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## ***Empire Religions, Theologies, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems***

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# *Alternation*

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**Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the  
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**Empire Religions, Theologies, and  
Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Guest Editors  
*Chammah J. Kaunda and  
R. Simangaliso Kumalo*

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# Editorial: Empire Religions, Theologies, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

**Chammah J. Kaunda**  
**R. Simangaliso Kumalo**

This special issue of *Alternation* consists of thirteen selected, peer reviewed and approved articles from an interdisciplinary International Summer School Conference on ‘Empire Religions, Theologies, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems’, held at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics of the University of KwaZulu–Natal in 2014. The Summer School was hosted in collaboration with Humboldt University (Berlin, Germany). The aim was to create an interdisciplinary dialogue platform for academics, researchers and postgraduate students within the Humanities from Germany and South Africa. The particular focus was to examine issues ranging from the relationship between indigenous knowledge systems and modernity, postcolonial identity, religion and ethics in the context of globalization with special interest on religious pluralism and the common responsibility for the world. This was perceived as significant in understanding various configurations and intersectionalities among notions of knowledge, power, and religion.

The underlying argument of the articles is that since the times of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, religion and religious symbols have been used repeatedly to legitimate the political and military power of Empires. In close connection to this, the Empires of Antiquity were the first ones to form elites of knowledge and to produce written knowledge - partly also with religious connotations. Elsewhere Chammah Kaunda (2015) has argued that during the period of modern colonialism, Christian religion and its theology was an overarching frame of knowledge for European missionaries in Africa. The missionary theological politics of knowledge was used as an instrument for conquest and subjugation of indigenous knowledge, identities and subjectivities in Africa. Therefore what in the theories of Michel Foucault (1972) is called the ‘Archaeology of knowledge’, partly is a religious

institution. This configuration endures to colonial and post-colonial times. Distinct from the archives of imperial power, there are other knowledge systems like those handed down by communities of descent, by groups or schools of religious experts or by alternative networks of the poor and the powerless. In African and other indigenous communities around the world such knowledge is classified in its academic usage as ‘indigenous knowledge’. It is perceived to be the worldviews of indigenous people and people with African ancestry and are claimed to be an ‘epistemology of struggle’ which aims at decentring ‘Eurocentrism’ which rejects the possibility of meaningful scientific knowledge to be found elsewhere rather than Europe. In a way indigenous knowledge critiques the universalization of Eurocentric norms, the idea that any race, in Aimé Césaire’s words, ‘holds a monopoly on beauty, intelligence, and strength’ (cited in Shohat & Stam 2014/1994:3). The approach of indigenous knowledge is ‘experientially-based, non-universal, holistic and relational knowledge of ‘resistance’’, recognition of their legitimacy is associated with the politics of decolonizing the mind, gender, identities and subjectivities and institutions of knowledge production such as colleges and universities (Dei 2002:114). This is about more than challenging and subverting ‘epistemological imperialism’. George Sefa Dei (2012:104) asks a poignant question: ‘How do we African scholars stop ourselves from becoming ‘intellectual imposters’ in the Western academy?’ The answer to this sobering question lies in consciously and decisively grounding African knowledge production, and practices into their appropriate soils, cultural contexts, histories and heritages. That is, in addition to resisting colonial education and knowledges, it is important to work, learn, and engage in knowledge production, sharing and critical inquiry in contexts that affirm or are suitable given the histories, heritages and cultures that shape our ways of understanding the world (Dei 2012:104-105).

In a way, the articles in this issue engage in building on literature that is exploring fresh approaches in an endeavour to exercise intellectual agencies rooted in assertion of indigenous social reality informed by local experiences and practices.

The content of the articles are situated with a range of academic disciplines, especially within the Humanities – such African Theology, Religion and Politics, Sociology, Philosophy, Gender and Religion, Ethics, Education, Cultural, Gender, Drama and Performance Studies. These articles are approached from interdisciplinary perspectives. This special issue is

divided into four sections beginning with the religion against empire, followed by theology and indigenous knowledge, then the question of identity in post-apartheid South Africa and finally there are specific articles that focus on biographies of distinguished personalities of either African ancestry or association.

In his provocative article 'Christianity in Africa', Anthony Balcomb argues that 'Christian religion has become deeply insinuated into the world view of many Africans south of the Sahara'. Employing Bourdieu's theory of habitus, Balcomb notes that depending on the paradigm used, Christianity in African can be seen as either liberating or culturally alienating. In the first sector is the conquest model used mostly by African elites, who see Christianity as colonial instrument used to subjugate Africans to European domination. This resulted in the foreignization and alienation of Christianity as religion of colonizers. The second is liberation paradigm which promotes African identities and subjectivities. He accentuates that more than 'a set of abstract criteria' alone, Africans prefer using stories to interpret Christian faith in concrete social realities.

The next four articles focus on indigenous knowledge systems and begins with an article by Chammah J. Kaunda which examines the validity of the assertion that has been popular among African elites that homosexuality is 'un-Africa'. Chammah J. Kaunda evaluates the literature of the early cultural anthropologists among the Ndembu people and other related ethnic groups in Zambia and demonstrates that 'the current politicization of homosexuality as 'un-African' in Zambia is a by-product of African epistemic failure to articulate cultural sexualities within the ideological and material legacies of African cultural past'. He argues that homosexuality was a ritual sexuality that existed in the liminal stage of the ritual of circumcision among the Ndembus and had specific cultural function in the overall scheme of the ritual. He proposes 'an African ecclesia-ethic of openness' based on unconditional love.

The article by Beatrice Okyere-Manu, 'Cohabitation in Akan Culture of Ghana', takes an ethical investigation on the current issue of cohabitation in Akan culture of Ghana. Using consequentialism theory Okyere-Manu discovers the Akan traditional culture has mechanisms that minimises 'the unity and the rituals that binds and protects the individuals in the relationship' and simultaneously restrains 'the essence of the institution of marriage within the indigenous Akan context'. She therefore argues for critical reclaiming and

reconstituting some Akan cultural elements on marriage to strengthen the current social system.

Articles of Lilian Siwila and Christina Kgari-Masondo pick up in more detail the implications of indigenous knowledge system in the area of gender, maternal health and environmental issues. In different ways they both argue for more dialogue between contemporary knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems in order to recover the notion of the community. Siwila explores 'The role of indigenous Knowledge in African Women's Theology for understanding motherhood and maternal health' within the African context. This research is significant especially in the context where issues of maternal and infant mortality rates are high on agenda of many African countries. Through the lens of liminality, Siwila articulates the process from conception to childbirth as a rite of passage and shows how the community participates in the process by providing support to the mother and child.

Kgari-Masondo looks at the role the Sotho-Tswana women in environmental issues. She analyses women who were forcibly removed in the 1960s from their ancestral land in Lady Selborne, South Africa and resettled in Ga-Rankuwa. She argues that the task of food production and land guardianship was a sacred duty of Sotho-Tswana women and displacement interrupted this function as they lost their fertile lands and relocated in barren and arid land. Kgari-Masondo suggests reclamation of the sacred role of women as guardians of environment and food producers by involving different stakeholders such as the state, communities and non-governmental organisations to engaged Sotho-Tswana women in alternative ways of interacting with the environment by combining both contemporary and indigenous approaches.

The next three articles deal with the question of identity within postcolonial perspectives. In the first article, Sokfa, Kaunda and Madlala engage with young people's contestations of the notion 'Born Free' identity in post-apartheid South Africa. The authors analyse stage play-script called *Mzansi* stories written and performed by students in the Drama and Performance Studies of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. They demonstrate that stage play such as *Mzansi* stories have potential to enable the wider society to understand various ways in which post-apartheid young generation is contesting, deconstructing and reconstructing the 'Born Free identity in protest to prevailing socio-political circumstances within South Africa'.

In 'The black body in colonial and postcolonial public discourse in



South Africa', Federico Settler and Mari Engh interrogate 'the representation of the black body, and the ways these representations have been sustained by social discourses that imagine black bodies as fixed and without agency'. The authors note that current discourses and epistemologies that form the representation of black body in postcolonial [South] Africa remain entrenched in Eurocentric epistemology and colonial representation in which the black body remains essentially a space 'of labour, violence and disease'. In analysing and exposing these representations, Settler and Engh intended to develop other ways of reassessing social discourses about gender and health in the southern African context.

In the next article, Mutshidzi Maraganedzha questions: 'Can we eliminate race?' Using a normative approach, he engages Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion of race eliminativism which suggests obliteration of the concept of race from public discourses. He notes the polemics that have persisted among philosophers on the question whether to eliminate or retain the concept of race in public social discourses. He underlines that the notion of race should be maintained and only re-conceptualized in terms that are non-racist and affirmation of equality of all human beings and social justice that transcends racial boundaries.

The final section consists of five articles which are dedicated to the contributions of some renowned personalities with either African ancestry or associations. Roderick Hewitt pushes academic frontiers as he brings into conversation the legend of creative art, Bob Marley and an academia, Steve de Gruchy 'as two prophets of social change that belonged to two different eras and social locations, who lived their lives in the fast lane and died in the prime of their lives and career development'. He argues Marley's Redemption Song exemplified the 'spirituality that undergirded de Gruchy's theology of development and its accompanying Olive Agenda'. While Marley symbolically used Marijuana as a 'tree of life' for the 'healing of the nations', de Gruchy used Olive tree as representation of the same. Hewitt noted that Marley and de Gruchy not only did they embody 'a unique form of integrated and open spirituality' but were also 'committed ultimately to the service of life'.

Simangaliso Kumalo borrows Pliny the Elder's popular saying *Ex Africa semper aliquid Novi* (something new always comes from Africa) to establish that 'the vision of a self-reliant and developed continent' were already somehow articulated by Pixley ka Isaka Seme in 1906 in his speech,

‘the Regeneration of Africa’. Kumalo notes that Seme already developed some contours for uniting African tribes in 1912 through his facilitation to establish South African Native National Congress (SNNC) - a forerunner of the African National Congress (ANC). Kumalo argues that while the traces of African Renaissance may not be explicit in NEPAD, OAU and the African Parliament, they still live ‘in the dreams, aspirations and imagination of patriotic Africans’. Thus, Kumalo calls for the rebirthing of the memory of Seme and rearticulating his ideas for fresh strategies of resisting new imperialism and colonialism.

Kaunda, Owino and Phiri contest the applicability of Bediako’s translatability theory in the context of European missionary masculinity performance in 19<sup>th</sup> century Africa. They argue that missionaries’ gender ideological was deeply entrenched in the process of translation and in the politics of interpretation of Christian faith which was transposed into African worldviews. They therefore suggest some ways to consider for the way forward for decolonising African masculinities in African Christianity.

The article by Sibusiso Masondo, ‘Prophets never die?’ examines the life and ministry of Petros Masango who was a bishop in St John’s Apostolic Faith Mission seceding and forming an independent ministry after a long court battle with the female founder Ma Christinah Nku. He noted that the patriarchal system that was embedded in the theology of that time did not allow her to head the church. Masondo established that the story of Masango and struggle for control over the church represents an epistemological bondage of some African churches to Euro-western Christian paradigm of gender that was introduced by missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In crowning this issue, the final article by Johannes A. Smit, ‘Beyers Naudé as Post-colonial Theologian’, resurrects the memory of an Afrikaner Dutch Reformed cleric and theologian, Beyers Naudé who defied the generic Afrikaner ethos of the day to become an anti-apartheid and social justice advocate. Smit argues that Naudé’s increasing consciousness of the negative effects that the apartheid ideology had on the majority of the black population in South Africa, resulted in the establishment of ‘inter-denominational Bible Study groups, the pro-liberation inter-denominational and inter-racial journal *Pro Veritate* (1962) as well as the well-known Christian Institute (1963)’. Smit concludes that Naudé’s theological thought was entrenched in an ‘inclusive ecumenical Christian message as confessing public theologian’.

The thread that binds these critical articles together is their engage-

ment with empire religions and theologies and how indigenous knowledge systems can contribute to the liberation of African subjectivity, ways of knowing, knowledge production and transform institutions of higher learning.

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# Christianity in Africa – Watchdog of Imperialism or ‘drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth’

Anthony Balcomb<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The Christian religion has become deeply insinuated into the world view of many Africans south of the Sahara. The dynamics of the process could be explained in terms of Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus, but one’s evaluation of such a phenomenon depends on the paradigm with which one chooses to interpret it. The paradigm of conquest leads to a negative evaluation of Christianity as an alien religion that has been used by the colonizer to subjugate the masses, and is the preferred paradigm of some sectors of the intellectual African elite. The paradigm of liberation, on the other hand, leads to a more positive evaluation of Christianity as a religion that is consistent with, and supportive of, an African identity. In his book *Things Fall Apart* Chinua Achebe explores these differing paradigms in the persons of Okwonkwo and his son Nwoye. He demonstrates that stories are a more effective tool of interpreting the Christian religion in Africa than paradigms alone because they can ‘get into the skin’ of the protagonists involved which allows for an interpretation of the religion in terms of their own existential experience and not merely through a set of abstract criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Tony Balcomb is Senior Research Associate with the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is the author of forty eight published articles and chapters in books and of two books – *Third Way Theology – Reconciliation, Revolution and Reform in the South African Church during the 1980’s* and *Journey into the African Sun – Soundings in Search of Another Way of Being in the World*.

**Keywords:** Christianity in Africa, Watchdog of Imperialism, habitus, paradigmatic approach, African Identity

## **Introduction**

One of the central characters in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* is Nwoye, who becomes deeply fascinated with the Christian message. 'It was not the mad logic of the Trinity that captivated him', writes Achebe,

It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul .... He felt relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. The words of the hymn were like *the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth*. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled (Achebe 1986:105, my emphasis).

Achebe brilliantly encapsulates two diametrically opposing responses to the Christian mission in Africa in the persons of Okwonkwo and Nwoye. Okwonkwo, in many ways the hero of the story, despises and rejects the Christian message, sensing that it was an assault on his dignity and identity as an African.

If a man comes into my hut and defecates on the floor what do I do? Do I shut my eyes? No! I take a stick and break his head. That is what a man does. These people are pouring filth over us, and Okeke says we should pretend not to see (1986:115).

Nwoye, on the other hand, is enthralled by the message, wholeheartedly embraces it, and while it is Enoch who eventually commits the unpardonable sin of tearing the masks off the *egwegwu*, or apparitions of the ancestors, to expose the human faces behind them, thus symbolizing the attack on African culture by Africans who have become converted to the Christian faith, Nwoye arguably represents a moderate majority whose fascination with Christianity causes them to follow it without necessarily forsaking their African culture. These two characters represent two trajectories that

Christianity in Africa has taken, the trajectory of rejection and the trajectory of embrace. For the former Christianity is simply the watchdog of imperialism, the most effective weapon in the colonizer's arsenal, used to rob Africans of their identity and cause them to become the slaves of the colonial master, for the latter Christianity has become the religion of choice, an African religion that they have received and transacted into their worldviews. But there are many intellectual heavyweights in the tradition of Okwonkwo, including Okot p'Bitek (1970), Ali Mazrui (1979), Wole Soyinka (2001), Paulin Hountondji (1983), Franz Fanon (1986), Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1986), and indeed, Achebe himself. There are also a whole swathe of people in between these two extremes, often practitioners of African Traditional Religion, who have seen no reason to surrender their traditional beliefs but who are accommodating towards others, appropriating from them what they deem necessary and rejecting what they do not. Indeed there is an extraordinary tolerance among indigenous people generally towards other beliefs that is born out of the penchant for inclusion rather than exclusion that is the hallmark of an indigenous worldview (see Balcomb 2014:75).

In what follows I will first briefly outline on a purely statistical level the extent to which Christianity has apparently become an African religion, secondly I will ask some questions about the kind of faith that has been transacted into the African habitus and the processes involved, and finally I will highlight the issues involved when interpreting the phenomenon of Christianity in Africa through the two opposing paradigms of rejection and embrace.

### **Christianity as the Dominant Religion of sub-Saharan Africa**

That sub-Saharan Africa is now overwhelmingly Christian is common knowledge. The latest evidence of this comes out of the 2010 Edinburgh conference of the WCC, which was used as an opportunity to survey the church's mission over the past one hundred years. The success of this mission, especially in Africa, has been nothing short of spectacular. It has, in the words of Kenneth Ross, one of the editors of the *Atlas of Global Christianity* that came out of the conference, 'surpassed even the most sanguine expectations of 1910' and could not have been 'foreseen by any of the Edinburgh delegates' of that year (Kerr & Ross 2010:314). The *Atlas of Global Christianity* gives extraordinary visual impact to the reality of the

shift of the centre of gravity of the Christian faith from the North to the South. In almost all sub-Saharan African countries, the growth of Christianity has outpaced population growth. In 1910 Africa was less than 10% Christian, in 2010 it was almost 50% Christian with sub-Saharan Africa at least 70% Christian (Phiri & Werner 2013: xxvii). Another statistic puts the population of Christians in Africa in 1900 at 8.7 million, projected to be 633 million in 2025 at the present rate of growth (Kombo 2013:105). Philip Jenkins argues against the idea that Africa was ever ‘off the map’ when it came to the Christian religion and maintains that, contrary to other religions in other parts of the world, African Christianity is a grassroots movement that is taking place from ‘the bottom up’, significantly among the youth because of its high mobility across society (2002:43). He also argues that the millions of Africans who have embraced Christianity have done so simply because they have found in it the ‘best means of explaining the world around them’ (2002:44).

It must of course be stated immediately that such success has been restricted mainly to Africa south of the Sahara, with Islam being the dominant religion further north. North Africa has its own set of dynamics and it would be interesting to unpack the success of Islam in that region. Neither should it be assumed that the species of Christian faith that was brought to the continent by western missionaries is the one that has always been appropriated by Africans. Far from it. The really successful forms of faith are those that have been translated, in the broad sense of the word, by Africans themselves. It is the process of how Christianity has become part of the African habitus in the form of cultural and symbolic capital that particularly interests me, and it is to this that I now turn.

## **Christian Faith in the African Habitus**

What are we to understand by the following two statements, one from the well-known African scholar Lamin Sanneh and the other from a leading judge in South Africa: ‘Africa has become, or is becoming’, says Sanneh, ‘a Christian continent in cultural as well as numerical terms, while on the small scale the West has become, or is rapidly becoming, a post-Christian society’ (in Kombo 2013:104). ‘He is a Christian’ says Judge Leeuw, ‘like all of us’ (Sibusiso Ngalwa ‘Judging the Judge’ in *Sunday Times Review* 2014).

Leeuw was talking about the appointment of Judge Mogoeng Mogoeng as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and was trying to allay the fears of many critics of the Mogoeng appointment that he would allow his conservative faith to influence his deliberations as Chief Justice. Mogoeng is a member of a Pentecostal church notorious for its belief in the prosperity gospel and made no secret of his conviction that God was calling him to the job. Where else in the world would you get a chief justice who boasts about his faith in this way? And what is the meaning of the claim of another senior judge that ‘all of us [are Christians]’? Does he mean all the judges on the bench are Christians or all people, generally, are Christians? And if the former is the case is it that there are no senior judges who are Muslims, or Hindus, or atheists? Whatever he means it is doubtful that such statements would be made by senior judges anywhere in the Western world, given the extreme sensitivity around the need for the impartiality of the judiciary. I juxtapose these two statements because they serve to underscore Sanneh’s assertion that Africa is becoming ‘culturally’ Christian. But what does *this* mean?

There are numbers of ways of understanding this assertion, one of which is through Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus. Very briefly the habitus is ‘the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them’ (Wacquant 2005: 316). There are three crucial aspects of the notion of the habitus that are relevant for this discussion. Firstly it is created and reproduced unconsciously; secondly it becomes part of the social, and symbolic capital of a society that provides a non-economic form of power and the establishment of hierarchy; and thirdly it is not fixed or permanent but can be changed under unexpected situations over a long historical period.

So what is the meaning of the two statements mentioned above - that is that Christianity has ‘become part of African culture’, and that ‘we are all Christians’ – in the light of the notion of the habitus? It means, first of all, that Christianity has become ‘deposited’ in people in the form of lasting dispositions, trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel, act, and be guided in ways which they call ‘Christian’. It means, secondly, that these dispositions have become ‘second nature’ to the people concerned, that is that they are not only not questioned and not only have they become embedded in a kind of subconscious normative rule by which people live but that they denote the possession of a form of social power. Thirdly it means



that the form of Christianity that has been appropriated is shaped according to the social needs of the protagonist rather than some doctrinal norm and will continue to be shaped according to the various social contexts in which he or she operates.

Three things strike one about this scenario. Firstly that there doesn't seem to be much rationality involved in terms of carefully weighed decisions about the materials being transacted into the habitus. As the word 'habitus' suggests, Christianity has become not so much an issue of conscious decision as an issue of habit. Secondly what is eventually appropriated may bear little resemblance to what was originally offered. In other words the unintended consequences of the Christian mission are probably more important than the intended. In other words what Africans have done to the gospel is as important as what the gospel has done to Africans. Thirdly that Christianity has not been experienced as contradictory to an African identity but the form in which it has been appropriated seems to reinforce such an identity.

I would like to unpack the last of these a little more but must make reference first of all to the 'non-rational' dynamic involved here. Gabriel Setiloane, perhaps one of the most articulate exponents of the need for African culture to shape Christianity, makes the following startling admission:

I am like someone who has been bewitched, and I find it difficult to shake off the Christian witchcraft with which I have been captivated. I cannot say I necessarily like where I am. Second, I rationalize my position by taking the view that to be Christian I do not have to endorse every detail of western theology (Setiloane 1979:64).

Here is an interesting description of the ambivalent relationship that Setiloane has with the Christian religion. It 'bewitches' rather than 'convinces'; the 'rationalization' takes place not prior to its reception but subsequent to it. And such rationalization is precisely to do with what excludes certain western influences.

But what of the issue of power and identity? Through the person of Okwonkwo Achebe describes Christianity as being inimical to African culture. But through Nwoye he describes it as being deeply alluring for Africans. And many Africans seem to have had a similar experience to that of Nwoye, who discovered in his conversion a sense of identity and purpose.

For example there are those who, on acceptance of the faith, feel as though they have been promoted to the status of close relative to Jesus and thus to God. There are other examples of this such as William Wade Harris (see Bediako 1995:92), Alice Lenshina of Zambia, Simon Kimbangu of the Congo, Nehemiah Mudende of Zimbabwe, and the Xhosa prophet Nxele (see Balcomb 2014:120). All of these prophets have gained followings, some of them enormous. Sometimes their stories appear quite bizarre, but the only difference between Nxele believing that he had become the younger brother of Jesus and the apostle Paul believing that he had become a son of God, is the exact nature of the filial relationship. Both are to do with becoming part of the family of God. And what better family to be identified with than that of the divine family of the holy trinity!

If the testimonies of these spiritual leaders sometimes sound a little strange perhaps it is because we have forgotten that the essence of the gospel is good news for the poor. Certainly it was this good news that seemed to impact the lives of early leaders in the African nationalist movement throughout the continent. Was this not the experience of Tiyo Soga, sometimes known as the father of African nationalism in South Africa, but also Pixley ka Seme, John Dube, Albert Luthuli, Nicholas Bhengu, Samuel Johnson and Samuel Crowther? Very often the political and spiritual roles that these African leaders played merged because fundamental to their experience of the gospel was a sense of national pride which translated both into social capital that could be used in a variety of fields and forms in the life of the protagonist.

The generic similarity between the experience of an Ntsikana, a William Harris, a Tiyo Soga, and a Saul of Tarsus, may also be associated with the experience that Pentecostals in Africa seem to be having. The growth of Pentecostalism in the two thirds world, especially Africa and South America, is now a phenomenon of great interest in academic circles, both in social science as well as theology. I was contracted by the Centre for Development and Enterprise in 2005 to conduct research on Pentecostal churches mainly in the Gauteng area and interviewed 30 Pentecostal pastors and leaders with the intention of finding out what the basic message of the Pentecostals is, how they understand themselves - both in relation to the Christian mission in general and in this society in particular, how they structure and embody themselves organizationally, and what sort of interventions they are making into the communities that they find themselves

in (see 'Under the radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and its potential social and economic role' [www.cde.org.za](http://www.cde.org.za)). What became clear during this research was the extraordinary appeal of the Pentecostal message in terms of emphasizing the worth of the individual self. An encounter with Christ apparently leads to an encounter with the self and the realization of one's value in the sight of God. It helps people overcome their sense of inferiority and gives them a sense of agency. It could be argued that all the extravagance of Pentecost, all the noise, has, at its heart, the realization of self-worth. Pentecostalism is growing primarily because it is bringing a message that few people can ignore - the message of the love of God and the value of the human individual. It is a message, if believed, that has profound consequences for the individual. This does not mean, of course, that the Pentecostals are without fault, indeed they are deficient in many ways, but to argue that their experience is consistent with what I have been describing as a discovery of self-worth that does not negate but rather reinforces an African identity. This was born out in most of the interviews I conducted. For example Modisa Mzondi of Let My People Go Ministries described the message of Pentecost as the message of Steve Biko.

The essence of our message is freedom from mental slavery. The church is situated in informal settlements where people feel that they are third class citizens. This is why we need to preach the message of freedom from mental slavery. Teach youth to go beyond perpetual dependency. They must be free from the idea that they should be employed by white men. We are trying to teach the young people to do things for themselves. They must be independent (Interview on 2/10/2005).

For Trevor Ntlahola of Vineyard, Zone 3 Pimville,

The message of the church is to take the teachings of Jesus as seriously as those of Marx, Slovo, and Mandela. This means taking care of the poor. We use our money to take people to school, aids care, university, food, etc. We are here because we love Jesus and this means that we must love the poor (Interview on 24/11/2005).

It is therefore not surprising that some scholars have asserted that 'Liberation

theology opted for the poor at the same time that the poor opted for Pentecostalism' (Miller & Yamamori 2007:215). If there is any truth in the assertion of Dr David Niringiye, assistant bishop of Kampala that 'Africa's crisis is not poverty; it is not AIDS. Africa's crisis is confidence. What decades of colonialism and missionary enterprise eroded among us is confidence ... We Africans must constantly repent of that sense of inferiority' (in Phiri & Werner 2013:xxx), then any theology that empowers and fosters dignity must surely be given credit for this.

What I have presented so far in this article is evidence for the argument of the embrace of Christianity in Africa. But this does not resolve the conundrum that is implicit in the title: that is that it has also been seen as the watchdog of imperialism, that it represents the mental enslavement of Africans, and that, in the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, it has been used to 'capture the soul and the mind' of Africans in order that they might be further exploited by western imperialism (wa Thiong'o 1986:67). Indeed all that I have said so far in terms of the success of the Christian religion in sub Saharan Africa could just as well be used as evidence for the theory that it has indeed captured, or, in Setiloane's words, 'bewitched' Africans. Instead of taking the path of brave resistance, as did Okwonkwo, they have taken the path of least resistance, as did Nwoyo, and allowed themselves to be robbed of their African identity. In other words, the facts that are presented to argue that Christianity has been embraced because it does not contradict African identity could just as well be presented to demonstrate that it has robbed Africans of their identity. It all depends on the paradigm which you choose to interpret the facts. And it is to the issue of a paradigmatic approach to the role of Christianity in Africa that I must now turn.

## **Understanding Christianity in Africa – A Paradigmatic Approach**

First of all I need to explain what I mean by the concept of a paradigm. I must stress that this is my own very simple definition that I have constructed for the purposes of this essay so it should not be assumed that it is applicable elsewhere. A paradigm is a theoretical construct adopted by a particular community of scholars that is used to interpret a specific set of facts or phenomena. To interpret something via a paradigm is to admit that there is no such thing as one, objective interpretation, but that the interpretation must be

understood in terms of the set of criteria that the paradigm offers and which has been pre-determined by the scholars concerned. A paradigm shift may occur when a paradigm loses its ability to interpret persuasively the facts in question and therefore becomes incoherent and implausible. But different paradigms may be used simultaneously to interpret the same set of facts and produce different outcomes with different levels of plausibility.

In the context of this essay the set of 'facts' in question is the extraordinary success of the Christian religion in Africa. The extant paradigms that are competing for a plausible interpretation of this phenomenon revolve around different understandings of the essence of the Christian religion, that is Christianity as a foreign religion designed to be part of the colonizing strategy of the west (paradigm 1) and Christianity has such a close affinity to African culture that it can, and has, been easily translated into the African context from where it liberates and empowers (paradigm 2). Advocates of paradigm 1 might argue that the success of Christianity in Africa is not because of the credulity of Africans who have allowed themselves to become brainwashed on a massive scale but the cultural, economic, and political hegemony of the western world that has imposed its will on the rest of the world and made it impossible for non-westerners to resist. They might further argue that although Christianity has become hopelessly compromised in providing the ideological basis for the exploitation of the world's resources it still remains the most powerful religion of the capitalist west which accounts for its hegemony throughout the world due to neo-colonialism and globalisation. Put simply, Christianity in Africa has been so successful because embracing it is the only way to survive in the modern world. In Chinua Achebe's words, things will fall apart if you don't accept it. Did not Okwoko, the brave opposition warrior, die, even by his own hand, because he resisted it? And did not Nwoye, that little traitor, survive and flourish?

Advocates of paradigm 2 argue that the success of Christianity in Africa is because of the ease with which it translates into an African religion, was prepared for by African Traditional Religion, was spread not by Europeans but by Africans, and involved not the Westernization of African culture but the Africanization of the gospel. They believe that African expressions of the faith have burgeoned throughout the subcontinent not because Westerners are exceptionally good at selling their product but because Africans found in it what they were looking for. It explains why

there is a demise of the faith in Europe and an explosion of the faith in Africa. It suggests that we need not bewail the loss of African identity because of Christianity, but rejoice in the flowering of African identity because of Christianity.

And what of the so-called ‘community of scholars’ that have constructed these paradigms? Who exactly are they? Overwhelmingly the architects of paradigm 1 are African intellectuals, novelists and philosophers who are vexed by what they see as the oppression of their people and have tried to understand what exactly the dynamics of what has happened are. The architects of paradigm 2 are African theologians such as Kwame Bediako (e.g. Edinburgh University Press: 1995), Lamin Sanneh (e.g. Oxford University Press: 1995), and John Mbiti (e.g. East African Educational Publishers: 1992), who have all attempted to explain the dynamics of what has happened through the lens of a totally different paradigm, that is one that accepts the validity of Christianity for the African context.

But how exactly can we characterize these two paradigms and why are they so important? I would like to suggest that paradigm 1 could be characterized as the paradigm of conquest and paradigm 2 as the paradigm of liberation, and they are important not only because they are the constructs of some of the greatest thinkers that Africa has produced but because they profoundly influence how Christianity as an African project is to be understood and evaluated. Space does not permit me to unpack exactly what the implications of these two paradigms are for the evaluation of such a project. However I would like to illustrate the effect of these paradigms on one’s thinking by referencing my own experience of them, somewhat in the tradition of story-telling rather than abstract theoretical discourse.

## **A Concluding Confession**

For as long as I can remember one of my major interests, both academically and existentially, has been Africa. For most of my academic career I have worked within what I have called in this essay the paradigm of conquest. When I travel to places such as Ghana, which I have been doing every year for the past twenty years, I have never ceased to be amazed at the extent to which the Christian faith saturates that society at every level, a phenomenon that has caused me a certain amount of unease. But at the same time I am also amazed at how non-western this faith is. I say ‘non-western’ in this context

and not 'African' because I want to make the point that what strikes me is that the kind of faith that is being embraced there with such passion has only vague resemblance to the species that I am used to in the west. The unease that I experienced is not because of the species of faith that is being practiced, indeed I find this reassuring, but what I perceived as the apparently enormous credulity of the people of this country. How is it, I have asked myself, that Africans are so unquestioning, so uncritically accepting, so filled with the capacity to believe? But what I have not realized until recently is that I have felt this way because my perspective has been profoundly influenced by the notion that Christianity has conquered these people and not liberated them. What I am seeing then, is not people who are experiencing the 'drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth', but people with weak knees and callow minds, who have been brainwashed, hoodwinked, and subjugated. I have only recently had cause to reflect further on my own response to this situation in the light of the possibility that my view was being influenced by the paradigm through which I was interpreting the facts. Such a view is not without certain ethical implications. My judgement of the Ghanaians' faith boiled down to the fact that I was questioning its authenticity because I saw it as symptomatic of some kind of character weakness. This was directly related to the paradigm of conquest through which I was interpreting the reception of Christianity. If, however, I took more seriously the perspective of the Ghanaians themselves concerning their faith I would have to acknowledge that they understood the phenomenon of their faith in a completely different way, more in line with what I have called in this essay the paradigm of liberation. When seen in this way my previous judgement betrayed a certain arrogance on my part because it assumed that my understanding of what constituted authentic faith was the correct one. I have since come to the recognition that it is more appropriate to attempt to view the phenomenon of Christianity (and for that matter any religion) in Africa through the eyes of Africans themselves rather than through my own. But, as has been argued in this essay, there is not only one African perspective on this matter.

I have told my story here to illustrate that paradigms, though mere constructs, powerfully influence our way of viewing reality, and if applied inflexibly they also might distort our view of reality. One of the problems of viewing things paradigmatically in the way that I have described is that the criteria that are used in a paradigm dictate the way that we apprehend the

truth of a matter and will not allow us to see things that contradict these criteria. The paradigms I have spoken about in this essay demand that we see the phenomenon of Christianity in Africa either in terms of conquest or in terms of liberation. But the truth of the matter is that it is far more nuanced than this. The genius of authors such as Achebe is precisely that they are able to explore these nuances in the stories of the characters that they create. So instead of constructing paradigms they create stories. Perhaps we, too, need to listen to the stories of those who have embraced the faith as well as not embraced it, to find out what exactly it is that they have embraced and why they have embraced it, and what it is that they have not embraced and why they have not. In other words more credence needs to be given to the agency of ordinary people in the way that the Christian faith has been transacted, assimilated, and insinuated into their lives. Such stories need to find their way into our theological curricula and become a central part of shaping our theological agenda. And if they shatter our paradigms then so be it, because at the end of the day it is the stories of people that will demonstrate what happens to the Christian message, what it has done to them and what they have done to it. Not just the stories of the dead but also the living, not just of the past but the present. This does not mean that we can forsake the task of constructing the paradigms because there is a constant and dynamic relationship between the stories that are told and the paradigms that they infer. Such paradigms are necessary as long as they are seen as provisional and do not distort but rather enhance our appreciation of the truth of such a matter as the phenomenon of Christianity in Africa.

