to train as pastors in the ELCZ, there was still a visible problem of the dehumanisation of women as women are not recognised as Bishops and Deans in the very Church which they feel they are part of.

Some mainline Churches have remained adamant in denying women access to top leadership positions in the Church. The Catholic Church, for example, has not promoted the training women in its seminaries, let alone ordain them as members of the clergy. The argument commonly made is that Jesus did not choose women among his disciples and not even to his mother did he bequeath the gift of priesthood but just to his male followers. As a response to the petitions and lobbies which were being raised by members of various Christian communities and groups clamouring for the admission of women into the pastoral office at par with men as what was obtaining in the other Christian communities stemming from the Sixteenth-Century Reformation, Pope Paul V1 in 1976 issued an official Declaration *Inter Insigniores* against women's ordination. The Declaration, which was issued through the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, categorically stated that "the Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination" (Pope Paul VI, 1976). In issuing the Declaration, the Pope, however contradicted the biblical findings of his own special committee from the Pontifical Biblical Commission. He also seemed oblivious to the fact that Bishop Felix Davidek had ordained married men and women in Czechoslovakia in exceptional circumstances to preserve an underground church which was behind the Iron Curtain (McEnroy, 2011). In his Declaration against the ordination of women, Pope Paul VI further explained that the fact of conferring priestly ordination only on men is "a question of unbroken tradition throughout the history of the Church, universal in the East and in the West…This norm, based on Christ's example, has been and is still observed because it is considered to conform to God's plan for his Church" (Pope Paul VI, 1976).

The Declaration made by Pope Paul VI was later echoed twice during the papacy of John Paul II. In 1994, Pope John Paul II issued the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* whereby he reaffirmed that the

prohibition against women's ordination was definitive and off-limits to further discussions (McEnroy, 2011). During the following year in June 1995, he wrote a Letter which was addressed to women. In the Letter, while the Pope praised women's historic contributions to the Church and society as mothers, wives and social leaders and apologised for the Church's failure to recognise these contributions, he, however, insisted that priesthood is not about domination but service. He argued that men and women have a diversity of roles in society, hence the Church's stance on an all-male priesthood is not a sign of male domination, and rather, it is embracing their complementary natures. He also maintained that doing so is in no way prejudicial to women because such a stance is congruent to Christ's choice to entrust only to men this ministerial task (Pope John Paul II, 1995).

Following in the footsteps of his predecessors, Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 criminalised women ordination alongside gay marriages and paedophilia. Of the three criminalised offences, Benedict XVI made it to appear as if women ordination or even suggestion of it was one of the most serious. This was evidenced by his immediate defrocking of Bishop William Morris of Australia in 2011 for merely having raised a suggestion to consider the possibility of ordaining women so as to alleviate the shortage of priests (McEnroy, 2011).

Although the Popes have throughout history continued to hold that women ordination is by biblical law off-limits to further questioning, there is a continuous debate among people whether the papal interpretation of the biblical law is valid. A number among both the lay and clergy feel that the Bible is continuously being interpreted in ways which are not liberative to women who constitute the greatest percentage of Church membership. This biased usage of the biblical texts can actually be traced back to the arrival of the Gospel on the African soil. Writing about the Churches in Nigeria, Bateye (2008: 114) avers:

> The Bible was used authoritatively by the Western Orthodox Churches to silence women and prevent them from assuming administrative pastoral roles in the church hierarchy. There was therefore ambivalence in the stance of Western Christian mission pertaining to women. On the one hand, they claimed to liberate and empower women, while on the other hand, there was a rigid rejection of women from taking up leadership roles in the church, and in some cases even the larger secular Western Society.

The Nigerian experience provides a window to what was happening throughout the African continent wherever the Gospel found its way. Though some African Christian women were able to find legitimacy for their inclusion in leadership positions in the mission churches from the biblical passages which depict women like Deborah, Miriam, Prisca and Lydia playing prominent roles, it would appear the missionaries overlooked these passages as they were bent on silencing women.

What made the Gospel message more appealing on the African soil is that it resonated well with aspects of the traditional patriarchal mentality of African societies, hence, nobody dared to challenge the Western use of biblical texts to silence women and to prevent them from taking up administrative roles in the Church regardless of their historic contributions to church planting, growth and even their large compositions in Church membership. Writing on gender and power in African Christianity, Philomena Mwaura (2005) argues that while women still dominate the pews in mainline churches, African Instituted Churches (AICs), Charismatic movements and Pentecostal churches, they are, however, absent from the power structures of the churches, which are male-dominated. She further noted that a dominant male ideology has ensured that women continue being clients in the churches, just as they were in shrines of traditional society. As a result, some women, writes McEnroy (2011), feel as though they are guests in their own house, continuously being cheated by their clerical male counterparts because they cannot counsel the congregation, say mass, and neither can they perform other priestly duties, except just doing other communal duties as nuns.

As for the Anglican Church, there appears to be no unanimity over this matter. While there has been a move in other Provinces of the Anglican Church to accommodate female clergy, the Province of Central Africa in which the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe falls under, has over the years leaned towards the Catholic position. Though the Province has not taken the hard stance of the Catholic Church that the issue is off-limits for further discussions, it appears most Synods which have ever since debated this issue have almost come to the same conclusion that the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe is not yet ready to accommodate female clergy. On being asked why women were not taking up leadership roles in the Anglican Church, the former Archbishop of Harare, Bishop Chad Nicholas Gandiya responded that the Church had culturally inherited the patriarchal standpoint of the biblical writers whereby anything done by women is barely recognised as compared to what is done by men

(Mapika, 2015). While the provision is there in the *Acts of the Diocese of Harare CPCA 1975*, for example, that in every parish there should be two wardens and two deputies regardless of gender, most churchwardens in Harare, as noted by Mapika (2015) are male and it would appear a majority of women in the Anglican Church are not comfortable being led by their female counterparts, let alone them leading Holy Communion.

The prevailing state of affairs in the Anglican Church brings to light some realities that one needs to empathise with and find ways of redressing them. In the first place, one gets the sense that women to a greater extent are contributors to their own downfall despite their numerous cries that they be freed from the control of men. In shunning their own from leading Holy Communion and performing as churchwardens, they shoot themselves in the foot, instead of assisting some of their own to rise to positions of influence. If women are really to make it in meeting their aspirations as leaders, there has to be a shift on most of what they have been brought up believing. They are only able to rise above themselves when they come to know that certain things that they take to be realities are not. For example, they need to recognise the reality of demystifying the myth that women are weak, that God is male and that God in biblical tradition revealed Godself only to males. It is the association of maleness with God in particular that above all needs to be redressed. They have to wrestle with the reality that God has no gender and on that basis, males and females are equal before God.

Having discussed the low status of women in mainline churches, it is the thrust of the next section to assess the position of their counterparts in AICs given that they fought alongside their male counterparts to liberate themselves when they formed AICs. It would be interesting to find if this quest for liberation really translated into these women being unboundedly free to take up leadership positions in the new churches alongside men.

