

Editorial: HIV, AIDS, Sex and Sexualities in Africa

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The HIV and AIDS epidemic is nearly 40 years old since the HIV was first discovered in the United States. At the moment the epicentre of HIV new infections; challenges related to the availability, accessibility and adherence to ART and AIDS related deaths is Africa south of the Sahara (UNAIDS Report 2016; see also UNAIDS 2013 Global Report). A lot of work in the form of research and publications has already been done in responding to the epidemic. The government, Non-Governmental Organisations, Faith Based Organisations, churches and other religious institutions have invested in human, material and financial resources over the years in a bid to mitigate the effects of the epidemic (Moyo 2015; and Haddad 2011). With so much efforts and investment in mitigating against HIV and AIDS, the impact of the disease is still evident in many communities especial in Africa South of the Sahara which has remained as the epicentre.

Two members (Herbert Moyo and Beatrice Okyere-Manu) of The Collaborative for HIV and AIDS, Religion and Theology (CHART), an initiative of the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg – South Africa held 4 research paper writing seminars on HIV for their own academic publications. These two members of CHART also teach in the module: *The Church and HIV and AIDS* offered in the school of Religion, Philosophy and Classics. Other academics teaching in this module are Professors Gerald West and Philippe Denis and Doctor Lilian Siwila. This module exposes participants to the complexity of the HIV and AIDS epidemic as it relates to Sex and Sexuality which is assumed to perpetuate Stigma and discrimination. The module addresses the cultural and gender issues that contribute to its growth as well as attempting to deal with issues of stigma and discrimination. A key aspect of the course focuses

on what the response of religious leaders and the church to the epidemic should be. Class dynamics of this module and the experiences in CHART influenced the expansion of research paper writing seminars to a call for papers on *HIV, Sex and Sexualities in Africa*.

This *Alternation* special issues addresses questions that are similar to those addressed by this church and AIDS module. The question is: What has changed and what has remained the same after more than 30 years of response engagements by religious groups, civil society, individuals and the government? It is indisputable that much has changed, but there are two enduring concerns: stigma and sexuality. HIV continues to be stigmatised, particularly within faith communities. And part of the reason for this is the connection between HIV and sexual intercourse.

It can be argued that communities are now somehow knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS. However, the subject of HIV and AIDS is becoming a boring discourse in community gatherings. There is some level of fatigue in talking about HIV in general. There is even more fatigue amongst the donor communities especial from the West. On the other hand, statistics for new infections, ART defaulting and the number of AIDS related deaths continues to grow. 1.2 million People worldwide died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2015 according to UNAIDS. The challenge of HIV and AIDS is still with us.

The challenge therefore concerns the development of new effective efforts in responding to the epidemic in order to achieve the ‘Zero New HIV Infections, Zero Discrimination and Zero AIDS-related deaths,’ per the theme of 2015 World AIDS day celebration.

It must be noted that the current new infections are located amongst the key population groups some of which are not reachable by the church and other religious organisations in contestation on different forms of sexualities. This makes the discourse on sex and sexualities part and parcel of the narrative of HIV and AIDS.

This special edition of *Alternation* engages questions such as the following:

- Where are the dangerous gaps in current responses to HIV and AIDS?
- What is it that needs to be done more effectively in current responses to HIV and AIDS?

- How best can religious organisations engage the key populations?
- Why are people not applying the knowledge that they know about HIV and ART in promoting healthy sexual practices?
- What new strategies can help to get to Zero stigma, Zero discrimination and Zero new infections from where we are now?

The above questions and many more around sex, sexualities and HIV still need to be asked and answered.

In a way the articles in this special issue are beginning to ask new questions around HIV. There is a tendency in the articles to explore fresh approaches in responding to the socio-cultural and religious challenges in the fight against the HIV epidemic. The content of the articles is premised within a range of academic disciplines in the humanities especial in anthropology, sociology, ethics religious studies and theology. This *Alternation* special issue makes original research based contributions to literature on HIV and AIDS.

This special issue is divided into four sections of related articles beginning with five papers on church and HIV and AIDS, followed by six articles that engage HIV and Stigma and discrimination. The third section has five articles that discuss on the role of culture and traditions in the context of HIV and AIDS. The last section is made up of five papers that critically engage a variety of formal and informal forms of education and HIV prevention.

The special issue opens with Francis Machingura and Norman Chivasa who expose the mainstreaming of HIV and AIDS programmes in the ministry of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe. Owing to stigma and discrimination which is rampant among Pentecostals, the paper by Machingura and Chivasa concludes that not mainstreaming is not an option for the AFM in Zimbabwe as the process is not resource-intensive which puts the denomination at a better position to effectively operate in the face of HIV and AIDS while at the same time fulfilling its mandate.