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# **Betrayed by Cultural Heritage: Liminality, Ambiguous Sexuality and Ndembu Cultural Change – An African Ecclesia-Ethic of Openness<sup>1</sup>**

**Chammah J. Kaunda**

## **Abstract**

The article investigates whether there were some ways in which African cultural heritage past may have enabled and enforced different sexual performances, whether normative or ‘divergent’. In response I analyse the significance of Ndembu notions of liminality as traditional cultural landscapes for initiating intentional processes of re-creation and redefinition of Ndembu agency and subjectivity. Employing historical approach, I evaluate a wider range of evidence from early cultural anthropologists who researched on the Ndembu people and other related ethnic groups in Zambia to provide an overall conceptual scheme that suggests that the current politicization of homosexuality as ‘un-African’ in Zambia is a by-product of African epistemic failure to articulate cultural sexualities within the ideological and material legacies of African cultural past. Drawing some examples from Ndembu Mukanda rite of passage for boys, this article sheds light on how traditional liminal imagination functioned as a subverting stage against prevailing social order by engaging with cultural taboos and un-conversional ideas. In these spaces, homosexuality appears to have been one of the instruments of exploration of other forms of sexualities. The resultant knowledge was alternatively interpreted with possibilities to alter social order

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<sup>1</sup> The article was originally presented as keynote by Chammah J. Kaunda at Theological Society of South Africa Annual Conference, Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, Pietermaritzburg, 17 – 19 June 2015.

for human progress and cultural transformation. Based on these findings the article proposes an African ecclesia-ethic of openness to enable Christians in Zambia to take a non-foreignization, non-discriminatory and life-affirming public perception of homosexuality as sociohistorical African cultural struggle to construct sexual agency and subjectivity.

**Keywords:** Ndembu, liminality, homosexuality, Africa Ecclesia-ethic of openness

## **Introduction**

In recent times, postcolonial Zambian society has crash-landed into homosexual struggle for rights, an encounter which has resulted in public hate speech in which homosexuality is labelled as ‘Satanism’, ‘deepest level of depravity’ or ‘scourge’ and anti-African traditional heritage<sup>2</sup>. This homophobic discourse aims at justifying suppression and segregation of homosexuality both within the margins and dominant spheres. Homosexuality is criminalised in Zambia and carries with it a minimum sentence of 15 years to life in prison. Respectful public debates on homosexuality are discouraged and anyone who dares to speak about the rights of the homosexuals is harassed and persecuted as the devil for ‘inciting’ the public to take part in ‘satanic and immoral activities’ (Mphande 2013). Mamba Writer (2012) writes that the government-owned newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, is replete with homophobic rhetoric. For instance, the current Zambian President Edgar Lungu declared that ‘there will be no such discussions on gay rights. That issue is foreign to this country. Those advocating gay rights should go to hell. That is not an issue we will tolerate’ (Mamba 2012). The Church is partly responsible for perpetuating the ideology of un-Africanizing homosexuality in Zambia (Kaoma 2012; van Klinken 2013; Van Klinken 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Africa’ and ‘African’ in this article refers more specifically to the Ndembu people of Zambia and ethnic groups from which examples are drawn which are specified.

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It is important to note that un-Africanized<sup>3</sup> classification of homosexuality is not uniquely Zambian but a phenomenon pervasive in various African countries<sup>4</sup>. Various scholars have grappled with the question of authenticity of the claim that homosexuality is un-African and a foreign phenomenon (Tamale 2013; Lyonga 2014; Aarmo 1999; Epprecht 2005; Epprecht 2008; Spurlin 2013; Abrahams 1997; Dlamini 2006; Cock 2003). Within this approach, this article argues that the question of homosexuality in Zambia invokes an inquiry into the complex cultural past in order to understand the validity of this claim within Zambian context. The argument of the article is that recent essentialist politicisation of homosexuality in Zambia as un-African have not taken into consideration the cultural history of some ethnic groups within the country and could be regarded as undermining their cultural heritage. In order to substantiate this assertion, I appeal to the Ndembu notion of liminality as was articulated by one of the pioneering Anthropologists among the Ndembu, Victor Turner (1985; 1974; 1969; 1968; 1967). The aim is to demonstrate how such ritual performances as Mukanda may still hold the clues to African struggle to understand their sexualities in contemporary society.

The following are questions this article seeks to respond to: how did the Ndembu liminality enabled, enforced and maintained diverging sexualities, whether normative or deviant in their society? How did the

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<sup>3</sup> A practising sangoma and graduate student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has published a study which challenges the traditionally-held belief homosexuality is un-African (Mkasi 2014). There is also general mounting literature analysing of anti-homosexual trends in African countries. The aim of this article is not to repeat their perspectives as are beyond its scope (see for example, Tamale 2013; Lyonga 2014; Aarmo 1999; Epprecht 2005; Epprecht 2008; Spurlin 2013; Abrahams 1997; Dlamini 2006; Cock 2003).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Vasu Reddy in his article, 'Perverts and sodomites' where he discusses the Hate speech against homosexuality in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Egypt (Reddy 2002). The challenge goes beyond the above mentioned countries as can be deduced from the recent United Nations conference where 17 countries rejected Stealth Homosexual Agenda which almost derailed the adoption of the Addis Ababa Declaration at the close of the African Regional Conference on Population and Development (Oas n.d.)

liminal space as landscapes of subservient knowledge construction contributed to the creation of nonconformist sexualities among the Ndembu people of Zambia? To what extent did the Ndembu people prevent homosexuality as a liminal ritual from crossing liminal borders into structured social order? In what ways can uncovering Ndembu religious traditions of openness to diverse sexualities become an ecclesiological resource for promoting life-giving public perception of the humanity of homosexuals among Zambian Christians? At stake here is not merely a rejection of the claim that homosexuality is un-African and that it is a western ideological imposition but a refusal to allow western elites to ideologically control how Africans understand their sexualities. In what follows, I conceptually frame liminality as traditional African cultural approach to conceptualising sexualities.

### **Victor Turner and Liminality in Ndembu Initiation**

In mid-twentieth century, Victor Turner (1977; 1968) studied the ritual and social processes that occur between separation and reintegration in the cultural process of Ndembu rite of passage. The Ndembu people live in the northwest of Zambia, and many aspects of their culture link rites of passage and social order. Like many African people, the Ndembu culture is embedded in ritual performance which embodies ‘the total system of interrelations between groups and persons that make up Ndembu society’ (Turner 1977:495)<sup>5</sup>. In his analysis of the ritual, Turner consistently appealed to Arnold van Gennep’s 1908 *Rites of Passage* (1960/1908) model. Van Gennep exemplified a three-phased process of ritual of transition from one state to another as shown in figure one below.

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<sup>5</sup> In Turner’s (1977:183) perspective, the ritual, religious beliefs and symbols are essentially related. This is well captured in his definition of the ritual as ‘a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests’. A symbol which can be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures, or spatial units is the smallest unit of ritual or a ‘storage unit’ filled with a vast amount of information (Turner 1968:1-2; 1967:19).

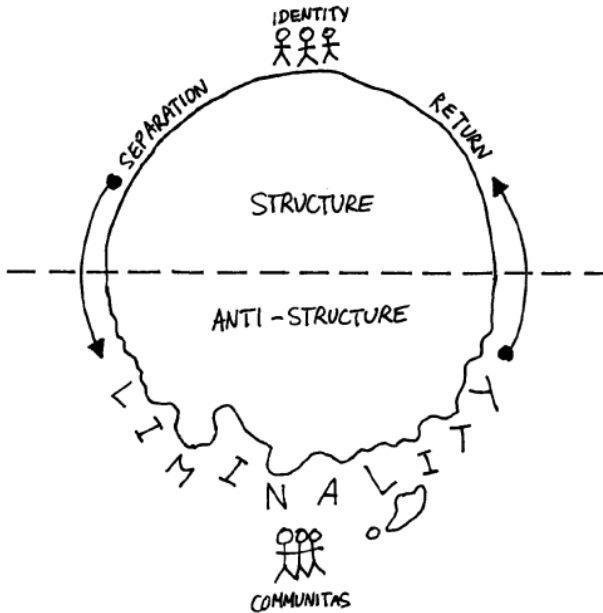


Figure one (adapted from Religion 331, 2015)

Turner (1967: 93ff; 1969: 94ff) witnessed that during ritual performances the initiates are often isolated from social structural spaces and spent a lengthy period in anti-structural spaces traditionally regarded as cocoon stage which Van Gennep classified as liminal state. During this phase, the ritual subjects are at loss for stable points of reference as the established normative are dissolved before the new images and attitudes begin to appear which are neither solid nor reliable as everything at this stage remain fluid and in flux (Stein 1998). They are also given new names to denote their new status as ‘no longer/not yet’ or both ‘dead and living’– ‘neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial’ (Turner 1969: 95). The ‘liminal personae’ are neither living nor dead but both living and dead. This is the ambiguity of the anti-structural period. They are considered neither male nor female, deprived of rank, status and property. They are all treated equally as pure spirits or

holistic beings with no hierarchy and only receive instructions from their liminal guardian(s).

They are liberated from conventional social structures with its hierarchic, gender binary and power relations. In the liminal state, these social relationships and the structural elements are dissolved. The significance of liminal experiences partly depends on their difference from social normative realities. In the liminal, power and privilege, status and role, law and institution no longer determine social relations. It is a time outside of time and space outside space or timeless time and spaceless space where alternative identities and subjectivities are constructed and new modalities of liminal relations appear. Turner calls this new model of relationship as *communitas* - characterized by equality, immediacy, and the lack of social ranks and roles. Within the Ndembu culture and many other Zambian cultural traditions, the liminal stage was a crucial context for cultural transformation like the caterpillar metamorphoses in the cocoon before it emerges as butterfly from the sovereignties of liminality. It was the only taboo-less and transgressive space-less space open to any form of experimentation and knowledge construction. Jeffrey Rubenstein (1992: 251) sees the liminal as 'a levelling process that brings about the dissolution of structure, the absence of social distinctions, a homogenization of roles, the disappearance of political allegiance, the breakdown of regular borders and barriers. With the suspension of status distinctions, human beings recognize the core humanity they share'. The struggle of every liminal subject was to realise their humanity – a humanity which was perceived as always becoming. Here it is possible to trace a political journey which affirms human agency and subjectivity as part of social attempt to engage the meaning of human becoming as a historical being with the capacity to transcend social constructions and life-denying social normative. The question is: how did the Ndembu conceptualise sexuality in the liminal space?

### **Cultural Liminality and Sexual Ambiguity**

The purpose of this section is to understand how sexuality was conceptualised within the liminal space. In the description of liminal space of Mukanda initiation rites, Turner noted that Mukanda was intentionally performed to 'make visible (ku-mwekesa) the man in the boy through ritual cleansing of him from 'the dirt of childhood' (Turner 1962: 144). Mukanda is

regarded as disorder phase where sacred and profane were synthesised generating new thought and new custom. As argued above, the liminal subjects were regarded as neither males nor females. There was a cross-sexual identification which likened the Mukanda boys to menstruating women and treated as girls at their first menstruation. Turner (1962: 152) noted that 'the senior official during the seclusion, the leader of the novices' shepherd - the young circumcised men who attend to their needs during that period - and the instructor in tribal mysteries (mpang'u), is entitled *nfumwa tubwiku* or husband of the novices'. He introduces himself as '*Ami nfumwenu, ami nasumbuli anyadi. Ami nukuyilama nakuyitala*' which Turner translates as meaning 'I am your husband, I have married you. I will protect you and look after you' (Turner 1962:151). This translation is supported in Lunda language which is a close dialect to Ndembu and also a Mukanda practicing ethnic group in Zambia. The same phrase in Lunda literally means, 'I, your husband, I who married virgins. I will take care of you and will keep you'. The Ndembu word *mwadi*, is singular for *nyadi* is derived from *kwadika*, a verb which means 'to initiate' or literally 'virgins'. It means to circumcise in the context of Mukanda. The concept of 'mwadi' also refers to the first wife a man marries, and thereafter to the senior wife in the case of polygamous marriage. The concept of 'mwadi' or more precisely 'mwali' is common among Bantu languages in northwest and central part of Zambia and refers to the girl undergoing puberty rites<sup>6</sup>. The emphasis here is that the initiates are regarded and treated in the sense of 'boy-wives'<sup>7</sup> by their instructors and shepherds.

During the stage of healing from their circumcisions, the 'anyadi' wore no clothes and it has been reported that they played copulation with the phalluses of some senior males. The anthropologist, Charles White (1953: 49) who did his research on the circumcision rites of the Luvale ethnic stressed that this kind of mimed copulation was considered as essential for hastening 'healing; the novices also hope that by so doing, their own penises will grow large and strong. The same is done to visitors to the lodge'. Max Gluckman (1963: 147ff), who also researched Mukanda rite among the ethnic groups in

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<sup>6</sup> Among the ethnic groups such as the Chokwe, Ila, Luchazi, Mbunda, Luvale, and many others, the initiates are called *mwali*.

<sup>7</sup> This perspective is substantiated by the empirical study done various scholars in the volume edited by Stephen Murray and Will Roscoe (1998).



northwest of Zambia, Chokwe, Luchazi, Lucho, Lunda, and Luvale, supports White's observation that initiates are perceived as 'union of female and male principles' and 'are grouped in pairs as husband and wife'. Gluckman noted that the upsetting of natural order of things within these rites meant that in many of these ethnic groups, during the phase of recovering, the liminal subjects were encouraged to play with the phalluses of the *vilombola* (keeper of the initiation lodge) and *tulombolachika* (initiated assistants of the *vilombola*) (see also Murray n.d.; Browne 1913).

The actual ritual sexual performances as demonstrations were common in many African rites of passage for boys and girls. Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (1929: 311) has documented some 'obscurities' which were condemnation as offending 'the moral sense of white men [sic] ... stigmatized as being anti-social and are commonly legislated against. They are said to be 'ultra-bestial' or 'too infamous to bear repetition'. This hostile attitude that many early anthropologists portrayed to 'ritual obscurities' appears to be the underlying reason for current resistance by many Africans who have refused to identify African past with certain forms of sexualities which were condemned as 'unnatural' and 'ultra-bestial' and now being promoted as natural and acceptable by the same people. For many Africans, this is self-contradiction and objectionable. However, the fact never be buried, as Evans-Pritchard noted that 'sodomy [sic]', was among the commonest features of boys initiations into manhood and also into secret societies which were imposed upon them. He (1929: 318) further points out that during this period 'each of the initiates has to copulate with another to show how he performs the sex act with a woman'. Such 'practical and theoretical instruction in sexual life', Géza Róheim (1929: 189) noted, are prominent feature not just in boy-initiation but also for girl-initiation ceremonies. The obscenity was part of initiation activities even in girls' puberty rites such as *Chisungu* (The Bemba people) and *Kankanga* (Ndembu) (Evans-Pritchard 1929; Audrey 1982; Rasing 2002; Turner 1987). For example, the wife and colleague of Victor Turner, Edith Turner (1987:60) writing on *Kankanga* among Ndembu, noted that:

*Kankanga* like the boys in Mukanda was considered as a 'spirit from ancient times', an *ikishi*... She may not name a thing directly-she is a prelapsarian being, as it were, before Adam as we might say, a holistic entity. In seclusion the women attend to her body, which

flowers at this time; they decorate it, they wet a peeled sweet potato and give her vaginal pleasure; they teach her a highly accomplished belly dance.

The emphasis here is that the contemporary emphasis on one form of sexuality-heterosexuality is not in line with African religio-cultural past. The liminal spaces create room for nonconformist forms of sexualities.

The earliest anthropologists among the Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia (present Zambia), Edwin Smith and Andrew Dale (1920: 74) noted that:

Instances of sexual inversion are known, but whether congenital or acquired it is impossible to say. We have known of only one man who dressed always as a woman, did woman's work such as plaiting baskets, and lived and slept among, but not with, the women. This man was a *mwaami* ('a prophet').

The fact that this man was *mwaami* confirms the recent research among the gay Sangomas in KwaZulu-Natal that in cultural liminal, taboos are un-tabooed. Since in African thought, Sangomas or prophets are considered as situated in the liminal spaces, same-sex relationships are not only sources of power but a demonstration of the ambiguous nature of human sexuality (Mkasi 2014). This shows that traditional cultures 'seems to allow unbridled excess, very rituals of rebellion, for the order itself keeps this rebellion within bounds' (Gluckman 1954: 21). Gluckman (1959: 119) rightly argued that:

These rituals contain the belief that if people perform certain actions they will influence the course of events so that their group be made richer, more prosperous, more successful, and so forth. Some of us therefore call these actions 'ritual', and say that they contain 'mystical notions' - notions that their performance will in some mysterious way affect the course of events. 'Ritual' in this definition is contrasted with 'ceremonial' which consists of similar actions but has no such mystical notions associated with it.

Gluckman has been criticized for failing to give specific ethnographical accounts on the African attitudes toward the so-called 'rituals of rebellion'

(Kuper 1961; Norbeck 1963), nevertheless, his thesis as noted above was already validated with empirical evidence by Victor Turner (1969: 108) who describes the ritual as ‘the power of the weak’ and currently many scholars including Africans are corroborating this thesis in different ways (Mkasi 2014; Gordon 2003; Shröter 2004). The underlying issue is that African religious traditions were traditions of openness to other perspectives and sexualities. It also affirms that different forms of sexualities have long existed side by side from antiquity, and each held a distinctive place in cultural tradition and in the process of sociocultural transformation. In addition, the liminal spaces were dynamic spaces of empowerment as they enabled initiates to create counter-heteronormative structures which gave emphasis on the values of justice, equality and appreciation of difference. In so doing, they demonstrated the inadequacy of existing social order and the need for cultural transformation.

The on-going discussion confirms what scholars have observed that ‘the ironic truth is that it is not homosexuality that is alien to Africa but the far off lands of Sodom and Gomorrah plus the many other religious depictions of other-sexuality that are often quoted in condemning same-sex relations on the continent’ (Tamale 2013: 36). Sylvia Tamale (2013: 36) argues that ‘it is not homosexuality that was exported to Africa from Europe but rather legalized homophobia that was exported in the form of Western codified and religious laws’. In order to facilitate the construction of original knowledge that can contribute to such a socio-cultural change, during Mukanda rite many ‘Ndembu conventions are consistently violated by means of obscene gestures, homosexuality, and taboos against touching the ground’ (Bell 1997: 54-55). In addition, sexual encounters with women for the liminal guardian and assistants are strictly prohibited as taboo during this period (Turner 1962).

The fact that there is some evidence of the traces of indigenous homosexual practices among some ethnic groups in Zambia during their Mukanda ceremonies, does not mean that the practice is prevalent throughout Zambia or Africa at large. There is still a need for more empirical studies focusing on the history of each specific ethnic group. Yet, this may prove problematic in contemporary context pervaded with public harassment and persecution of homosexuals. It can also be argued that since homosexuality was regarded as taboo in some structured African societies, that could only imply that the practice was known as only acknowledged cultural aspects

were classified as taboo. But when it comes to the Ndembu, one can argue without fear of contradiction that homosexuality was not a strange phenomenon before colonialism, however differently the notion may have been conceived and classified; the practice was entrenched within their cultural tradition. The acute question that remains unresolved is: to what extent did they manage to patrol the liminal borders so that homosexuality did not find its way into structured society?

## **On Liminality and Border Patrol**

There is no precise answer for the above question but the contention is that there was no way that they could have completely prevented the practice from finding expression in structured social order. They may have tried to suppress it but they could not have completely managed to prevent it from entering the structured society as was discovered by Smith and Dale (1920) among the Ila people. The trouble is that homosexuality within the liminal space acted as powerful cultural practice in which sexual agency and subjectivity was discovered. The identity was uncovered through the process and had potential to challenge the normative contractions of meaning of self and others (Quashie 2004: 78). The religious ritual in which the liminal space is situated does not exist apart from the community but ‘exists as such only in virtue of the fact that it serves the interests of the society in which it is preserved’ (Post 1969: ix), and whatever new knowledge that came out of there was significant for cultural renewal and this was an expectation within Ndembu society as highlighted above. It offered choice and multiplicity by making possible the deconstruction of meaningless constraints of common knowledge. It gave the initiates freedom to break free from and deconstruct the socially constructed identities and reconstruct their own rationally based sexual identities.

While homosexuality might have been suppressed in the community, it nevertheless was an aspect of the culture in transition and it was only a matter of time before it could become an established alternative to heterosexuality. It was inevitable that through the process of re-enacting homosexuality, some initiates could have rediscovered and consciously fashioned their identities in that direction. In this way, while the community could have tried to suppress and repress such identities because of its

overemphasis on procreation, there was always a possibility that in time this sexuality would eventually escape from anti-structural confinement, find its locus for expression within structured societies, begin the process of struggle for recognition and force cultural tradition to reorient into that direction. Because of the emphasis placed on liminality as taboo-less subversive space, Ndembu culture unconsciously and consciously depended on liminality for cultural transformation and in this way, the culture has never been static entity but rather dynamic. Ndembu culture has always evolved through 'communal assimilation' of certain aspects of knowledge emerging from the liminal space as perceived adequate to meet the needs of the time. Thus, they are constantly altered and redefined, more or less intentionally, to fit in with the cultural values of the time. Change itself is intrinsically part of Ndembu tradition.

It can be argued therefore that homosexuality as liminal ritual among the Ndembu was an aspect of cultural regeneration and renewal. The new, when it first appears, from the liminal is always profane and dangerous but having taken place, become one of the cultural tenets and inevitably become acceptable. Instead of threatening the wellbeing of the community it becomes part of the common experience upon which the community is founded. Thus, tradition cannot be regarded as a closed system. The Ndembu liminal space was that critical site where new subjectivities and identities were expected to break forth for the cultural regeneration and renewal. This shows that while cultural tradition emerges in the past, is not confined to the past but lived within material realities of the present. The question remains: how is the church in Zambia to respond to the foregoing discussion?

## **Beyond Tolerance: Toward an African Ecclesia-Ethics of Openness**

But what is the forgoing have to do with the church? In other words, what does the Ndembu ethics of openness mean for ecclesiological reflections for the Zambian Church? The concept of 'openness' is also articulated from a Black theological perspective by Roger Sneed (2010) in his *Representations of Homosexuality*. But specifically for this article I take the point of departure from the cultural liminality as an African religious space for enacting cultural transformation and argue for integration of Ndembu religious traditions of

‘openness’ as an ecclesiological ethical paradigm for Zambian church’s response to homosexuality. Many Zambian traditions like the Ndembu, Ila, Bemba, Kunda, Lunda, Luvale and others were centred on religio-ethics of ‘openness’ which drew form and content from the notion of radical hospitality. I am arguing that if Zambian church would win over the sin of homophobia, a constructive African ecclesia-ethics must begin with epistemic de-linking from rigid Church theologies to embrace African religious traditions of openness which resonates with the incarnation of Jesus as a moment of divine liminality with radical openness to the world.

The contention is that the concept of openness is biblical and grounded in the incarnational-liminality of Jesus – the earthly experiences, mission and work of Jesus. Jesus urged his disciples that ‘as the Father has sent me, I am sending you’ (John 20:21). The church participates in this divine mission. It is itself a divine ritual performance in the world. It is meant to be always in the liminal space as divine demonstration of resistance to sin and injustice inherent in human social order; as a locus for creating a counter-world through re-enactment of God’s kingdom of openness in the world. The church as divine liminal space was envisioned by Jesus to be the power and weapon of the weak in which all are unqualifiedly welcomed. In the same way that Jesus did not come ‘to condemn the world’ (John 3:17), in its missional engagement in the world, the church must never become an instrument of condemnation but a space of reconciliation of the estranged. The theology of openness was meant to continue through the church as God’s continued incarnation in the world to demonstrate God’s big heart for the world – the Creator who becomes a creature (one with creation).

To argue that the church is Jesus’ continued incarnation in the world does not mean that the church become less human as its members bear the marks of natural human struggles with sin in the world, but does so with the grace of God. Like in cultural liminality, Jesus’ existence in the world was dependent on his antithesis to human sinfulness and social structural order– ‘had no sin’ (1 Corinthians 5:21), ‘without sin’ (Hebrews 4:5), ‘committed no sin’ (1 Peter 2:22), and ‘in him no sin’ (1 John 5:3). But also in contrast to his heavenly glory as he emptied himself (Philippians 2), ‘grew in wisdom and stature’ (Luke 2:7), ‘was hungry’ (Matthew 4:2), ‘was sleeping’ (Matthew 8:24) and ‘died’ (1 Corinthians 15:3). In his earthly ministry, Jesus did everything in oppositional to the socio-normative of his day. Ernest van Eck (2009: 2) rightly argues that Jesus’ preaching of Kingdom of God should

be understood ‘as an imagined ‘kingdom’ (reality) in which different social relations and power structures operate’. It was a liminal speech with hidden transcript of ‘rebellion against prevailing order’ as it was directed at neutralising the powers that be and socio-political and economic injustice and inequities. This confirms that Jesus as the incarnational divine ‘wisdom from God’ (1 Corinthians 1:30. See also Colosians 2:3 – ‘in him is hidden all treasures of wisdom’), was envisioned as the new knowledge that often emerge out of the liminal space to filter into human social orders for socio-cultural transformation. The church in the world embodies Jesus, and like incarnate Jesus, it is called to serve the world through openness, understanding and seeing the world openly as Jesus did. The church as ecclesia-ethics of openness means that ‘the church is, first of all, an affair of understanding rather than doing’ (Hauerwas 1983: 103). In the incarnation of Jesus, the activities of Jesus on earth emerged from ‘love and understanding’ rather than ‘love and understanding’ emerging from the activities. It is unfortunate that many times the church has passed judgment on issues which it does not seem to understand adequately. This is a misrepresentation of God who does not require human beings to judge one another (Matthew 7:1-2).

In the context of homosexuality the first question the church must ask is not ‘whether homosexuality is sin or not, rather, how do we become human together? The way this question will be interpreted will determine how the church must respond. The demanding task of the church in the world is that in every circumstance try to understand rightly humanity as humanity, faced in the light of church’s own sinfulness. The ecclesia-ethics of openness is grounded on a deep appreciation of human life, dignity, and as bearers of the image of God. It calls the church to expander its response beyond mere tolerance by engaging in public appreciation for difference in human life and activity (Sneed 2010:180). I propose three areas in which ecclesiastical openness can function in the context of homosexuality in Zambia.

First, an African ecclesia-ethic of openness values dialogue and understanding of difference as primarily a human endeavour. The task of the church is one of understanding the differences without ignoring or trivialising them but perceived as site for dialogue. The incarnation was made possible by bringing into dialogue the differences – ‘the humanity’ and ‘the divinity’ without mixing or confusing them or making Jesus a dual personality but perfectly co-existing in the one person of Jesus Christ. In this way, the

incarnation is a symbol of the safe space for dialogue of difference. The life of Jesus demonstrates that critical recognition and deep appreciation for the difference is the basis for human fulfilment and flourishing in the world. The 'difference' is always the space of dialogue. Arguably, the church in Zambia has not always played a constructive role in either promoting respectful dialogue on the subject or alternative public perceptions of the humanity of homosexuals. In fact, the church is partly to blame for the negative public image and harassment of homosexuals and misinterpretation of African cultural heritage. It is responsible for perpetuating discrimination against human beings who practice homosexuality. This response is a result of the church's apparent lack of adequate culturally informed theology of human dignity that does not define the dignity and humanity of an individual based on their beliefs and practices but on their inherent value as bearer of the divinity. 'If humanity is regarded as made up of the children of God and God loves all humanity', Marcus Garvey noted, then God is more pleased with the church when it protects all humanity regardless of their beliefs and practices than when it outrages them (Garvey 1967: 61). It is difficult to imagine a minority group whose human dignity is more undermined by the church than that of homosexuals, who are regarded as criminals on the account of their sexual orientations, and whose prospects of living a dignified life is lightly dismissed by Christians in Zambian society.

Second, an African ecclesia-ethic of openness 'relies on a deep appreciation of human worth, value, and action...draws on those categories of human experience that humans hold sacred and of deep and abiding value and meaning' (Sneed 2010: 180). The Christians in Zambia have failed to be God's witnesses to human dignity which does not depend on what an individual does, but on affirmation of human beings as bearers of divine image. Rather, the Christians have sought to confront the moral challenge with no regard for the humanity of homosexuals, and have failed to exhibit this deepest theological conviction that human beings are endowed with divine essence, deserving equal dignity and respect regardless of their background and life-persuasions. The Zambian Christians have failed to shift the debate over homosexuality from focusing on moral practice to the humanity of those involved. They seem to lack adequate theological practice of human dignity that transcends the confinements of ecclesiastical corners to embrace pluralistic society. The issue at stake here is not whether homosexual practice is morally right or wrong but whether the human dignity



of those involved can be adequately preserved without relegating them to harassment and persecution. This is a perspective on which African traditional wisdom was grounded. African traditional religious thought has been classified as humanistic in its conception of reality because its approach to conflict primarily focused on first safeguarding the humanity and dignity of individuals involved in order to maintain intrinsic balance of forces and consequently social wholeness.

Third, an African ecclesia-ethic of openness is grounded on the quest for affirmation of the humanity of homosexuals and their quest to experience the fullness of life as a matter of divine concern. In his public ministry, Jesus did not begin by asking the masses about their beliefs and practices as precondition for ministering to them, rather he unconditionally love them, touched them, healed them, delivered them and feed them. In the same way, theology of openness is inclusive in its approach to the notion of abundant life for all without qualifications. The notion of the fullness of life is rooted in the word *Oikoumenē* a relational, dynamic concept which transcends the ecclesiological relationships to embrace the whole human community and the rest of creation. The church is called to transform the *Oikoumenē* from *oikein* (inhabited earth) into an *oikos* (the living household of God) (Raiser 2002: 840-841).

## **Implications for the Church in Zambia**

The following could be suggested as implications of African ecclesia-ethic of openness for the church in Zambia:

First, there is a need for urgent decolonization of Christian public perception of homosexuality. The church must abandon blame discourse and embrace the cultural origin of homosexuality within Zambian cultural traditions. In the words of Frantz Fanon (1963: 2):

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language

and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men ... Decolonization, therefore, implies the urgent need to thoroughly challenge the colonial situation.

Second, there is an urgent need for the church to re-humanise homosexuals. According to African thought system, in order for healing to take place in the context of dehumanization it is essential to re-humanise those who have been robbed off their humanity. The re-humanization requires the re-establishment of right relationships. As argued above, the church must function within the paradigm of the incarnation of Jesus which suggests that Jesus not only recognised and affirmed the humanity of others but sought to humanize them first before engaging in dialogue. A good example is the encounter of Jesus with a Samaritan woman in the Gospel according to St. John chapter four. In this chapter, Jesus asked for the water from a woman who was segregated by her people as a prostitute and considered as ethnically unclean by Jewish society. The action of asking for water to drink meant that Jesus recognised and appreciated her for who she was and thereby humanizing her. A conservative Jew would not have dared to ask for water from a Samaritan. The humanization is always the first step before engaging any respectful dialogue. The ethic of appreciation for the difference is not only indispensable but prerequisite for engaging in any respectful and life giving dialogue.

Third, there is an urgent need to reconceptualise the church as a social ethic of unconditional love in the world. The church was created by God to be God's social instrument for manifesting his unconditional love, unconditional acceptance and unconditional appreciation of the world as his good creation. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin understands love as the only power that can unite humankind in freedom:

Love has always been carefully eliminated from realist and positivist concepts of the world; but sooner or later we shall have to acknowledge that it is the fundamental impulse of Life, or, if you prefer, the one natural medium in which the rising course of evolution can proceed. With love omitted there is truly nothing ahead of us except the forbidding prospect of standardization and enslavement – the doom of ants and termites. It is through love and within love that we must look for the deepening of our deepest self,

in the life-giving coming together of humankind. Love is the free and imaginative outpouring of the spirit over all unexplored paths. It links those who love in bonds that unite but do not confound, causing them to discover in their mutual contact an exaltation capable, incomparably more than any arrogance of solitude, of arousing in the heart of their being all that they possess of uniqueness and creative power (de Chardin 1964: 54; see also Tillich 1954).

## **Conclusion**

This article demonstrated how the Ndembu people through ritual performance breach through cultural sexual normativity into sexual ambiguity as ways of rediscovering their full humanity. Drawing from Ndembu ritual of Mukanda initiation for boys, this article sheds light on how the liminal imagination as transgressive spaces can create unique tensions with potential to generate non-discriminating and liberating perspectives on human sexuality in African context. I have argued that the current un-Africanization of homosexuality is grounded in epistemic failure to understand the historical and material legacies of African cultural heritage. First, the un-Africanised discourse appears to lack acquaintance with the complexity of cultural liminal imagination within some African cultural traditions. This may have deprived them of vital key to understanding the origin of homosexuality in Africa. Secondly, even those Africans who are familiar with African notions of liminality appear to be struggling to acknowledge the possibility that homosexuality as cultural taboo that became un-tabooed in the liminal spaces could not have been always contained within the liminal spaces but most probably found way into structured social order. The Ndembu ritual thinking suggests that African cultures can no longer be perceived as immutable, unchanging and frozen in the timeless past but as something dynamic and many of social changes taking place are not of alien influence but aspects of African cultures that were inexorably to rapture out of cultural cocoon, acquire viability and exert authority over possible modes of African human being and becoming. The implications of this understanding are that the Church in Zambia should move from discriminatory discourse and foreignization of homosexuality to start raising questions about the possibilities of constructing ecclesia ethic of openness to controversial issues such as homosexuality.

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# **Cohabitation in Akan Culture of Ghana: An Ethical Challenge to Gatekeepers of Indigenous Knowledge System in the Akan Culture**

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## **Abstract**

This article proffers an ethical investigation on the current issue of cohabitation of people who are not formally married in Akan culture of Ghana. Whilst the issue of cohabitation has become common among other African cultures in recent times, in this article I am arguing that this practice poses a challenge to our African cultural outlook towards marriage. The article argues that the essence of the institution of marriage within these communities has slowly being adulterated. This has compromised the rich and cherished values around the indigenous rites and ritual leading to marriages. Through the lens of ethical theory of consequentialism, the article exposes the ethical implications of cohabitation within the Akan indigenous knowledge systems arguing that it underplays the unity and the rituals that binds and protects the individuals in the relationship. It also downplays the essence of the institution of marriage within the indigenous Akan context. Therefore the article calls for a critical engagement in preserving some of these values in our current social system.

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**Keywords:** African indigenous knowledge systems, cohabitation, Akan Culture, Ghana, Gatekeepers, ritual, marriage, modernity

## **Introduction**

African indigenous knowledge systems and practices are embodied in initiations, rites and rituals at the various levels of humankind's life. To the Indigenous African, the life of an individual in a society is a series of passage from one age to another and from one occupation to another. The progression from one stage to another is marked by special acts which are enveloped in various rites, rituals and ceremonies. These rituals have varying degrees of intensity and are performed to mark the major turning points in humankind's life, namely, birth, puberty marriage, child birth and death. These are termed by anthropologists as Rites of Passage; a term which was first coined by Van Gennep (1960). He grouped these rites of passage into three; the first, transition rite or adoption involves pregnancy, child birth and betrothal, the second, incorporation rites which involves marriage and naming ceremonies and the third, separation rite deals with funeral ceremonies (Van Gennep 1960). These rites and ritual have been binding and preserved for many years. This is because they embodied rich values and practices which define the African. In recent times these rites and ritual are been endangered by western knowledge systems embodied in colonialism, modernization and globalisation. Of particular interest is a gradual erosion of normative indigenous marriage rituals, rites and practices in favour of more informal types of unions particularly among the educated and some urban dwellers (Meekers 1993). It is being replaced by cohabitation a situation where two individuals decide to live together, share resources and in some cases even have children without going through the initiation rites embedded within the African indigenous knowledge system leading to marriage. Most researchers now argue that cohabitation is a form of marital status (Barlow *et al.* 2005). But to the indigenous African particularly the Akans, long term union without the prescribed cultural rites and rituals is seen as a taboo. These rites and rituals are built on important values that can contribute greatly to current communal social constructive values within the African society. Therefore there is need to retrieve these values that are being eroded.