Women's Leadership in Zimbabwean African Initiated Churches

African Initiated Churches (AICs), as the name suggests, are a group of independent Christian Churches whose origins can be traced to the African soil. A simple definition of these Churches as given by Martin West (1974) is that they are autonomous Church groups with an all-African leadership and an all-African membership. AICs are such a broad group and Bengt Sundkler classifies them into two broad groups: the

Zionists and the Ethiopian Churches (Sundkler, 1976: 15). While Sundkler had identified two broad groups within AICs, Tapiwa Mapuranga (2013) adds Apostolic type Churches to the umbrella tag, AICs. Let me hasten, however, to acknowledge that the classification of AICs is not an easy one given the flux state that characterises them. The attempt towards classification has remained a contested terrain among scholars, for example, Biri (2020), Gunda and Vengeyi (2018), Mwaura (2005) and Mapuranga (2013) whose positions on this matter lie beyond the immediate interests of this chapter.

In this discussion, it suffices to say that the term AICs in the context of Zimbabwe, would be used in reference to Churches that include the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Johane Marange, Johane Masowe WeChishanu, African Apostolic Church, Independent African Church, Guta RaJehova and Neo-Pentecostal churches such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Church (ZAOGA), Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Family of God (FOG) and the United Family International Church (UFIC). While the beliefs, forms of governance and doctrines of these Churches might differ in some aspects, what makes them all AICs, as argued by Mapuranga (2013), is that they have a common thread running through them in terms of beliefs and practice. This includes also the fact that they were formed out of a desire to be independent in organisation, leadership and religious experiences from the mainline Churches. Be that as it may, the issue of commonalities does not also serve the immediate interests of this chapter. The focus here, as noted earlier on, is how these Churches either accommodate or deny women from leadership positions.

Writing about gendered space in AICs, Mapuranga (2013) argues that the position and status of women in these Churches is ambivalent. While in one regard they can be characterised as marginalised, on the other, they are seen exercising their agency to take up leadership positions. She cautions, however, that researchers who are looking for "formal leadership" on the part of women in AICs are likely to be disappointed, because their leadership is best seen in terms of their capacity to subvert patriarchy (Mapuranga, 2013).

The Marginalisation of Women in African Independent Churches

Women's marginalisation, as pointed out earlier on, is not an import of missionary activity but it has been an entrenched practice in many African societies. Missionary activity can only be seen as having brought

what seemed to be a divine seal to what was already held by indigenous peoples that women cannot be accorded the same status as men. Despite AICs being autonomous Church groups with an all-African leadership and an all-African membership, they have not divorced from the missionary interpretation of the Bible in regard to women. The African Apostolic Church of Paul Mwazha, for example, interprets 1 Timothy 2:11–15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 literally to discriminate against women. Based on the said texts, women in this Church are not allowed to talk in church or to appear as the leaders of the congregation. While some women in this Church are allowed to say a prophetic word, that role of being a prophetesses does not translate in them being counted in any way in the Church's hierarchy. This finds echo in the words of Mabhunu (2010) who noted:

> Despite the inroads that women have had in AICs … consideration of personal testimonies and observations have indicated that they still have limited roles in leadership positions. Women are recognized as healers, midwives and prophetesses. But all women in AICs, even prophetesses, are excluded from the church hierarchy. The expression of equality in leadership is denied for women … Prophetesses are also excluded from positions of authority and influence such as occupying positions of secretary general or treasurer. (Mabhunu [2010] cited in Mapuranga, 2013, online)

A common trend in most AICs is that it is generally men in these Churches who acquire theological training and men also have opportunities to attend annual synods and conferences where they get opportunities to get elected into leadership positions. Contributing also towards women finding themselves on the fringes of the Church is the general leaning by many AICs towards the Old Testament given its closeness to African traditional religion. While missionary Christianity had tried to demonize traditional religion, most AIC founders started their Churches as a revolt against the missionary approach, hence, they sought to uphold and revitalise their traditional values and religion. Due to its rootedness in African religion and culture, the Johane Marange Church, for example, makes recourse to purity codes in the book of Leviticus to curtail women from assuming any meaningful leadership positions. Just as in African traditional religion, younger women in AICs are viewed as impure by virtue of them being associated with blood either through giving birth or their monthly menstrual cycle. Though women in these churches have strength in numbers, there is no way they can utilise this to their advantage given

the socially constructed belief that they cannot lead as men, their deprived chance to get theological training, as well as lack of representation in key decision-making meetings/synods.

Elevated Women in African Initiated Churches

In the foregoing paragraphs, it has been highlighted that women in AICs tend to be more of guests in their own houses, occupying less influential positions in the church. However, there are some exceptional ones who occupy key positions such as being church founders, prophetesses, priestesses, choristers, healers and itinerant preachers. This is mainly evident in some of the Spiritual/Zionist/Apostolic AICs, as well as in Neo-Pentecostal Churches and the revival movements. This finds echo in Chitando (2004: 122–123) who notes:

> Women have played a significant role in the rapid spread of AICs in Southern Africa. Apostolic women in their distinctive white garments and Zionist women in colourful outfits have become an integral part of urban life in the region. It is women who constitute the majority of members within AICs, and they have been central in the emergence of transnational networks that have emerged…One of the key attractions is the space that has been granted to women in these new religious movements. They are allowed to express themselves fully, and to occupy key offices as prophetesses.

The issue of space, as noted by Chitando, is very critical in attracting many women to AICs. Herein, space is granted also to single mothers, the divorced and separated women who are rarely given positions of responsibility in mainline Churches. In AICs, such women can be ordained or given other church responsibilities because the determining factor is not about a person's gender but an individual's spiritual gifts, seniority and experience. The understanding in these churches is that spiritual power is charismatic and both men and women are equally channels of God's power. Formal education also is not considered primary, thus a woman may have little formal education, limited economic means and low social status, and yet endowed with charismatic gifts that enable her to take up church leadership.

Through their dedicated ministry of word and deed, women in Spiritual AICs have managed to gain for themselves a highly distinguished reputation. At times, their evangelisation ministry as healers, prophetesses and priestesses extends to cover also Church leadership and management or even local political matters. Daneel (2000), for example, mentions the wife of the late Bishop Mutendi of the ZCC who acted not only as a prominent prophetess-healer but also as a pastoral consultant, giving advice to the ZCC chiefs and elders on local disputes (see also the chapter by Mukora in this volume).

While it is a common phenomenon that churches with a pneumatic emphasis tend to open more space for women's active participation, in Neo-Pentecostal churches, women play even greater leadership roles. In the case of the ZAOGA Church, Bishop Eunor Guti, for example, is second in command to her husband and Church founder, Archbishop Ezekiel Guti. The same applies to Prophetess Ruth Makandiwa, the wife of Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, the founder of the UFIC. What is behind the elevation of women in these churches is basically the Pentecostal theology that provides avenues for Charismatic gifting regardless of gender. An assessment of the structures of authority in these churches, as pointed out by Mwaura (2005), reveals an egalitarian structure influenced by a democratic spirit and women have been able to experience ministerial freedom not possible even in the Spiritual AICs. Women in these churches, as she further argues, are not just "spiritual mothers," but they have executive administrative positions as well.