This is followed by an article by Nomatter Sande who delves into the concept of sexual orientation in the context of Zimbabwe where political some sexualities are not acceptable. Nomatter juxtaposes sexual orientation with the amount of infections amongst sexualities that the church is not even talking to such as homosexuals. Thus, Nomatter's article seeks to understand the extent

to which the Pentecostal faith, practices, and rituals can dialogue with homosexuals in the context of HIV and AIDS. Nomatter utilizes Queer theology, and data collection is through in-depth interviews and sermonic discourse analysis. He concludes that reaching out to lesbians in Pentecostalism create space for the church to mitigate the widespread of HIV and AIDS.

Martin Mujinga and Herbert Moyo then come in arguing that Churches have a unique role to play in responding to HIV and AIDS through demonstrating that there is no other institution that has the reach into society, the continued presence nor the higher reach to respond like the church. Martin and Herbert interrogate the engagement and/or disengagement of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) on HIV and AIDS. Martin and Herbert conclude by challenging the MCZ to revise its theology of the needy as emphasized by John Wesley.

Chammah Kaunda then comes in at this point with his article on neo-prophetism. Kaunda writes about Neo-Prophetism, gender and 'Anointed Condoms' in a quest for a *missio-Spiritus* of just-sex in the African Context of HIV and AIDS. Chammah engages Sanyangore's theology of safe sex from Pneumatological missiological perspectives. It concludes with some proposals for mission practice for engaging issues of sex and sexuality.

This section on church and HIV and AIDS closes with an article by Martin Mujinga and Herbert Moyo who discuss the response of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. Sinenhlanhla Chisale and Herbert Moyo discuss the concept of the sexuality of adolescent girls and church discipline and subsequent absolution in the Lutheran church. The paper exposes the discriminatory nature of church discipline especial following pregnancy by adolescents and some adult single women. This paper further exposes the inadequacies of the concept of abstinence from sexual intercourse until marriage.

The second section is composed of six papers on HIV and stigma and discrimination begin with Elizabeth Pulane Motswapong and Sana Mmolai's article on zero stigma, zero discrimination and zero infection in Botswana. Motswapong and Mmolai argue that zero stigma, zero discrimination and zero infection is a farfetched dream for Botswana. Even though Botswana has been hailed as one of the few African countries that has tackled the HIV and AIDS scourge head on, the country is yet to overcome the scourge of stigma and discrimination. The exposes the sources and the levels of stigma and

discrimination in Botswana. This is followed by the work of Lekganyane Maditobane Robert who discusses courtesy stigma experienced mainly by caregivers in South Africa. Lekganyane gives the narratives of the experiences of the caregivers and how they are coping with the stigma. Seemingly there is some resonance in terms of stigma and discrimination between Botswana and South Africa.

The article that comes next in this section is original research data and analysis from the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), Thusanang and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ). The team of researchers (Nkosinathi Muyambo, Mphendulwa Moyo, Gift Dube, Dennis Muleya, Urethabisitse Mathe, Miss Sibikwaphi Ndlovu, P. Knutson, V Mzezewa and B.B. Dube) offer us data on the pastoral and biomedical responses to HIV and AIDS by the church in Zimbabwe. This article exposes the Pastoral and Biomedical Responses to HIV and AIDS programming by LUCSA and its partners. Data was gathered through engaging with members and workers of the ELCZ regarding their experiences of Home Based Care (HBC) training as a way of managing and holistically responding to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. This study explores the impact of the training for caregivers, nursing staff and pastors in HIV and AIDS management through a case study of the Thusanang HIV & AIDS project and Manama Mission Hospital of the Western Diocese of the ELCZ in Gwanda South. The study concludes that skills training in HBC and Palliative Care have made a positive and remarkable impact on the lives and work of HBC givers and pastors and that such training has contributed to the retention of caregivers. However in the analysis there is demonstration of the resilience of stigma and discrimination.

This section closes with an exposition of stigma and discrimination in the church and in Rastafarianism in Jamaica. Roderick Hewitt exposes the influences of Conservative Christianity, Rastafari and Dance Hall music within Jamaica on Homophobia and Stigma against People living with HIV. Hewitt concludes that in order for a more enlightened attitude towards the LGBT community and victims of HIV and AIDS to emerge within Jamaica fundamental changes are needed in the embedded conservative church and Rastafari theologies on human sexuality. Also the anti-LGBT and hegemonic masculinities narrative culture of Dance Hall music must give way to conscious advocating of healthy life affirming gender relationship.

The third section is composed of five articles that discuss the role of

culture and traditions in the context of HIV and AIDS. This section begins with Gyaviira Kisitu and Lilian Siwila who offer a critique of the construction of discourses on woman's body in African Religious spaces and its effect on Well-being. Through discourse analysis the two scholars argue that although women's bodies have power to control and challenge systems both in societal and spiritual realm as is argued by scholars these bodies are still perceived as subordinate to patriarchal control. Hence, their paper concludes, with a need for urgency in analyzing the way in which women's bodies are located in religious spaces and its effect to women's identity and well-being.