It is with this background that the current article argues that cohabita-

tion poses a challenge to our African outlook on marriage. It exposes the ethical implications of cohabitation within the Akan communitarian indigenous knowledge system. It unearths the various rites and rituals around the marriage process and argues that within these rites lay important values such as responsibility, accountability, security, celebrating of unity of families, even those from different settings, separation and incorporation into a new family by marriage. These important values will be preserved when integrated within our current marriage processes. The article is divided into 3: the first section explores the process of marriage ritual amongst the Akans' highlighting the important values embedded in the rituals. It will also look at the current challenges preventing the implementation of these rites and rituals.

Second it looks at the current phenomena of cohabitation that is eroding these communal values and lastly the article ethically challenges the Akan community of the need for a critical engagement to integrate some of these indigenous values in our society today.

### **The Marriage Process among the Indigenous Akans in Ghana**

To the Akans 'marriage is an institution in which interpersonal relationships, usually intimate and sexual are acknowledged' (Annin & Abrefa 2014: 92). This suggests that sexual intercourse is only recognised within the confinement of the marriage relationship. Virginity was perceived by the traditional Akan as very important and must be kept until marriage. In addition, they view marriage and the various rites and rituals attached to it as a very important practice and therefore must be followed in its strictest form. The Akans occupy the southern part of modern day Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Despite the controversy of whether they belong to the same ethnic group or not, they seem to be sharing institution, organisations and practices, for instance there is similarity in their family systems, kingship structures, religious practices, economic and political structures (Adu Boahen 1974; Robert *et al.* 1973). This study will be based on the Akans in Ghana. The Akans form the major ethnic group in the country, comprising 52.7% of the total population (GLSS 5 2008). They include many sub-groups such as the Kwahu, Ashanti, Fanti, Akwapim, Akyem, (Brong), Ahafo, Adansi, and Nzema. These groups are slightly distinct in language—generally classified

into Twi and Fanti, but their social systems are almost the same. For instance Hendrix has observed, to the Akans, there is an expectation of relative permanence, co-residence, a division of labour, sharing of resources, a sexual relationship, procreation and cooperation in child bearing and training within marriage (Hendrix 1996: 173). The idea of divorce or anything that will bridge the marriage institution was prohibited.

To the Akans, the process of marriage involves interpersonal as well as communal values such as interest, pleasure, likes, preference, duties, moral, obligations, desires, wants, needs, aversions and attractions and many other modalities of selective orientation (William 1968:283). This is because they believe that the survival of community depends on the institution of marriage and procreation that is attached to it. Marriage therefore was not only seen as a relationship between two individuals but also as a structural link between groups (Hendrix 1998:734). It brings clans, tribes and even villages together. To this end, the sanctity of marriage became the community's business and everyone made sure it happens as a major value to the indigenous Akans.

Another value that was attached to the process leading to marriage was the celebration of a transition from celibacy. For this reason the rituals and the ceremonies attached to the transition are adhered to strictly. As Van Gennep has observed: 'for one of the spouses it involves a change of family, clan and village and sometimes the newly married couple even establish residence in a new house' (1960: 116). This therefore suggest that within the indigenous Akan context, any time a man and a woman accept the responsibility to marry, the families or communities of both individuals come together. Both the leaving and the incorporation into a new family is celebrated. This celebration cements the social and communitarian character of the community. On the other hand, if there is a rift between the two families or communities, that rift can actually nullify a marriage between two persons. As such the indigenous marriage process was highly respected because of the significant number of people affected by the union (1960:116). Magesa rightly says that:

The communities involved share their very existence in that reality and they become one people, one thing, as African themselves would put it that through their marriage, their families and clans are also united so that what is done to one of their members is done to all. By

this gesture marriage also means that the partners' responsibilities are not limited to them alone but have a much wider application. Their own personal identity and identification are equally extended (1998:110).

Socially acceptable marriage among the Akans was therefore seen as lifelong union of husband and wife for mutual support and progeny to continue the ancestral line and to promote the welfare of the tribe or clan (Mole 1982:3). It was an obligation for all citizens so much that 'if you are of age and you do not marry, you lose your self-respect' (Anarfi 2006: 170). In some cases parents, elders, and family members may interfere in someone's private life out of legitimate concern should there be any undue delay especially if a man is of age and gainfully employed (Gyekye 2003: 76). Marriage among the Akans was also perceived as a sacred act and this was reiterated by Mbiti when he said that:

Marriage is looked upon as a sacred duty which every normal person must perform. Failure to do so means in effect, stopping the flow of life through the individual and hence the diminishing of mankind upon the earth... Therefore anybody who, under normal condition, refuses to get married is committing a major offence in the eyes of the society and people will be against him. In all African societies, everything possible is done to prepare people for marriage and to make them think in terms of marriage (Mbiti 1975: 98).

Being a sacred union, it was seen as a religious obligation and a means through which the community contribute to life, especially since the Akans like the rest of their African communities believe that in most cases the living dead are reborn in their descendants (Muzorewa 1985:11-15). Therefore a person without any offspring blocks the physical continuation of life. This was one of the reasons why most parents negotiate the marriage union for their children particularly the girl child at a young age. Refusing to marry is therefore seen as an abomination, families with unmarried grown up girls are a disgrace not only to the family but the clan as well. It is through the rituals, rites and ceremonies that the couples receive blessing both from the ancestors and the community as a whole. To the Akans, every union must go through the customary rites before it is socially accepted. The first and an important

step before the rites and ritual is that ‘both families must make enquiry into the backgrounds of the two families before the marriage is contracted. The investigation takes diverse forms, for instance they have to find out if there is no madness in the family or no chronic and contagious illness’ (Annin & Abrefa 2014:92). The idea of the inquiry of the background was to protect the bride to be from future problems in the marriage. When the family is convince that all is well then the rites and the rituals can proceed. These rites include the knocking (*kɔkɔkɔ*) and the main ceremony ‘Head drinks’ (*tirinsa*).

Unlike in recent times, traditionally only a few people attend the *tirinsa* ceremony. As a rule, the bride is not present and often the groom is absent as well. Someone acts on his behalf. This person may be his own father or a close maternal relative. A personal experience confirms this fact, during my *tirinsa* ceremony, my father and the groom’s father and their representative attended the ceremony. In the presence of all gathered the bride to be had to agree for the elders to accept the gift and that is what happened in my case. I was only called in to agree for the elders to accept the gifts. It must be noted that ‘a yes’ from the ‘bride to be’ seals the marriage. The grooms family then present bottles of schnapps and money as a token of appreciation for the brides’ family for bringing up a marriageable daughter and a few personal effect such as ornaments, cloths, sewing machine (optional) etc. (depending on the family) for the bride to be. The idea of the ornaments and cloths for the ‘bride to be’ is that in case children follow quickly after the marriage, that will require attention financially so in order for the ‘mother to be’ not to be in need, the ‘husband to be’ had to provide even before the children come. Again the significance of the machine is for her to learn how to sew in order to mend torn cloths and to preserve money instead of giving it to tailors. All these instil the value of hard work in the young couple.

In view of the importance and sacredness attached to marriage, issues of fornication, rape cohabitation were regarded as very serious offenses which required ritual for cleansing lest the Gods and ancestors be offended (Shorter 1999:95). In most cases offenders were punished severely or outlawed on moral as well as social grounds. This was to prevent others from repeating the mistakes of others. As has already been mentioned above, currently, the nature of marriage and the processes leading to it has changed dramatically. The next section explores the challenges that the traditional

processes are facing.

So far we have seen that marriage among the Akans enlarges a group and produces legitimate children. It is an achieved status that brings respect for both men and women. In the past, the unmarried woman was not accorded much respect. The same status is accorded to anyone who enters into a relationship of no social and cultural recognition and also a relationship that is not aimed at producing children into the lineage. Similarly, the unmarried man who stays alone for years was frowned at and a sense of shame or stigma was attached to cohabiting couples (Wilson & Mafeje 1963; Pauw 1968; Budlender *et al.* 2011).

### **Current Challenges Faced by the Culturally Accepted Marriages among the Akans**

From the above discussion it is clear that marriage among the Akans in Ghana, like any other ethnic groups on the African continent is very important and considered as an institution which every individual adult should experience if possible (Tetteh 1967 cited in Frost and Dodoo 2010). It must be noted that currently, marriages recognized in Ghana are of three types, marriage under ordinance, marriage under customary law and marriage of the Mohammedans ordinance (Kuenyehia & Aboagye 2004). Marriage under ordinance is monogamous while the two others can be polygamous. No matter which form one chooses, marriage is legally recognised after the customary rites and rituals have been performed. Yet there are a growing number of people living together without going through the instituted rites and rituals. Many scholars have attributed this trend to a number of factors these include the following:

Most scholars argue that modernization and urbanization has adversely impacted on the stability of African marriages (Moore 1994; Oppong 2003) and has contributed to more cohabitation. Urbanization or modernisation according to (Takyi 2001; Moore 1994) has gone to an extent to undermine African marriages and urban dwellers like the preference of conjugal union over the extended family. Scholars such as Oppong (1980) Tilson and Larson (2000) have argued that modernization in Africa and therefore Ghana has led to urbanization which is encouraging wide separation from the extended family members who are the gatekeepers of our cultural

heritage and therefore supporting individualistic kind of living arrangement. Currently, there have been movements from rural areas to urban in search for employment, infrastructure and better life. In the cities, people encounter different cultures and are influenced by them. In addition to the influence of the foreign cultures, religion and lifestyle there is freedom which has the potential to influence traditional lifestyle. Most migrants no longer live as they use to do in the rural areas where indigenous lifestyle is strictly upheld.

Another practice of the Akans believed to weaken traditional marital processes is the high price tag currently attached to the bride wealth demanded by the woman's family during the process leading to the marriage. As noted from above, this bride wealth was supposed to be as a token of appreciation for example among the Akans, this included two bottles of gin and a token of money and ornament (Fortes 1950), but currently this has changed. A visit to a bride price ceremony recently, revealed that in deed this transaction has been commercialised, the groom to be had to present a physical cash of about 4000 Ghana Cedis (approximately 958 US dollars), 3 suitcases full of clothes, sewing machine, ornaments, expensive wines and cool drinks as well as the cost of the party. Given the current economic status of Akan men only a few prospective husbands can afford the payment of bride wealth to the family of the bride (Hunter 2006; 2010; Hosegood 2009; Posel *et al.* 2011; Posel & Casale 2013). Most young men lack the economic readiness to marry given the high bride wealth, yet they have respect for the custom as an integral part of the marriage process (Posel *et al.* 2011; Posel & Rudwick 2011). This poses ethical dilemma for most of them.

Other studies attribute the reason for cohabitation to the changing attitudes to marriage. The context of rising levels of education and increased employment opportunities for African women has contributed to low and falling marriage rates among Africans (Garenne *et al.* 2001; Kalule-Sabiti *et al.* 2007). There is also increasing number of institutions within urban centres that allow for or justify cohabitation. Educational attainment has open opportunities for people to ask pertinent questions around these rites and ritual. A typical; example is the issue of upsetting the ancestors, with the current pluralism of religion such a belief is not respected by most people.

Another major reason why people opt for cohabitation is the binding nature as well as the presence of abuse and oppression that has characterized traditional marriages. Not only are people afraid to marry but also they are afraid that they will fail in marriage and end up with divorce. Thus far the



article has argued that the inability to pay the bride wealth, modernisation, migration and exposure to different form of cultures has influence most people to choose alternative union instead of the traditionally prescribed one. The next sections examine cohabitation among the Akans.

### **Cohabitation as a Modern Trend among Akans in Ghana**

As noted from above, the ideological significance of the indigenous rites and rituals leading to marriage among the Akans is slowly eroding and being replaced with 'consensual, free and casual unions' (Meyer Forte 1978: 29). The significance of the rituals associated with the processes leading to marriage in terms of bride wealth, alliance between kinship and lineage participation in marriage are declining particularly among many urban dwellers. In its place have witnessed the rise of unorthodox marital forms that have not been institutionalized by the exchange of bride-wealth or by a civil or religious ceremony (Locoh 1988). Carlos Arnaldo has defined cohabitation as a relationship where persons of the opposite sex cohabit without going through the formalities of customary, religious or civil marriage (2004:147). This suggests a mutual consensual relationship which can either be a long term or temporary depending on the choices of the cohabitants. It is with this background that the Demographic and Health Surveys of Ghana in 2003 and 2008 as well as the 2010 Population and Housing Census has included individuals in informal unions like cohabitation as other forms of union which exist within the Ghanaian context. It must be noted that there have been a substantial increase in this type of union since 1988 (Terborn 2004: 207) among Ghanaians. People co-habiting in 2003 according to the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey were about 8.1% this figure increased to 13.1% in 2008. This number rose to 14.1% in 2014 (GDHS 2014:10), suggesting that informal cohabitation has become a common trend. The inference here is that the institution of indigenous socially sanctioned marriage is gradually being compromised by consensual and this could have so many implications on the former as well as the children that come out of such unions. Interestingly within the Ghanaian context, most cohabitants see their situation as good as marriage and therefore rights afforded to marriage couples apply equally to them Barlow et al (2005:28-247).

A number of scholars have argued that most women in cohabitant

union are at a disadvantage and face a number of challenges. These include danger of economic deprivation and as well as human wellbeing. This situation is perpetuated by the lack of legal protection particularly in the event that their partners died intestate. Barlow et al (2005:65) also stressed the vulnerability of cohabitants. They further argue that cohabitation is mostly seen as the form of prelude to marriage before the actual union, it is also seen as an alternative to marriage. This therefore makes most cohabitants susceptible to deprivations since they view cohabitation as equal to marriage (2005: 67).

## **Ethical Implications of Cohabitation**

So far, the article has created awareness that the significance of indigenous rituals and rites that leads to socially sanctioned relationship among Akans is slowly being eroded. In its place is the phenomenon of cohabitation as David Parkin and David Nyamwaya have rightly observed (1987: 207). This emerging trend proposes a challenge particularly to the gate keepers of the Akan culture whose responsibility is to protect and preserve the indigenous heritage. These gatekeepers include the traditional leaders such as kings, chiefs, family heads and parents. A critical look at the current changing trend calls for consequentialist theory which argues that morally right action is one that produces a good outcome or result, and the consequences of that action or rule generally outweigh all other considerations (Mastin 2008). Consequentialism stresses the way people (or sentient beings, in general) are affected by our actions. Therefore, what matters is the welfare or the preferences of everyone to whom our actions make a difference (Bergström 1996: 76). This means that the right thing to do in any given situation is the act with the best consequence. Looking at cohabitation in the Akan culture through the lens of the above theory, the following issues come out:

To the Akan, the consequences of cohabitation undermine the significant values such as responsibility, commitment and accountability cherished within the confinement of traditional marriages. The quest for autonomy in today's society forces people to shy away from strong commitment with the view of seeking independence in relationships. A number of people opt to hang loose so that they can walk in and out at any given time. Ambert (2009) has explained that cohabitants are less committed

and can easily decide to go or come out of a relationship as compared to married couples who are much committed. Cohabitation is not recognised and respected in the Akan context therefore cohabitants may not be able to be held accountable of cheating outside the relationship. Such relationship is called 'mpenawadie' meaning concubine marriage which is not respected in the culture (Ankomah 2004: 472). In the same way individuals cannot be held accountable for any form of abuse or neglect. In fact there is a sense of shame or stigma attached to cohabiting couples (Wilson & Mafeje 1963; Pauw 1968; Budlender *et al.* 2011), more so it serves as disrespect to the family, the clan and the community as a whole. A number of studies both local and international have confirmed that the likelihood of couples who cohabit to divorce later in marriage is higher than those who do not cohabit. The reasons stem from unfaithfulness, instability to domestic violence (Waite & Gallagher 2000: 46; Wellings, Field, Johnson & Wadsworth 1994:116). Indeed prior cohabitation experience can contribute to divorce in later marriage (Amato 2010).

Another important consequence of cohabitation is that there is neither protection nor security. For instance on the death of a partner the other cannot claim inheritance; in fact he or she is treated as an outsider until the bride wealth has been paid. Children born in such union are considered illegitimate. It is seen as individualist union and does not unite families, clans, villages, towns and even countries in any way.

## **What we Ought to Do**

The consequences of cohabitation discussed above calls for an urgent action, especially if the ideological significance of the rites, rituals and processes leading to marriage is to be protected and preserved. With the dawn of modernity, some of these rites and ritual may need to be interrogated. There will be need to deconstruct and reconstruct new rites and rituals to reflect the current context consisting of people from different educational backgrounds, religious groups, racial as well as ethnic group.

First, transformation through debates and education around the greed and self-interested tendencies which has resulted in the commercialisation of the bride wealth must be encouraged. This is because as noted the consequences of it do not burden only the bridegroom but also the woman.

The expensive bride wealth does not only put financial burden on the couple to be but also perpetuates abuse in the marriage. The current situation challenges gate keepers of the Akans cultural heritage such as traditional kings, chiefs, community leaders, family heads and even parents to challenge their fellow men who play central role in the bride wealth rites and rituals to embrace the challenges as a matter of urgency. It must be noted that the patriarchal nature of the bride wealth has to be challenged because as noted during such ceremonies, even the few women who are present may not be given a platform to contribute in the whole process (Matope *et al.* 2013:1).

Such an education will help preserve the important heritage that seems to be eroding. This can be achieved through community forums and debates. Gate keepers must join forces with the government and other stakeholders in its protracted efforts to consider re-educating society on the dangers of allowing exorbitant amounts of money to be paid as bride wealth in marriages.

Gate keepers must be challenged not to turn a blind eye on issues of domestic violence, marital rape and other social ills found in the binding confinements marriages. Such neglect serves as discouragement to potential brides and therefore they chose the cohabitation option. There is need for cultural transformation, and on this the article recommends that the appropriate stakeholders work to make sure that such rites are not abused by members of the society. There has to be efforts to eradicate the driving forces like greed, moral degradation, unemployment that most individuals are facing.

## **Conclusion**

Thus far the article has argued that the significance of the rites and rituals surrounding marriage among the Akans in Ghana are slowly being eroded and a new form of unsanctioned unions is emerging. Cohabitation defined as a situation where two individuals decide to live together, share resources and in some cases even have children without going through the initiation and rites embedded in the indigenous knowledge system leading to marriage is becoming more popular. The article has argued that there are a number of legitimate reasons for this phenomenon. As noted from the discussion above, these may include the economic status of Akan young men, the commercialised bride worth, migration and modernisation. Yet a critical look

at the consequences suggests that such union is not a sustainable alternative to marriage. Apart from the fact that cohabitants are vulnerable to security, abuse, binding responsibilities and accountability, it is a threat to the rich indigenous knowledge and values such as the unifying of families, appreciation of good parenting and test of maturity in taking up responsibility of starting a family. What is needed is interrogation of the practices perpetuating cohabitation whilst protecting and preserving the rich values found in the indigenous knowledge and practices in keeping with the changing nature of our societies.

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# **The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in African Women's Theology of Understanding Motherhood and Maternal Health**

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## **Abstract**

Community life is believed to be one of the indigenous essences of African life style. Traditionally the need to live together as a clan or village in the African setting is accorded high value. These communities shared indigenous knowledge with one another on various issues for the promotion of life. Although this pattern is slowly diminishing, we still find communities that have managed to respect this kind of lifestyle. The individualistic life style seems to be more preferred than a communal life which in some communities is slowly beginning to be seen as primitive. Historically, from a woman's perspective communal life meant working together towards common good. Some of the occasions that always brought women together were childbirth and bringing up of a child which were seen as a community event needing companionship and partnership among women. This article explores the role of indigenous knowledge in African Women's understanding of motherhood and its effect on community life within the African context. In an era where

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issues of maternal and infant mortality rates are on the agenda, the communal approach to childbirth becomes inevitable for women's participation. Through the use of the theory of liminality the article shows how the transition from conception to childbirth is articulated as a rite of passage and how society upholds the concept of community life in providing support to the mother and child. Throughout the article the value of liminality and collective action in theologizing of motherhood is acknowledged. The article is a contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the works of African Women Theologians on the motherhood and maternal health.

**Keywords:** indigenous knowledge, maternal health, liminal space, motherhood, birthing rituals, liminality.

‘When a knowledgeable man dies, a whole library disappears’ (An African proverb).

## **Introduction**

Motherhood is one of Africa's most revered and celebrated acts in human life. This is reflected both biologically and metaphorically. The term mother is used to speak of nations as well as nature. In many African cultures giving birth is celebrated through ritual events which involve the whole community. Among most Zambian cultures childlessness in a marriage relationship is mostly associated with failure of the woman to conceive. In such communities a woman's identity is hidden in motherhood. Proverbs defining women who are not able to conceive always depict them in a negative sense such as *‘one who ate her baby's placenta’*. A woman who experiences miscarriages or still births is called *‘one whose basket leaks’*<sup>2</sup>. These proverbs go to show how a woman's womb is theorized as a significant space for nurturing and celebrating life. Apart from indigenous cultures, religion also

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<sup>2</sup> In this sense the womb is reflected as the basket, by nature a basket cannot hold water. The fact that the women keep having miscarriages reflects that her womb is despised to be weak and not able to hold a child.

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has a lot to say about motherhood and child birth. Within the Christian tradition, narratives related to motherhood are recorded in the Biblical texts either from positive or negative perspectives. For example the story of Hanna in (1Samuel 1:1-20)<sup>3</sup> reveals a situation of a desperate barren woman who was also mocked by her rival in marriage. From an African woman's perspective, Oduyoye (1999) in her article *A Coming Home to Myself...* uses her own story to relate the experience of barrenness in an African context. Reading through her story one is able to identify the value attached to biological motherhood in her context, and how women are associated with child birth. Oduyoye 1999 narrates how both the church and African Tradition Religions are used as tools of oppression to barren women. In another article Oduyoye (1992) discusses how among the Akan people child birth is celebrated as a channel for the return of ancestors and how the woman who has given birth is valued by the community. In describing her own journey of childlessness, Oduyoye (1999) uses what she calls a 'child factor' to show how African women are tied to biological reproduction which views childlessness as a taboo. Emphasising how the reality of childlessness dehumanizes women's lives, Oduyoye calls her narrative a story of women's experience that is yet to be told. Her experience of being childless taught her that motherhood is one of the most important aspects of a woman's life. She further states that African societies have in many ways used an essentialist approach to talk about motherhood as though being childless is being less human 1999. The experiences of Oduyoye to childlessness where she had to live with spiritual and emotional separation from the community and live between 'hope for' the child and despair due to shame associated with childlessness can be associated with one who is in a liminal space. Although Oduyoye condemns this kind of approach to childlessness she remains optimistic about the value of motherhood and its significance within African communities. The aim of this article to discuss the significance attached to motherhood and maternal health among African Women and the role that indigenous knowledge derived from rituals, beliefs practices and norms play

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<sup>3</sup> This is the story of Hanna and Penninah the wives of Elkanah. Hanna was not able to have children while Penninah had children and the rival between these women was on the fact that Penninah always despised Hannah for not having children and yet she was the most loved wife of the two. Hannah prayed to God so fervently in order to have the son Samuel.

in defining motherhood and maternal health. The article uses a theory of liminality to show the different stages that women go through in their experiences of motherhood. Sherwin (1998), Turner (1967) and van Gennep (1960) are among the key scholars in the theory of liminality. The scholars have demonstrated how liminal space when used to discuss rites of passage can have both negative and positive effect. In the case of motherhood, a feminist critique of the *liminal persona* will show that women's lives who are the persona in this case are also put at risk during the performance of some of the rituals. Apart from the risks involved this article also reflects the positive aspects of liminality in that it becomes a space where women experiencing motherhood find support from those who accompany them in this journey of birthing. The article also uses the concept of liminality to show how indigenous knowledge is used to address women's health and wellbeing during pregnancy. As an emotional space liminality also has aspects where the novices who are the initiates have to deal with both an already occurred event and something still to happen. It's a place where new responsibilities and values are learnt and embraced by the *liminal persona*. This is reflected in the next section where I discuss some of the rituals associated to childbirth.

### **'Buried under the *Mupundu* Tree' – Traditional Indigenous Rituals in Childbirth**

In addressing motherhood in traditional African societies we also relate to the value of indigenous knowledge systems to addressing issues related to maternal health. In this article I commence the discussion by looking at the indigenous rituals associated with childbirth. Many African communities treat child birth as a life cycle and a communal event associated with rites of passage. Kanyoro states that rites of passage such as birthing rites, naming rites ... were all performed as affirmation of individuals within a religious and cultural setting. They were seen as community building and never as a way of diminishing persons (2002:60). The process entails the involvement of nature, the spirit world and the world of the living and the dead. One of the contentious issues during the period in most Zambian cultures is the disposal of the placenta. Among the Tonga people of Zambia the placenta is buried

either under the *mupundu* tree, while others bury it behind an ant hill or at the centre of the family hut; and others bury it on the veranda of the family hut. The burial site depends on the clan line where the child comes from. Each of these sites hold significant traditional meaning to the life of the mother and child. One of the interpretations given is that the process of disposing the placenta symbolise the rites of passage that the child undergoes. Turner contends that rites of passage are found in all societies but tend to reach their maximal expression in small scales where change is bound up with biological and meteorological recurrences rather than technological innovations (1967).

Therefore treatment of the placenta signifies its biological value as part of the child's life cycle. Communities that adhere to this kind of teaching believe that although the child is separated from the placenta, ritualistically they is still a spiritual connection that needs to be delinked through ritual performances. That is why for those who bury the placenta of the first born child in the family hut of the homestead, they symbolically announce to the child that he/she belongs to that particular homestead. And when this child dies later in life, there is a demand that the body is brought back to be reunited with the placenta in the homestead. Words such as '*let him/her come to lie where his/her home is*', will be used to illustrate that the home in this case is the placenta which is seen as the initial home for the baby.

The use of the *mupundu* tree is an illustration of how nature is connected to birthing. The fertility of the *mupundu* tree is used to relate to the fertility of the woman. Therefore burying the placenta under the *mupundu* tree is another way of evoking the spirit world through nature to continue blessing the womb of the woman so that she can be as fruitful as the *mupundu* tree. The proverb that says *the mupundu tree that ate the placenta* simply symbolises the value of the decay of the placenta under the *mupundu* tree to women's reproductive health. As a result of this connectivity, in most of the Zambian communities the *mupundu* tree is one of the most significant trees for discussing indigenous knowledge systems associated to women's reproductive lives. For example among the Bemba people one of the puberty rites observed during initiation ceremonies the introduction of the girl to the *mupundu* tree by asking her to sit under the tree during some of the initiation lessons. The association to the *mupundu* tree is a sign of productivity demonstrating that childbirth is a continuation of life. Just like the child is expected to grow die and become an ancestor so does the *mupundu* tree grow to provide enough fruit and dies and regenerates through the seed.

Apart from the disposal of the placenta and the umbilical cord, traditional African life also celebrates the transition that the expectant mother undergoes from conception to childbirth. Burying of the placenta is seen as a life giving ritual which celebrates the continuation of life. During all this transition both mother and child are said to be in a liminal space. In connection with the value of indigenous knowledge, liminal space is one of the most crucial periods in the life of the mother and the child. Different forms of rituals continue to be performed on the mother until the time when the child is born and introduced to the outside world. Some of the rituals that are performed during this period are ambiguous and can be dangerous to the life of the mother and child. For example in some cultures the control over the mother's diet such as denying her of nutritional foods and the demand for hard labour in order to ease the labour pains on the day of delivery and to ease the delivery process can be detrimental to the mother's health and affect the unborn child. Following strict rights and obligation the *liminal persona* who in this case is the mother is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms, ethics and standards.

## **Transition through the Liminal Space – The Separation Ritual**

Van Gennep (1960) observe that important role transitions generally consist of three phases: 1) *separation*, in which a person disengages from a social role or status, 2) *transition*, in which the person adapts and changes to fit new roles, and 3) *incorporation*, in which the person integrates the new role or status into the self. In most African communities the transition period that a mother undergoes during pregnancy involves the stages mentioned by van Gennep associated with ritual observance. One such ritual found in most ethnic groups in Zambia is called a separation ritual. An expectant mother is identified as a patient requiring to be separated from the rest of the community for the safety of both mother and child. This ritual entails that the expectant mother is now handed over to the world of ancestors who become the custodians of the pregnancy. This is done in the very initial stages of the pregnancy before it is seen by many people. The ritual is performed secretly mainly within the family confinements for fear of attacks on the mother by the evil spirits. Among the Tonga people of Zambia the practice is called

*kwaanga da*<sup>4</sup>. The ritual is meant to announce the pregnancy to both the community of the living and the living dead. This ritual involves tying the mother with white beads around her waist and wrist. During this ritual the mother will also be advised on what food to eat, how to dress and other prohibitions that may also relate to her sex life. The herb strung to the beads is believed to be a protection against all diseases and spiritual powers that may be targeting the child. Once this ritual has been performed the mother now enters another phase of life where she is treated differently from the rest of the women in the community. Turner acknowledges this statement stating that the first stage of separation comprises of symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual from an early fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions (1967). The mother to be is no longer part of the community; she is in the liminal phase going into the unknown world. In the Bemba culture the name used for this phase is *balipakati* meaning the woman is in a midpoint of life. She is also seen as one who lives between life and death one whose future is unknown. Victor Turner (1967) described the transitional or liminal phase as a limbo between a past state and a coming one, a period of personal ambiguity, of non-status, and of unanchored identity. In primal societies, culturally prescribed rituals (rites of passage) provided individuals an experience of 'communitas' or shared psychological support throughout major status passages. During this period the unborn child will not be named as its life is not yet determined. The child's life is in a limbo therefore naming the unborn child is seen as exposing the child to the spiritual world that may cause harm since the evil world is also part of spirit world. According to Sherwin (1998), in Benin there is a saying that when a woman is pregnant she has one foot in the grave, and on the day of delivery she is said to be between life and death. Among the Bemba people of Zambia when a child is born the community greets the

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<sup>4</sup> The term literally means to tie the womb. This however does not mean that womb will be physically tied but it simply means that the womb is no longer loose and vulnerable but is tied up to the other world for protection. Symbolically women in this state receive a medicinal loop which they have to wear around the waist. In the biomedical world such symbolic assets will be condemned and women would sometimes be forced get rid of them as they are considered to be primitive.

family with the words *mwapusukeni*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore such interpretation associated with death at childbirth is generally communicated in religious forms such as accepting it as God's will should death occur (1998:159-160). Although there are cultures where a death of a mother or child at birth is associated with promiscuity such as the Bemba ethnic group of Zambia.

In describing the transition that the mother undergoes van Stadan's (2014) quotes Campbell and Cilliers who describe liminality as an in-between space where people are caught in an ambiguous phase between two situations (2012:41). This liminal space the betwixt life and death is significant in that it forms part of the indigenous knowledge that is found in motherhood.

Liminality also has its own positivity and negativity for example, within the Tonga community, liminal space sometimes also involves separating the couple from each other so as to protect the child from any contamination that may occur due to the father's promiscuity. This is done by allocating the mother and child in a separate house away from the rest of the family. According to this ethnic group, the liminal space also becomes a safe space for the health of the mother and child. This kind of separation may have some negative effects on the bonding of the father with the child by denying the father the opportunity to be part of the birthing process. Despite this negative aspect it is also clear that liminality theory has the power of communal support as displayed by women.

## **Analysing the Concept of Liminality and Motherhood through Feminist Cultural Hermeneutical Lens**

Among the African women theologians, the works of authors like Kanyoro (2002), Oduyoye (2001) and Oduyoye (1995) emerge as the foci for defining feminist cultural hermeneutics. A renowned Asian feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan sees cultural hermeneutics as an important tool that African women theologians have developed in order to analyze their culture, religion and Christian heritage (2001:15). Kanyoro sees cultural hermeneutics as analysis and interpretation of how culture conditions people's understand of reality at

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<sup>5</sup> The word literally means you have survived ordeal of death. Following the concept of communal living this kind of greeting entails that the whole family was in the liminal space between life and death.

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a particular time and location (2002:9). Context and time plays a very important role in any cultural analysis. This is because cultures are neither similar nor static (2002:64). This is despite the fact that there are some cultural rituals that are common within the African continent. For example practices and beliefs discussed on birthing though they may have similarities have strong cultural ideologies that are understood differently according to time and contexts. In this section, I wish to discuss three points relating to how we can respond to these cultural practices using feminist cultural lens while upholding the indigenous knowledge found in these practices.

First, Kanyoro (2002) cautions that cultural hermeneutics also means learning to question, scrutinize and examine culture practices of their essence to women's lives. This is because the author understands culture as the most authoritative cannon to the African worldview. Therefore any attempt to change these cultural practices must take into account the value attached to culture by the custodians of these practices (Kanyoro 2002). This is because in every culture there are certain elements of cultural that a community will value as the lens through which a community is nurtured. For example in the discussions on birthing I have also outlined some of the practices that are observed during liminal period that are a danger to both mother and child and yet society continue to uphold them. Therefore in as much as there can be oppressive elements in the practices addressed in this study, the idea of abandoning these cultural practices comes with caution and fear of losing these societal norms. Kanyoro further argues that such dilemma is highly influenced by the fear of breaking cultural norms (2002:56).

Second, it is also significant to note that same ritual practices that were identified in the liminal space are slowly diminishing as the practice lose momentum due to challenges emerging from outside influences. In most sects these practices are being discouraged and seen as primitive. While in other communities there is a strong advocate for a pluralistic model where women embrace both the traditional and modern forms of health care services. Kanyoro states that:

Africa has reached crossroads between an inherited culture and the challenges of modernism. This confusion and dilemma will continue to tear Africa apart. Indeed the present is the consequences of the past and the future is the result of what is done today. To get out of

this estrangement ... cultural hermeneutics need to be given the space and seriousness that it deserves in the discipline (2002: 57).

Thirdly, while it may be a positive thing to say that these practises need to be abandoned there is need to challenge the idea of doing away with these practices. This is because in some cases negligence of such practices sometimes come too early even before some rich indigenous knowledge is retrieved and passed on to the next generation. Kanyoro poses a challenge that so long as we continue to look at our own heritage as inferior and only to be studied as anthropological curiosity, then we will indeed be torn apart while following someone else's aroma. For example the need for a mother to go through liminal space can be encouraged in our current generation of young mothers. This is because most of the girls who become pregnant are too young to understand what is going on their lives and therefore passing through stages of liminality may help them appreciate the value of motherhood. What is needed is to combine an affirmation of culture and a critique of it through the feminist hermeneutical lens (2002:57). One good example why we need to protect some of the cultural values in these practices is the communal aspect that the liminal space provides to the novice the practice bring together women who in most cases act as traditional midwives to the young mother. The communal aspect found among women in the liminal space embodies a kind of theology that calls for collective action in supporting life. In this article I propose this theology of collective action as a model that has been used by women in their sustenance of the role of motherhood.