Executive or Derivated Powers?

While indeed some women in both Spiritual and Neo-Pentecostal Churches appear to be masters in their own right, it is not all rosy as it appears. Various hurdles still stand in their way despite their charismatic endowment. Just as the late Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the historic contributions and sacrifices of women in Catholicism go unrecognised, so too with women in AICs, often their efforts go unnoticed. While they sacrifice a lot in the growth of their churches, it is not surprising to see the progress and success being attributed to their male counterparts. Even in the annals of history, it is almost difficult to know that they were part of the planting and expansion of churches, save their husbands or male compatriots in the field. In the case of Neo-Pentecostal Churches, one wonders whether the posts held by such people like Prophetess

Eunor Guti or Prophetess Ruth Makandiwa are positions of real power or they are just ceremonial and symbolic posts. Their leadership positions appear to have been facilitated through the principle of co-dependency whereby they are in those positions only by virtue of their husbands' positions as founders/archbishops. Administrative functions of the Church appear restricted to their husbands and the only domain they appear to have some administrative power is within women's organisations. In the AFMZ, for example, while the wife of a pastor may perform some administrative functions in women's organisations, she remains answerable to her husband who either instructs her on what to say or vets her script before she goes to such gatherings (Interview with a male pastor in the AFMZ, Zvishavane, 12 October 2019). If the husbands of such women were to pass on, it would not be surprising to see them relegated to the dust bins of Church history.[1]

What is quite significant to note is that even in those cases where women have been founders of churches, it appears none has been able to bestow the Church's leadership in the hands of another woman. As rightfully pointed out by Mwaura (2005), this has happened in the Mai Chaza Church, Lumpa Church of Alice Lenshina and Gaudencia Aoko's Legio Maria Church of Africa. None of these women has been able to bequeath leadership to another woman. While some women in Neo-Pentecostal churches appear to be a step ahead given their access to formal education and are already applying a liberating hermeneutic in their readings of scripture, critiquing even Pauline injunctions which appear retrogressive towards the cause of women, they nevertheless experience restriction and have to contend with negative attitudes. They face resistance from male authority and are frequently stigmatised and demonised. This tends to be worse for single women who at times are resisted also by fellow women as potential 'gold diggers,' ever on the lookout for married men for material benefits (Biri, 2019). What Hackett observed with regard to Nigerian Charismatic Churches equally applies to AIC women in Zimbabwe when she said: "[… there still exists] ambivalent attitudes towards women. At

[1] These same issues are also raised by Mpumelelo Moyo in this volume in a chapter entitled "The Emergence of Churches and Ministries founded/led by Women in Zimbabwe."

one level they may enjoy greater participation and leadership opportunities in God's army, at another level, they are frequently stigmatized and demonized (notably those of the unmarried and 'liberated' vanity)" (Hackett cited in Mwaura, 2005: 442).

Interpretation of Scriptures

Since the starting point of orthopraxis in the Church is the Bible for both mainline and some AICs, more needs to be done around the interpretation of Scriptures. As reflected in the foregoing discussion, males in both mainline and AICs often determine interpretations that are regarded as 'valid,' and normative hence, to be upheld by all followers in their churches. They easily do so because they have access to the pulpit where a male-oriented hermeneutic is developed and communicated. Since they deem themselves as having a God-given mandate, they determine how texts about men and women are understood, how gender is performed at home and in the Church. It is the same men who officiate at weddings where they reinforce dominant narratives that call women into subordination (Gabaitse, 2012). While at times women in both mainline and AICs preach also like men, hold Bible studies or even share testimonies, their interpretations of the Bible should not be seen going contrary to that of males; it is males only who should determine interpretations that are acceptable for the community of believers. Acting contrary to this, one would see herself being arrayed before a disciplinary committee, if not being made to cease from being a member of the Church.

Given such a scenario where only males determine the interpretation of scripture, it is worthwhile to encourage a liberating hermeneutic that promotes an egalitarian community of believers. Such an interpretation will, in the long run, afford women an opportunity to enter fully and as equal members into the mainstream of church leadership.

Liberating Hermeneutics

Liberation hermeneutics, as noted by Stanely Porter (2007), is an approach that seeks to combine biblical exegesis and liberating praxis into one cohesive approach to create a feminist liberating-seeking theology. As its starting point, proponents of this approach begin with a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' against the patriarchal monopolisation of scripture and the traditional interpretation. After being suspicious of

everything surrounding the text's earlier interpretation, the next step they take is a 'hermeneutic of remembrance' whereby effort is made to recognise women and their contribution to Christian origins. This hermeneutic, as further articulated by Porter (2007), places the text within its historical cultural setting, and through this placement allows the cultural influences and structures of power dominance to be acknowledged. This, in turn, will result in their removal from the text enabling thus the true meaning to be placed within the values of the twenty-first century. The goal of such an endeavour would be "to expose the hidden power scheme within the Bible and the patriarchal cultures and to revise these long-held beliefs to bring equality for women and their viewpoints" (Porter, 2007: 108).

Looking at women in both mainline and AICs, it has been established that they find themselves in a devalued state, not as a result of their own weaknesses, but rather due to the patriarchal monopolisation of scriptures in these churches and the long-held belief that women cannot in any way be compared to men. The text monopolised most in the subordination of women is the creation passage where a woman (Eve) was created second and from Adam's rib (Gen.2:4). This passage has traditionally been interpreted to mean women should be subservient to men since they were an afterthought and created out of man. Some male interpreters regard this traditional interpretation as God's design hence, normative for the community of believers and would not entertain any other interpretation not in line with this view.

It is such traditional interpretations noted above coloured by cultural influences and power dominance that ought to be removed from the community of believers and substituted by an egalitarian interpretation of the texts. In their fight to attain liberation and an egalitarian existence, there is perhaps no better starting point for women in these churches other than revisiting the same foundational creation passage and challenge how it has been traditionally used against women. From a twenty-first-century perspective, it is quite scandalous to believe that a woman is really the product of a man since there's no implication at all in the first creation story that men and women are in any kind of unequal relationship before God.