Elijah M. Baloyi's article on 'Theological Reflections on Sex as a Cleansing Ritual for African Widows' discusses the dehumanising nature of the ritual of widow cleansing which he views as entrenched in patriarchal gender inequalities, culture, religion and tradition which are vehicles by means of which structured stereotypes are entrenched. Baloyi demonstrates that cleansing of the widow is done through sexual intercourse. Baloyi argues that besides being both oppressive and abusive, the sex cleansing ritual can also be an instrument of the transmission of sex-related sicknesses such as HIV. The article exposes the vulnerability of widows who have no choice as refusal to be cleansed can lead one to be an outcast. Baloyi highlights how humiliating and unchristian such a ritual is for defenceless widows and their children.

Sinenhlanhla poses questions on cultural forms for the prevention of the spread of HIV. She interrogates the Zulu cultural practice of *ukusoma* as a form of prevention of the spread of HIV amongst young unmarried women. Sinenhlanhla S Chisale argues that African HIV prevention methods are being politicized and racialised. She uses the example of the concept of *ukusoma* as an entry point to the debate. Chisale discusses how these traditional indigenous practices can, on one hand, be limiting and on the other hand, be a source of female power in a context of patriarchy, particularly taking into account the HIV epidemic.

Joseph Kofi Antwi and Beatrice Okyere-Manu look at a cultural and social Easter festival celebrated in Ghana amongst the people of Kwahu. These authors argue that the festival has the potential to become a silent contributor to HIV infection in Ghana. Drawing on a personal observations as well as available literature on the current developments of the festival, the two authors argue that notwithstanding the economic boost that may accompany the festival, as a result of the tourist attraction and other activities, the growing presence of people from different communities and countries who travel to the

festival presents a chance for unintended, unprotected sexual networks as a result of excessive drinking of alcohol, and abuse of drugs, show off of wealth and multiple sexual partners which makes them vulnerable to HIV infections through unreasoned actions/indulgencies.

Herbert Moyo's paper says that the traditionalization of menopause amongst the Karanga and the Shangaan contributes to the spread of HIV. Culture is a major challenge to effective responses to HIV. Moyo argues that the cultural explanations of the meaning of blood released by women during menstruation requires some biological explanation to ease the fears and taboos thereof among the Karanga and the Shangaan Tsonga. Moyo concludes that the continued use of traditionalised explanations of menstrual blood is a possible source for the spread of HIV especial in a trans-generational manner amongst the concerned tribal groupings.

The last section of this special issue is made up of five papers engaging the concept of education and HIV prevention. Chika-Eze's paper on 'Childhood Sex Education Facilitating Zero HIV Infection' argues that the continual prevalence of HIV and AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa leading to a high rate of AIDS related deaths indicates that in spite of tremendous efforts made so far, humanity is struggling with the epidemic. Chika-Eze argues that children as well as adults need to be well-informed of sex and sexuality related issues to facilitate appropriate decision making on matters of sexual activity. She concludes that now is the time to take children's sexual education serious.

Chika-Eze's paper is followed by Tenson Muyambo's article which investigates why the available information on HIV-AIDS does not translate into effective and efficient HIV intervention measures. Muyambo argues that *ngano* (folktales) as repertoires of indigenous knowledge, can be used for HIV information dissemination. In this paper Muyambo further argues that indigenous knowledge systems are a useful resource for mitigating the HIV epidemic.

Sindiso Zhou, Nhlanhla Landa and Isabella Zhou contend that access to information and resources are critical factors in ensuring that young girls are empowered to handle reproductive health issues. These three scholars conclude that in some contexts young girls have limited access to information, medical services, support and resources that can empower them to prevent unplanned teenage pregnancies and attendant risks like HIV due to common preconceptions about the taboos of teaching 'young' people about 'adult' iss-

ues in a culture-conscious society.

The article by Fairfield Siyawamwaya, 'HIV Prevention Programmes in Zimbabwe: A Gendered Terrain' is of the view that gender disparities have a negative effect on the fight against HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Siyawamwaya argues that HIV prevention is a gendered terrain. Through the theory of social constructionism and literature review as well as in-depth analysis Siyawamwaya contends that proper gender equality is a necessity in the battle against HIV and AIDS.

The last article comes from Beatrice Okyere-Manu, 'HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) in Schools: Ethical Implications to Long Term Support Structures'. Okyere-Manu, through the lens of ethical theory of Consequentialism, argues that there are long term implications for the families as well as communities therefore all key role players in the adolescent's life need to rethink their approach of engagement to issues around sex and sexuality, HIV infections, sexual behaviours and HIV testing. Okyere-Manu concludes that if the proposal by the department of Health and Department of education in South Africa for a school-based HIV counselling and testing programme were to be effective, then there is the need to pay much attention to the long term support structures such as Parents, Carers, Guardians and Spiritual leaders as those who will carry the long term responsibilities of the teens once the test is completed.

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Editorial

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