## **Towards a Theology of Women's Collective Action within Liminality**

As stated above, traditional birthing rituals do not only carry negative acts but have in many ways helped to bring out the support that women need from their fellow women in the period of liminality. The support that women offer to each other during this period of liminality goes to illustrate women's activism and collaboration. The story of Oduyoye who despite not being able to have children of her own and yet she enjoyed being called mama Mercy is a good example of how women offer support to each other during the liminal

space. Reading through her story it becomes evident that Oduyoye enjoyed the presence of midwives. Women who helped her to come out of the liminal space a journey she has had to undergo during her period of discovering her childlessness.<sup>6</sup> A theology of collective action as used in this article reflects on the role that women play in support of their fellow women that go through the liminal space during the period of experiencing motherhood. Theological reflection in this sense becomes significant due to the fact that the liminal space has also been identified as a space with religious norms and values. Therefore be it in African Tradition Religions or Christian perspective the Supreme Being/God is revealed in these liminal spaces. A theology of collective action in relation to motherhood is also a manifestation of God's own life-giving, liberative, sustaining love, and presence that encourages women to find hope in this space of limbo. This is because the creator God is also part of this liminality.

For example Raveh talks about the role of Hebrew midwives in Egypt as presented in Exodus that these Hebrew women displayed the power of women's resistance to political influence in an effort to serve the lives of the boy children. The author further explains:

The book of exodus opens with the description of the crushing slavery that Pharaoh King of Egypt, imposes on the children of Israel. Among other decrees, Pharaoh commands the Hebrew midwives that all male infants born are to be cast in the Nile. The midwives defy the king's order which violets natural morality, and allow the children to live. Their motivation to disobey the decree stems from their devotion to a profession whose essence is helping to create life, as well as from their being women (2013:12).

Raveh seems to equate the role of protecting life to women, from a feminist stand point it can be argued that women's position in childbirth is to protect life. The statement also reveals women's resistance and resilience to providing health care in the context of childbirth. Variel Swai observes that women occupy a special place in the improvement and promotion of health care services mainly because they participate in and manage many health

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<sup>6</sup> For a full story on Oduyoye's journey of childlessness, see *A Coming Home to Myself* ....

activities that affect the health of their families. The author further comments, research on the determinant of infant mortality further show that the mother is the most important health worker for the child (2006:36). As a result of all these factors women are socialised into motherhood even at a very tender age. Motherhood is not only valued but expected of every woman (Sherwin 1998:164). Therefore the participation of women in the promotion of life makes women's role of motherhood a unique concept that demands for unity and companionship of collective action which is also part of God's call for humanity to care for one another.

The story of the birth of Moses in Exodus chapter one brings out yet another dimension into the collective activism of women in an attempt to save life. From an African feminist perspective biological reproduction is apprehended as primarily social event and not as an individual experience. As a result when a child is born all members of the community are required to participate in the birthing process of the child. Revah states that childbirth has never been a neutral sphere (2013:12). The story in (Exodus1:19) where a group of women displayed resistance to the King's order by lying to him that they were not able to have the Hebrew baby boys killed at birth is a good example of communal approach to sustaining life. The baby boys' lives were in the liminal space where there was determinant of death and life, thus the Hebrew midwives as the gatekeepers had the power to protect these baby boys. These women did not only help the actual birthing of mothers, but they also played a symbolic role in the story of birthing of a nation of Israel (2013:12). The scenario set by Raveh in the birth of Moses also designates communal approach to providing health care services. The author relates how Jochebed the mother of Moses, Miriam the sister and Pharaoh's daughter worked together to rescue the slave boy. The collaboration of these three women reflects a communal and collective action. The partnership that is reflected in the story of Moses reflects the traditional African women's perception of motherhood. From an indigenous knowledge perspective the story of Moses can be concluded as, three women in the story went against their culture and all other barriers to save the boy child using their assets, all means available, for the survival of the baby. Cochrane, discussing religious health assets specifically, articulates the concept of assets well:

When we speak of religious health assets we mean something quite distinctive. The language... points to what people have available to

them, no matter how disadvantaged they may be materially, politically and in other ways, though this is not to suggest that socio-economic conditions are in themselves not critical to transforming the conditions of health in any context. Clearly the more assets people have to work with, the greater these assets are (2006: 63).

Women creatively used all the resources at their disposal as they worked together to resist death and protect life. Rabera further justifies women's communality and collective action concept using the scenario at the cross that:

The gospel stories record images of a strong collective action of women. The phrase 'a group of women' appears many times in the Jesus narratives. The strongest evidence of this group was at the foot of the cross. The women stood in solidarity with each other in a situation that must have been frightening and bewildering to them. Their collective support empowered them to keep going when there seemed to be no hope. Later when the disciples refused to believe Mary's report of her encounter with the risen Christ, a group of women went back to the empty tomb, women believing in women (1992:48).

These scenes reflect women's experience of connectedness with each other and solidarity through their experiences. Ruether discussing women's experience observes that women's experience is in itself a grace event, an infusion of liberating empowerment from beyond the patriarchal cultural context that allows women to critic and stand out against andocentric interpretations of who and what they are (1985:114). For example the scene at the cross of Jesus that is discussed by Rabera gives us an illustration on how these women embraced the death and resurrection as a 'group of' women during this liminal period between the death and resurrection of Christ. Their collective action behaviour brings out the power of motherhood that was demonstrated by each one of them as they accompanied Jesus on this painful journey.

## **Intersection between Religion and Maternal Health and its Relation to Motherhood**

Before I draw the discussion together and come to the conclusion of the article, it is pertinent to mention some specific areas related to motherhood, and especially maternal health, that are indicative of tensions between traditional indigenous knowledge and modern western ways. For example the modern ways of disposal of a placenta which is said to de-link the child from the African traditional religious worldviews. Therefore one may question its viability in a globalised Africa where women are now exposed to modern ways of disposing placenta, with chimneys that burn the placenta and create an 'eternal separation with the child'. Although this seems to be the scene at hand, it is also important to take into account the religiosity associated with the practice. From an indigenous perspective this kind of disposal of the placenta is sometimes condemned by the advocates of indigenous knowledge systems who believe that burning the placenta may bring some misfortune in the life of the child who is believed to be eternally separated from his/her initial 'home'. Disease and infant mortality is sometimes blamed for the act of disposing the placenta. This is because this kind of separation carries along religious rituals meant to appease the ancestors.

Although this kind of advocacy can be upheld in our society today there is also a need for those of us operating in the modern era to appreciate the tension and danger that such worldviews can create to the mother and child who are trapped in the cultural domains of their society as custodians of their culture (Kanyoro 2002). Such kind of approach can sometimes contribute to the negative attitude towards biomedical health care services by advocates of such ritual practices. At the same time it may also create a pluralistic ideology where people embrace both the African and western methods of health seeking. Therefore Glenier would argue that research aimed at engaging local knowledge systems must capture the different sets of knowledge and pay attention to whose knowledge is being included or excluded (1998:39). A feminist approach to indigenous knowledge systems will argue that in as much there is a paradigm shift to biomedical health services from indigenous African traditional methods, the shift may not have affected every aspect of human life especially in as far as rituals associated to child birth are concerned.

## **Conclusion**

Motherhood has traditionally been one of the most important aspects in most African women's lives. African Women Theologians have in many ways written on the value of motherhood and maternal health. These women theologians have argued that Motherhood is not only a biological factor but it's about nurturing, protection and promotion of life. This article has shown the role that the concept of motherhood still plays in our society and the value of indigenous understandings and practices in the journey of creating and protecting life, extending to the health and life of the mother and child. In this article I have also argued that within the African context most ethnic groups are still observing a community approach to motherhood where the whole community is involved in the journey to child birth, this includes the community if the living dead as well Especially women who collectively work together to resist oppressive forces to support, protect and sustain the life of the mother and child. The article has used the theory of liminality to show the transition that women go through in their experiences of motherhood and how this period helps them to develop support structures for their wellbeing.

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# **Women as Guardians of the Environment in the Midst of Forced Removals: From Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the role of the Sotho-Tswana women in environmental issues who were displaced in Lady Selborne in the 1960s in South Africa and resettled in Ga-Rankuwa. The task of food production has been the work of women in black African communities but forced removals interrupted such roles as many black people lost their fertile lands and were relocated in areas with soils not viable for subsistence farming like Ga-Rankuwa. Women were essentially hit hard by displacements as they were the people primarily involved in guardianship of the environment. It contends that, some women felt happy by owning plots in the relocation areas like Ga-Rankuwa but felt dehumanised because they could not engage with the environment the way they did in Lady Selborne. Such women tried all they could to improve their soils and failed, they then adopted passiveness towards environmental issues. On the contrary, some women maintained their role as guardians of the environment by devising measures to engage with their environment like producing manure to fertilise the soils and cultivate lands for growing fruits and vegetables in their yards. Such measures were not sustainable as

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there was poverty and at times they failed to get food peals. Depicting that, women even in the midst of land dispossession their attachment to environmental engagement does not seize. This article thus proposes that; women's critical role as pillars of the environment in safeguarding environmental sustainability necessitates – active involvement of all stakeholders like – the state, communities and non-governmental organisations

**Keywords:** women as guardians, environment, forced removals, Lady Selborne, Ga-Rankuwa, Land Tenure system, Sotho-Tswana ideology

## **Introduction**

Gender roles played an important part in defining the Sotho-Tswana's relationship with the land and environment. Any environmental calamity like droughts, floods, lightning etc. was explained as a consequence of one or another infringement or spiritual order – witchcraft or disregard to ancestors and so forth. Thus, women as people who work intimately with nature in any environmental disaster they get severely affected. The history of land loss under the apartheid period is a tragedy that has been under researched in terms of its ramifications on women and their relationship with the environment from before forced removals and after resettlement. This article is based on fieldwork conducted in Ga-Rankuwa in 2004, 2006 and 2014 among those women who were displaced from Lady Selborne in the 1960s. The data collected reveals that women often performed traditional roles such as food-producing agriculturalists and some were ecologists who performed rain-making rituals. But the women were continually oppressed by men and the colonial state.

Women maintained their role as guardians of the environment after land dispossession. Land dispossession through the colonialization, segregation and apartheid period could not stop their role of being nurturers of the environment. Many women resisted with their all to maintain their role of guarding the environment. According to Guy (1990), the history of women in South Africa is one of oppression, and the nature of that oppression is dynamic and has undergone qualitative changes over time whereby women ended up engaging actively in fighting against such discrimination. A lot of

literature on the role of women in environmental issues has been done from a male perspective with women as subordinate and unimportant. Men are perceived as official guardians of lineage and land. Men and women played different environmental roles, but both were traditionally and culturally intimately related to the environment. But, it remains the fact that women carry out most agricultural tasks (Ranger 2003:72). Bryant (1949:73) argues there is interdependence between people and the environment in that 'human beings are servants of their environment and the environment servants of people – because they eat, built, grow food in accordance to what the environment around them determined or allowed'. Hence the Sotho-Tswana, regard the environment as *lefa* (inheritance) from the ancestors who left it for them to utilise and preserve for future generations (Kgari-Masondo, interview Tshweni 2004). Women thus played that role of heritage conservers even under difficult epochs of land loss. Forced removals changed the map of South Africa as it caused black women's day-to-day physical world to disappear because, displacement rearranged residential patterns and made people to move from cluster style traditional settlements into grid plan villages and this had effect on food production too as some of the relocation plots were small and had infertile soils (Hofmeyr 1992:46-47).

The article will show that, although black African women and forced removals have received historiographical attention, they have received little analysis through the multidisciplinary, socio-environmental and indigenous lens. Equally, a historiographical fissure exists in the understanding of historically rooted and contingent perceptions of land by black women, land-ownership and the 'natural world' in the shifting environmental context from the original land inhabited and the resettlement areas. The article draws from indigenous knowledge of the Sotho-Tswana to show that forced removals were not just understood as a mere loss of land but, it was also seen as the result of one or another contravention or spiritual order like; disrespect to ancestors. Thus, also illuminating that even the ramifications of forced removals on women were not only perceived as economic, emotional, physical and political but were also spiritual, psychological, and environmental.

Twelve women were interviewed in 2004, 2006 and 2014 from a qualitative and phenomenological perspective. The phenomenological method is important for such a study as it allows researchers to suspend their judgements about the community studied. Generalization is not the purpose

of the study even though a small sample of interviewees were used. Hence qualitative method is used with the purpose of unearthing deeper understanding on the topic under study. Chow (2008) also supports this by arguing that normally many projects on place attachment and identity use small scale data, I believe it is because of the nature of the project which is involved and requires intense discussions with the interviewees.

The approach of this article is Afrocentric because it establishes: '[a] frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person ... it centres on placing people of African origin in control of their lives and attitudes about the world' (Molefi 1991 cited in Mazama 2003:5). In terms of socio-environmental History, an Afrocentric analysis would look at aspects of environmentalism by eschewing comparative study with other ethnicities but focuses rather on the Sotho-Tswana women's relationship with the environment. It is understood that perceptions of the environment vary across the selected study group – based on fissures of generation, gender, class, geographic distribution and idiosyncratic life experiences – but I will focus on similarities while acknowledging areas of difference, particularly those of gender.

Throughout this article, environmental injustice that black African women suffered through forced removals is highlighted, which prompts the recommendation of the article that, environmental sustainability policies are required in order to restore black African women to their ecological roles of the past. This is to provide a historical context of the worldview and ideologies of the community under study and provide a context for understanding gender issues in environmental history, more specifically during and after forced removals of the Group Areas Act of 1956. Hence Jacobs (2003) has argued that gender is an important feature in environmental history. Cultures are not static and change over time in response to internal and external stimuli, which this article seeks to reflect. Sotho-Tswana patterns of change will be discussed to illustrate that both pre- and post-colonial black African women's history is dynamic. For example, the relationship that existed between the communities and their environment was based on mutual interdependence in terms of sustenance through food production. This relationship has changed over time under political, economic, environmental, philosophical and social pressures. The initial Sotho-Tswana interaction with the environment is termed 'an ecological approach' by Merchant because it purports the idea of nature as a historical

actor and suggests that nature is a whole of which we are but one part, hence we interact with plants, animals and soils (1987:267). When Merchant talks about the 'ecological approach to nature', she uses a certain historiographical approach, but her analysis can also be applied to the lifestyle of the Sotho-Tswana women in relation to nature and, as Worster has pointed out, 'Merchant herself admitted that any theory of nature or society is rooted in its historical conditions' (1987:252).

It is worth mentioning that the Sotho-Tswana women did not always adhere to an ecological approach. Through contact with the West they had to adhere to scientific authority and a new set of social practices and policies, especially in the twentieth century and, with any norm, some Sotho-Tswana were non-conformists and did not follow nature conservation and preservation. Harrison describes the intervention of science in the environmental approach of black Africans and argues that a series of policies regulated black people's relationship with their environment (1987:50). This illustrates that the Sotho-Tswana perceived nature as an active agent in human ecology but there were instances where some deviated from the norms and values of environmental conservation and preservation. But, some of the rituals, idioms and myths were kept intact and ensured that they did not entirely disband with their environmental attachment. Consequently, Sotho-Tswana women's perception and relationship with their environment was a process that kept on changing depending on how the environment treated them. For example, if the environment was unkind to them they would appease it through rituals like rain-making (Manyeli 1992:53). Through rain-making, the Sotho-Tswana environmental rubric was evident as it was a process that involved the whole community and was led by chiefs and women, normally 'queens' (Ranger 2003:78).

## **Women and the Environment: From Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa**

Sotho-Tswana ideology towards the environment, as indicated by scholars like Khan (1990) and Mphahlele (1987) was a positive as it connected the individual to the environment through an intertwined assortment of physical, spiritual and cultural links. For the Sotho-Tswana, '*Motho* (human) is part of Nature and Nature is *Motho*'s companion from the beginning. Nature is not

therefore an object for human exploitation, for like the human it came out of the same source' (Setiloane 1985:40). Women are called *bomme and basadi* because they give birth and are left at home to nurture their families by growing crops, fetching water to drink, fetching firewood, collecting wild plants for food and spending time in the rivers and this gives meaning to the understanding and explanation of ecological functions. Both Mukonyora (1999) and Ranger (2003) made a useful observation that women had more intimate relationship with the environment than men because with the latter they were accustomed with the environment mainly through hunting and territorial wars.

Lady Selborne was situated in Pretoria and is currently known as Suiderberg. It was an urban area established in 1905 and accepted black freehold title to land until the 1950s when apartheid forced removals ensued. Ga-Rankuwa was established in late 1961 to accommodate black Africans displaced from Lady Selborne (National Archives Repository, NAR, Department of Bantu Administration and Development, BAO 7818G60/2/1547/1 n. d). It was proclaimed a township by Proclamation 448 of 1965 (NAR, BAO 7818T60/2/1547/1 n. d). The area was named after the Bakgatla headman, Rankuwa Boikhutso. 'Rankuwa' means we are accepted. Then the word 'Ga' was inserted by the community to imply 'we are not accepted'. As attested by an interviewee Motshetshane, the community did not feel happy about the quality of the soil as it was difficult to cultivate food in Ga-Rankuwa as compared to Lady Selborne.

The most important essence of being which was widespread among the Sotho-Tswana from pre-colonial times is participation. It was based on the belief of relationality with other humans, the physical environment and spiritual world – because they believe they are interlocked with other humans, the environment and the non-living world. The fact that some Sotho-Tswana former landlord women interviewed like Tshweni, Sekhu and Manamela declared that in Lady Selborne, they had intimate relationship with their environment, and after losing their plots and relocated to Ga-Rankuwa, they gave up on environmental issues. Being uprooted from their homes in Lady Selborne without their consent is evidence of their questioning of their identity because ownership of their plots affirmed their identity. On the same note men like Andrew also corroborate this view of environmental apathy as an indicator to the apartheid government that the relocated were unhappy with forced removals (see Kgari-Masondo 2008:303-304). Hence Setiloane

(1985) argues that a human being is not only dynamic force, but vital in participation. Suggesting that; the holistic person's participation in life's agents and components is vital. This elucidates that the gender roles that each society has are socially constructed to ensure the smooth running of each community. There were distinct roles that women performed from pre-colonial in Lady Selborne till resettlement in Ga-Rankuwa. Such roles have changed over time due to contact with other cultures and the effects of capitalism and racism – they were not static (Guy 1990:35). Some of the roles that women executed differed from household to household, for example, in the absence of men in the home women had to perform men's duties until a male relative arrived if the absence was due to death (*kenelo*) (Lye & Murray 1980:112).

The history of women in South Africa has been one of subjugation, but they have played a central role in environmental history via agriculture. Jacobs argues that the role of cultivator was a less propitious form of production, but that role was important because it provided subsistence (2003:22) and put women at a pivotal role in the universe of being guardians of the environment. The Sotho-Tswana call such women *basadi* as they remain at home doing vital duties. The role of women in the pre-colonial period in the homesteads was generally to control and direct household affairs and to take decisions pertaining to the disposal of homes (Lichtenstein 1930). Working the land was key to women. Sotho-Tswana women, until the early twentieth century, prepared the ground for sowing by breaking it up to the depth of about four inches with a hoe or mattock (Burchell 1953:413). Maize was planted in August or September, according to early or late rains. They also cultivated *dinawa* (kidney beans), and searched forests for wild spinach or edible wild herbs (*morogo*). They used clay soil and mixed it with chopped grass and ashes to make earthen pots, and wood for spoons, called *lushua* (Burchell 1953:418). This shows that Sotho-Tswana women were core domestic figures and had power to access food – the basis of their social power and influence. Men had authority over women and distributed land to females who in turn had to work it. As a result, women were obliged to provide children so that labour could be accumulated (Guy 1990:34). Barren women were sent back home because they could not fulfil their core duty in the homestead. Pre-colonial Sotho-Tswanan society believed in the accumulation of fertile and productive women to ensure food production.

Pre-colonial Batswana used a system of 'assistance' to the poor that

resembled serfdom. Other groups of the poor class were made up of the captives from wars (*batlhanka*), sarwa ('Bushmen') and those citizens who lost their herds' through *go jewa* (punishment) (Comaroff 1990:206) – and all of these groups looked after the livestock and fields of the rich Sotho-Tswana. A person is 'eaten' (*go jewa*) when they have done something wrong and are fined a herd of cattle. Today people are charged anything from cattle, goat, chicken, liquor and money. The *mafisa* system allowed relatives, friends or neighbours of the rich to care for and milk cattle but they had no ownership rights over that livestock (Jacobs 2003:47). The obligation of the herdsman to the cattle owner is articulated in the Setswana proverb *kgomo ya mafisa o e gama o lebeletse tsela* (you milk a borrowed cow while facing the road). Inferring the *mafisa* cow could be commandeered by its owner at any time. *Mafisa* gave men control over other men and, according to the Comaroffs, 'that control was only open to those with substantial and more important growing herds – supported by food producing wives' (1990:205). The identity of men who had no cattle was transformed and relegated to females. The Comaroffs (1990) describe the *balala* men being called to assist their master's wives in agricultural work.

Since the black economy deteriorated after 1866 because of the need for men to earn money, gender roles changed again. Scarcity of land undermined traditional means of subsistence and the common name for women was *bomme* (mothers) – they had to look mainly after children. In Lady Selborne the soil was fertile and this helped food production to flourish (Kgari-Masondo 2008:294-310). Many women were unemployed and had to engage in subsistence farming which helped in supplementing their husband's wages. Those who were working mothers had to supplement their salaries by cultivating food. This confirms Ranger's argument about Zimbabwean women that even in 1974 the aboriginal female among Mutoko District has survived without masculinisation (2003:78). From Lady Selborne to Ga-Rankuwa women were core in environmental issues as they managed to preserve some fundamentals of the older female eco-religion.

Women were also perceived as ecologists because they played a major role in rain-making. Womenfolk as rain-makers played the role of environmental nurturers (Phiri cited in Ranger 2003:76). The rain-making ritual is different from many other rituals because it addresses communal and environmental apprehensions. Queens (like Queen Mojaji of the Lovedu tribe) were seen as vital in procuring rain and their popularity depended



## *Women as Guardians of the Environment in the Midst of Forced Removals*

thereon (Schapera 1951:xviii) and they make ecological laws and decisions on behalf of their community. Ranger confirms that even in Zimbabwe the princess's report to chiefs on environmental matters and that they sit with the chiefs to hear domestic cases and enforce traditional ecological laws (2003:78). Men were also involved in rain-making but the majority of prominent rain specialists were women because they were seen to be closer to nature through the act of childbearing. Rain-making provided an explanation of local climatic conditions and was seen as a means of communicating with the ancestors, God and natural forces. It was an activity grounded in the material necessity to succeed in agriculture. Since most Sotho-Tswana settled near perennial rivers where rainfall was scarce, rain-making ceremonies were seen to be crucial (Anonymous author 1977:108). To illustrate the importance of rain, the Sotho-Tswana greeting is '*pula*' (literary, rain), which refers to water, success and peace. The interviews illustrate that rain is still pivotal in black African areas, but since the emergence of modernity and capitalism people's emphasis in the twentieth century was mainly on the job market in urban areas. The focus is more on women's prayer groups for rain (*bomme ba morapelo*) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Roman Catholic Women's Prayer Group in Lady Selborne in the 1940s

In Ga-Rankuwa the soil was infertile and that posed a serious challenge to women. But their role as environmental custodians is still upheld among the Sotho-Tswana as women try to improve the poor soil of their resettlement areas (Kgari-Masondo, interview, Poo 2014). This emphasis on improving soil quality was maintained by most of the female interviewees, which suggests that women are still the primary ecologists even in relocation areas. This makes them vulnerable to environmental degradation and contamination and hence they are involved in rain-making because they experience environmental problems directly (Dankelman 1988). Ranger also mentioned that in Zimbabwe some women had special responsibility for the environment (2003:75). It is because they know how to engage with nature by appeasing it through rituals like rainmaking to ensure that they get rain so they can cultivate quality food and fight poverty. In environmental history, according to Dankelman and Davidson, it is only from the 1980s that scholars recognised that poverty is linked to environmental problems and this implies an inherent sexism. Indicating that apartheid hit hard on women as it killed their environments through forced removals.

Some women were forced to enter the job market as poverty was rife in Ga-Rankuwa. They empowered themselves with skills beyond the household and agriculture. Like Maphalare who worked as a sewing lady for South African Police in Rosslyn in the 1960s to the 1980s (see Fig. 2).



Figure 2: V. Maphalare at work in Roseline

### *Women as Guardians of the Environment in the Midst of Forced Removals*

Also Poo worked at Tony's café as a cashier at Van der Holf Street in Pretoria city centre in the late 1960s (see Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Poo at work in Pretoria Tony's Café in the 1960s.

Thus from pre-colonial to Lady Selborne and to Ga-Rankuwa women's role changed dramatically but their role as guardians of the environment remained important for many females. They also had to share their roles with men, especially the sewing of blankets, milking and herding after the industrial revolution as most of them worked as migrant labourers. Women in some families started performing rituals themselves after 1900 as men flocked to the mines. Statics shows that in 1909 about 18 105 in black men migrated from rural areas to the Transvaal (Union of South Africa Department of Native Affairs 1911:395). While in 1916 the number of migrant black men labourers rose to about 22 539 (Union of South Africa Union Office of Census and statistics 1918:283) and 10 251 moved in certain coal mines in Transvaal (Horrell 1973:291). Working men earned respect from younger male family members (Lye & Murray 1980:109). Modernity and capitalism played an important part in altering gender roles. Capitalism transformed

gender roles by preventing men from working the land. Interviews suggest that women were primarily involved in cultivating food and tending the soil. Male labour was controlled in mines and markets and no longer controlled female labour (Guy 1990:43). Women deepened their environmental roles even though apartheid and forced removals worsened matters and this affected food production and resulted in social and economic crisis. Women, despite the crisis in food making, became more important in society because 'through their fertility they became not objects of exploitation but as bearers of value in the technical and non-technical sense' (Guy 1990:45). They often became more fundamental than males in a practical sense because they provided food and related more to the soil and nature. Hence from the 1930s many unmarried or divorced women started establishing independent households while most men established independent homes through marriage (Lye & Murray 1980:107-108). Women realised that they could survive without men because they managed to subsist historically in their absence as 'food makers'.

## **Women and the Land Tenure System**

Land tenure is defined as a condition or form of right or title under which property is held, permanently or temporally (*Oxford advanced learner Dictionary of Current English* 1987:891). Women were also allocated land but that decision was based on factors such as marital status and age. This did not exclude widows or old unmarried women (Letsoalo 1987:20). Traditional indigenous land tenure systems were institutions defined by social groups, and were communal in that land belonged to everybody and therefore to nobody (Ngcongco 1974:100). Some argue that chiefs were landlords and their subjects' tenants (Ellenberger 1969:265). But, according to Okoth-Ogondo (In Letsoalo 1987:3) and Ngubane (1986:20), this is a misconception which stems from 'people not looking at structural organisation of land tenure system but the rights and obligation which it defines, that is man to man relationships instead of man to land' of which chiefs were merely leaders who had to ensure good administration and management of the land. For the Sotho-Tswana, land belonged to the community and people held it individually on behalf of future generations, and chiefs in return had to rule over people and ensure that they cared for the land. Sotho-Tswana traditional

religion land tenure ideology would never have recognised any sale of land by an individual to an individual as land was not for sale but for residency and subsistence (Brookes cited in Ngcongco 1974:101). As Danquah observes an absolute sale of land was 'therefore not simply a question of alienating reality; notoriously it was a case of selling a spiritual heritage for a mess of portage, a veritable betrayal of an ancestral trust, an undoing of hope of posterity' (cited in Mbao 2002:90).

Those eligible for land tenure included every male that was old enough and was married. Land was not acquired through a capitalist market system. A married man normally received land through his father who would ask the chief (*kgosi*) for it. The chief and his council would then allocate enough land to feed and house people. Some women played roles of landlords in the absence of males. Landlords could transfer their right of use if there was anyone in need.

New economic systems and forms of land administration that emerged from colonisation, industrialisation and capitalism led to the destruction of traditional land tenure systems. This led to the introduction of 'western' systems of land ownership, which were entrenched in various Acts aimed at displacing blacks (Keegan 1988:138.). Men were compelled to pursue wage labour in the late nineteenth century and cash became the means for buying land. The role of females thus became tightened and they started holding title of their properties after 1900, which had not previously been the case as married women were forced to remarry in the same family of dead husbands for them to own property (Platzky & Walker 1985:117). Forced removals, especially those of the 1950s, ensured that many women lost title over their own or prospective properties but got certificate of occupation and most of them could not get compensation and thus had to rent in the resettlement areas (Kgari-Masondo, interview, Tshweni 2004). The new settlements could thus not accommodate the previous sexual division of space and labour. Black wealth was destroyed with the traditional land tenure system and black Africans had to buy land under the new system of colonial administration. For women it was a 'punitive untenable allocation of land and land rights to land' because they were mainly housewives and could not afford to buy plots. Equally the type of land allocated to them was unviable with small plots which to date are not supporting food production but are meant for housing and this hits hard on women who had to work the land (Bundy 1990:11). Areas that were found suitable for white settlers were

appropriated and the Sotho-Tswana system of land tenure slowly but surely destroyed (Bundy 1990:5–7, Desmond 1971:13, Letsoalo 1987:4–5 and 25–27). Black Africans became squatters on their former lands and agriculture was crippled. This transformed the rules on tenure to land which enabled women to start owning land on a larger scale as men had to work in mines. This transition of most black Africans in rural areas from their pre-colonial existence as pastoralist-cultivators to their contemporary status of sub-subsistence rural dwellers, unable to support themselves by agriculture and thus depending on wages earned in white industrial areas or on white farms, is emphasised by Bundy (1988:1) that it disturbed women's role as guardians of the environment as their tenure to land was eroding through title deeds system.

The mode of land tenure practiced in Lady Selborne during the period under discussion was unlike the pre-colonial tenure system of communal land ownership in that land was now owned individually and women could also buy land. This represented a (counter) revolution in the ideology of land ownership as it became industrialised. Such women thrived even under new tenure system they continued to even build shacks in their yards to rent out and became landlords (*mmastand*). Some interviewed women like Sekhu and Tshweni were privileged to be landlords in Lady Selborne. But, after being resettled in Ga-Rankuwa, without compensation for their lost homes they could not buy land in the relocation areas.

Nevertheless, as Mphahlele (1987) has argued, land continued to play a historical and spiritual role in the memories of the Sotho-Tswana even though the 'spiritual and mystical bond between the soil and its users around which so much of their folklore, poetry, religion and language were constructed was miscued' by interference of the white government. Women were disadvantaged because they lost their invested tenure partnership with their land through forced removals. Hence the South African Human Rights Commission posits that 'the apartheid Human Rights violation is currently manifested in the lack of access to productive land, homelessness and high levels of insecure tenure' (1999/2000:278). Many former women tenants, who lost no property, felt ownership of 'homes' in Ga-Rankuwa because of secure private living spaces and the possibility of buying such plots. By contrast former women landlords found it very difficult to adjust to the reality of Ga-Rankuwa, as they regarded Lady Selborne as their inheritance. Furthermore, they were devastated by the move as they had invested their

houses/properties with cultural and religious meaning. There was thus a sense of alienation. Interviewees emphasised the importance of secure tenure over properties that allow them to engage in food production as providing them with a sense of security and positive identity.

## **Women in Partnership with the Environment**

Land was perceived to be pivotal as a (re)source that gave birth to humanity as evidenced by the Sotho-Tswana creation story about the origin of humanity that – human beings came from the ‘hole in the ground’ (Setiloane 1985:5–7). In this regard an analogy with a woman is used as the females have womb thus they also are seen as more connected with the land. In reciprocation or as an act of reverence towards the earth that was seen as accommodating the ancestors, the Basotho would perform rituals on the soil to attempt to communicate with the deceased. Thus it can be suggested that the women of Lady Selborne were in partnership with their land in addition to depending on it for water, food and shelter. Women became ‘pillars’ of their communities as environmental guardians and overseers of the land.

Land formed part of their source of life. It became part of the community or individual’s history since it was kept in trust for future generations. People were born on a particular site, grew up, socialised and buried their relatives there. Land became a history and told a story, and hence peoples’ umbilical cords were buried in the land as a mark of connection thereto. Land is a religion as it is a place to perform rituals. The administration and management of the burial was done mainly by older women to mark the close relationship women have with the land. This practice still continues but is mainly followed only by those who still adhere to African Traditional Religion. Such a practise on the land and women relationships with the land makes them to be eternally attached to the environment.

As cultivators they engaged more with plants and used them for different purposes. Plants like green mealies, sorghum, *morogo*, sweet reeds, sweet melons, pumpkins and kidney beans (*dinawa*) were ploughed and eaten. The Sotho-Tswana acquired maize through trade with the United States of America and Australia in 1898 (Lye & Murray 1980:73). The amaPedi rejected it after a year because they preferred sorghum (Wilson

1982:142). Maize became widely used after 1930 because it requires less labour and has great adaptive capacity (McCann 1999:126 and 165). Sugarcane was planted and vegetables and fruits were introduced by European settlers in the 1840s (Moffat 1846:152). They used grass to make mats, and the stems of wild dates to make brooms. Herbs are still used medicinally by many Sotho-Tswana, especially those who adhere to African traditional Religion.<sup>2</sup> Some of such traditional healers were women like Maphalare in Lady-Selborne (see Fig.4).



Figure 4: A. Maphalare who was a traditional healer in Lady Selborne.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of some of the herbal remedies used – *kgoma* to heal sores and swollen feet, tobacco oil to kill snakes (Campbell 1822: 31), *lengana* to cool a fever, *sehoere* as a painkiller during male circumcision (Manyeli 1992:70), and *amarula* was used against kwashiorkor (Mpinga 1994:23).

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Animals were also very important for women as they provided food, material and herbs (Burchell 1953:392). For an example the frog (*letlametlo*) was eaten in Lady Selborne and it allegedly tastes like chicken (Kgari-Masondo interview, Kgari 2004), and grasshoppers were considered a delicacy. They made clothes for kings and chiefs with leopard skins, ostriches were used for umbrellas, blankets were manufactured from kudu, gemsbok and domestic goats' skins, and cloaks were made from bird feathers (Burchell 1953:416). Some animals were used medicinally, for example jackals' bladders and snakeskin were combined with herbs to combat bewitchment and snake's poison was used to heal someone bitten by a snake (Ellenberger 1969:249).

Accordingly women as partners with nature had to teach their children about their heritage – the fauna and the flora. The ideology of environment as a heritage had to be delivered to children through *bomme* that – *Modimo* (God) gave them natural resources to preserve for the benefit of their own and future generations. Kunnie further elaborates this point by saying that, 'indigenous peoples are the original biodiversity teachers of our world' because of their traditional conservation ethics that precluded killing certain animals or plants' (2003:138). Thus loss of land through forced removals destroyed the initial partnership women had with the land and had to restart that cordial relationship in another area. This obliged them to realise that apartheid policy was a system that was destroying their religious, moral, environmental, economic and historical patterns of existence. Apartheid enforced anti-partnering of women with their environment. Hence an interviewee Tshweni who was displaced from Lady Selborne and resettled in Ga-Rankuwa states that: 'by losing our houses in Lady Selborne during forced removals, our humanness was impacted negatively because we lost the places where we performed rituals. And we lost our homes, our inheritance from our parents'. The loss of their environment meant death of their land and partnership – a painful spiritual disconnection that Tshweni refers as 'a pain as if an umbilical cord is expurgated from the mother to the child'.