Employing a canonical, close reading to texts, one is able to see that the opening chapters of Genesis (Gen.1-3) provide the interpretive foundation for the rest of Scripture. This finds echo in Deborah Sawyer who avers, "In the opening chapters of Genesis, the triangular relationship of

God/man/woman is set in place to explain and inform subsequent narrative and legislation as it unfolds" (Sawyer cited in Davidson, 2007: 15). After God created animals and brought them before Adam, God is said to have found no fitting *'ezer*. The Hebrew word *'ezer* used here does not connote an assistant, an inferior being, but rather the term refers to a relational term describing a beneficial relationship. The specific position of the woman intended here, as argued by Davidson (2007: 29), should be gleaned from the immediate context. When Adam looked at the animals, he found no fitting companion, the *'ezer* intended is clearly 'a real companionship that can only be given by an equal, egalitarian partner.' When Eve is introduced to Adam, his joyous exclaim, 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' does not entail the notion of subordination but of mutuality and equality, a person so close as one's own body. The man actually becomes aware of his own identity as he discerns the identity of the woman. Humankind, as pictured here, is thus complete only when both male and female are viewed together, both were made in the image of God, hence, none was to have authority over the other. Gilbert Bilezikian (1985) put it succinctly when he said,

> Conspicuously absent in Gen. 1-2 is any reference to divine prescriptions for man to exercise authority over woman ... The total absence of such a commission indicates that it was not part of God's design/intent. Only God was in authority over Adam and Eve. Neither of them had the right to usurp divine prerogatives by assuming authority over each other. Any teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve in God's creative design is to be firmly rejected since it is not founded on the biblical text. (Bilezikian [1985] cited in Davidson, 2007: 35)

A theology of human sexuality that can easily be discerned from Gen.1-2 stems from the equal pairing of male and female, both being created in God's image (Gen.1:27). Both also are blessed and jointly instructed to procreate and subdue the earth (Gen.1:26, 28). Both, as opined by Rebecca Groothius (1995: 27), were "commanded equally and without distinction to take dominion, not one over the other, but both together over the rest of God's creation for the glory of the Creator." Clearly reflective in these passages, therefore, is lack of ontological superiority/inferiority over the other.

Given, therefore, that the Edenic paradigm (Gen.1-3) provides the interpretive foundation for the rest of Scripture, women in mainline and

AICs in re-reading this creation story and subsequent passages in the Bible should celebrate their liberation from the male interpretive framework that has over the years been imposed on them. Taking a cue from the Edenic paradigm, they should not let any person instil and dictate any inferiority complex in them using the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Applying a life course approach to the lives of women in mainline and AICs in Zimbabwe, the foregoing narrative has been able to demonstrate that the Bible in particular has been used to inhibit women from attaining their aspirations. Read and interpreted from the worldview of men, it is males who determine interpretations that are valid, normative and upheld by their churches and more often these interpretations are construed in such a way that women should be contended with their subdued positions. To promote an egalitarian existence which would see women achieving their aspirations in the churches that they feel they belong to and no longer to be just like guests in their own house, a call has been made for women to put into praxis liberative hermeneutics. The Edenic paradigm has been identified as the best launching platform to meet their endeavours since it is interpretive foundation for the rest of Scripture. It is, therefore, pertinent that the churches in Zimbabwe be the ones that lead society by example through ensuring that all their leadership structures are gender-inclusive. This would strategically position the churches to serve as a beaming light into the country's future, characterised by gender justice and gender equality.

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CHAPTER 10

Zezuru Women's Leadership Roles in the Death Rites of Passage in Zimbabwe: A Pastoral Response

Sylvia C. Musasiwa and Yolanda Dreyer

The Zezuru are one of the sub-groups of the Shona, the largest indigenous ethnic group in Zimbabwe.

This article is derived from the unpublished doctoral thesis of the first author, titled "The role of women in the death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture of Zimbabwe: A pastoral approach", submitted in the Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

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Introduction

This chapter investigates Zezuru death rites of passage with a specific focus on the role of women. In the Zezuru culture, there are pre-burial, burial and post-burial rituals. All these rituals are based on the Zezuru understanding of the relationship between the living and those whom Mbiti (1969) calls the "living-dead". The chapter's thrust is to foreground the concept of Zezuru women's participatory leadership during the death rites of passage. Specific activities which are the preserve for women will be highlighted. These activities reveal that despite the women's leadership during the death rites of passage, their pivotal role tends to be trivialized within the Zezuru culture and it has not received adequate attention in academic literature. To create a setting for understanding the death rites of passage, we begin by briefly discussing the concept of death and the "living-dead" in the Zezuru culture.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The very nature of this study calls for a qualitative methodology. The two characteristics of qualitative methodology identified by Leedy and Ormrod (2015: 270) are applicable. Firstly, a qualitative methodology typically focuses on phenomena that are occurring or have previously occurred in natural settings—that is, in the "real world". Death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture is such a phenomenon occurring in the lived experience of Zezuru people. Secondly, such a methodology involves exploring the complexity of those phenomena. Zezuru death rites of passage manifest such complexity over a period stretching for a year beginning with pre-burial rites and proceeding to burial and post-burial rites.

The theoretical framework of the study focuses on the following three concepts:

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- The concept of "the living-dead" as explained by Mbiti (1969: 83) and Nyamiti (1984: 15). This study explores the significance of this "living-dead" concept for Zezuru death rites of passage.
- The concept of "contextualization" (Hesselgrave & Rommen, 1984: 33; Kadenge, 1998: 254; Musasiwa, 2002: 22–23; 2007: 66–71) in the interface between the Zezuru rites of passage and the Christian faith. The concept of contextualization is a recognition that all theology is contextual insofar as it is consciously or unconsciously influenced by its context, whether that context is social, ecclesiastical, geographic or historical (Musasiwa, 2007: 66). This necessitates a theological method that consciously focuses on and utilizes the context as part of the theological process itself.
- The nature of pastoral care according to Clebsch and Jaekle (1994) and Lartey (2003). According to Clebsch and Jaekle (1994: 32), pastoral care pertains to "helping acts done by representative Christians directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled people", to which Lartey (2003: 684–719) adds three more functions of pastoral care, namely nurturing, liberating and empowering.

To the above theoretical framework is built the methodological framework of what practical theologian Emmanuel Lartey (2006: 89) calls "liberating intercultural praxis" which privileges the contextual experience of social groups which are suppressed by the views and expressions of dominant groups which oppress, marginalize or trivialize them. This is the case with Zezuru women, particularly widows, who operate in a dominating patriarchal culture.

In terms of data collection, the study partially relied on available literature on death rites of passage among the Shona people, of which the Zezuru are a sub-group, but also relied on primary empirical data which were collected through interviews of participants from Mashonaland Central and Harare, Zimbabwe. In order to overcome the limitations of travel during the COVID-19 period, the first author organized a widows' retreat at the United Baptist Conference Centre in Harare over the period 23–25 May 2021 under the theme "Healed by God's love". It was attended by 12 widows and three facilitators. In addition, the researcher also organized pastor's workshop held at Domboshawa Theological College on 30 September 2021 attended by six female and eight male pastors. These events yielded the empirical data that contributed to

the study. In order to ensure truthful disclosure on an otherwise sensitive participants were assured of confidentiality and pseudonyms were used in the study.

Death and the "Living-Dead" in the Zezuru Culture

Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005: 204) express what could be seen as a typical Western view of death when they describe it as a "heart-breaking *dividing line*" marking the irrevocable separation between "time with" a loved one and "time without" them. In contrast to this, the African view of death, shared also by the Zezuru people, is that of a *continuation* of existence on the part of the departed and their continuing relationship with the living. Banana (1991: 27) puts it across as follows: "Death is not death; it is a vehicle from ontology of the visible beings to the ontology of the invisible. Death is part of life; it is a gateway to eternity". In this view, death does not end life. It does not sever the bond between the living and the dead. Banana (1991: 27) characterizes the dead in African ontology as "living-timeless", while Mbiti (1969) calls them the "living-dead".

This African view of death is amply demonstrated in the Zezuru ontological worldview. The Zezuru people, as in other African cultures, view death as a means of entering into the higher spirit world. In an interview, Rev Chimuti, a Roman Catholic priest based in one high density of Harare and has ministered among the Zezuru for several years, explained that "the Zezuru traditional belief centers around what happens when someone dies, namely *chinoora inyama, mweya hauori* (what perishes is the flesh but the spirit is immortal)" (Interview Tuesday 1 June, 2021). This belief is evident in the death and burial rituals as described in this chapter. Whereas Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005: 204) see death as a dividing line between the living and the dead, the Zezuru people believe that death is not the annihilation of life, but a departure to the spirit world. This is illustrated by the following Zezuru sayings pertaining to death and after-life:

- *vari mumhepo*: those who now exist in the "air" or spirit world;
- *atisiya*: the person has departed from us, but is expected to come back later;
- *waenda*: the person has gone;

- *atungamira*: the person has led the way;
- *azorora*: the person is resting.

The Zezuru view of death is, however, paradoxical. Although death is viewed as a gateway to a new life, it is not regarded as acceptable and inevitable. This is why some post-death rituals have the purpose of spiritually diagnosing the cause of death in order for the living to take remedial action to prevent a further occurrence of death among the surviving close family members. The following Shona sayings show a negative view of death:

- *nhamo*: death as deep trouble;
- *kufa*: death as cessation of life;
- *kuparara*: death as demise;
- *rufu runoparadza*: death is destructive and takes away loved ones.

However, these negative ideas regarding death among the Zezuru people are far fewer than the positive ones. They are a recognition of the loss of loved ones in the sharing of this earthly life. This deep sense of loss, as in all cultures, calls for pastoral involvement for support on the path to healing. In the Zezuru culture, a holistic and meaningful pastoral approach to support the bereaved will have to include knowledge of the death rituals and their significance to people. The negative view of death in the Zezuru Traditional Religion (ZTR) stems from the idea that death is unnatural, that no one should die. Human beings should live forever. Even the death of a very old person is not seen as simply natural. It is attributed to negative forces such as witchcraft, offended spirits of the person's own family (*mudzimu)* or avenging spirits from outside the family (*ngozi*).

In an interview (July 2020), Tafadzwa[1] from the Domboshava area, 30 kilometers from Harare, expressed the paradoxical Zezuru view of death as follows:

> I see death as caused by some external forces of witches, spirits or curses. But one thing that pleases me is that death is a passage to the after-life and it is a continuation of life from the physical to the spiritual realm. It is the

[1] All the study participants' names are pseudonyms.

> *midzimu* (ancestral spirits) who look after me and my family. (Interview with Tafadzwa, July 2020)

In the Zezuru Traditional Religion (ZTR), it is believed that when people die, they transcend into the realm of the ancestors, which is a higher realm than the physical realm on earth. That is why when people lose a loved one, their emotions will be a mixture of sorrow over the death of someone dear to them, combined with the belief that death is not the end, influenced by the belief that the departed continues to live in a different realm. Ancestors (*vadzimu*—plural) are the spirits of the deceased, believed to be the "living-dead". They continue to influence the lives of the living descendants in this world. Through rituals, the ancestors communicate with their living descendants (see Smith, 1950: 38).

Ancestorhood is not the preserve of men. Although both patrilineal and matrilineal ancestors are influential in the family affairs, the matrilineal ancestors are the most important. It is generally believed that the matrilineal ancestors are more protective of the living. A mother in real life is protective and vigilant (*kusunga mbereko*), meaning to safeguard one's progeny. She will not leave a child to its own devices. One of the participants in this study put it across as follows:

> If other malicious spirits defeat one's matrilineal ancestors, then one has no more protection (*mudzimu waamai wadimbura mbereko*). When the matrilineal ancestors are angered, there is nothing that can stop them from inflicting punishment on the family. (Pastor Wanaka at the pastor's workshop held in Harare, 30 September 2021)

To buttress the points highlighted above, among the Zezuru, when one is injured, one would cry, *maiwe!* (o, mother!). The underlying belief is that the mother has either caused the injury or allowed it to happen. Therefore, if one is protected by the matrilineal ancestor, no evil can befall that person unless the matrilineal ancestor opens a door to it (*avhura musuwo*). The female ancestors of the mother's lineage are interested in the well-being of women and children and they also have an influence on child bearing (*kubara vana).* The pivotal role of matrilineal ancestors lends weight to the role of women in the death rites of passage within the Zezuru culture in Zimbabwe.

Burial rites should be performed properly for someone to become an ancestor. One of the Zimbabwean Catholic priests who has written about

death rituals in Zimbabwe is Father Kumbirai (1966: 127), who puts it as follows:

> The spirit will wander in the forest until that time when the living hands it over (*kusuma)* to the ancestors through *kurova guva* (bringing home*)* ceremony. The living plead with the ancestors saying, "Do not let your child go on wandering about the forests, take him/her today and live with him/her and let him/her come back to us".

Death is an event in Zezuru culture that is accompanied by numerous rituals. The rituals are done by designated individuals and care is taken to do things *muChivanhu chedu or mutsika dzed*u (in the Zezuru traditional way). It is also through the rituals that the ancestors communicate with their living descendants.

Matrilineal and patrilineal ancestors are expected to care for their own descendants. The family members in turn owe respect and loyalty to the ancestors. The living and the living-dead remain one family. Mbiti (1976: 76) provides the following explanation regarding the various death rites of passage:

> When these acts are directed towards the living-dead, they are a symbol of fellowship, a recognition that the departed are still members of their human families and tokens of respect and remembrances for the living-dead.

Similarly, according to Ela (2001: 19), "the presence of ancestors is authentically experienced as the participation of the invisible world in the world of the living". The reverse is also true. The presence of ancestors is authentically experienced as the participation of the living in the world of invisible world. That is what the following death and burial ceremonies and rituals are all about. The role of women in these ceremonies and rituals will be seen to be particularly significant.

The Pre-burial Rituals

The pre-burial rituals begin with the preparation of the body (*kugadzira chitunha*), the wailing (*kuridza mhere yekuchema*) and the funeral wake (*muwonekedzano weumbowo*). Urbanization has necessitated some modification of the practices. The following is a description of the rural practices which are more typical of Zezuru culture. The aim is to highlight the role

of women in the various stages of the ritual. The rituals begin immediately after death.