## **Towards a Sustainable Guardianship of the Environment by Women**

The Sotho-Tswana women have many traditions of environmental conservation that are not based on modern conservation principles (Hean &

Mokhehle 1947:69; and Anonymous author 1977:183). Timberlake considers the challenge of conservation ‘the saving of the vast amount of human knowledge of African wild life possessed by people of Africa’ (1985:135). The concept of environmental conservation is called *goboloka tlhago*, which means to preserve, care, sustain, and respect nature. *Tlhago* (to emerge / come out) implies ‘everything that has been created by God like the soil, mountain, trees, stones and people’. This means whether a person is in the urban, slums or rural areas, *tlhago* is still in their midst. The United Nations Environmental Programme report on apartheid and the environment in 1982 maintains that: ‘Apartheid is a killer and by far the most dangerous on the South African veld. It kills not only people but their land and environment as well’ (cited in Timberlake 1985:152). Thus, one can argue that apartheid killed many women’s sustainable engagement with their environment as they had to be moved from one place to the other through forced removals policy. Furthermore apartheid killed their positive perceptions of the environment in Ga-Rankuwa, hence they kept on resurrecting and reviving the soils in the resettlement space. This led to unsustainable engagement with the environment for women.

Forced removals led to environmental crises especially for women as ‘whites seized the best land by force while local blacks became landless labourers or forced to move into marginal areas which were much more easily degraded’ (Harrison 1987:49) (see Fig. 5). The environmental calamity emerged because most resettlement areas were infertile and ‘land, particularly healthy soil, is the foundation on which life depends. If the land is healthy, then agriculture and pasturage will yield food in plenty. If not, the ecosystem will show signs of strain and food production will become more difficult’ (Dankelman & Davidson 1988:7). Our case study is a good example, as the community could not plant food in Ga-Rankuwa unless they fertilized the soil intensely. This presented an almost insurmountable problem as most resettled people were poor and could not afford manure (Kgari-Masondo, interviews, Tshweni 2004; Maphalare 2004 and 2014; and Poo 2014). Such women could not just allow their close relationship with the land to die, they looked at creative strategies to fertilise the soil. Selected women interviewed argued that they tried measures to try remedy their soils – some tried measures like using vegetable peels to create their own manure (see Fig. 6).



Figure 5: Ga-Rankuwa: type of soil – red, sandy and infertile. Worsened by animal overgrazing.

Forced removals dispossessed women of their attachment to their fertile land in Lady Selborne and this resulted in anger and a history of poverty that proved difficult to mend. Interviewees argued that many black African women became environmentally apathetic as they found themselves in a hopeless situation and this represented an important resistance strategy. Hence Ntsoko claims that environmental apathy was a strategy utilised by the community to fight against the effects of land dispossession with the view that the apartheid government would feel pity on their lot. She states that ‘land makes a woman feel strong like a man and loosing big plots like the ones we had in Lady Selborne made women hurt and angry especially former landlords (*bommastand*). Henceforth we ended up not caring for our environment in Ga-Rankuwa’ (Kgari-Masondo, interview 2014).



Figure 6: Poo using peels from fruits, vegetables and leaves to create manure.

It is clear that environmental apathy was not planned but occurred spontaneously. Gibson, a psychologist, argues that ‘perception occurs as response to a specific stimulus’ (cited in Bechtet 1997:129). This was the case among women in Ga-Rankuwa as some of those resettled developed negative perceptions of their new environment (Kgari-Masondo, interviews, Tshweni, Sekhu, Motshetshane 2004; Poo and Ntsoko 2014). Gibson’s theory also implies that perception is dynamic. This explains why some former *mmastands* women like Tshweni and Sekhu responded to stimuli like discrimination, low self-esteem, anger and hatred and became negative about conservation.

Apartheid perpetrated environmental injustice and undermined traditional conservation values that women believed in that had been

sustained by religion, ethics, myths and idioms (Seboni 1980; Hean & Mokhehle 1947; Anonymous author 1977:183). The Sotho-Tswana relationship with the environment was embedded in their way of life, *mokgwa wa go etsa dilo* ('the way we do things').

The Tswana people have a long tradition of nature conservation. The customs and taboos, which promoted the preservation of indigenous fauna and flora, were not based on modern conservation principles but they certainly contributed very much to the fact that in many tribal areas several species of wild game and magnificent specimens of indigenous trees are still to be found (Anonymous author 1977:183).

Pre-colonial traditional values and cultural taboos placed constraints on the use of certain plants, animals and areas. This policy was often successful and several species of wildlife and indigenous trees are still to be found in many tribal areas. Women adhered to a well-developed land ethic that was founded on the belief that an individual was an integral part of nature until the period of drastic land dispossession in the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century (Mabuza 1982 cited in Khan 1992:5). Traditional environmental perceptions were positive as they connected the individual to the environment through interwoven physical, spiritual and cultural links (Mphahlele 1987).

Women as guardians of the environment believed in sustainable engagement with the environment by embracing conservationism in the sense that, 'they used resources wisely with the goal of maintaining its future availability or productivity or as a saving natural resource for later consumption' (Norton & Passmore cited in Krech 1999:25). Such women were preservationists because they 'protected an ecosystem or a species to an extent possible from the disruptions attendant upon it from human use' (Norton cited in Krech, 1999:25). Chiefs punished anti-conservationists and anti-preservationists and traditional courts (*kgotla*) enforced cultural norms and beliefs (Anonymous author 1977:183-184).

The Sotho-Tswana enforced environmental conservation through the ethic of respect: *go hlompa*. The ethic of *go hlompa* refers to 'avoidance rules' but also includes positive actions and means 'respect, avoidance rules between people and between persons and certain places and objects' (Kuckertz 1997:312). These sustainable conservationist and preservationist tendencies do not preclude pragmatic decisions but do mean that women did not (on the whole) wilfully waste, despoil or exhaust their environment. Of

course some negative impact on the environment was inevitable, and we cannot romanticise pre-colonial South Africa as an untouched utopia because the environment was a scene of daily conflict as women struggled for survival against nature. Pre-colonial populations were small which minimised environmental damage (Wilson 1982:153). Written descriptions of the flora and the fauna life found by early callers at the Cape and accounts left by travellers to the interior attest to light pre-colonial environmental impact (Hart 1967).

These environmental preservation ethics were beginning to fade by the early twentieth century as black Africans were displaced on a large scale. Hoffmann (2001) argues that it is because the white government was oblivious to prevailing social, economic conditions and cultural practices of blacks and this irritated communities and heightened resistance to soil conservation efforts encouraged through governments Schemes like Betterment in the 1940s. Forced removals caused many environmental problems for women as resources like water and wood became scarce and were degraded, and there was overgrazing near villages. According to Showers, environmental problems were exacerbated by the fact that 'conservation measures introduced by Europeans were of a coercive measure to no negotiation with Africans, they were told what to do' (1994:1). Such measures disturbed traditional land use systems and blacks were allocated 13% of land under the Land Act of 1913, which crippled subsistence farming which was the corner stone for women's survival. This resulted in increased unavoidable and unsustainable pressures on the landscape, pressures that led to cultivation in marginal lands and thus degradation of pastures, deforestation and soil erosion (Showers 1994:2).

Khan (1990) argues that post-colonial conservation ideologies in South Africa have been dominated by racist paradigms and Euro-centric environmental perceptions. Black African women were seen as environmentally destructive and thus the white government saw its role as paternalistically didactic. Blacks tried to establish conservation organisations but most of these were elitist and Euro-centric, and failed financially (Khan 1990:33; Fuggle 1992; Carruthers 1995). For example, the African National Soil Conservation Association (ANSCA) was formed in 1953, The African Wildlife Society was established in Natal, and The National Environmental Awareness Campaign (NEAC) was established in Soweto in 1970, together with other organisations like the African Conservation Education (ACE) and

Native Farmers Association. These organisations were hampered by their elitism and exclusion of traditional conservation laws and ideas. Such Conservation Associations thus became alien to most black Africans who were illiterate and couldn't afford the luxury of conservation. It is worth noting that though the nature conservation associations had their drawbacks they achieved some environmental improvement in black areas. But there is a need for organisations that would encompass both traditional and western environmental ideologies to ensure that food production sustainability occurs for women.

## **Conclusion**

Capitalism, colonisation, segregation and apartheid alienated black African women from their land and this promoted environmental apathy. Hardoy, Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2001) argue that, a successful city must instil a sense among its inhabitants that their culture and history are esteemed as part of the city and are mirrored in its form and layout. Relating to the South Africa and the case study of Lady Selborne, it was not the case as black African women lacked a sense of ownership of their environment in the relocation areas. But some of the women interviewed for this article fought tirelessly to maintain their role as guardians of the environment they enjoyed before land dispossession. A western environment ideology of land as just an estate was privileged and this undermined black African people's environmentalism – that perceives land as being more than property but a religion, heritage, history and contributing to humanness.

Though some religious and cultural norms and environmental values survived, Sotho-Tswanan women's ideas of humanity (or humanness) were partly eroded because they lacked interconnectedness with each other and their landscape because of forced removals. Women's partnership they enjoyed in their former townships (Lady Selborne) was impacted negatively but some women adhered to revival and resurrection mode of dealing with the environment. As Williams corroborates that 'what is often being argued in the idea of nature is the idea of man or vice versa' because humanity cannot survive without the environment (cited in Peterson 2001:1). As the Sotho-Tswanan cosmology ensures that it links humanity and nature to display interconnectedness (Setiloane 1985). Implying that for the women of

Ga-Rankuwa the death of the fertile land of Lady Selborne environment meant disruptions in their ideology of what it means to be human but they could not give up but fight to ensure their custodian role.

This means that the women's idea of a person was disrupted and arrested through loss of land. It made them experience a sense of rapture in their attachment with nature. But, the Comaroffs (2001:269 and 271) argue that the Sotho-Tswana saw a person as a constant work-in-progress, not a state of being but a state of becoming. Hence women interviewed they all in one way or the other are active in guarding the environment because the environment for them means inheritance. Some focused on spiritual landscape engagement while others on food production or both. This explains the environmental apathy by some women in areas like Ga-Rankuwa because 'not only are ideas of humanness and of nature wrapped up with each other, but they also shape ethical systems and practices' (Peterson 2001:1). Which suggest that, there is hope in ensuring the sustainable engagement role that women played in pre-colonial era and in Lady Selborne over environmental issues. Proposing that for environmental sustainability to occur– there must be active involvement of all stakeholders like – the state, communities and non-governmental organisations. More so, there is a need of policies by the government on environmentalism that accommodate traditional environmental conservation rules. To use Walker (2006) the task now is to manage the juncture of the previously corresponding discourses around women's rights and customary rights in practice, in such a way that the fundamentals established by that principle are not undermined on the ground. This will be a pilgrimage towards re-cementing women to their role as guardians of the environment because despite the dominance of patriarchy in South Africa land ownership, inheritance and politics women still play a major role in ecology.

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*Women as Guardians of the Environment in the Midst of Forced Removals*

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# Contesting the ‘Born Free’ Identity: A Postcolonial Perspective on *Mzansi* Stories<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Employing postcolonial approach, this article analyses the recent stage play script called *Mzansi* stories to demonstrate that despite the lack of space in the political mainstream, post-apartheid young generation have created alternative spaces for engaging in deconstructing and reconstructing the notion of Born Free and its implications for their socio-political participation in South Africa. The findings suggest that the Born Free notion as a broader framework for young people’s identity is still under construction. The article concludes that plays and other related social network spaces such *Mzansi* stories have potential to enable society understand how young South Africans are engaging the meaning of Born Free identity in relation to prevailing socio-political circumstances within the nation.

**Keywords:** Born Free, Identity, Postcolonial, *Mzansi* Stories, socio-political, post-apartheid, South Africa

*So, who we are, or who we are seen to be, can matter enormously* (Jenkins 2008:4).

## Introduction

The question of identity is one that continues to haunt individuals and societies throughout history and many theorists have grappled with how this

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<sup>1</sup> The three authors of this article share an equal contribution to this work.

issue could be handled or better understood in society. Identity is a construct which means the way an individual or a group conceive, define and represent themselves is often in relation to their position in society (Ellison 2013). Societies, families, individuals can thrive or perish based on their understanding of, and relationship with, their own identity. They can build or destroy based on how their identities are perceived by themselves and others.

In this article we have selected a piece of theatre as an entry point into a dialogue about the complexities surrounding the recently constructed identity of South African youth as the 'Born Free' generation. We look at how post-apartheid youths in South Africa are constructing and reconstructing this newly celebrated and contested identity. Using the postcolonial perspective on identity as a lens, we dissect the process and product of an original South African play *Mzansi*<sup>2</sup> *Stories*, created by the Born Frees, as an alternative form of expression, given alienation from political mainstream, through which the Born Frees own, appropriate and contest the dominant ways in which the self and other is constructed in South Africa. Therefore, we employ *Mzansi Stories* to argue that the plot and biography of the 'Born Frees' is being rewritten on stage as young people grapple with what is true and what is not about this identity construct that appears to have been imposed on them. We stress that whether they accept the identity or not, maybe as important as their own perception of the construct in relation to those of previous generations.

### **Theorizing the Notion of Identity: A Postcolonial Struggle**

In social identity theory, a social identity is one's knowledge that one belongs to particular social group or category; thus, persons in the society are categorized with the self as in-group or separate from the self as out-group based, respectively, on similarity and difference (Stets & Burke 2000). In identity theory, however, identity is primarily, self-categorization in relation to specific roles, whereby the self is seen as an 'occupant' of a role, and the associated meaning, expectations, and performance of that role is made a part of this categorization (Stets & Burke 2000: 225). Identity, therefore, is formed through the self-reflexive activity of self-categorization (social

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<sup>2</sup> *Mzansi* is a popular term and refers to South Africa. It is derived from a Xhosa word *uMzantsi* which literally means 'south'.

identity theory) or identification (identity theory). Thus, while there is personal and collective dimensions to identity (Korostelina 2007), it can be seen from both theoretical traditions that all are primarily social as they emerge and exist through social interaction and relationships with others (Grad & Rojo 2008; Ellison 2013).

Postcolonial theory assents to postmodern approaches to identity, which conceives identities as dynamic, hybrid, multiple, evolving, fluid, sensitive, context-specific, and in constant state of flux (Korostelina 2007; Karkaba 2010; Lawler 2008). Each person, at any given time, has an array of identities available to them from which they choose which one they consider most effective in a given situation (Korostelina 2007: 15). Yet, the self-concept of an individual is often a combination of social categories making up a set of social identities, although all may not be meaningful at the same time in self-definition (Deaux 2001:1). A study of adolescent South Africans conducted by Shane Norris and others (2008), for instance, shows that in their self-definition, white adolescents prioritized personal categories such as age and gender while blacks, coloureds and Indians drew on collective categories such as language, ethnicity and religion.

The core of postcolonial conception of identity is highlighted by Cherki Karkaba (2010). Drawing on Edward Said's (1994) caution about the inconsistent and temporary nature of common identity labels, and Homi Bhabha's (1994) presentation of the notion of hybridity, Karkaba (2010:93) argues that the notion of identity in postcolonial thought is affected by a 'destabilization' and 'fragmentation' which results in 'increasing awareness that identity is a question involving the relationship of the self and the other'. This implies that the self and self-meaning (identity) only exists because there is the other. In other words, from a postcolonial perspective, identification and self-categorization are not possible without difference embodied in the other. The self is formed in opposition to the other (Basaglia, 2012). In addition, Karkaba (2010) notes that the self is unstable, continuously shifting, constantly changing in relation to the other. The point Karkaba (2010:93) is making is that the self-identity is 'not a finished product'. Richard Jenkins expresses the same idea differently. He (2008: 17) holds that,

Identity can only be understood as a process of 'being' or 'becoming'. One's identity – one's identities, indeed, for who we are



is always multi-dimensional, singular *and* plural – is never a final or settled matter. Not even death freezes the picture: identity or reputation may be reassessed after death.

It should be added here that identity formation process can have certain consequences on behaviour, beliefs and relationships (Ellison 2013: 2). In trying to construct the self as unique, for instance, individuals and groups may accentuate or amplify minor difference with others and play down similarities. This has been termed the 'narcissism of small difference', until the differences in identities come to be seen as natural or obvious, instead of what they really are – produced (Lawler 2008: 3-4). This often influences attitudes and behaviours interpersonal and inter-group relations as those in a similar category or group as the self are judged positively and others negatively (Stets & Burke 2000: 225).

We consider the postcolonial understanding of identity to be an effective optic for engaging the notion of 'Born Free' as a category with which young people in post-Apartheid South Africa are identified. Some of these young people also utilize the notion in their self-definition/self-categorization. The relevance of this perspective springs further from the broader concern of postcolonial theory with the question of alterity, representations of the self and other; the disruption of cultures and social identities in previously colonized societies (apartheid in the present case); and the privileging of alternative and often less powerful knowledge and voices (Young 2003; Rattansi 1997). Indeed, some scholars understand the South African experience of domination to be so unique and exceptional that it cannot be considered postcolonial and must be treated as different from other previously colonized states – more so African states. Others have sought to argue against any form of South African exceptionalism (Settler 2006). In his highly celebrated study of colonial legacy in (South) Africa, Mahmood Mamdani (1996) argues that although the South African experience of apartheid set it apart from other colonised territories, it nonetheless suffers from the legacies of colonialism. Despite the unique racial structure and challenge South Africa had to contend with, Mamdani argues that apartheid was a variation of the colonial principle and practice applied across Africa. Laurence Piper (2009) argues that Mamdani's position is evident in post-apartheid South Africa which is increasingly revealing the postcolonial condition and resembling other postcolonial contexts. Mamdani sought to

show that post-apartheid South Africa fits the description of a postcolony, and increasingly so. If we take as a premise that post-colonialism is concerned with deconstructing the ways in which colonialism impacted the identities of both the coloniser and the colonised, and engaged with the recognition that the imbrication of colonised identities and polity continues long after the formal end of colonization (Rattansi 1997), then post-apartheid social discourses in South Africa can be analysed from postcolonial theoretical procedure to engage with the notion of Born Free as neo-colonial practice. In this sense postcolonial approach is both an emancipatory and oppositional response to Born Free identity. Thus we utilize a postcolonial notion of identity for its reflection of the most developed understanding of identity and its allowance for a more nuanced engagement with the Born Free identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

## **Engaging the Born Free Identity in Post-apartheid South Africa**

While it is clear from popular usage that the ‘free’ in ‘Born Free’ refers to freedom from Apartheid, there is no specified period within which the Born Free generation is located. The term is used in some quarters to mean South Africans born in or after 1994 when South Africa became independent (Malila 2013). Other scholars have used the notion to refer to the about 27 million South Africans born in 1990 or after (Institute of Race Relations - IRR, 2015:3). Rather than focus on the time of birth, Robert Mattes (2012), refers to political experience. Thus, the Born Frees as commonly used in South Africa, he holds, comprise the generation of South Africans ‘who have come of age since the advent of democracy... young people who have spent some or all of their high school years exposed to a pro-democracy curriculum’ (2012: 135). Mattes (2012: 139) further uses the expression ‘Born Frees’ to refer to the ‘growing number of young people [who] began [from 1997] to move through the ages of 16, 17 and 18 and enter the political arena with little if any first-hand experience of the trauma that came before’. What seems clear about all the definitions highlighted is the fact that the term refers to young South Africans who have lived all or most of their lives in post-apartheid South Africa. It is this understanding that we retain in this article. Although freedom from apartheid is generally understood as freedom

of non-Whites from white oppression, it has been observed that whites were also freed from apartheid. Consequently, one can speak of white Born Frees, who, unlike their parents, are free from compulsory military service and forced racism and hatred for black people (IRR 2015:4). But what are the unique benefits of being Born Free?

There are immense advantages of being Born Free in contemporary South Africa. Mattes (2012:139) notes:

In many ways, the Born Frees confront a totally different world than that of their parents. There are no official limits to where they can go, work or live, or on whom they may date or marry. They have experienced a series of peaceful democratic elections that increasingly turn on new issues and personalities with diminishing links to the past. They consume news provided by a reformed public broadcaster, and have increasing access to privately owned radio and television broadcast news, as well as to increasing amounts of private and international news on subscription satellite television.

Mattes (2012) further observes that despite these developments, the Born Frees are evidently experiencing a South Africa that appears to be regressing rather than enjoying a positive change. He argues that 'many Born Frees face the same, if not greater, levels of unemployment, poverty, inequality and hopelessness as their parents' (Mattes 2012: 140). Other challenges include class segregation, crime, poor education and HIV. Despite government investment in education, the Born Frees cannot be considered better off in educational attainment and their high school completion rate is lower than that of the so-called 'struggle' generation. Though the frequency of protests in South Africa may suggest otherwise, it is shown that the likelihood of Born Frees to join and be actively participate in religious or community groups, or even work with others to raise local issues, is low. Moreover, they are not as committed to democracy as the 'struggle' generation (Mattes 2012: 139-141).

In addition to the preceding observation, is the general tendency, in popular and other available discourses, to tie the Born Frees' social identity to Apartheid and democracy, hence their treatment as primarily a political category (IRR 2015:3). This also impacts how the society views and assesses them as well as the expectations placed on them. Thus, the assertion of Malila

(2013) that while their parents had a political ‘cause’ to pursue, the Born Frees are ‘imagined’ to have been ‘given’ everything they need to be successful such as employment opportunities, a society not divided along racial lines, education and more. Hence, it is expected that they contribute in improving democracy instead of protesting their conditions (Malila 2013:5). Mattes (2012) and Malila (2013) are in agreement that while evidence shows that some of them are active and help in their communities, the picture is also one of socio-political disengagement and indifference to any endeavour that could contribute to the progress and transformation of South Africa. In addition, there is a suggestion that the Born Frees are plagued by many social challenges that are life-threatening, such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, perpetration of violence, and poor upbringing and socialization due to their parents still recuperating from the wounds of apartheid (Nxusani 2012).

In its recent study, the Institute of Race Relations (2015:3) considers itself the first to depart from the common treatment of the Born Frees as a political category by seeking to make available social and economic data on the Born Frees, with the conviction that these conditions can provide insight into political behaviour. The picture painted by the Institute is rather gloomy, and appropriately captured in the title of its report: *Born Free but Still in Chains*. Although the Born Frees are born and raised in a context with an increasing number of middle class families and in households richer than those of their parents, they still face daunting economic challenges. They face a ‘high degree of alienation from the economic mainstream’ (IRR 2015:4, 24). The IRR (2015:4, 24) believes that this constitute the explanation for the alienation of the Born Frees from the political mainstream as well as their regular participation in ‘disruptive’ and ‘violent’ street protests.

The forgoing underlines that the ‘Born Free’ is a contested notion that appears to be imposed on young citizens born in democratic South Africa. Identification or being identified with this category carries with it numerous privileges as well as expectations and challenges. This raises some critical questions: To what extent has young South Africans owned and appropriated the Born Free identity? How has the post-apartheid generation received or contested this categorisation? The observation has been made that the Born Frees are alienated from both the political and economic mainstream. It can be argued, therefore, that the two of the key social spheres relative to which the born free identity is constructed, important, made

meaningful and often assessed, excludes the Born Frees themselves. Nxusani's, (2012) assertion, thus, becomes critical, that because the Born Frees 'feel they are left in the cold when it comes to mainstream political culture', they have explored 'alternative' ways to exercise their 'democratic right of speech and expression'. Participation in protest, as a consequence of this alienation, has been stated, but for our purpose, we have explored workshop theatre, particularly, *Mzansi Stories*, as one such alternative medium of expression and engagement with the question of their categorization as Born Free. In what follows we analyse how young South Africans are contesting and interrogating the Born Free identity through *Mzansi Stories*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is worthy of note here that young South Africans have explored the question on certain online platforms available to them. A young South African has, for instance, expressed his utter discontent with the expression 'Born Free', arguing that it presents a false picture of the lived experience of the people it refers to. He also argues that the youth themselves had no part in the emergence and meaning the expression has come to acquire and call on young South Africans to 'fight forcefully for their right to cultural freedom that enables them to define themselves' (Maimela, 2014). Blogging on a Stellenbosch University site is another young South African at pains to logically prove that 'born-freeism' is a fallacy and an invalid concept. The blogger bemoaned the usage of the expression to define a set of South Africans in ways that places insurmountable expectations on them (Cewe, 2014). Malaika wa Azania has offered a personal reflection on the Born Free question in her recent book, *Memoirs of a Born Free* (2014). She questions the notion of being 'Born Free' given the struggle the so called Born Free generation for economic and other forms of freedom. In the same vein, another Born Free, Eleanor Swartz (2012), in an article published by the SA Barometer, contests the 'rhetoric of unruliness and destruction' which is used in the South African society to portray young the Born Frees as a 'lost generation' (2012:7). He argues that young South Africans today are faced with a struggle that is as important as that of the previous generation, and demands a shift from the dominant negative perceptions and representations of young people to more empowering narratives.

## **Contestation and Wrestling with Born Free Identity: *Mzansi Stories***

Theatre has for centuries been used as a tool for various societal needs. These range from the obvious functions of entertainment and the passing on of time to conscientization. Other, more socially conscious practitioners like Augusto Boal (1979: 89) set to construct theatre as a ‘rehearsal for a revolution’ and for human rights activism. Such is the diversity of the functions of theatre within society. In South Africa theatre has been used as a protest mechanism against the injustices of both apartheid and neo-apartheid regimes. Plays like *Woza Albert*, *Sophiatown*, *Asinamali* were all attempts at critiquing apartheid and giving a voice to the voiceless. Lara Foot argues that ‘the power of theatre is that we can rewrite the plots of our lives and biographies; we can find healing in our country. This can happen in the safe environment of the theatre, sitting in the dark, being part of that community that an audience is, engaging together with life on stage’ (cited in Twijnstra & Durden 2013: 31)

‘Mzansi stories’ is a theatre production that was created by second and third year drama students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus in 2014. The production group consisted of three directors and twenty-seven students. Twenty-four of these students were born in post-apartheid era. The production was engendered by a visiting American theatre director, Jon Leiseth, who collaborated with two South African directors; Ntokozo Madlala and Louise Buchler to direct the piece. He was curious about how post-apartheid young South Africans perceive themselves and their country twenty years after independence. He was told that ‘they’re lazy, entitled, they don’t value their freedom’. This raised a curiosity and interest to create a piece of theatre that would explore what this generation have to say about growing up ‘free’ – what were some of their personal stories, their hopes and fears for the future of South Africa. There was also a curiosity about whether or not the legacy of Nelson Mandela and other freedom fighters was being honoured through the actions of this generation.

The production then traces a very complex journey of young people as they try to find themselves within the new socio-political and economic landscapes of *Mzansi*. It is not a single chronological story with a clear beginning, middle and end; but a collage of multiple narratives strung together by a common theme! It finds its expression in multiple mediums

such as dance, physical theatre, dialogue, monologues, spoken word, prose and song. It is a beautiful weaving of the various performance forms with the young people's narratives about themselves, their families, and their country into a colourful tapestry of celebrations, questions and declarations about *Mzansi*.

*Mzansi Stories* is truly a representation of the voice of post-apartheid generation. The production was created through a workshop process which involves collaboration between actors and directors in the theatre making process, as such the making of the play is a group effort, 'as opposed to being written by a single playwright in isolation' (Fleischman 1990:89). Workshop theatre is a popular theatre making approach among South Africans developed in the late 70's 'The plays that emerge are... (dependent) on various kinds of research conducted by the members of the group and they often draw as well on the personal experiences of individual members' (Orkin 1995:9). Thus *Mzansi Stories* workshop theatres have been from inception creating space for deconstructing and reconstructing the Born Free voice. This affirms Fleischman's (1990: 113) argument about workshop theatre as 'a form which has managed to capture the energy and dynamics of a society undergoing transformation'.

As a way of gathering material for the play, the director commissioned all actors to individually engage on a creative task reflection on what it means to be a South African, how do the actors and/ the people around them feel about being South African and living in South Africa in 2014. This was to be presented in various creative forms such as a poem, a movement, a three dimensional collage, etc. Everyone was required to contribute materials and ideas that would later form part of the performance. The presentations were highly emotional and reflected very mixed feelings about South Africa. These were mostly negative with some sprinkles of hope in between. These ideas were then refined and developed in rehearsal. The result is a play with exactly twenty scenes with probably as many themes as the scenes themselves. It was hardly edited by the directors, except for one or two significant sections. Therefore the text remained unadulterated and raw, exactly as it was written by the young people. The actors played multiple characters, their bodies are the primary tools for communicating meaning and there is hardly any use of elaborate scenery and properties. This makes it easy to investigate how the Born Free identity was portrayed, has been

constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by young people who are its recipient.

Throughout the play, *Mzansi Stories*, there is a demonstration of profound awareness by the Born Frees of their identification as a certain category or generation juxtaposed against previous generations. They hold their Born Free privilege in high regard, as expressed by one of the characters in the first episode:

*Being a Born Free baby is really an honor as I didn't have to experience those horrible times.... The best part is the freedom we have compared to other African countries... (Mzansi1).*

The play also demonstrates an awareness of the dominant representations and narratives about the Born Frees, as captured in the following lines:

*A lot of criticism has been levelled at the 'Born Free' generation.  
We've all heard it,  
Perhaps we've even said it.  
'They're lazy, they're entitled, they don't value their freedom  
(Mzansi1).*

They are also aware of the expectations on them and, to an extent, their predicament as a generation defined relative to the political history of South Africa, where, political freedom, though pivotal, was not the panacea for the several challenges in their lived experience and knowledge of South Africa. This is captured in these words of a rather sombre character:

*This is Mzantsi, the bottom yet I'm trying to get to the top. I'm happy here but at the same time sad. I'm excited and enthusiastic but at the same time angry and frustrated. A promise land filled with broken promises, this is mzantsi. Is this soil fertile enough for me to achieve my dreams? A generation under pressure, can we do it? Can we save mzantsi or will we allow it to enslave us?  
Enslave us with its chains of corruption, its hand cuffs of greed and its jail bars of illiteracy. Change is what we need but pocket change*



*is what we a living off. Unemployment haunts this generation, a broken nation that not even the great Tata Madiba could mend.*

In this line, there is a clear ambivalent experience of the new South Africa by the young people which is happy and simultaneously sad; excited and enthusiastic and at the same time angry and frustrated. This struggle emerges as a result of the failure to realise a just and equitable society that was promised in 1994. This is the site of contestation against the notion of Born Free – a notion that appears to lack equitable access to resources that can enable the majority of young South Africans to realise its essence. For the purpose of this article we analyse two themes from Mzansi stories as follows.

### ***Born Free Identity as a Contestation of Popular Notions of Identity***

In many ways, *Mzansi stories* challenge the dominant ways and sources of identity in South Africa. While we have argued above that the Born Free as an identity is largely an essentializing category imposed on the new generation, *Mzansi Stories*, however, reveals a level of acceptance of this marker by young people who also used it throughout the play as a self-concept. Although, it is an identity into which they were born or grew, they have appropriated it in a way that positions it in contest to the very identification process that produced/reproduces it. In other words, the play challenges the basing of identity primarily on political history through which people are divided into several generations that are tied to historical moments and experiences in their lives, such as clearly demarcated by Mattes (2012): the Pre/Early apartheid, Grand apartheid, Struggle and Born Free generations. These groupings contribute greatly to self-definition and the definition of the other. Members of the struggle generation, for instance, have a strong sense of themselves as a people who had a [political] cause (Malila 2013) and who obtained freedom for South Africa (Nxusani 2012). Thus, providing a basis for comparison, contrast and differentiation against the Born Free generation defined and represented as everything the previous generation was not - without a cause, unruly, and a lost generation, and more (Swartz 2012). Indeed, as noted earlier, the self can only exist and be meaningful if other selves exist (Karkaba 2010: 93). However, *Mzansi stories* challenges this

sourcing of identity from political history. This it does through the very process from which the play emerged, the Born Free's deep appreciation of their history, the expressed concern for South Africa's present and future, and the diverse aspects of life in South Africa covered in the play which shows the variety of issues the Born Free generation grapple with in order to make sense of their identity as individuals and as South Africans. This calls for a definition and engagement with identity, in contemporary South Africa, which goes beyond political history.

More broadly, *Mzansi stories* raise critical questions regarding identity in relation to time: What is the place of the past in the Born Free identity construction today? What period or cultural experience determines who are to be today? How do they deal with a nostalgic narrative of who they are when they can only make sense of their own uniqueness in relation to the present and future aspirations? Consider the following excerpt from the story of a Born Free in *Mzansi Stories*:

*I always believed each day will follow the last  
I always assumed that my future will somehow connect with my past  
But here I am grieving for my culture that my soul belongs to.  
Ever since I was born, my cultures have been told to me by my  
parents..., as storytelling.  
They say they used to seat around the fire, eating uphutu (dry  
pap)....drinking umqomboti (traditional beer) and sharing folktales.  
They say they used to practice cultural ceremonies for young girls  
like me, where they were taught how to be submissive to their  
husbands.  
But I, I never got a chance to experience any of these  
And from the stories that my parents told me, I became deeply  
confused because it leaves me with a question mark, whether I'm  
Zulu or Swati... (Mzansi2).*

It is common for persons to define themselves in terms of 'belonging' to a certain ethnic group, often considered to impose a certain culture. Thus, culture often finds its way into people's self-definition/categorization. The problem however, as demonstrated in the lines above is an understanding of culture as a thing of the past, especially among peoples whose ways of life were disrupted by colonialism or apartheid. Thus, in an effort to find

themselves again, there is a tendency and/or desire to reclaim the cultures taken from them by the oppressors – to reclaim their identity (Dei 2012). For a younger generation, such as the Born Frees, who were born after a long period of disruption and change, culture becomes a nostalgic reminiscence of the past – real or imagined – told in stories. The question of culture and change, and whether there exists a cultural essence or a 'pure culture' (or a pure self) which can be reclaimed from the past is an entire enterprise of its own beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient here to note that the above quote, and indeed other stories in *Mzansi Stories* suggest that while culture, as past, can enhance the sense of belonging, it can also create personal confusion on the same question of belonging. Thus, the storyteller moves on to say:

*I am living an abnormal life,  
And I might as well embrace my life the way it is. Because I feel  
there is more to my destiny than to my past.*

The sense of purposefulness with which these words were expressed suggests a firm resolution to stick to the present and the future as more important and less confusing in defining the self. However, this was followed by seemingly contradictory lines:

*I am searching for my root  
So I need you, and you and you, actually I need all of your to search  
your roots and acknowledge them, be in accordance.*

'Roots' in this context refer to ancestral cultural heritage. The actor was probably simply drawing on popular rhetoric of one's identity as determined by one's origin. The seeming contradiction and ambivalence attest to the nature of the Born Free identity as sometimes confusing, and a grappling with some of the identifiers society presents to them, especially those that are time bound.