Firstly comes *kugadzira chitunha* (the preparation of the body). The *kupeta munhu* is performed in all Zezuru areas by women who make sure the eyes of the deceased are closed properly. Then, the body is ritually washed, starting with the head because at birth the person's head normally comes out first. Then, all the orifices, the nose, ears, mouth and private parts, are plugged. The body is anointed with oil, dressed in a clean robe and arranged into a reposed state, with hands folded and joined on the chest. Lastly, the legs are fastened together and tied with a strip of white cloth. When all this has been done, the body (*mutumbi*) is laid out (*kurariswa)* on the *chikuva* (altar).

The actual preparation of the body by the women goes by the Zezuru term *kupeta munhu*. The women take meticulous care and make sure there is no red linen (*jira dzvuku*) or blanket. No covering should have even a tinge of red because *chitsvuku chinoshura ngozi* (the color red can cause the spirit of the departed to become vengeful). After the preparation, the *sahwira* (ritual friend) leads the women in the clapping of hands and ululating in the traditional way. This is followed by wailing (*kuridza mhere*) by the women.

Second is the pre-burial mourning (*kuchema mufi*). Women also play a central role in the pre-burial mourning rites as they do in the preparation of the body. After the announcement of the funeral, people begin arriving in order to console the bereaved family (*kubata maoko*). The women *sahwiras* (ritual friends) and the *varoora* (daughters-in-law) ensure that fiber bands are tied on the arms of close relatives of the dead. That makes it easier for guest mourners to recognize who the close relatives are so that they shake their hands to express their condolences.

During this mourning ceremony, women bring gifts in the form of groceries, such as containers of mealie-meal to be used for making *sadza* (maize meal), vegetables, tomatoes and bundles of firewood. Men are usually responsible for gathering thick logs of wood to be used in the outside fireplace. These gifts are used for the celebratory farewell to the deceased (*kuonekana nemufi*). All gifts for *chema* (to bid the deceased farewell) from various mourners are recorded in a notebook. No matter how small the gift, the name of the donor must be announced and recorded. The gifts express the particular relationship they had with the deceased. All gifts are received by *muzukuru* (nephew or niece) who will use the following formulae as they repeat the words of the presenters.

The pre-burial mourning rituals include the funeral wake (*kurindira mufi*). The Zezuru tradition requires that the body of the deceased spends a night in the home of the deceased. Normally, the body is laid in the hut on the *chikuva* (altar). This is a sign of respect. It also gives relatives and friends sufficient time to perform the necessary mourning rituals (Kadenge, 1998: 86). If it is a husband who has died, the wife has to sit at the feet of the body and the mother of the deceased at the head.

During the night vigil in Domboshawa, the *varoora* (daughters-in-law) perform the *chinemera*. This ritual is designed to lighten the atmosphere somewhat. The women say something funny that comes to mind. The aim is to create a more relaxed atmosphere. They remain jovial in order to make the mourning process more bearable. The *varoora* sing traditional songs and religious hymns.

The women fetch water early in the morning before dawn. The water is heated in order that all the bereaved relatives can take a bath. The body of the deceased is also washed again. The deceased is cleansed for the journey ahead. This is symbolic of the last bath in the old home before entering the new home, the grave. The women dance and ululate as a send-off to the deceased. This is a sign that the deceased should now join the relatives in the new world. The deceased must leave the old home with good memories. In Bindura, the capital of the Mashonaland Central Province, the women do the *kutyora muzura* (ritual courtesy) as a sign of honoring the deceased.

The *kuchema mufi* ceremony goes on until the body of the deceased leaves the house and is taken for burial. In the pre-burial ceremony, the role played by women is again prominent. The women work hard to look after the guests. They care for the bereaved. They lighten the burden of sorrow through their ritual jokes and funny acts. The night vigil is designed to comfort and encourage the bereaved family. This is mainly the responsibility of women. As recognition of this significant role, the v*aroora* will receive some money from the *tetes* (aunts*)* and *vazukuru* (nephews*)* as a token of their appreciation for the services rendered to the deceased and the family. They will sing, dance and ululate as they receive the token and give it to the head *muroora* (daughter-in-law) to keep safely. The money is to be shared equally among the daughters-in-law after the burial.

Throughout the pre-burial period, women play a prominent role. As soon as the kutema *rukarwa* (the breaking the ground ritual) is performed, the *varoora* (daughter-in-law) prepares the path (*nzira*) which will be used during the procession to the grave. While the men dig the grave, the women cook the food that is to be served after the burial. The *varoora* also cook for the grave diggers. They carry the water which is used for constructing the interior of the grave.

Burial Rituals

The burial rituals are crucial to the Zezuru culture because it is believed that if these are not performed correctly, the deceased becomes a wandering spirit that represents a danger to the living. The rituals enable the dead to be reunited with their departed communities. The only people who are thought not to benefit from the elaborate rituals are those believed to have been witches (*varoyi*), murders (*mhondi*) and those who took their own life (*vanozvisungirira*) (see Dodo, 2015: 10). Burial rituals include:

- bidding the deceased farewell (*kuoneka mufi*);
- escorting the body out of the hut (*kubudisa mufi mumba)*;
- bidding the deceased's homestead farewell (*kutenderera musha)*;
- journeying to the grave yard (*rwendo rwekumakuva)*;
- laying the body in the grave (*kuviga mutumbi*);
- sprinkling soil on the coffin (*kukanda ivhu*);
- the burial ceremony itself (*kuvigwa*);
- the early morning visit to the grave on the day after the burial (*rumuko*);
- the distribution of the deceased's effects—depending on circumstances, this can be done the day after the burial or only after several months.

As all these rituals are being performed, the women, especially the *varoora*, intermittently ululate, dance and sing in order to keep the morale of the mourners high. It is the women who bring water in *pfuko* (clay pots) for making dagga to cover the grave. Once the grave has been covered, the women thoroughly sweep the gravesite. According to

Kadenge (1998: 126), the sweeping of the gravesite is done for easy identification of footprints of witches should they come to exhume the corpse during the night.

Post-burial Rituals

Post-burial rites stretch over the course of one year. They begin with the inspection ceremony the morning after burial and end with the *kurova guva* ceremony after one year. In all these rituals, women are indispensable even when they are culturally oppressed by patriarchy and male hegemony. For example, soon after the burial rituals, the women ensure that the deceased's items of clothing are washed and packed away in a safe place.

Anytime ranging between one and seven weeks after the burial, it is time for the rite of passage called *hwahwa hwehonye*, the ritual to commemorate body decomposition (Mandaza, 1970: 54-60), or *hwahwa hwemvura/hwechenura*, the ritual for cleansing the burial tools (Kadenge, 1998: 129–130). This ritual has multiple significance as the names suggest. Firstly, the ritual commemorates the decomposition of the body as it is consumed by larvae (*honye*). This ritual provides the opportunity to reflect on the sadness of parting and the inevitability of a body decomposing in the grave. As such, the ritual is a somber one. There is no singing or dancing.

The second purpose of this ceremony, according to Gelfand (1999: 134), is to provide the opportunity to an elder person within the family to announce the purported cause of the death (*chakadya munhu)*. The results of the *gata* are now made known. The third, and more important purpose of this ceremony, is the ritual cleansing of the tools that were used during the burial. According to Kadenge (1998: 129–130), all tools used in the burial ceremony, including borrowed ones, are kept at the homestead of the deceased until the *hwahwa hwemvura* ceremony. *Mvura* (water) is a symbol of cleansing. At this ceremony, the grave diggers and all their tools are ritually cleansed. The beer (*hwahwa*) which is shared at this ceremony is believed to remove the defilement associated with death. After this cleansing, the tools can be taken home by their various owners. Whenever possible, the ceremony must take place about 7–14 days after the burial so that people are not deprived of their tools for longer than necessary.

Beer is an essential ingredient in the rituals associated with this and other ceremonies. The traditional beer is prepared by women. It takes them seven days to do so. On the day of the ceremony, the women will be present to serve those who will be drinking the beer. This again demonstrates women's central role and participatory leadership.

One year after the burial, or even later depending on circumstances, the family organizes the crucial *kurova guva* (home-bringing) ceremony (Kapito, 1978). Alternative names are *kugadzira mufi* (to restore the dead) and *kudzosa mufi* (to bring back the dead). As noted by Gundani (1994: 25), kurova *guva* is a ritual where the spirit of the deceased is integrated with the living. It is a way of appeasing the dead by bringing them back to the village after they had wandered in the forest for a year. Until this ceremony has been completed, the spirit of the deceased is regarded as "homeless", neither belonging fully in the world of the living nor in the world of the ancestors. Burial places where the ancestors live are sacred places where they can be approached with offerings and consulted in times of crisis. Hence, the *kurova guva* ceremony is crucial to ensure the unity between the living and the dead.

The *kurova guva* ceremony constitutes the winding up of the burial rites. It is also the symbolic ritual that brings closure to the period of mourning. The ceremony is significant for the deceased as it marks their integration with both the living and the departed ancestors (*vadzimu).* Through this ceremony and its ritual, the spirit of the deceased evolves to become a true ancestor. This is evident in the typical address to the deceased: *Nhasi takudzora, kubva kumasanzu, kusango kwawanga uri takuisa kumusha kuna vamwe* (We have taken you back today, we have taken you out of the woods, out of the forest, we have brought you home to be among others).

Women play a prominent part in the preparation for this ceremony. Banana (1991: 67) explains it as follows:

> Beer is brewed by an elderly woman who has passed the child bearing age (*chembere yapedza ura)*, with the assistance of little girls who have not reached the stage of puberty. It is believed that females who do not menstruate are undefiled. They are the ones to brew the beer. Menstrual blood is believed to be dangerous to the spirits.

The preparation of the beer is an elaborate process. It involves steps like consecrating the finger millet, immersing it in water (*kunyika mumera)*

for partial germination, drying it and grinding it into *chimera* (flour) which the elderly woman uses to brew the sacrificial beer for the kurova guva ceremony.

The ceremony itself usually starts on Friday evening and goes on until Saturday morning. During the night, women ululate (*kuridza mhururu*), sing and dance to the rhythm of drums. Not doing so would be a sign of disrespect to the spirit. One elderly woman explained that if people do not dance, the spirit might come back and say *Hamuna kunditambira kana kundiimbira, makandiramwa here?* (You did not dance or sing for me; are you now ignoring me?) People therefore dance and drink beer all night, along with woman playing an essential participatory role.

Early the next morning (*mambakuedza*), the elders (women and men) entreat the spirits of ancestors to welcome the deceased spirit to join the other *vadzimu*. They also reintegrate the spirit of the spirit of the person for whom the ceremony is done to rejoin the family. At one such morning ceremony, an elder in the family addressed the spirit as follows: *Tauya kuzokutora kuti uchirega kugara mumasango, uye uzochengeta mhuri yako yawakasiya* (We have come to bring you back to the homestead, instead of you wandering in the woods, for you to look after the family you left behind).[2]

While men play a dominant role in this *kurova guva* ritual, women are indispensable to the process. Without the role they play, this ritual, central to the understanding of Zezuru spirituality, cannot take place. The brewing of beer, cooking and creating the right atmosphere during the ceremony itself through singing, ululating and dancing, is done by women. They practically direct the occasion from the background. Makwasha (2004: 355–360) describes the central role played by Mbuya Ndoro at the *kurova guva* ceremony of her deceased son Augustine. She was the one to give various instructions, which included rebuking some men who she felt were detracting from the sacredness of the occasion.

The last post-burial ceremony is usually the inheritance ceremony which goes by such names as *kugara nhaka* (literally "to inherit") or ku*garwa nhaka* (literally "to be inherited"). This ceremony takes place fairly soon after *kurova guva*, or some weeks or months later depending on the circumstances. The actual *kugara nhaka* ritual is done differently in many parts of Mashonaland Central. In Mount Darwin, the

[2] This is based on my participant observation at Tineyi Rabvu's place in Mount Darwin on 13th August 2021.

widow gives water to drink or to wash hands in a gourd (*mukombe)* to the one she chooses to marry her. In Bindura, the widow gives *tsvimbo* (knobkierie) to her preferred husband. The brothers of her late husband sit in a line and she hands over the knobkierie to the man of her choice. *Tsvimbo* symbolizes protection. She is seeking someone to protect her and her children. If the man does not want to inherit her, he refuses the water for washing his hands and does not receive the *tsvimbo.* If the widow does not want the *nhaka*, she will give her son (or *tete*) the *tsvimbo.* Hereby, the woman indicates that she wishes to either remain in the family as a widow, or that she wishes to move out of the matrimonial home and maybe marry outside of the family.

In summary, the role of women in the death rites of passage begins directly after death. Women wash the body and prepare it for burial. Women are the chief mourners at funerals. Women are also the ones to lighten the atmosphere and make the mourning process more bearable through their singing and dancing. They are in effect therefore "care-givers" where families have been thrown into turmoil because of a death. The women prepare the food, fetch water, clear the pathway to the grave and sweep the hut after the body has been taken away for burial. They also take care of people's health as they prepare medicated water for washing of hands after burial procedures. The women are in charge of brewing beer for the immediate and post-burial ceremonies. After burial, the female relatives remain behind to comfort, console and provide moral support to the bereaved.

Yet, despite women playing all these active roles, the investigation has shown that cultural oppression and male domination do in many ways characterize death rites of passage in the Zezuru culture.

Pastoral Care, Culture and Healing

Zezuru death rites of passage are male dominated. The values underlying these practices are patriarchal and gender discriminatory. At best, widows are marginalized. At worst, the rites can be seen as oppressive. All of this is contrary to the basic functions of pastoral care. There are, however, two mitigatory measures uncovered by this study. Firstly, we have seen that the widows often become agents of their own healing process while journeying together with fellow widows. We have seen how they play the most active role before, during and after burial.