Through *Mzansi Stories*, thus, the Born Free generation calls for identities that acknowledge the past but are focused on the present and the future. Indeed identities by their nature are always in a state of flux (Korostelina 2007:15) and any effort to pin them down to specific periods can only produce crisis and frustration.

## ***Born Free Identity as a Questioning/self-interrogation and Paradoxical Crisis***

There is an assumption that identities neatly fit into the labels used to describe them. However as the play demonstrates, for these Born Frees and indeed most people, identity is more of a question as opposed to a singular fixed narrative. It seems to exist as self-interrogation as much as self-identification. The questions can be primarily about a person's sense of uniqueness and self: 'who am I...?' but also about belonging: 'where do I belong....?' These questions came up several times in the play and it always seems to be an attempt to make sense of my identity in the present in relation to what has been before.

In *Mzansi stories* this is demonstrated beautifully through a song written by one of the two Caucasian actors in the cast. He opens the song by saying:

*'Oh, where the f... do I belong?'*

The passion and cheekiness with which this question is posed in the play clearly reflects a sense of distance and distaste; confusion and anger; rage and protest; frustration and resentment towards the current location. Then he starts reflecting on how this identity came to be:

*From the moment I popped out  
I thought without a doubt  
I was clearly one and the same  
But now without my blinkers on  
and 25 years along  
I've found that I belong  
I've found that I belong  
To a pink skinned minority  
a controversial anomaly ....*

Whatever he says about this group to which he belongs does not sound complementary. Also saying that 'I thought... I was one and the same' implies a sense of contesting the sameness to this inherited identity. Because perhaps what I thought then and what I think now is not quite the same. There

is a sense of distancing himself from it even though he acknowledges his initial association with it, even though not by choice. His own admission is that the realisation that he belonged to it only came when he took his 'blinkers off'. Before then, the realities or facts about this identity were not apparent. In short, they only became illuminated with time and maturity. Thus through this song, his own Caucasian roots are brought to question.

It is interesting also, that he chose to write this song in the style of satire, which uses 'humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues' (Oxford Dictionaries 2015). Therefore by choosing this form of expression as a medium, he is automatically associating the actions of 'his people' group with stupidity. The cunning factor about satire is that it takes something dark and disturbing and brings parody to it, so that in the process of listening and witnessing as audiences we laugh (perhaps in an exaggerated manner). However as we do that we are also consuming the truth, no matter how ugly that truth may be.

The song continues and he starts othering this group in relation to his own personal position. It seems from his narrative that one can be identified by belonging to a group but not necessarily identifying themselves with that group's ideologies and behaviour choices. Thus he distances himself from the actions of his forefathers:

*From the beginnings of history till now,  
They've (these people that I belong to) managed to pave the way  
Pillage rape and savagery, western ideology,  
Converting your linguistic ability...*

In this case he is clearly making reference to colonisation and its effects on the so called 'indigenous' of South African soil. He is saying that the fact that 'they (*these people that I belong to*)' colonised black Africans does not make him a coloniser by default. The implications of this are that even though he cannot escape belonging to them by ethnicity and birth right, he cannot and should not be judged as one of them. Thus this paradoxical positioning seems to continue within the play as is indeed, perhaps, felt by most Born Frees in South Africa, whether black or white.

Who is to say that white Born Frees do not have a history of being oppressed and even though theirs could have been a different kind. Perhaps

what was perceived as freedom then has now become a source of oppression in the present, because there is a certain way in which white young people are seen and perceived in contemporary South Africa based on inherited historical factors. This white young man comments on the association of his identity with controversy, violent oppression and dehumanizing ideologies. He refers to dangerous forms of otherization:

*...now look here you  
I'm a professional racist  
and I think we should embrace it  
use it, multiply it  
common get excited  
most of us like it  
Hitler, Mussolini invited  
common lets have a party  
open up your mind get naughty  
let that racist breeze in  
float up to the ceiling  
common lets divide;  
separate and deny;  
break down and defy ...*

The interesting factor about this young white actor is that his concern was less to do with apartheid and democracy as did most of his black and coloured counterparts, but more to do with colonisation. This suggests that the Born Free identity construction is not the same for young whites as it is for the young black Africans. As well, contrary to popular perceptions that white identity is stable, powerful and is the one that disrupts that of the other races, it seems that the white Born Free is just as disturbed or dislocated by the events of the past as those of black Africans.

## **Conclusion**

The singular nature of the dominant narrative about the Born Free identity in contemporary South Africa implies a 'finished' construction, with known features and expectations. However our observation through *Mzansi Stories*

suggests that the formation of this identity is not yet complete and what will become remain obscure. In short, the Born Free concept is an identity under construction. The self-reflexiveness of identity construction means that identities can be accepted and rejected, even when they are accepted they can still be questioned and contested. The play *Mzansi Stories* has potential to help us reflect on what young people consider as truth and flux-ness of this identity. Perhaps a new kind of freedom will have to be identified, one that is not bound by politics of race. When this emancipated kind of freedom has taken place, then those who are born into it will truly be 'Born Free'.

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# **The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Public Discourse in South Africa**

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## **Abstract**

The black body has been over-represented in colonial travel accounts, administrative records, novel literature, media and popular anecdotes. Without suggesting that other persons are more immune to poor representations, this essay simply wishes to focus the reader's attention on the historical representations of black people, and women in particular, to offer an epistemological account of the black body in religion, gender and health. In so doing, we argue that the continuing alienation of the body within religious and social discourses in contemporary South Africa is sustained by three historical articulations and representations of the black body. We further argue that these colonially produced representations continue to shape the rhetoric and the epistemologies of the black body in the postcolonial context. We suggest that the representation of the black body as site of labour; violence and disease has been particularly enduring. The article

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interrogates the representation of the black body, and the ways these representations have been sustained by social discourses that imagine black bodies as fixed and without agency. Through the deconstruction of these representations this we draw attention to some ways through which to reconsider discourses about gender and health in the southern African context. The main argument is that an understanding of the relationship between gender and health in South Africa requires a necessary understanding of the representations of the black body in history because they frame current articulations and/ or relationships to black bodies.

**Keywords:** black body, health, colonial and postcolonial public discourse, South Africa, Violence and Degeneracy, Representation

## **Introduction**

The intersection of religion and health has enjoyed much vibrant discussion in Southern Africa in recent years. The HIV pandemic has provoked a range of social responses and religious reflections on what constitutes health and well-being (Cochrane 2012; Haddad 2011). Historically, faith communities in Southern Africa have not reflected much on the idea of the body, other than as a socially located subject engaged in a struggle for liberation. The theistic religious traditions that have been the norm in South Africa have by and large assumed a Cartesian conception of the body as a biological entity distinct from the mind. While most scholars would offer a critique or revision of traditional Cartesian ideas about the body, few would contest that his ideas about the body have significantly shaped modern protestant thought (Torcello & Wear 2000; Barglow 2002; Meiring 2014).

Johannes Meiring (2014) in his excellent doctoral dissertation on ‘the corporeal turn in Southern Africa’ lays bare the dominance of Protestantism and how it has informed ideas about the body in colonial and Apartheid South Africa. The inherited alienation of the temporal from the profane resulted in a material segregation of interests in the body from interests in the soul, and this impacted on the lives and futures of black people in very particular ways. For example, David Chidester (1996) in his *Savage Systems* reminds us that in early encounters with colonial travellers, indigenous people were believed not only to lack religion but also the ability to reason.

More recently, Anthony Pinn (2010) writing from the perspective of black theology in the USA, asserts that historically American protestant religion reinforced the idea that black people's bodies need to be policed and kept under surveillance because if not arrested in labour, they would degenerate into chaos. The historical collusion between state and church was similarly characterised by the ways in which black people's bodily rights were constrained in South Africa in the colonial era.

As we reconsider the intersection of health, the body and religion in the postcolonial context – we need to recognise that the body is always simultaneously fixed and flexible. It is fixed in its socio-spatial context, for example for the person in a wheelchair or a woman prevented from speaking in church; and yet it is flexible because whether through prosthetics or surgery bodies can be modified, and in ritual performance arresting representations of the religious or racial body can be disrupted through, for example, dance. Further, despite material and theological reservations about the idea of the body as flexible, and well-being as environmental, these issues require serious consideration in the postcolonial context.

As an incident that highlights the interest and sensitivity around politics of health and the representation of black women's bodies, we want to start with a consideration of the 2012 media storm provoked by Afro-Swedish artist, Makode Aj Linde's 'genital mutilation cake'. The artist produced a large cake caricatured as a black woman, as part of an art installation to highlight the issue of female circumcision. Yet, it was the Swedish Minister of Culture's participation at the opening ceremony that initially provoked the most vocal public protest about insensitivity and caricature. According to another Afro-Swedish critic who blogged about the exhibition it was precisely 'the objectification of the black female body via the cartoonish color scheme that distanced the viewers from the victim's humanity'<sup>2</sup>. What this debate signals is that despite this artist's concern with female genital cutting during this exhibition, the sign and symbols concerned with the depiction of the black female body in the modern era remains highly contested and politicized, not least when reminiscent of or inspired by colonial representations and imagery.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/swedish-culture-minister-caught-racist-cake-cutting-scandal>.

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## **Colonial and Postcolonial Representations of Black Womens' Bodies**

Most postcolonial scholars (*cf.* Mazrui 2005, Mohanty 2003, Gandhi 1998, Rattansi 1997, Mudimbe 1988, Said 1978) acknowledge that the discursive practices of arresting the black female body as uncivil, superstitious, degenerate, lazy and over-sexed forms part of a longer history of Orientalist depictions of the colonial Other. Indeed, in much of nineteenth-century literature as well as in the popular imagination, the black body emerges as a symbol of sexual promiscuity and deviant behaviour (McClintock 1995). A particularly disturbing and illuminating example of the ignorance and prejudice that African women's foreign sexuality engendered is the infamous case of the 'Hottentot Venus'. The story of Saartjie Baartman is the tale of how British 'colonial powers transformed one young African woman into an icon for racial inferiority and savage female sexuality'<sup>3</sup>. Saartjie Baartman (1789-1815) a young Khoisan woman was taken to Britain in 1810 and exhibited as a biological oddity and scientific curiosity due to her supposedly pronounced buttocks and genitalia. Baartman's consequent humiliation and degradation exposes the racist attitudes that characterised 19th Century Europe, and for many activists her image has become an enduring symbol of Western colonial and patriarchal attitudes towards Africa.

Throughout the colonial period black women's bodies continued to be sites of contestation. Colonial battles for mastery over the territory and over indigenous polity continued to be fought out on and over women's bodies, and African geographies were imagined as 'virgin lands' ready for occupation and settlement. In this, colonial territories were gendered, and the conquest of female lands and bodies came to symbolise the civilising mission. Theorising the relationship between gender and nationalism, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989:7) write that 'women are seen as the biological producers of national collectivities, they reproduce the boundaries of national groups'. For example, in 1998 the Anglican Church celebrated Manche Masemola, a young Christian convert who died for her faith in 1928, as one of the ten martyrs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and installed a statue of her at London's Westminster Abbey. By most accounts Masemola, in her

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.qub.ac.uk/imperial/key-concepts/feminism-and-postcolonialism.Htm>.

determination not to be deterred from her new-found faith famously declared, 'I shall be baptised in my own blood'. Masemola died having been killed by her family after she refused to renounce Christianity and relinquish colonial, western dress. Both the examples of Baartman and Masemola illustrate how the domestication and policing of women's bodies, whether by science or religion, remained sites of contestation from early colonial times well into the postcolonial period. Further, what has historically often been viewed as a western scientific project to grasp the African mentality or sexuality, must also be seen in relation to the various ways that indigenous politics and colonial mission have been embroiled in the policing and domestication of black women's bodies.

However, these constructions of black women's bodies as unruly and deserving of regulation persists even in the postcolonial state. In recent years both Zimbabwe and Swaziland have sought to regulate women's freedoms in public spaces. For example, during the 2013 Swazi national election campaign two Swazi chiefs threatened to ban women from participating in the elections if they wore miniskirts or trousers. These men insisted that women should 'dress properly, decently, in line with our culture to show respect'<sup>4</sup>. In a more decisive move to regulate women's freedoms and bodies, the Zimbabwean police in 2013 launched a campaign called Operation Zvanyanya (It's too much) a campaign intended to expel women sex workers from the city of Harare. The police gained widespread support from Christian churches that welcomed this move to rid the city of this supposed immorality. In a statement Apostle Last Fundira of the Zimbabwe's Christian Aflame Ministries, not only asserted that 'we do not need these undesirables on our streets' but went on to insist that the expulsion of these women was in the national interest. He stated that 'as a nation we cannot stand aside and look whilst our capital city is turned into Sodom and Gomorrah'<sup>5</sup>. Evidently at the heart of these religious and cultural objections are not only concerns with sexuality, but also the reinforcement of the idea that black women's bodies

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2013/08/04/swazi-chief-bans-miniskirts-and-trousers>.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.zimdiaspora.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=12342:harare-prostitute-rounded-up-under-operation-zvanyanya&catid=96:international&Itemid=342](http://www.zimdiaspora.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12342:harare-prostitute-rounded-up-under-operation-zvanyanya&catid=96:international&Itemid=342).

are the locus of physical disease and moral decay.

In her eloquent chapter 'Nudity and Morality: legislating women's bodies and dress in Nigeria', Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2011) exposes the hypocrisy of religious leaders and legislators in utilising Judeo-Christian, as well as Islamic, ideas to argue for the recovery of what they call 'African modesty'. She insists that among Nigerian moralists it is no longer possible to imagine the female body or sexuality outside the realm of arousal (Bakare-Yusuf 2011: 124). Thus in order for society to be safeguarded from moral decay, likeminded moralists throughout sub-Saharan Africa would argue that women's bodies must be regulated by men, a practice largely underscored by religious and social discourses that relies on rhetoric of civic morality and public health.

### **The Body and Knowledge Production**

Some may ask why this focus on the body? And what might we learn from considering the ways that the body has been theorised and, elsewhere, administered? Chris Schilling (2001) argues that the body has come to occupy a central position within both social theory and contemporary media culture, particularly through its representational power and symbolism. Similarly, Anthony Giddens reminds us that in the modern era, which he refers to as an 'age of anxiety', embodiment has gained currency and appeal because reason in some respects the body has become regarded as a false god. In his view the body can no longer be imagined as a fixed essence and he argues that as a result 'we have become responsible for the design of our own bodies' (Giddens 1991: 102). Bringing attention to representation through and from bodies, Ben Carrington argues, will allow 'us to map dominant ideologies as they circulate through culture and produce themselves as sites of interpellation of individuals in specific gendered, classed and racialised subjectivities' (2010: 4). It is thus precisely through examining the symbolic significance of the body as a metaphor of social relationships (Turner 1994) that we can trace the meanings embedded within cultural representations of particular bodies – for our purposes, black women's bodies - and see how such imaginaries operate to sustain specific power relations between groups and therefore influence women's social, political and reproductive rights and decisions.

Most significant literature about the body has emerged out of poststructuralist and feminist critiques of social subjectivity and embodiment. This body of literature is historically represented in the work of Bryan Turner (1994), Arthur Frank (1996), Chris Schilling (2001), Donna Haraway (1991) and Judith Butler (1990). Turner (1991) argues that society is best analysed in relation to the 'government of the body' which is effected through reproduction (patriarchy), restraint (incarceration), regulation (policing), and representation. Frank (1996) in a less Foucauldian fashion than Turner, moves beyond a consideration of the body as simply an artefact manipulated by institutional and structural constraints, to emphasise human agency and the active nature of bodies. This conception of the body is echoed in the work of feminist theorists, Donna Haraway (1991) and Judith Butler (1990) who both emphasise the notion of the body as not simply a site of inscription but also significantly, simultaneously as site of performance (resistance and self-assertion).

In his sociology of the body, Arthur Frank (1996) suggests that the body is represented in distinct ways and he differentiates between the sexualised body, the medicalized body, the disciplined body and the talking body. Of course we must in this recognise the distinctly gendered and racialised ways in which men's and women's bodies are imagined and regulated, and in particular the ways that black women's bodies are represented and governed. Frank's distinction of the various categories through which the body is represented offers a useful typology by which we can imagine bodies in the domains of leisure, health and religion. Further, Frank's typology makes possible a reimagining of religious rhetoric and representation as it pertains to ageing, medical ethics, disability, consumption and quite significantly, religious performance.

Sociologists of health have variously defined health as the absence of disease, which is of course a rather negative understanding of health, while others have insisted that health must be seen as a social phenomenon (Huber, Knotterus, Green *et al.* 2011; WHO 2004; Balog 1978; Germov 2009). This latter conception holds that health should be measured against and alongside the environmental conditions within which the body exists. Both understandings of health locates the body at the centre of the social world. However, despite recent scholarship on the sociology of the body, for many scholars of religion this privileging of the body is often situated, at least



philosophically, as being at odds with the Judeo-Christian notion of the body as a mere vessel or host for the primordial soul (Calef & Simkins 2009). Nonetheless, Feher, Naddaff and Tazi (1989) remind us that historically bodies have been imagined along a continuum, from deified god-like bodies on the one end of the spectrum, to bodies as machines or animals on the other.

The ideological sentiments expressed by Africansist Leopold Senghor demonstrate this: in his recovery of indigenous forms of rule and administration he sought to expel (western) reason because he saw it as corrupting the more intuitive embodiment of African social reality, such as knowing through dreams or dance. Thomas Albert in his 2014 text, *Shamanism, Discourse and Modernity*, not only draws our attention to the explosion of allopathic medicines into a multibillion dollar industry as people look for new ways to engage their bodies in regimes of healing that integrate mind, body and spirit, but also illustrates how postcolonial indigenous healing practices collapse the mind-body/ body-spirit duality. Alberts cites David Cumes who in his shamanistic training with a famous Swazi *sanogoma*, Petros Ezekiel Mtshali, came to the following conclusion:

The healing that the *sangoma* does, like the San healing, is the first medicine; it has not changed and will not change. This therapy arises from nature, and like us it will return to nature (Cumes cited in Alberts 2014: 187).

This recognition of indigenous knowledge forms and practices is consistent with shifts away from how the body has been regarded in medical science (as a Cartesian flesh machine), to integrate conceptions of the body in terms of social and political relations (Scheper-Hughes & Lock 1987). There has been a marked shift from medicine as primarily concerned with the elimination, and/or containment of disease, towards a concern with the management of health. Medical science has thus come to be about more than the diagnosis of disease and the prescription of remedies, to now including ‘prescriptions’ on how to live – as well as the pursuit of what is regarded as a healthy lifestyle; about the regulation and management of the body through exercise, watching what and how much you eat or drink, as well as how much you sleep or concern with such mundane matters as how you sit. Consequently such life prescriptions have come to include vigilance about behaviour, lifestyle, patt-

erns of consumption, as well as the organization of social space.

Of course such a view has implicit ideological assumptions, such as the idea that you have control and choice regarding what you eat – which for many economically vulnerable households, for example in Southern Africa, are bounded choices. A further embedded assumption rests in the widely held view that a ‘healthy’ body is the result of self-discipline and good health management, and vice versa. As such we often find that body shapes and illnesses that emerge from poverty and malnutrition in all its forms, are often outside patient control (Goedecke, Jennings & Lambert 2006).

The final assumption underscoring this approach to health is the idea that the body is not essential or determined but flexible insofar as it can be modified through rigorous health management, body sculpturing and/or cosmetic surgery. These ideas of the body as flexible have often been seen as contrary to Christian theological dogma – the idea of being created in the image of God, and as God intended. Similarly, the idea of health as self-management has often been rejected by African civil society activists and health scholars who are acutely aware of the bounded choices of African households. Accordingly they are more inclined to define health not so much as the poor management of the self but as the poor management or provision of infrastructure and utilities by postcolonial governments (Bradshaw & Steyn 2001).

As we suggested at the start of this article, it is our intention to interrogate the representation of the black body, and the ways these representations have been sustained by social discourses that imagine black bodies as fixed and without agency. Recent years have seen a flourishing of scholarship that deconstructs representations of the black body, and here we look to see what critical insights this body of scholarship adds to reflections on religion, gender and health in postcolonial South Africa. It is not uncommon to read scholars who illustrate the various ways that black peoples’ bodies are implicated in social, religious and bio-medical discourses. Butchart (1998), for example, writes that in discourses about missionary medicine in South Africa correlations were created between sin, disease and the black body. Invoking Harriet Washington’s *Medical Apartheid*, Zine Magubane (2014) reminds us that in early settler histories, the black body became an object of medical fascination and scientific speculation on both sides of the Atlantic. Finally, Sylvia Tamale (2011) cautions readers against

homogenizing and essentializing peoples' sexualities on the basis of race, religion, class and ethnicity. Drawing on this scholarship, we below explore three historical articulations and representations of the black body that we propose continue to shape the rhetoric and the epistemologies of the black body in the postcolonial context.

## **The Black Body as Site of Labour and Reproduction**

... what he wants from the slave is not recognition but labour.

A mere footnote in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967a) this statement goes to the heart of his critique of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*, wherein Hegel explores the mutuality in the relationship between master and slave. In the chapter 'the Negro and Hegel' Fanon offers an incisive critique of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic by insisting that in the colonial context reciprocity is not ever-present. He argues that in a context where race and colour is privileged over (psychic) recognition, the master shows no interest in the self-consciousness of the other but merely seeks the labour offered by the slave.

Recognizing the very racialised conditions of existence under slavery in America, and for our purposes, colonialism at the southern African frontier, Harvard historian, Walter Johnson (2013) insists that we consider slavery or bonded labour as a system of racist extraction of labour in the interest of wealth accumulation. Moreover, Johnson argues that this was also a system of practices that controlled and regulated the black body, globally and intimately, to serve the demands of the colonial labour market. His 'ecology of cotton production' points not only to the material parameters of the enslaved peoples – the interchange between human beings, animals and plants – but is suggestive of the conditions of the enslaved. This regulation of the mundane in the interest of labour suggests a conception of the black body as simultaneously *machine* and *animal*.

This notion of the black body as machine is clarified when Walter Johnson, in *River of Dark Dreams* forces us to confront the body in the context of the plantation ecology by drawing attention to the most rudimentary, biological aspects of plantation life, what he terms 'bare-life processes and material exchanges' – the sun and soil, semen and shit, blood

and milk – into the history of ‘slavery’ and ‘capitalism’ (2013: 9). This highlights the under-examined material circumstances of the lives of ‘enslaved human beings’ – the morbidity and moral depravity – to reveal narratives of slaves who bled from whips until they lost consciousness, and sometimes life. As was common from around Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (1993) black bonded lives were marked by stories of women raped by slaveholders to produce new labour in the form of an infant child. These tales emerge as accounts of the black body as a site of labour through ‘the calculation of a person in direct proportion to the crop they they could cultivate’ (Johnson 2013: 246).

On the other side of the Atlantic, in South Africa, similar calculations were being made by colonial administrators and missionaries as they sought to ascertain the cost benefits of education to the indigenous populations. At the Eastern Cape Frontier – where the indigenous population had been effectively made landless – menacing calculations were refined as missionaries sought to define an education policy at missionary schools. Les Switzer in his *Power and Resistance in an African Society* (1993) offers a detailed account of the contestation over people and land at the Cape colonial frontier. Demonstrating the complex negotiation between European protestant settlers and Xhosa speaking communities, Switzer highlights, contestation over the colonial mission education policy that would retreat from educating Africans for leadership and instead seek to limit the education of Africans for servitude – labour on farms. And not unlike on the Mississippi plantations, studied by Johnson, in South Africa too economies were built and sustained through the policing and containment of black people’s bodily engagement with the society.

With regards to women in the colonial context, labour was defined in particularly gendered and racialised ways. Apart from the association of women with the symbolic reproduction of the nation, they were also tasked with the literal and material work of reproduction; ‘women’s work’ was defined in relation, and restricted, to the home. This ‘cult of domesticity’ stigmatised women who laboured - particularly black women- who through their labour outside the home came to be seen as masculine, as existing outside of ‘true womanhood’ (McClintock 1995). This historical link between reproductive labour and black women is powerfully illustrated by the fact that the *Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* argues that

the word *maid* denotes both ‘black woman’ and ‘servant’ (Baderoon 2014). In this sense, the historical representation of black women in the Southern African context, situates their labour as primarily concerned with domesticity (and civilisation) and reproduction (McClintock 1995).

For a more contemporary example, let us consider, for instance, the work and life of, the predominantly black, women domestic workers in South Africa. Most domestic work is characterised by long hours, poor wages and the responsibility for conducting what is often considered demeaning and ‘dirty’ tasks. Domestic work, even when formalised and regulated, is concerned with reproductive labour; the work and care required to reproduce and sustain families and households. As such, what is at stake in these employer-employee relationships is the ‘worker’s ‘personhood’, rather than her labour power’ (Anderson 2000:2). For domestic work is not merely labour, it is intimately tied to notions and expectations around womanhood and femininity. A good domestic worker is necessarily also a good mother/wife; she possesses the qualities required to keep a home and a family happy, fed and clean. Through her labour, and personhood, the ‘dirty’ and degraded black domestic worker ensures that the ‘clean’ white, middle-class employer sustains her image as a good mother/wife (Anderson 2000). Yet by so doing, and directly correlated to how well she does it, the domestic labourer ‘fails’ to fulfil the same gendered role as wife-and-mother in her own home. Hence, the work of a live-in domestic worker presents us with a paradox: it is precisely the reproductive work she performs for her employer on a day-to-day, around-the-clock basis, that undermines her ability to perform similar tasks for her own family. As an intimately gendered and racialised form of labour and employer-employee relationship, the labour of domestic work is embroiled with the status and meaning assigned to black women’s bodies.

## **The Black Body as Site of Violence and Degeneracy**

... the negro is an example of an animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all European attitudes ... nothing

consonant with humanity is to be found is his character  
(Hegel cited in Eze 1997: 128).

These words of Georg Hegel reflect the philosophical and bio-medical assumption of his day. The late colonial period was characterised by a mixture of contradictory but pervasive representation of the black body as not just only subhuman but also superhuman; superstitious and child-like on the one hand and yet constantly depicted as savage and threatening. This idea of the black body as threatening informed much of the representations thereof during the last century, from ideas of the ‘noble savage’ to postcolonial depiction of morally based ‘Big Men’. Most theorists and commentators (Cf. Fanon 1967a; 1967b; Mbembe 2003; Mamdani 2001) on the predicament of the African, agree that the black body is frequently configured and articulated in contexts and narratives of violence. Frantz Fanon, for example argued that the black person lives in the world differently precisely because of a long history of representations. He asserts that the Other ‘has woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes and stories’ (Fanon 1967a; 111) invoking the fact that such representation extend beyond simply psychological alienation but, significantly, that it is born out of narratives of violence that characterised the encounters between Europe and its colonised others. By invoking incidents of European incursion into Madagascar and the French police torture of Algerian revolutionaries, Fanon’s work reflects clearly his concern with the ‘embodiment of colonial violence and the inscription of racist colonial discourse on the black man’s body’ (Pramod Nayar 2013:75). Finally, Nayar (2013: 75) concludes that ‘violence upon the body, then, is a hallmark of the colonial condition’. However, as Fanon makes clear in his *A Dying Colonialism* (1967b), it was not just the black man who suffered violence in the Algerian battle for liberty. He critically recognises that women’s bodies, and their embodiment of Algerian culture was put at the centre of the struggle for liberation. He writes that the French strategy against rebels, to ‘unveil’ Algeria were as such:

Lets win over the women and the rest will follow and if we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves

and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight.  
(1967b:38)

What Fanon here exposes is not just the colonial assumption regarding patriarchy in the colonial territories, but also notions of colonised women as the symbolic, and actual, conveyors of the nation. This French strategy rested on the belief that by conquering the women, Algerian society would be conquered in full.

In the introduction to his *When Victims Become Killers* Mamdani (2001) reminds us that the late colonial period was one of the most violent times in modern history. While the book focuses on the history and geography of genocide in Africa, Mamdani reminds us that such regimes of violence have had a long history in the region. He recalls his reading the genocide of the Herero of Namibia in the early 1900s, when the German army and missionaries colluded to hold 15000 people in concentration camps where they were subjected to harsh working conditions, and exposed to diseases such as typhoid and smallpox from which many perished. Similarly in his *On the Postcolony* Mbembe (2003a) traces a history of violence in Africa, both by those who rule and those who are ruled, to demonstrate how the boundaries between state and society has been collapsed to include government, economy and society. Likewise in his famous 'Necropolitics' he invokes Hannah Arendt to illustrate the point that 'the politics of race is ultimately linked to the politics of death' (Mbembe 2003b: 16). While Mbembe drives home the point that power and mastery over the black body is coupled in economies of death (necropolitics), he like Mamdani, and if only in a very limited sense, recognizes that black women's bodies are implicated and engaged with very differently in contexts of colonial and postcolonial violence.

Davis and Anthias (1989) suggest that it is precisely because women's bodies are depicted and governed as sites of national identities their bodies become sites of contestations. Davis and Anthias suggest five ways in which gender and nationalism are coupled: (1) women are viewed as reproducers of national collectives; (2) through restriction over sexual and marital relation women reproduce boundaries of national groups; (3) women serve as active producers of national culture; (4) women are seen as symbolic signifiers of national culture, and (5) active participants in national struggle. Because women are constructed as bearers of the nation (McClintock 1995)

the violence over black women's bodies - whether through use of rape as weapon of war, forced sterilization, or legislating public appearance and conduct – expose patriarchal notions of ownership over women's choices and conduct.

Thus if we ultimately accept that the idea of women as keepers of national identity and morality to be a flawed patriarchal presumption, then we must necessarily dismiss those discourses that seek to prescribe and police women bodies, dress and conduct. The tendency within Southern African polities to stigmatize young black mothers and lesbians as locus of societal moral decay (Van der Walt 2003), is a clear contemporary illustration of how colonial representations of the black female body as oversexed and degenerate, endure in the postcolonial context.

## **The Black Body as Site of Disease**

As their philanthropic dreams hardened into colonial realities, the black body became ever more specifically associated with degradation, disease and contagion (Comaroff 1993: 306).

In her 'Diseased Heart of Africa: Medicine, Colonialism and the Black Body' Jean Comaroff notes that 'medicine held a special place in the imagination of colonised nineteenth-century Africa' (1993: 305). She argues that European colonisers used medical terminology to validate their dominance over indigenous people, and ultimately to assert control over the black body. Similarly, Mari Womack (2010) has argued that medicine provided a model for discrimination and regulation of relationships between the colonised and the colonizers, between the civil and the unruly. Comaroff continues by suggesting that 'early evangelists in South Africa saw social and political obstacles to their 'human imperialism' as natural contagions, responsive to medical control (1993: 306).

Health conditions in Cape Town at the end of the nineteenth century produced socio-political circumstances that would reinforce colonial imaginaries of the black body as disease-ridden. When in 1901 the bubonic



plague broke out in a few neighbourhoods of the city, a motion was tabled by local councillors to remove all black people from the city because their settlements were believed to be the source of the outbreak (Molefi 2001). Ironically, the motion was defeated after employers intervened, insisting that they needed their labourers close to the city and that their removal would be detrimental to the economy. However, when in 1904 the city was struck with the bubonic plague, the authorities invoked the Public Health Act and with little reservation introduced health policies of containment, which eventually resulted in the removal of black communities into quarantine at a place that would later become known as Ndabeni, just outside the city (Sambumbu 2010). Thus the formal expulsion of black people from the city and into a 'township' was not simply the result of racist exclusionary policies but was significantly born out of the imaginaries of the black body as site of disease.

This incident was indicative of how the colonial world had become preoccupied with the hygiene of black people which would be used in health policies as a means to discipline and regulate individuals and communities. McClintock, in her *Imperial Leather*, argues that in the context of colonial science 'soap took shape as a technology of social purification, inextricably entwined with the semiotics of racial imperialism and class denigration' (1995: 212). Such industries, alongside speculations about African sexuality, produced an imperial science preoccupied with certain organs, bones and systems of the African body, making it the epicentre of colonial discourses of health (Magubane 2014). The fetishization of the black body as site of disease is best understood in the context of the long history of the science of empire. Depending largely on observer accounts of 'manners and customs' of indigenous peoples, this science determined that black body was the embodiment of savagery. For these frontier scientists the scientific location of the body was assumed to depend on outside stimuli such as heat, social and moral value. Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* argues that the boundaries of the body are symbolic of societal boundaries. Simon Clarke building on Douglas' notion of pollution power writes that 'pollution and dirt are associated with danger which becomes associated with the Other. The Other then becomes dangerous' (2008:519). He continues that the idea of the 'infectious threat' or the polluting other becomes central to the way that structures of society are ordered and maintained. In the colonial context the unclothed heathen body posed an acute threat to the fragile colonial world and had to be disciplined in the name of decency, cleanliness and health.

These assumptions ultimately conspired to produce representations of the black woman as an icon of exotic sexuality and fertility, while simultaneously being viewed as possessing an uncontained sexuality that threatens moral and social order.

Dorothy Roberts, in *Killing the Black Body* deconstructs pervasive public policy orientation in post-civil rights America insofar as ‘poor black mothers are blamed for perpetuating social problems by transmitting defective genes, irreparable crack damage and deviant lifestyles to their children’ (1997: 3). She critically discusses the collusion between public policy practitioners and pharmaceutical companies to coerce black mothers into sterilization, and a condition for receiving social grants. Roberts explores a number of cases (Norplant & Depo-Provera) to illustrate how in contrast to American women’s right of control over their reproductive choices, black women have experienced a sustained, and systematic denial of their reproductive rights. In making clear the link between historical representation of the black body and contemporary policies, Roberts writes that ‘regulating black women’s fertility seems so imperative because of the powerful stereotypes that propel these policies’ (1997: 8). Of course these stereotypes are not new and Fanon reminds us that they are intimately coupled with (white) anxiety about black people’s reproductive power:

They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital. They have so many children, they cannot count them. Be careful or they will flood us (1967: 157).

What is not immediately clear from Fanon’s critique is the gendered nature of white anxiety about black sexuality. For example, in the context of the HIV pandemic that has ravaged Southern Africa, where public health discourses has by necessity assumed a gendered orientation, one that focuses on women (Badul & Strode 2013), black women’s bodies are nonetheless paradoxically viewed as the containers of, and barriers against, disease. Thus in these contexts, where patriarchal cultures have made women disproportionately vulnerable to HIV and AIDS, initiatives has focussed empowering women to gain mastery over their bodies, framing sexual and reproductive choices as the locus of change. However, widespread social discourses, premised also on the idea of unruly black sexualities and the HIV positive person as the

polluting Other, not only present women black women with bounded and prescribed notions of bodily conduct, but also leaves them vulnerable to excessive surveillance, and even the removal of reproductive abilities. A number of HIV positive women in South Africa and Namibia have reported being subject to coerced sterilization with grave repercussions (Essack & Strode 2012). While the motivations for such coerced sterilization vary, they all nonetheless rest on representations of women bodies and sexualities as coupled with containing the spread of disease, degeneracy, and black fertility, as an undue burden on the state. What is finally evident from both sides of the Atlantic, is that public health and social policy concerns are mediated through bio-medical control over women's bodies.