Secondly, widows can formulate functional substitutes for the cultural rites of passage and therefore take a lead in their healing. An empirical investigation was done in the form of a widows' retreat of two and a half days. The retreat was organized by a female pastor, who is the first author of the article. The theme was: "Healed by God's love". The retreat had two main purposes. The first was to gather empirical data from widows themselves. The second was that the retreat itself could function as a new kind of post-death ritual for Zezuru Christian widows in which the usual constraints would not apply. In the presence and with the support of others, the Christian widows who are fully steeped in their culture could create their own post-death rite of passage without compromising their Christian convictions. The participants could support one another, learn from one another and encourage one another. The devotions focused on widows in the Bible. Testimonies were shared in a safe space. They watched the film, *Neria* (1993), which depicts the struggles and eventual triumph of a widow in that particular culture. In the group discussions, participants could reflect on their own experiences and those of others.

This kind of a retreat and the liturgical functional substitutes for Zezuru cultural post-burial rituals can both be utilized in pastoral care with widows on their journey toward healing. They are now brought into dialogue with the seven functions of pastoral care as identified by Lartey (2003).

The first is the pastoral function of healing. Zezuru widows often find themselves broken and bruised not only by the loss of their loved one, but also when they find themselves in conflict with detrimental cultural beliefs and practices. The widows are in need of emotional, psychological and spiritual restoration and healing (see Lartey, 2003: 637). Some elements in Zezuru death rites of passage are conducive to healing, but others exacerbate the women's suffering. In the Christian retreat, the voices of the women were heard and their humanity and dignity were respected. They could tell their story and be encouraged by others. This had a deeply healing effect. The devotions strengthened their relationship of faith. The film and the narrative of a long-time widow who had made a success in life on her own opened their eyes to positive possibilities. This helped them to break out of their utter isolation and loneliness. It inspired them to greater resolve and determination. Faith, a sense of belonging and community, and a vision for the future, contributed positively to the healing process.

The second is the pastoral function of *sustaining*. Sustaining is about finding strength and support from within and without. It enables a person to cope adequately with what cannot be changed (Lartey, 2003: 660–661). Death is an undesirable situation that cannot be changed. It triggers a grief process. The journey toward acceptance, healing and peace is a long one which requires great endurance. The strength and support that come from being sustained are needed. The retreat was tailored to provide support and empower and sustain the women on their arduous journey. "Sustaining" suggests an ongoing process rather than a once-off event. The widows requested that annual retreats for them and other widows in their churches and communities should be conducted regularly.

Third is the pastoral function of *guiding*. Guiding, according to Clebsch and Jaekle (1994: 429–436), is about "assisting perplexed persons to make confident choices between alternative courses of thought and action, when such choices are viewed as affecting the present and future state of the soul". This requires problem-solving and decision-making skills (see Lartey, 2003: 667). The retreat facilitated the widows to confront the many complex and life-altering choices they face after having lost their husband. Many of the difficulties and questions arise from the very nature of the Zezuru culture. The *Neria* film provided an example of how a widow could assert her legal and human rights with regard to property, for instance, in order not to end up destitute due to the actions of the deceased's family that are based on cultural and customary views. Discussion groups and plenary presentations helped them to answer many questions regarding their situation. One of the issues that elicited much discussion is the cultural pressure to be "being inherited" by a male relative of the husband. The guidance they received came from a combination of the devotions, the film, the sharing of their stories and the testimony of a role model.

Fourth is the pastoral function of *reconciling*. In a quest for harmonious human relationships, reconciling must include "bringing together again parties that have become estranged or alienated from each other" (Lartey, 2003: 678–679). Death often triggers conflict in families. This is also the case in Zezuru culture. Some conflict arises from accusations of witchcraft and blaming the widow for the husband's death. These actions provide the husband's family with the excuse to appropriate the deceased's property and assets. Another terrain of conflict is *kugarwa nhaka* (wife inheritance). The way in which a widow is passed on to another man elicits great bitterness. While the retreat could not resolve

these conflicts, the women together could explore avenues of reconciliation. For example, the emphasis on forgiveness as a means of gaining freedom in oneself lowered the level of bitterness and powerlessness. The speaker with many years of experience as a widow illustrated from her own life the need to maintain harmonious relationships with the in-laws for the sake of the children. However, she also emphasized the need for setting clear boundaries. She also restated that forgiveness and sustaining good relationships do not mean that a woman should give up her agency or betray the convictions of her faith.

Fifth is the pastoral function of *nurturing*. Following the death of their spouse, widows in Zezuru culture need encouragement to grow and develop their talents and potential. This necessitates that they should be nurtured. Lartey (2003: 690–691) identifies six dimensions of growth or nurturing, namely: nurturing of the mind, of the body, of relationships with others, of the relationship with the biosphere, of relationships with groups and institutions, and of the spiritual dimension of one's life. Nurturing is done through both "caring" and "confrontation" (Lartey, 2003: 694). At the retreat, the caring occurred through empathetic devotions which nurtured the spiritual aspect of their lives. The opportunity to relate their experiences in an understanding environment provided care for the emotional and relational aspects of being human. The confrontational aspect of nurturing encouraged self-insight and provided the stimulus to grow out of self-pity and resolve to work hard for themselves, their independence and their families. The Neria film opened the eyes of the widows to the reality that culture is not set in stone, and that oppressive cultural practices can be confronted and overcome through legal means.

Sixth and seventh are the pastoral functions of *liberating* and *empowering*. The pastoral function of *liberation* is significant for Christian widows in Zezuru culture on both the socio-cultural and psychological levels. They are often inhibited by patriarchal structures to think and act for themselves. They tend to internalize negative social messages about their worth and value as a human being. This puts them in a position of "servile dependence on others in one's social circle or outside it", in the words of Emmanuel Lartey (2003: 700). Women who have been subjected to patriarchy and androcentrism and who lack a strong sense of self-worth need liberation from domination and oppression. The retreat focused on this crucial function of pastoral care. One aim was to raise awareness and facilitate the women to examine personal and structural

sources of inequality critically. A second aim was to guide them to find practical means to confront and overcome obstacles to their freedom and self-determination. They were challenged to consider options for change. These include legal means and support groups and networks.

Closely linked with liberation is the pastoral function of *empowerment*. Lartey (2003: 709–711) explains that marginalized groups and persons who endure years of enforced and internalized helplessness struggle to break free. They first have to find the strength to do so—they need to become empowered. The retreat aimed to empower Zezuru widows *within* themselves and also to find and utilize the available resources *outside* of themselves. Empowered persons with access to resources can think and act in ways that will result in greater freedom and participation in the life of the societies of which they form a part (Lartey, 2003: 711–713).

Conclusion

This article has explored the Zezuru women's role in the death rites of passage in Zimbabwe. It has highlighted the concept of Zezuru women's participatory leadership during such death rites of passage. Specific activities which are the preserve for women were highlighted. These activities revealed that despite the women's participatory leadership during the death rites of passage, their role is suppressed within the Zezuru culture and it has also not received adequate attention in academic literature. The chapter then gives a pastoral response to the death and burial rituals whereby women may employ functional substitutes to put the seven functions of pastoral care into practice. These are: healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating and empowering.

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