## **Conclusion**

... a sun-darkened skin stained by outdoor manual work was the visible stigma not only of a class obliged to work under the elements for a living but also of a far-off benighted marked by God's disfavour (McClintock 1995: 212).

It is widely accepted that most colonial representations of self and other are the result of protracted histories informed by 'a thousand details, anecdotes and stories' (Fanon 1967a:111). Postcolonial deconstruction of the black body has sought to expose and lay bare how colonial travel accounts, administrative records, media and popular anecdotes, have continued to shape representations of the black body, as well as the resistance to such representations. Our reflection on the intersection of health, the body and religion in the postcolonial context focussed in particular on the ways that the representation of black women's bodies have informed and shaped their sexual and reproductive rights, choices and opportunities in the postcolonial context. We highlight the prevailing alienation of the body within social discourses in contemporary Southern Africa by drawing attention to Swazi and Nigerian enforcement of 'African modesty' by outlawing short skirts, the removal of sex-workers from urban Harare, and the coerced sterilization of HIV positive women in South Africa. Through this we sought to illustrate how postcolonial governance of black women's bodies rely significantly on

enduring colonial representations of the black body as site of labour and reproduction; violence and degeneracy, and disease.

In the discussion of these representations we, for instance, assert that as an intimately gendered and racialised form of labour, domestic work is embroiled with the status and meaning assigned to black women's bodies. Yet, women, we argue because their bodies are depicted and governed as sites of national identities, become sites of contestations. We suggest that in postcolonial contexts, the violence over black women's bodies - whether through use of rape as weapon of war, forced sterilization, or the legislation of public appearance and conduct – expose patriarchal notions of ownership over women's choices and rights. Thus we contend that the idea of women as keepers of national identity and morality leave black women particularly vulnerable to paternalism, surveillance, violence, and over-regulation of their sexualities.

Finally, we argued that premised on colonial imperial science, which fetishised the black body as site of disease, the black woman's body is represented as at once an icon of exotic sexuality and fertility, but also the embodiment of dangerous sexualities that threaten moral and social order. The representations of the black body, and black women's bodies in particular, not only served as a basis for regulating and domesticating black sexualities, but also significantly shaped African women's reproductive rights and choices. These colonial representations of the black woman's body remain powerful and debilitating precisely because the articulation of these representations in their postcolonial guises have remained largely unchecked – limiting the possibility of new corporeal schemas wherein the black body can be imagined outside a history of over-determination.

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# A Normative Approach: Can We Eliminate Race?<sup>1</sup>

Mutshidzi Maraganedzha<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

It would not be exaggerating to point out that there is a clear controversy on the notion of race. In some instances philosophers acknowledge that race might have a meaning that can be traced to the world. In his book, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Kwame Anthony Appiah has developed an account of race that is eliminativist in nature. Appiah's intention was to demonstrate that the notion of race is non-existent. Meanwhile, lines have been drawn between proponents who advocate for conservationism and others for eliminativism. The controversy persists among philosophers with regard to the question whether to eliminate or conserve the concept of race. This article seeks to examine the performance of the eliminativism theory, in contrast with the conservation theory of race. I seek to show that the metaphysics of race via finding determinative theory of reference for racial terms or concepts is unfruitful. I seek to argue that racial eliminativist criticism against the notion of race is not convincing. I argue that we should preserve the notion of race, given that the position of eliminativism does not account for the social injustice that people of different races experience.

**Keywords:** eliminativism, normative, race, racialism, philosophers, Kwame Anthony Appiah

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## **Introduction**

In the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophers have again turned their focus on racial discourses. A key worrisome factor in the philosophy of race is the normative question of whether to conserve or eliminate racial discourse and thought, as well as the practices that depends on the racial categories thereof. The desire to leave the notion<sup>3</sup> of race behind us seems to be the urge that dominates many people's minds (Glasgow 2009; Zack 1993). This idea looks to be attractive on paper. A number of scholars argue that we have to do away with this notion, but it is highly impractical in reality. However, a number of arguments have been put forward by those proponents who propose eliminativism about race. These arguments seek to confront the most sensitive problems that the modern-day communities across the globe face. Some of those problems are perpetuated by the notion of race, and its ideologies and doctrines. Those problems still persists in our communities across the globe even up today—social problems like racism<sup>4</sup>—that are closely aligned with the notion of race. In their arguments of eliminating the concept of race, the liberal eliminativists, like Appiah, argues that the significance that is attached to racial classification is not important or artificial, and that this significance shall depreciate over time (and perhaps disappear completely) (Appiah 1985 & 1992). In brief, Appiah argues that 'the truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us' (Appiah 1992: 45). This is the view that I believe seeks to resolve the tensions that are brought by the notion of race and its practice. I find this eliminativist argument unconvincing on their position of the normative question of race. To demonstrate this, I wish to take an indirect approach. Firstly, I seek to outline the important arguments of eliminativism camp and also outline the different types of racial eliminativist camps. Secondly, I seek to outline some of the major criticism against racial eliminativist position on the notion of race. Thirdly, I seek to search for a plausible property that can account for the existence of race that still persists

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout, I use the terms 'notion' and 'concept' interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> As evidence to the claim above, the intriguing racism is the Oprah Winfrey case were she claimed that in her visit to Switzerland in 2013. A shop assistant refused to serve her in an upmarket shop in Zurich. To read the actual article, see: <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-23626340> =Detail (Accessed 29 April 2015).

even today by analysing the doctrine of racialism. If my search for this property succeeds, I then seek to argue that it is important to conserve the notion or concept of race within our communities. I argue that in order for race to exist—we do not have to engage in tedious examination of things to find its reality in the world—we can consider what comes to our knowledge when one looks at racial landscape of individuals, as Lee (1994) will concur; through our naked eyes what we cannot miss is the differences that exist amongst people. This difference is what I call race<sup>5</sup>.

This article is arranged into four sections. In the first section outline the important arguments from the racial eliminativism camp and also outline the different types of racial eliminativism. In the second section I briefly give a cursory outline of the criticism against racial eliminativism camp. In third section I make the analysis of the doctrine of racialism and show the role that it plays in racial discourse. In the four sections I attempt a critical interpretation of the arguments that are for eliminativism on race. I then argue that there is a need of conserving the notion of race in our communities, given, that there are still differences that exist in our racial landscape.

So conceived, this article is limited to the arguments between philosophers like Appiah (1992), (1985), Glasgow (2009), Zack (1993), and Mallon (2006) where the central focus is the normative question of whether race is supposed to be conserved or eliminated. I thereby consider this article as a contribution to the debate of race specifically focused on the normative question of whether we need to eliminate or conserve the notion of race.

## **Philosophical Eliminativism**

My use of the term philosophical eliminativism is meant to describe the new racial eliminativism tradition that originated in the early 90s. The eliminativists, whose main proponents are Kwame Anthony Appiah and Naomi Zack, argue that the scientific invalidity of race calls for the rejection of the concept. In addition to its scientific invalidity, Zack also argues that the concept renders mixed race people race-less because of their supposed

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<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this article, I seek not to engage in the taxonomy of race, as this question goes beyond the purpose and the scope of this article. The main purpose of this article is to worry about the normative question whether we can eliminate the notion of race.

exclusion from racial binaries (Zack 1993). This tradition has been formulated, with a clear reflection of society and its history, with regard to the corrupted notion of race. Most racial eliminativists, in regard to their position on the reality of race, come to a conclusion that this assumption that it is possible to divide human beings into racial groups such that members of each group share certain heritable characteristics, is false. I think care must be taken to make a clear distinction between views within this racial camp. From the view of things, there seems to be more than one view that belongs to this camp. However the proponents of those views have one ultimate goal to eliminate the notion of race, racial discourse and thoughts.

The views of racial eliminativist camps that I have in mind can be traced to Joshua Glasgow's analysis of racial eliminativism views in his book *A Theory of Race*. Here, Glasgow pointed out that there is more than one view or type of eliminativism. I suggest that racial eliminativism tradition is mostly encouraged by the history of human kind (of suffering and oppression, of other human beings by the other). It is in this history that the racial eliminativists conceived it to be fundamentally importance to be revolutionary towards the available knowledge of race. What seems to be the backbone or their motivation mechanism is the suffering that human beings faced in the previous centuries.

In his analysis of Placide Temples' *Bantu Philosophy* project of displaying of the Bantu systems of thought, Bernard Matolino reiterates that there are three philosophical racialism<sup>6</sup> views. I think it is fair, before I discuss the types or views of philosophical eliminativism, to consider the views that are proposed by Matolino's *Tempels' Philosophical Racialism* as they ultimately serve a major purpose of narrating the human history that the proponents of racial eliminativism seek to reject. Matolino claims that:

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<sup>6</sup> For Matolino, philosophical racialism, is meant to refer to those doctrines that have been deliberately formulated, with reflection, come to the conclusion that people of another races or other races, other than one's own, are inferior by virtue of their race. He further claims that 'it does not refer to those incidents where people of another race may simply be prejudiced against some other race or races. It does not also refer to situations whereby people of one racial group may act in ways that may show preference to keep company, marry or only see as equals only those people who belong to their racial group' (2011: 332).

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the first view of philosophical racialism seeks to claim that black people are, by virtue of their blackness, incapable of developing any culture, particularly one that is not to exhibit any form of logical and precise reasoning. And it may be argued, consistent with this line, black people's behaviour is based on myths, ill-informed fears that give rise to abhorrent ritualism, superstition, and failure to distinguish fact from fiction, that results in a culture of indolence when it comes to the use of their mental faculties (Matolino 2011: 333).

He [Matolino] concludes that this type of philosophical racialism is nakedly vicious in its condemnation of the African as completely hopeless and useless in terms of development. The second philosophical racialism view, is unlike the first type, which is nakedly vicious in its condemnation of Africans, this view is advocated by Tempels and Marcel Griaule's *Conservations with Ogottemmelli*. These works according to Matolino interpretation, seek to present the philosophical viewpoint of Africans from the Africans' own perspective. The third and last philosophical racialism according to Matolino is from the same vein of condemnation and condescending in nature. He claims:

for Hume, the first type was unimpressive and only the third type was impressive. This also meant the superiority of white people since they were the only ones who were capable of engaging in the third type of mental activity. What we can see here is that Hume's kind of racism seeks to present some evidence to sustain its position. It firstly seeks to draw evidence of the African's backwardness by tracing his history of lack of achievement in both arts and science. Secondly, it turns to genetic account of what it implies to bear black skin and how that marks one as different from other bearers of lighter skins. And, finally, it seeks to seal the condemnation of the African by showing how his mind is incapable of abstract and faint impressions (Matolino 2011: 335).

For racial eliminativists, this is a social situation that is not ideal; I suppose they believe there is more to mankind than to be racist towards each other.

The first racial eliminativism view is academic eliminativism, in this

view eliminativists seek to claim that race does not refer to anything—by virtue of that there are no racial essences—this then led eliminativists like Appiah to claim that race cannot have meaning without referring to metaphysical features of the world. Appiah (1992: 37) writes:

To say that biological races existed because it was possible to classify people into a small number of classes according to their gross morphology would be to save racialism in the letter but lose it in the substance. The notion of race that was recovered would be of no biological interest—the interesting biological generalizations are about genotypes, phenotypes, and their distribution in geographical populations. We could just as well classify people according to whether or not they were redheaded, or redheaded and freckled, or redheaded, freckled, and broad-nosed too, but nobody claims that this sort of classification is central to human biology.

Furthermore, Appiah concludes by claiming that:

The truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us. As we have seen, even the biologist's notion has only limited uses, and the notion that Du Bois required, and that underlies the more hateful racisms of the modern era, refers to nothing in the world at all. The evil that is done is done by the concept and by easy—yet impossible—assumptions as to its application (Appiah 1992: 45).

Appiah's position is definitely informed by his desire or urge to undermine race as a natural factor and the existence of racism. He believes that race is relatively unimportant, by virtue that, is not biological real and it cannot account for the racial differences that exist amongst human beings. This position is also endorsed and emphasized by Naomi Zack. In her book *Race and Mixed Race*, Zack goes further to suggest that many 'biologists and anthropologists are sceptical of the concept of race as a useful scientific tool because no racial population, past or present, has ever been completely isolated from other races in terms of breeding' (Zack 1993: 15). Hence, Appiah and Zack contend that there is nothing in the world that can be used as reference to race.

The second racial eliminativism is a political view, Glasgow suggests, in a more contestable form, the political version of eliminativism claims that we should eliminate racial categories from all or most of the formal state policies, proceeding, documents and institutions. Glasgow, however, argues that the state of California and its residences rejected this proposal that we have to remove the racial categories from most or if not all formal documents and states policies (Glasgow 2009: 2). He further claims that political eliminativism is, in other times, motivated not only by the claim that the way we think about race might be incoherent, but also by the rationale that eliminating racial categories will undermine other policies, such as affirmative action, which presuppose race (ibid). These actions will lead to good relations economically.

The racial eliminativism that I consider to be third view is a public eliminativism. This eliminativism is not far removed from the previous eliminativism as they are intertwined. They are both concerned with eliminating the notion of race and its practices from the public avenue. Glasgow writes that:

[A] more sweeping form of eliminativism is the public version. Public eliminativism advises that we get rid of race-thinking not only in the political sphere, but in the entirety of our public lives, so that we neither assert nor recognize one another's races (Glasgow 2009:2).

The final racial eliminativism is global racial eliminativism.

The goal of this view is for us to eventually get rid of race-thinking not only in the political or even public world, but altogether. That is, even in our most private inner moments, race-thinking should go the way of belief in witchcraft and phlogiston: a perhaps understandable but hopelessly flawed, antiquated way of making sense of our world, a way of making sense that has no place in our most sophisticated story about The Way Things Are (Glasgow 2009: 2).

From the foregoing there are four valuable ideas in my evaluation of racial eliminativism position on the notion of race. The first idea claims that racism

must be abandoned. The reason is that it has been proven to be genetically inaccurate and relatively unimportant biologically. Second, racial identification is not natural then it is warranted for individuals to disassociate themselves with race related identification. The third idea, as things stands, claims that it is warranted to abandon race—because we reject the doctrine that is racism, there is surely a need of rejecting the concept that support the doctrine. Lastly, we should abandon racial terms from both public and academic discourses and the practices that rely on those terms.

## **Topology of Criticism against Racial Eliminativism**

In this section I seek to give cursory arguments against racial eliminativist position on race. There are three major criticisms against racial eliminativists on their position that race is meaningless as it is biologically unreal, and it has to be abandoned. The first argument against racial eliminativism is that the idea that race is not scientifically supported does not rule out its existence. David F. McClean (2004: 142) argues that:

I do not agree that race has no ‘reality’ because I see no reason to over-privilege the scientific account of race’s status—no more reason to limit the discussion of race to the scientific’s vocabulary than limit the question of whether we should make more bombs or grow more corn to that vocabulary. Race, while a legitimate subject for scientific study, has taken on a meaning and a life far greater than the mere scientific pronouncement of its death.

He further explains that this scientific pronouncement of the death of race is valuable as a literature for proper interpretation. McClean is of a view that scientific pronouncement of the death of race can be read or conceived differently from what the racial eliminativist camp conceive.

Indeed, it makes no more sense to ignore the scientific pronouncement about race than to ignore the scientific conclusion that disease is caused by germs, genetic anomalies, and poisons in the environment, rather than by evil spirits (McClean 2004: 142).

Regarding disease this is an unchangeable truth but that is not the case with



race. I propose that there is a need to read scientific outcomes differently, as McClean (2004) will concur, than what other philosophers have been tempted to read them. Most racial eliminativism, like Appiah and Zack, read the scientific pronouncement of race as a call for rejection of the concept of race. Lucius Outlaw (2001) acknowledges that race is not completely scientific. In light of the above, it is clear that race has much more strand that is dynamic in nature than what scientists have proposed that philosophers like Appiah and Zack endorse with such eagerness. Geneticists have told us that there is no race and it has no reality (McClean 2004: 142). However, the idea that race has no reality is not sufficient enough to disprove or discredit what people experience in their social world.

Secondly, racial eliminativist attempt at rejecting the notion of race relies on a misleading approach. They base their arguments on semantics theories. One can ask what makes this approach misleading. Mallon gives satisfactory answers to this question, and can be formulated in two ways. Firstly, Mallon argues that there is a problem with semantic strategy of answering the question of race (Mallon 2006). The problem is the disputes of the correct account of reference theory to employ on answering the question of race. Mallon (2006: 548) claims that ‘accounts of reference are justified by reference to semantics intuitions that vary from person to person and from culture to culture’. Before, I outline the second answer I wish to consider Mallon’s outline of the questions that we ask ourselves when we engage in race talk. Mallon outlines three questions that we ask ourselves when we question the reality of race. Here are the three questions:

- 1) The normative question: Should we eliminate or conserve racial discourse and though, as well as practices that rely on racial categories?
- 2) The ontology question: Is race real?
- 3) The conceptual question: What is the ordinary meaning of race, and what is the folk theory of race? (Mallon 2009: 1).

Secondly, Mallon argues that there is a need to overlook the ontological and conceptual questions of race. He proposes that if we insist in these two questions the answers with which we shall arrive at will be distorted. The reason for this I suppose is that it does not reflect reality as most of us know it. But, if there is continuation of over-privileging the scientific (here I mean

geneticists) account of race by defending its position through semantic strategy which most racial eliminativist seem to be engaging in. This approach shall mislead us in our quest of understanding the notion of race. Mallon, further, proposes that understanding metaphysics of race through the account of reference theory is unlikely to be fruitful (Mallon 2006: 549).

This leads me to the third and final argument against racial eliminativist position on race. As argued above, racial eliminativist are a new generation of philosophers who endorse values of universalism. It is clear in racial eliminativists that they tend to align their argument with values that will promote the ideas that we are all the same, as we have less variation. But the fundamental problem at hand is racism. Racism and its mischief have led racial eliminativist to claim that [Although] ‘there is sufficient social significance of the concept for it to be used in the effort to eliminate racism, but that the achievement of the latter would imply the elimination of the former’ (Gordon 2010: 6). But, does eliminating the doctrine of racism and the notion of race change our racial landscape? This does not seem to be plausible the fact that there are different races in terms of racial landscape will still be a fact without any change. My proposed criticism differs from all these criticism in that I seek to show that the rejection of ‘racialism’ by racial eliminativists is false. This issue will occupy our time later. I conceive that racial eliminativist quest of eliminating the notion of race has stemmed from their rejection of the doctrine of racialism. My position is sympathetic towards racial constructivist view that argues that race as social phenomenon is real. Further, without race we cannot account for campaigns against racism and policies that are race related like affirmative action.

## **The Analysis of Racialism**

In this section I wish to turn my attention to the analysis of the doctrine of racialism. There is general agreement amongst race scholars that *racialism* is a doctrine which was at the heart of the ill treatment of many people of different colours – in South Africa for example—this doctrine played a major role in the segregation rules that were used by the government of Apartheid (Mandela 1994). Racialism has informed many of the racist ideas and practices in the previous two centuries. Many people have suffered a great deal at the hands of those who adhere to this doctrine. Racialism, according to Appiah,

[is a doctrine that claims that] ... there are heritable characteristics, possessed by members of our species, which allow us to divide them into a small set of races, in such a way that all the members of these races share certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race. These traits and tendencies characteristics of a race constitute, on the racist view, a sort of racial essence; it is part of the content of racialism that the essential heritable characteristics of the 'Race of Man' account for more than the visible morphological characteristics – skin color, hair type, facial features – on the basis of which we make our informal classifications (Appiah 1992: 13).

Further, Appiah argues that there are three types of racism, namely; racialism, extrinsic racism and intrinsic racism. According to Appiah, extrinsic racists:

Make moral distinctions between members of different races because they believe that the racial essence entails certain morally relevant qualities. The basis for the extrinsic racists' discrimination between people is their belief that members of different races differ in respects that *warrant* the differential treatment—respects, like honesty or courage or intelligence, that are uncontroversially held (at least in most contemporary cultures) to be acceptable as a basis for treating people differently (Appiah 1992: 13-14).

Intrinsic racism is a form of racism that I take to be a mild form of racism. For Appiah, intrinsic racism:

... are people who differentiate morally between members of different races, because they believe that each race has a different moral status, quite independent of the moral characteristics entailed by its racial essence. Just as, for example, many people assume that the bare fact that they are biologically related to another person—a brother, an aunt, a cousin—gives them a moral interest in that person, so an intrinsic racist holds that the bare fact of being of the same race is a reason for preferring one person to another (Appiah 1992: 14).

Racialism that was at the center of the attempts by some Westerners to build

a science of racial difference during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Appiah also claims that racialism in itself is not a dangerous doctrine. But it must be seen to be false as well as a cognitive problem. But it does not mean that this doctrine is a harmful doctrine. Appiah argues that racialism is a ‘... presupposition of other doctrines that have been called “racism”, and these other doctrines have been, in the last few centuries, the basis of a great deal of human suffering and the source of a great deal of moral error’ (Appiah 1992: 13). From this claim, it is clear that racialism is not the only doctrine that has brought suffering for human beings, and other doctrines that works hand in hand with racialism like racism, extrinsic racism and intrinsic racism have contributed to a great deal of hurt. Appiah in his illuminating categorization of racism into three schemata. Appiah argues that racialism forms part of his three distinct doctrines that compete for the term racism (Appiah 1992), however, I beg to differ on this understanding that racialism is part of the competing doctrines for racism. I suspect the doctrine of racialism is the umbrella of racism. My reason for this is that if we can look close at Appiah’s definition of the doctrine of racialism it is vivid that most of the characteristics that are presented as the criteria for one to belong to a particular race, plays a role in the practices of preference, discrimination, and segregation based on the skin colour.

It is clear now, that racialism forms part and parcel of the term and practices of racism. Lee concurs, with this, when she argues that ‘racialism is a necessary premise of racism’ (Lee 1994: 766). Thus, we can conclude that racism is a term that is based on racialism, but, racism is not the only notion that hangs on it. Racialism also forms a necessary premise to the notion of race. The description or meaning that is attributed to the notion of racialism plays part to the defining of the notion of race. My aim in this section is to search for property that still persists even today for our racial difference.

As an entry to my search of the property that still exist even today to account for notion of race. Thus, if I secure it, then I will argue that there is a need for us to conserve race as its elimination renders the efforts of racism campaigns meaningless as the notion which this campaigns rely on would have been abandoned. This, therefore, entails that the combat of racism have no place without the notion of race. Lee argues that:

if race does not exist outside from discursive frameworks, then our

task is not to probe for the reality of race, but search for the authentic features of race difference (Lee 1994: 751-2).

Though, I concur with Lee on the idea that our task is to probe for the property that can account for our racial difference. I disagree with Lee over the point that we should not ask the question of the reality of race not unless if Lee take it to be the case that race exist. Thus, if this is the case this disagreement will be trivial. I will take it that Lee is of a view that the question of the reality of race is not important.

Elliot Sober, in his *From Biological Point of View*, he assessed and defended essentialism modes of thought. Sober argues that:

Both typologists and populationists seek to transcend the blooming, buzzing confusion of individual variation. Like all scientists, they do this by trying to identify properties of systems that remain constant in spite of the system's changes. For the typologist, the search for invariances takes the form of a search for natural tendencies (Sober 1994: 219).

I suggest that both Lee and Sober have hinted on something valuable that can be of good use in the philosophy of race. It seems to be important despite dismissing the notion of race facile by asking the metaphysical question if race exist, what we need to be engaging on is to probe for an authentic feature or features that will be useful for our understanding of the notion of race. On the other hand, as Sober has argued we need to be searching for a property that remains constant in a system despite the changes that has occurred. To my mind, I believe these are quite valuable views that can make a positive contribution to philosophy of race. This approach seems to hold promise in the debate of the notion of race. It seems apt that this approach can yield a good outcome if followed through. For the purpose of this article I will accept this approach on the debate of race. In this section I seek to employ this approach and search for a property that remain constant on the debate of race.

It is certainly the truth that biological races are false and if we conceive race from a biological point of view our exercise will be unfruitful, as the conclusion that follows from this assessment will be that there are no races (Appiah 1992); (Zack 1993). Indeed, as cited above, we cannot ignore

the scientific pronouncement of the death of race. But it looks like most race scholars, especially those of eliminativist view, asks the wrong question in their assessment of the notion of race. There seems to be a distortion on the approach which racial eliminativist camps use to question the notion of race. This distortion is not clearly articulated in literature. However, most scholars seem to hint on this point, as seen above, in spite of fully articulating this distortion race scholars, tend to deviant from this point as the questioning of the notion of race is an exercise that is accompanied by emotions, as it is highly sensitive. Thus, McClean argues that ‘... the question has more to do with...*who* we are than *what* we are’ (McClean 2004: 142). I seek to detach myself from those emotions while attempting to search for property or properties that are viable that still exist that can be used to account for this notion of race.

According to Andreason (2005), the doctrine of racialism went unquestioned for a long time. But, when put through questioning by race scholars it has been found that the doctrine of racialism is false. This view is one which most scholars of race across most disciplines like anthropology, philosophy and science agree that racialism is false (Appiah 1992; Zack 1993; Outlaw 2001; Lee 1994). But care has to be taken on this point, it seems that this universal dogma of racialism being false might have some elements of fault on it. Here, I seek to revisit the definition of racialism with a purpose to ask is the entire definition of the doctrine of racialism false. Thus, I suggest that the doctrine of racialism is a doctrine that is made up by more than one aspect. These aspects are denoted by the definition of racialism. When we look closely to the stipulated definition of racialism that is given by Appiah, we can note that there are two intertwined aspects of this doctrine.

I propose to separate and formulate the two aspects that had played a greater role in the separation of people into different racial groups during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as follows:

- (1) The first aspect deals with bio-behavioral essences<sup>7</sup> underlying natural properties that are heritable, biological features, and are

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<sup>7</sup> I owe this understanding to Professor Ron Mallon from Washington University in St. Louis. In his paper, *Race: Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantics*, he defines *bio-behavioral* essences as ‘underlying natural (and perhaps genetic) properties that (1) are heritable, biological features, (2) are

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shared by all and only by the members of a race, and as a result of which, are said to behave in the same way.

(2) The second aspect has to do with physical appearance (or morphological characteristics) which was a tool with which people were separated into racial groups based on their appearances.

The doctrine of racialism assumes that people of the same race share the same traits and tendencies, including the idea that there is some form of hierarchical standing in races, with whites being at the top of the hierarchy and other races coming after them. Two classical philosophers (Immanuel Kant and David Hume) held a belief that the appearance of a person or race has a relation to that person's mental ability (Eze 1997: 38). The first aspect has to do with dividing people by traits and tendencies. This aspect of racialism has been mainly responsible for the stigma and hatred that most races experienced in the past century. The second aspect has to do with what I call the simple classification of people by physical appearance. We can classify people using this aspect of racialism without any stigma. I suggest that it is the first aspect of racialism that philosopher like Appiah has rejected as false. Since there are no traits and tendencies that are peculiar to particular races, it is likely that people of different races act in a similar manner. Does the view that people share the same behaviour imply that they are of the same race? I do not think that this is the case.

I believe if Appiah's argument does not comprehend that racialism is formed by two intertwined aspects, then Appiah's rejection of the notion of race is incorrect. If we consider that a simple aspect of racialism exists and is still in use today, then his argument that is keen to eliminate the concept of race fails and it is not persuasive. I argued that the rejection of racialism by philosophers and other intellectuals seems to be a rejection of only a single part of racialism which, according to my assessment, has caused the ill treatment of other human beings. The other aspect of racialism is not harmful in nature. What is left of racialism, according to my observation, is a diluted version of the doctrine whereby people are separated according to their visible appearance, without any stereotypical connotations being attached to this separation: the doctrine merely acknowledges that we are different. If

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shared by all and only by the members of a race ... cultural predispositions of individual persons and racial groups' (2006: 528–529).

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my suggestion is right that philosophers are mostly worried by the first aspect of racialism, then there is one half that remains that ensure the possibility of the concept of race and account for the problem of racism. With this in my mind I seek to move to the next section where I will attempt to critique views that are perpetuated by racial eliminativism camp holistically.

## **The Normative Question: Should we Conserve or Eliminate the Notion of Race?**

In this section I seek to answer the most perennial question in philosophy of race. The question that I seek to answer in this section forms the main purpose of this article; the normative question: whether to eliminate or conserve the notion of race has occupied minds of many scholars across most disciplines as pointed above. This question has also kept most philosophers busy, and in this debate there are two camps that has emerged. The first camp argues that it is advisable for the notion of race to be eliminated as it is based on false assumption and arbitrary ideas of classifying people according to their superficial features. This camp, further, argues that race has to be abandoned as it is not biological real. The second camp argues that race has to be conserved as elimination race would be like ‘giving up the features of ourselves that are most important, that makes us interesting individuals’ (McClean 2004: 149).

Race is a constitutive element of our common sense and thus is a key component of our taken for granted through which we get on in the world. And, as we are constantly burdened by the need to resolve difficulties, posing varying degrees of danger to the social whole, in which race is the focal point of contention (Outlaw 2001: 58).

It should not go without saying that Appiah’s criticism on the notion of race is highly uncharitable. Yet, my focus in this section is not on the incoherence and the unclarity of this highly corrupted notion of race as such rather I wish to worry about the normative question of whether to eliminate or conserve race. I perceive from the racial eliminativism camp that is more aligned with anti-realism, than to interpret the real phenomena that we can visibly experience by our naked eyes. I suspect that there is a need for us to conserve



the notion of race in our communities across the globe. The reason for this is because the notion of race has a number of uses in our daily dealings as human beings. Here, I seek to outline what are my reasons of suggesting that there is a need for us to conserve the notion of race in our communities across the globe.

Thus, my first reason why we need to conserve the notion of race in our communities, is that racial eliminativist position on race is incompatible with our intuitive understanding of the notion of race. Our intuitive understanding of the notion of race can be captured by our naked eyes. Through our naked eyes we can make reports that there is a clear difference amongst races that is visible to our naked eyes. I have argued above this is what I call race. This is an obvious reality in our social worlds as Outlaw (2001) will affirm. The concept of race is useful as a tool to categorize human beings. Hence, this point might have been disapproved in literature, but, I argue race is a fundamental currency in a social world which people tend to draw lines amongst themselves as races. I think that the following observations, by McClean, will help to emphasize this point:

The idea of race is pretty much dead, but the damage race has done still remains, although not withstanding that damage, race, as a social construct, could be something we might keep around (McClean 2004: 149).

The second and final reasons why we need to conserve the notion of race, is that without the notion of race we cannot account for the term and practices of racism in our societies. Further, we will also be unable to account the campaigns of racism that are in existence across the globe. David Theo Goldberg argues that ‘race is irrelevant, but all is race’ (Goldberg 1993: 6), in light of this quotation, it is apt Goldberg is of view that it is highly impractical to remove the notion of race in society. Given, that the racial problems are still evident in our societies. In South Africa, for example, a minister in the presidency Trevor Manuel accused Jimmy Manyi as the worst kind of racist that is called black racism<sup>8</sup>. To be truthful removing the notion

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<sup>8</sup> To read the actual article in detail, see, Matolino’s analysis of the effectiveness of black racism in his ‘There is a racist on my stoep and he is black: A Philosophical Analysis of Black Racism in Post-apartheid South Africa’.

of race in society will be an act that will cripple how people conceive themselves and structures that have been established by a history that is befogged by racialized thinking and racism that had been a serious problem – and it is still even today. On this account, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that most societies across the globe have been build a long side the idea of race.

It seems apt that the concept of race cannot easily be abandoned. It does account for the social injustice that occurs within societies in which this concept is the main factor. It will be doing injustice if we can eliminate and abandon this concept, because most aspects of daily dealing with one another would have lost their meaning. I have argued that there is an aspect that still persists that can be used to secure this concept. Outlaw (2001: 82) argues that ‘elimination I think unlikely – and unnecessary’. My view of race aligns itself with racial constructionism – that argues the concept of race cannot easily be abandoned – this concept exists it is social real.

It should be clear by now, that my view is sympathetic towards the social constructionism position. Although my position corresponds with views of the constructivist, it does not take the more radical views of this position. But, it only accepts that race has functioned as a maker and social category, were others were privileged and others oppressed. In addition, it also accepts that there are visible differences among races that is what I call race. Finally, in a footnote, Mallon (2006: 539) argues that ‘racial theorist should want something stronger than the rejection of racial essences...the rejection of racialism on the grounds that there are no racial essences is too weak’.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen that, despite the ever-increasing appeal for eliminating the notion of race. That is a view held by racial eliminativism. Mostly, the reasons that have perpetuate this state of affairs seem to be the history and legacy of the notion of race—that have left many human beings suffered through the ill-informed ideas about this notion of race. As a result, I have argued that it is a legitimate case that race has brought suffering among human beings. But it seems to be apt to abandon the notion of race or dismissing the notion of race in a facile way. It appears that dismissing the notion of race does not bring solution to the problem that people experience

in the social world. There are still reports of individuals who experience discrimination, prejudice and social injustices based on color as Du Bois has predicted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Further, I argued that the rejection of racialism by philosophers and other intellectuals seems to be a rejection of only a single part of racialism which, according to my assessment, has caused the ill treatment of other human beings. The other aspect of racialism is not harmful in nature. What is left of racialism, according to my observation, is a diluted version of the doctrine whereby people are separated according to their visible appearance, without any stereotypical connotations being attached to this separation: the doctrine merely acknowledges that we are different. It appears that there is an aspect that still persists even today. From this, it is clear that there is a need for us to conserve the notion of race.

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# **Bob Marley's Redemption Song in Conversation with de Gruchy's Olive Agenda**

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## **Abstract**

Bob Marley and Steve de Gruchy are presented as two prophets of social change that belonged to two different eras and social locations, who lived their lives in the fast lane and died in the prime of their lives and career development. Through their common love for living life to the fullest their common love for the creative art of reggae music empowered them to create a hermeneutical frame-work through which their God-talk narrated a fundamental connectivity of self, others, and the past, present and future life. Their dialogical and theological conversations gave voices to the voiceless to articulate their dreams, hopes and fears. United in their common resistance to centralised authority and leadership and any attempt to institutionalise the religion they advocated in their writings for radical reinterpretation of Christianity that celebrates human dignity and both refused to compromise with systems or institutions that embraced oppression. This article argues that it was Bob Marley's Redemption Song that embodied the spirituality that undergirded de Gruchy's theology of development and its accompanying Olive Agenda that offered an in-depth critique of the global imperial system that thrives on underdevelopment of the poor. Together they exhibited a revolutionary posture of overcoming all forces of oppression that prevent the realization of freedom. They engaged in transformative education. The ultimate objective of their advocacy is to destabilize and overthrow oppressive life denying systems by working for a fundamental deconstruction of how their disordered world functioned in the interest of powerful global

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political and forces. Whereas Bob used the Marijuana as the symbolic ‘tree of life’ for the ‘healing of the nations’, Steve used the symbolic Olive tree as ‘his tree of life’. But their common agenda was fullness of life for all. The article concludes that Bob and Steve have demonstrated a unique form of integrated and open spirituality. Their ministry and mission were committed ultimately to the service of life.

**Keywords:** Redemption Olive Agenda, Liberation, Rastafari, Reggae, Babylon System, Metaphorical theology, Dialogical method

We refuse to be what you wanted us to be, we are what we are and that’s the way it’s going to be (Babylon system, Bob Marley 1978).

Though often hidden from Western view, religion is so overwhelmingly significant in the African search for wellbeing, so deeply woven in the rhythms of everyday life, and so deeply entwined in African values, attitudes, perspectives and decision-making frameworks that the inability to understand religion leads to an inability to understand people’s lives (de Gruchy 2006).

## **Introduction**

My relationship with De Gruchy began in the early 1990s when I served on the Staff of the Council for World Mission as an Executive Secretary for Education in Mission. The Council had a programme called ‘Equipping Local Congregations in Mission’ that focused on helping churches to move from out of their maintenance, non-life-giving and clergy centred ministry to a risk taking life-transforming missional mode of identity, vocation and witness. Later in 2008, de Gruchy became a resident scholar at the Council for World Mission (CWM) office in London during the period of his Sabbatical from UKZN. In supporting his sabbatical, he was required to engage in a

missiological critique of the CWM's life and work. During that period I grew to love and respect de Gruchy even more both as a person and scholar. I loved his deep passion, intellect, competence, compassion and respect for humanity. He wrote about thirty-two articles for the CWM Inside Out Magazine in which he reflected on mission and development.

The articles have reappeared in Beverley Haddad's edited text, *Keeping Body and Soul Together, Reflections by Steve de Gruchy on Theology and Development*. This text was launched at the fourth Steve de Gruchy memorial at the School of Religion Philosophy and Classics, UKZN on February 26, 2015. This important text with its poignant title could be classified as Steve's unfinished book that his colleague has now completed. In addition, an editorial team comprising of Steve de Gruchy as chief Editor, Desmond van der Water, Isabel Phiri, Nansoon Kang, Sarojini Nadar and Roderick Hewitt work on the publication, *Postcolonial Mission: Power and Partnership in World Christianity*. The untimely and sad death of Steve in February 2010 led to the text being published in his honour in 2011.

It was during 2009 that de Gruchy, who was also Head of the School of Religion and Theology at UKZN, issued the invitation to me to join him and the staff at the School to lecture in ecumenical theology and missiology within the systematic theology discipline. But this was not to be. I still remember the heart-piercing call that I received on Monday February 11, 2010 informing me of his death. His fast track promising life of 49 years was cut short. From February 2011 until 2014 I had had the honor of organizing the UKZN Steve de Gruchy memorial Lectures. This became for me a way of saying thanks to him for the years of friendship.

Academically, I began to engage in more serious reflections on Steve's olive theology when I first examined the Masters' thesis of a UKZN student Brian E. Konkol. (*Mission Possible? Power, Truth-Telling, and the Pursuit of Mission as Accompaniment*, (Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 2011). Later in 2012, I became his main supervisor for his PhD research along with Professor Gerald West (*From Anaesthetic to Advocate through Mission as Accompaniment: Towards a More Effective Response from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Global Mission to Mechanistic Dehumanization*).

In both works he gave in depth critique of de Gruchy's 'Olive Theology'. I am also indebted to Professor Bev Haddad a Research Associate of the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics UKZN. She worked

alongside Steve for many years in the Theology and Development Discipline and succeeded him as Director of the programme. Another text dedicated to the memory of Steve was published in 2012 when Cochaine, J.R., Bongmba, E., Phiri, I., and van der Water, D. served as editors of the acclaimed Cluster publication: *Living on the Edge (Essays in Honour of Steve de Gruchy: Activist & Theologian)*. That text offered me the first opportunity to reflect on Steve's theology as I offered some insights on 'Re-interpreting Development through Mission Praxis'.

### **Songs that United de Gruchy and Bob Marley**

This conversation begins with first linking de Gruchy's theology with my religio-cultural world. I thought of our common love of liberation theology framed within reformed theological discourse, our mutual commitment to missiological formation and our love of reggae music<sup>2</sup>, especially that of Bob Marley. On the surface, it appears that de Gruchy and Bob are two of the most unlikely 'bed fellow' to engage in theological conversation. However, close examination of their background and philosophy of life offer some telling signposts of their common 'groundings' and intentional commitment to fashion a theology that takes into account one's social location.

Of the many songs done by Marley, I am of the opinion that his rendition of 'Rebel' best summed up the hidden transcript<sup>3</sup> of Rastafari ideology<sup>3</sup> in de

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<sup>2</sup> The term word 'reggae'(reggay) has evolved in meaning from its Yoruba rege-rege meaning 'rough' to symbolise in Jamaica how the 'rough' poor people in the ghettos of Kingston, Jamaica use their musical resources to renew and reinvent themselves. Senior, O. 2003, *Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage*, Twin Guinep Publishers, Jamaica. P.412

<sup>3</sup> The foundations of Rastafari religion were laid by the Jamaican Pan-Africanist philosopher, Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940). For more on Garvey's teachings see: Martin, T., 1986. *Marcus Garvey, message to the People, the Course of African Philosophy*, Dover, Massachusetts: The Majority Press. Garvey himself was not a Rastafari but his African philosophical discourse led him to embrace a strong Afro-centric reinterpretation of Christianity in which he saw God as Black.



Gruchy's worldview 'Babylon System'<sup>4</sup> In this revolutionary anti-imperialist anthem Marley declared his core ideological position on the 'Babylon System' that controls world order: *'We refuse to be what you wanted us to be; We are what we are: That's the way it's going to be. You don't know!'* In this statement is the embodiment of resistance as a life style orientation. The quest for personal and the people's freedom and liberty will not be compromised and in order to ensure this, eternal vigilance will be given to critical thinking to ensure that the system does not (mis)educate into the deceptiveness of *equal opportunity*. An urgent call is made to all sufferers within the Babylon System to rise up and Rebel! Rebel! People have been *'trodding on the winepress much too long'* and as a result they have *been 'taken for granted much too long'*. Trodding on the wine press is figurative of doing, engaging in difficult manual labour over and over again without reaping any tangible benefits from work. It is for this reason Marley described the Babylon imperial system as a vampire because it is *'Suckin' the children day by day'* and it is also *'suckin' the blood of the sufferers'*. Such a corrupt system cannot last because it lacks moral and ethical foundation. Therefore, it must be viewed as a *'fallen empire'* that thrives illegitimately by *building church and university* and *'graduatin' thieves and murderers'*. Convinced about the soundness of his argument he issued a rallying cry to the people to join with him and *'Tell the children the truth; Tell the children the truth; Tell the children the truth right now! 'Cause - 'cause we've been trodding on ya winepress much too long: Rebel, rebel!*

De Gruchy listened to Bob's key songs: *'Exodus- Movement of Jah people'*; This song used the Jewish Exodus and Babylonian exile narratives as representing the experiences of oppressed peoples and mixed them with and highlighted the need for all oppressed people to use intentional community engagement constructing life-giving economics and education rooted in values of upliftment. In the song he pleaded *'Open your eyes and look within; are you satisfied with the life you're living? We know where we're going; we know where we're from we're leaving Babylon we're going to our fatherland'* (Bob Marley 'Exodus' 1977). This methodology of engagement was to repair and regain dignity and respect that 'Babylon

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<sup>4</sup> Bob Marley - Babylon System Lyrics | MetroLyrics <http://www.metrolyrics.com/babylon-system-lyrics-bob-marley.html>. 'Babylon' is the world system... of inequality, injustice and constitutes a destructive way of life

system' sought to destroy. 'I shot the Sheriff' that is usually interpreted by the public as a song advocating violence against police office is to misunderstand Bob's ideology. Here he argued for confrontation against all systems that are organised against the poor and that people of goodwill must not opt for neutrality but to get involved and change the system to benefit the poor. *Buffalo Soldier* and *No woman no Cry*, I would dare say, 'Blackened' de Gruchy's theology, meaning it energised him to embrace a theological discourse that opted for solidarity with victims, people that were deprived fullness of life, those that lived on the margins.

Marley's song '*Babylon System*' seems to be better aligned ideologically with Steve's theology of development that he articulated in his 'Olive Agenda' because of its in-depth critique of the global imperial system that thrives on underdevelopment of the poor. However, this article argues that it is *Redemption Song* that embodied the spirituality that undergirded de Gruchy's theology of development and its accompanying Olive Agenda. They ideologically found common ground in the olive tree as a defining metaphor for the struggles thrown up by the modern economy. Together they exhibited a revolutionary posture of overcoming all forces of oppression that prevent the realization of freedom. This was the song that students remembered him playing the most and that which was used by staff and student to say goodbye when news of his death came. It was a paradox that close to the time of his death de Gruchy used this song that Marley sang as his last public testament.

## **Redemption Song in Conversation with de Gruchy's Olive Theology**

Both de Bob and de Gruchy were dialogical theologians that used a dialogical method of discourse in their passion for social change. This was much more obvious in Steve's theological formation. This activist/scholar was unequivocal in his argument that *his metaphorical theology seeks to engage with poets, artists, musicians and actors in the stuff of life*. Steve was an accomplished musician in his own right. According to his Mother Isobel de Gruchy (unpublished document, Hermanus: South Africa 2014) learnt to play the guitar at age 14 and he also learnt to write his own music. Indeed by age 20 he had composed over 150 songs. His songs embodied his commitment to

the struggle for justice as he articulated the pains and hopes of those that lived on the margins of society. His songs of protest gave deep insights into the reality of life during the 1980s. His Christian faith embodied the radical politics of Jesus that treated the need of people as sacred. Steve may not have received the acclaimed as a great singer but, he would never miss an opportunity to sing those songs that articulated his vision and commitment to see the coming into being of a new world order that values equal rights , justice and peace. These embedded values and audacious vision that shaped his worldview led him to embrace the religio-political music of Bob Marley.

This competent, passionate, committed and consistent UCCSA minister and University Professor who, to the day he took his last breath, offered prophetic critique of any institutional practice that failed to treat the felt needs of ordinary people as central to their identity and vocation. His theological formulation has been forged on the treating people's need as sacred and using those needs to set the agenda for theological reflection. From his anti-Apartheid experience of resistance of State oppression to his struggles against the poverty of rural South African communities within the new structures of democratic governance, de Gruchy knew oppressive systems of governance can deceptively mutate to become new forms of oppression against the poor.

Bob Marley (1945-1981) was born to a Scottish father and a poor African-Jamaican mother during the period of British colonialism in Jamaica in a rural and poor community of Nine Miles . His mixed race identity forced him from day one to wrestle with issues about his identity. His experience of having a loving, poor and young black woman that also fathered him pushed him to ask questions about his identity in a racially stratified colonial society. Who really are you? What is your purpose in life? What is it that you are called to be and do? His life journey went through different phases for which his different songs are narratives that help to tell his story of recovering his lost self (Erskine 2004: 172). His journey from the rural community of Nine Miles to the depressed inner-city area of Kingston transported him to embracing the religion of Rastafari and its accompanying communication tool –reggae music. The evolution of Bob's music over the years became an articulation and proclamation of Rastafari theology, a radical form of Black Theology of liberation for all oppressed peoples<sup>5</sup>. He drew upon themes from

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<sup>5</sup> For more details on Rastafari Theology see Erskine (1998).

the bible, people's everyday struggles of life, Jamaican proverbs and folklore to become musical message of judgement and hope in his quest for social change which according to Allan Smith (2005: 3),

Bob Marley's religion, his increasingly militant commitment to freedom and justice, his bi-racial family background, his combination of 'in your face', challenging lyrics with easy, almost happy melodies, his blending of African, biblically based, and Rastafarian themes, were all devices employed in service of transformative education and creating a musical 'hybrid third space' where freedom might be experienced.

### **Redefining the Boundaries of the Permissible**

It was reggae music that brought de Gruchy and Bob into theological conversation. The evolutionary foundation of reggae music was created primarily for people to dance and be happy but the embracement by Rastafari musicians, transformed the music as a tool (a means and method) to engage in educating the masses in putting up resistance against systems of oppression. Although there are many unsung artists who have contributed to the development of this indigenous Jamaican music, Bob Marley has transcended this group of contributors to become the undisputed father of the music. He created the standard for the music to become the premier communication tool for social change in the society and the world. It gave voices to the voiceless to articulate their dreams, hopes and fears. Thirty four years after his death his music continues to receive global acclaim as a catalyst for social change. I therefore wish to postulate that Bob and Steve embodied what Carolyn Cooper's (1993: 15) describes as being unique to literature within the Jamaican popular culture as:

*a transgressive ideological position that redefines the boundaries of the permissible'.*

## **Mutual Rejection of the status quo of Economics, Politics and Social Relations**

Both Bob and de Gruchy are also (in my reading of their life and work), Narrative Theologians and their God-talk narrates a fundamental connectivity of self, others, and past, present and future life. They called for radical reinterpretation of Christianity that celebrates human dignity and both refused to compromise with systems or institutions that embraced oppression. De Gruchy was a product of Congregational ecclesiological and theological formation. In this community according to historian Philip Denis, the model of governance gives priority to local democracy and fellowship of believers and 'it values sharing of ministerial authority between office holders and church members, relation of mutuality between the churches, ecumenical commitment and aversion to state religion' (Denis. P in Cochraine, Bongmba, Phiri & van der Water 2012. *Living on the Edge (Essays in Honour of Steve de Gruchy: Activist & Theologian*, 305). However, consistent with de Gruchy's hybrid theological identity, he was also a fierce critic of the very congregational ecclesiological theological formation that informed his identity and vocation.

The Rastafari creed that Marley embraced also resisted centralised authority and leadership and any attempt to institutionalise the religion. No one person within the community can speak as the only or final source of authority (Erskine 2004: 123). Both experienced untimely death in the prime of their lives Steve at 49 and Bob at 36years. Yet, both had accomplished so much in such a short timeframe. They loved and celebrated life and therefore embraced a spirituality that embodied bodily experiences. Ironically, both lived middle class lives but their message took inspiration from the experiences of people who live on the margins. It could therefore be argued that they functioned as a catalyst that merely instrumentalized the experiences of people living on the margins of society whilst they remained recipients of the privileged class. However their message reached and was embraced by diverse classes of people. They were visionary who were ahead of their time with a Universalist world view tied to contextual rootedness. They both expounded radical ideas of social transformation that embraced incarnational theology and used music as an instrument for social change. Social and economic justice and overcoming inequality became their passionate agenda. Bob's music and Steve's theology dealt with the struggles of the poor and the

powerless. Also, although they had radically different outlook on human sexuality they both advocated for total respect for human dignity through their unflinching refusal to become co-opted by imperial forces of oppression that Bob called Babylon that must be chanted down (overthrown). Cooper (1993: 121) claims that Babylon symbolises *the oppressive State, the formal social and political institution of Anglo/American imperialism*.

Therefore, sin in Bob's Rastafari theology and de Gruchy Christian theology 'is not simply an individual problem but also has political and social (*and economic*) dimensions (Barnett 2012: 252). Their common and central ideological concern is to facilitate radical change in society. Finally they were very disruptive and transgressive with their use of language. Who but Steve could create 'Poo theology' after the citizens who were demonstrating against poor municipal service delivery pour excrement on the public buildings! Bob Marley on the other hand would use new Rastafari coined words like 'downpressor' for oppressor, and 'understand', that connotes submission to another, was replaced by 'overstand'; and 'shituation' as an alternative to 'situation' and 'head-decay-shun' for education' to describe the oppressive conditions in which the poor lived.

## **Redemption Song**

Bob Marley died May 11, 1981 at age 36 after a few years fighting cancer. Redemption Song was the last song on his final album 'Uprising' in 1980 with the Wailers. *Redemption song* therefore summed up his life story that could be described as a journey from spiritual enslavement to emancipation. It would be fair to argue that since Bob must have known in 1980 that the cancer that he had was terminal, one can therefore, assume that the words that were put together to construct Redemption song emerged out of deep contemplation on his life's journey. Indeed, the music that was put to the words was inconsistent with the deep bass rhythm of reggae music. Rather, this was more of a ballad, a goodbye song to the people that he loved dearly and he sang it alone using only an acoustic guitar for his accompaniment. In many different ways this song represented his spiritual metamorphosis and identity formation. He became fully aware of his mortality and that he 'Got no time to lose'. In the closing months of life the medical personnel made it known that nothing more could be done because the cancer was all over his

body however, he kept on working feeling his pain. This is confirmed in the words of one of his early songs written in 1960's and rehearsed for his final stage show in 1980: 'I'm hurting inside':

*When I was just a little child (little child) Happiness was there  
awhile (there awhile) and from me it... It slipped one day Happiness  
come back I say cause if you don't come, I've got to go looking For  
happiness.*

*Well if you don't come I've got to go looking, God, for happiness,  
happiness.*

Bob's life was rooted in contradiction. He is known globally as a Rastafari but there is more to his identity than this. It would be more correct to describe him at the end of his life as a Rastafari Ethiopian Orthodox Church believer. The church to which the former Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie belonged and was its Patron. A priest from the Church offered pastoral care of Bob up to the time of his death and it was claimed that Bob' requested the Christian rite of baptism before he died and it was duly performed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Priest. This was the reason his official funeral was conducted by Priests belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This surprising ideological shift in Bob spiritual journey was further complicated in the use of an orthodox funeral liturgy that did not accommodate any of the traditional Rastafari religious rite being practiced. This act was to the dismay of many local Rastafarians.

According to Dawes 'Redemption Song' would confirm Marley's commitment to the task of teaching and leading his people out of a world marked by oppression and hopelessness and into a world of survival' (2002: 311). The term *redemption* is pregnant with deep meanings. It carries both religious and commercial symbolism. The Greek word *agorazo* means 'to purchase in the marketplace' and this is done in the context of buying an enslaved human being. It is also linked to another Greek work, *lutroo* that emphasises 'to obtain release by the payment of a price'. However, Marley usage is rooted in not so much in what others have done to set him free, but a celebration of liberation of good over evil. Carolyn Cooper (1999: 124) argues that Bob's usage embodied,

*Liberation becomes much more than freeing from physical chains, for true freedom cannot be given; it has to be appropriated. Authenticity comes with the slaves' reassertion of the right to self-determination.*

The true understanding of *Redemption song* must be experienced through words and music because, 'reggae songwriter's art is a dynamic process in which words, music and dance are organically integrated within an afro-centric aesthetic' (1999: 117).

### **The Song**

'Old pirates, yes, they rob I, sold I to the merchant ships,  
Minutes after they took I from the bottomless pit.  
But my hand was made strong by the hand of the Almighty.  
We forward in this generation triumphantly.  
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?  
'Cause all I ever have, Redemption songs, Redemption songs.

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.  
Have no fear for atomic energy, 'Cause none of them can stop the time.  
How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look?  
Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill de book.  
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?  
'Cause all I ever have, Redemption songs, Redemption songs, Redemption songs.

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind.  
Have no fear for atomic energy, 'cause none of them can stop the time.  
How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look?  
Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill the book.



Won't you help to sing, these songs of freedom?  
'Cause all I ever had, Redemption songs. All I ever had, Redemption songs.  
These songs of freedom songs of freedom<sup>6</sup>.

## **An Interpretation: Those who Struggle for Fullness of Life become Overcomers**

Bob located his journey not with the impending of death but with historical identity and legacy with the ancestors of his mother and all other African-Jamaicans who were forcibly removed from their African homeland by human traffickers and sold as commodities to Europeans who enslaved them into forced labour. Consistent in his transgressive use of language, Marley demythologised the so-called heroes of Empire, along with the African collaborators that benefited, as mercenary that thrived on human suffering and identified them as 'pirates' or criminals that rob the innocent.

Rather than denying this African heritage Bob affirmed it and used it as his reference of where he wanted to go in life:

*Old pirates, yes, they rob I, sold I to the merchant ships,  
Minutes after they took I from the bottomless pit.  
But my hand was made strong by the hand of the Almighty.  
We forward in this generation triumphantly.*

Even though the ancestors' journey from the African mainland was done in the most inhumane way as they were packed like sardines in a tin and placed into the ship hold, they did not surrender their human dignity. Their resilience came from self-awareness and faith in God who held their hands and gave them strength to cope and eventually to become overcomers. Their faith in God did not allow the life-destroying pirates to defeat the African people who were forced to leave their homelands in bondage. For Marley there will be no going forward into the future without knowing and appropriating the past

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<sup>6</sup> Songwriters: Hawkins, Edwin / Marley, Bob 1979. 'Redemption Song' lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

African heritage. Consistent with Bob's dialogical discourse he ends his critique of the past with Positive Vibrations. The negativities of the past and the system of the oppression will never win! The task of claiming our contemporary inheritances requires that '*we forward in this generation... triumphantly and singing songs of freedom*'.

## **Emancipate Yourself from Mental Slavery**

If the first verse of the song had set the stage and context then the second verse articulates the message. Bob proceeded to advocate a transformative educational framework for transformative and liberative education:

*Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds. Have no fear for atomic energy, 'Cause none of them can stop the time. How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look? Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill de book.*

In his context where neo-colonial and imperial forces were still at work enslaving people through transnational corporation in partnership with oppressive government policies that favoured the rich, Marley connected them on a continuum with the same dehumanising, force labour and human trafficking strategies employed by 17<sup>th</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> century enslaving colonial forces. The quality of resistance needed to overcome such forces in the contemporary era necessitates liberation of the enslaved minds that are addicted to the ideological formulations of the old world disorder. This call for '*emancipation of the mind*' implies that the form of enslavement is more psychologically entrenched and deeply rooted into the DNA of the victims. Therefore deep counter measures are needed to liberate such an enslaved person. Carolyn Cooper (1999: 124) argues that,

*Emancipation from mental slavery thus means liberation from passivity-the instinctive posture of automatic subservience that continues to cripple the neo-colonised.*

## *Marley's Redemption Song in Conversation with de Gruchy's Olive Agenda*

This recurring call to, '*emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind*' constitutes the recurring message of this song. The aftermath of colonialism and slavery has left unhealed wounds of human development that have not been attended. Under the scars are psychologically damaged persons who are still experiencing mental forms of enslavement through socio-economic underdevelopment that breeds hopelessness. The call emancipate is an invitation for intentional proactive resistance that is rooted in taking full responsibility for one's own liberative development because it will not come as a gift from others. Bob's call to 'Emancipate yourself from mental slavery', according to Noel Erskine (178),

... points to the need not only for emancipation from the external oppression found in Babylon but also for liberation from internal bondage and the positing of an alternative consciousness.

Marley's world from birth until death was influenced by Cold War tensions between The USA and the USSR. The scepter of nuclear war was real but for Marley not even the power of atomic energy could prevent the people's quest for freedom. His message is very emphatic: '*Have no fear for atomic energy / Cause none a them can stop the time*'.

Marley's Rastafari ideology has been deeply influenced by the philosophy and teachings of Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1884-1940), the Pan-African use of prophetic biblical motif to articulate another perspective of his emancipation paradigm:

*How long shall they kill our prophets, while we stand aside and look?  
Some say it's just a part of it, we've got to fulfill de book –*

There is a cost to participate in the struggle of liberation. The committed participants must be ready for sacrificial service that may result in the ultimate price of death being paid. Bob was conscious that when Garvey addressed the issues of oppression of Black people around the world by the Western colonial and imperial forces they laid plans for his demise and ultimate death (Murrell, Spencer & McFarlane 1998: 145-158). His message called for an Afro-centric ideology to counter Western enslaving philosophical construct, serious inculturation of Christianity and the Bible in

which God as incarnated in Christ is seen as Black for the people of African descent, a reordering of the economic order to empower victims to develop economic independence through enterprise and self-love to overcome self-hate as a method to psychologically repair the personhood of damaged victims of oppression (1998: 145-158). This revolutionary posture recognised that there will be detractors and onlookers whose cynicism and fatalistic worldview that is undergirded by fundamentalist religious views will support the maintenance of the dominant world order that rejects redistribution of power that empowers the poor. Therefore, the call to emancipation must be embraced as a cooperative venture. To defeat the entrenched the globally controlled power systems there is need for a united team of resisters. The songs of freedom need a strong global choir that can ‘Chant down Babylon one by one’. These songs can never be privatised. The invitation is open to all who can join and participate *‘to sing these songs of freedom’*.

The dialogical narrative model of engagement in the quest for fullness of life that permeates Bob’s Rastafari worldview therefore correlates with Steve’s dialogical theology that informs his olive agenda which I now explore. This metaphorical theological method done through community engagement that cultivates an environment that de Gruchy argue *‘should make us want to smile, to laugh, to sing, to write poetry, to dance’*<sup>7</sup>. This was theology for life!

## De Gruchy’s Olive Agenda

De Gruchy’s perspectives on the Olive agenda were first shared his article, *An Olive Agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development*<sup>7</sup>. He used this metaphorical concept to bridge the duality gap and unite ‘the ‘green’ environmental agenda and the ‘brown’ poverty agenda’<sup>8</sup> that he posited has restricted the world’s development to favour the agenda of powerful global commercial and financial institutions that put profits ahead of all other human and environmental considerations. It is this mixture of green and brown that he argues, create an ‘olive agenda’ which

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<sup>7</sup> Steve de Gruchy, *An Olive Agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development* p.6 [http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/61043/DeGruchy\\_An\\_Olive\\_Agenda.pdf](http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/61043/DeGruchy_An_Olive_Agenda.pdf)) accessed 12/04/2015.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

'holds together that which religious and political discourse rends apart: earth, land, climate, labour, time, family, food, nutrition, health, hunger, poverty, power and violence'<sup>9</sup>. De Gruchy's 'Olive theology opted for a different epistemological' trajectory. He was not afraid to be a lonely voice in the wilderness calling for a different path to be created that facilitates life for vulnerable people. His metaphorical theology of social development is derived from reading of Biblical texts that suggest that a metaphorical theology that draws upon the allegorical method but he is not restricted by it and is prepared to speak a language that goes beyond specifically Biblical metaphors because of his ideology of inclusiveness that is oriented towards the *oikou-mene*, the whole inhabited earth.

De Gruchy's use of Olive goes beyond its obvious colour identity. Within this context of conversing with Bob's Redemption Song, the Olive tree is at its core a symbol of life and serves as a life-giving and support plant. Also its metaphorical usage has missiological intentions. Olive then becomes more than a colour, and becomes the defining metaphor of a missiological agenda. De Gruchy's Olive agenda gives expression to the World Council of Churches AGAPE process – Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth<sup>10</sup> that states:

Any viable alternative for the future must fulfil the criteria of social and ecological justice, enabling life in dignity in just and sustainable communities for generations to come.

De Gruchy's universalism, is however, rooted in the contextual reality of Africa and its Southern expression of life for the majority poor that faces perennial struggles around food sovereignty. He also locates the Olive Agenda with the 'olive branch' as a symbol of peace. His embrace of the Old Testament motif found in (Gen 8:11) in which,

*the dove returning to Noah with the olive branch is symbolic of the way in which human evil and injustice (Gen 6:5, 12, 13) are held*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Justice, Peace and Creation Team, Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE) A Background Document. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 42.

*together with the ecological crisis of the flood (Gen 6:17); and of course it is the Noahic covenant that is so explicitly an ecological covenant – one that is not just with humans, but with all living things (9:10,12,15)<sup>11</sup>.*

This integration of ecology with economy is consistent with the ecumenical agenda of the WCC programme on Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation in which peace/shalom is an intrinsic component of the eco/nomic construct. The Olive agenda calls for justice in the economy that fundamentally alters the design of this dominant ‘Big economy’ with its insatiable appetite built on greed and violence to ensure that it becomes accountable to ‘the Great economy’ that is accountable to the common good of all. This commitment of de Gruchy’s Olive Agenda to peace building is not restricted to an ecclesio-centric world view. God’s oikoumene necessitates the involvement of all cultures and religions and the Olive plant has traditionally grown in soil dominated by plurality of cultures and religions. This inclusive movement comes with a preferential bias for those who are committed to engage in people’s struggles acts against all imperial forces of oppression.

De Gruchy’s passion for justice in the economy is rooted in an understanding that:

... the earth sustains human life, and that human life perspectives the sustaining power of the earth (Haddad 2015:220).

The olive agenda therefore advocates for policies that integrate economy with ecology to ensure environmental sustainability of that human use. It calls for a healthy relationship between leisure, rest and work through appropriation of Sabbath lifestyles that value the building healthy human relationship. De Gruchy called into question the wrong use of words that can lead to enslavement. For example he challenged the use of the word ‘land’ in the context of ownership and usage and felt that ‘earth’ is a better use of language to emphasise our interconnectedness. The Olive agenda therefore opposes the neoliberal economic order that deal with unjust trade policies that

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<sup>11</sup> Steve de Gruchy, An Olive Agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development p.8 [http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/61043/DeGruchy\\_An\\_Olive\\_Agenda.pdf](http://acen.anglicancommunion.org/media/61043/DeGruchy_An_Olive_Agenda.pdf)) accessed 12/04/2015.

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promotes over consumption and greed of the global financial institutions. De Gruchy recognised that the implementation of the Olive Agenda would require a transformative community that has become conscientized through a liberative educational programme. He therefore saw the worshipping community of churches as constituting a strong agent for change (2012: 222-226).

### **Conclusion: A Redemptive and Olive Song of liberation**

Although Bob and de Gruchy served people in different contexts and era, the message communicated through their songs and writings have united them in a common mission of liberative justice, a 'theology from the margins', for all but especially those that live on the margins of life. De Gruchy's Public theology was heavily influenced by the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) on whom he modeled his integration of the academy with societal issues such as racism, health issues, sexuality, ecological, environmental and economic issues (2012: 51). Bob's Rastafari worldview came from the philosophy and opinions of the Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey that influenced his message in song. A synthesis of Bob's song of redemption and de Gruchy's Olive agenda seems to suggest that both discourses have called into question the contemporary socio-political and economic 'disorder' that thrive on greed and corruption and supported by well-equipped security forces to maintain the privileges of the wealthy. Their theological arguments are still valid and potent frameworks to unmask the deceptive and entrenched power systems at work within many African societies.

They both had a unique capacity of combining issues of development that impact on the wellbeing of the poor and especially those that live on the margins of life. Both were able to fuse these issues of development (such as health care, access to clean and affordable water) with their direct relationship to ecology, economic justice and key theological theme within scripture. Steve's use of religious health assets (RHA) to promote health care within the African context identified the assets of spiritual encouragement, compassionate care, knowledge giving, material support, moral formation and creative interventions as key elements (Gunderson in Cochrane, Bongmba, Phiri & van der Water 2012: 35). Marley's spirituality also embraced these values as expressed in his songs.

Marley and de Gruchy intentionally opposed to ‘the dehumanizing use of religion, politics and intellectual institutions’, not to worship or intellectual growth. They engaged in transformative education. The ultimate objective of their advocacy is to destabilize and overthrow oppressive life denying systems by working for a fundamental deconstruction of how their disordered world. Whereas Bob used the Marijuana as the symbolic ‘tree of life’ for the healing of the nations, de Gruchy used the symbolic Olive tree. But the common agenda was fullness of life for all. Both Bob and de Gruchy’s have demonstrated a unique form of integrated and open spirituality. Their ministry and mission were committed ultimately to the service of life.

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***Ex Africa semper aliquid Novi!*<sup>1</sup>**

# **Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the African Renaissance and the Empire in Contemporary South Africa**

**R. Simangaliso Kumalo<sup>2</sup>**

## **Abstract**

Since the 2000s, Africa has carried out a project of its regeneration, popularly known as the African Renaissance. This vision of a self-reliant and developed continent is embodied in the figure of Pixley ka Isaka Seme. Seme had first eloquently articulated this vision in 1906 in an award-winning speech titled the Regeneration of Africa. He had implemented its fundamental ideas of uniting African tribes in 1912 when he facilitated the founding of the oldest political movement in the continent - the South African Native National Congress (SNNC) - the precursor of the African National Congress (ANC). The traces of Seme and the African Renaissance are not obvious in the projects of NEPAD, the African Parliament and so on. They rather remain buried in the archives of the history of the ANC, and the social history of South Africa - but also in the dreams, aspirations and imagination of patriotic Africans. The aim of this article is to explore how and why a shared memory of Seme has to be built; to contribute to the construction of an ideology that will be instrumental in underpinning the work of resisting the negative effects of the empire or globalization.

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<sup>1</sup> Latin saying written by Pliny, meaning something new always comes out of Africa. Quoted in Thabo Mbeki 1998. *Africa: The Time Has Come*. Cape Town: Tafelberg (p. 239).

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**Keywords:** Seme, Pixley ka Isaka, South Africa, Africa, Regeneration, Renaissance, empire, citizenship

*I am an African, I set my pride in my race over against a hostile public opinion... I would ask you not to compare Africa to Europe or to any other continent. I make this request not from any fear that such comparison might bring humiliation upon Africa. The reason I have stated - a common standard is impossible! (Seme 1906:1)*

## **Introduction**

In 1906 whilst in Columbia University, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, a 26 year old relatively unknown African law graduate student from Inanda South Africa, delivered his award winning speech titled 'The Regeneration of Africa'. In this speech he dreamt of the revival or renaissance of Africa. As Richard Rive and Tim Couzens have noted, 'it was largely through his ideas and inspiration that the African National Congress (Africa's oldest liberation movement and South Africa's ruling party) was founded' (Couzens & Rive 1993:1).

This speech became the foundation of the African Renaissance. When other African leaders called for the liberation of their people, they built their speeches and ideas on this speech. Seme's speech was quoted in its entirety by Kwameh Nkrumah in his speeches when he called for the regeneration of Africa (Nkrumah 1973:212; Muendane 2008). It was also used by Thabo Mbeki as a template in his groundbreaking speech the Regeneration of Africa (Gevisser 2007:326). Seme held the view that 'regional and tribal differences among Africans had to be overcome by promoting a spirit of African nationalism' (Karter & Carter 1989:62). It is through these ideas that Africa's unity of purpose and the quest to develop its own reliance and sustain its mark amongst continents in the world has been built. It is now 63 years since Seme died, but Africa is still struggling to make a case for a prominent position in the world. It continues to fight the onslaught brought by the invasion of the empire, manifesting itself through economic exploitation, through multi-nationals and unfair international trade agreements that benefit the so-called first world at the expense of Africa. After Seme's death in June 1951, there was a removal of his contribution and

legacy from memory, when he was associated with the failure of the cautious gradualist and peaceful non-violent approach to the struggle for the liberation of Africa. It was only during the adoption of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill in 1996 that Seme's sentiments were echoed by President Thabo Mbeki, though implicitly, when he delivered his historic speech 'I am an African' at the Constitutional Assembly (Mbeki 2007:325). The same sentiments were echoed during the launch of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Mbeki 2001:16). Again this was done implicitly because Seme was not quoted directly. However one can note that under the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki and his African Renaissance projects, Seme was gradually brought back to memory. The radical advocate of the regeneration of Africa was cautiously brought back onto the scene and was brandished as the father of the African Renaissance and the African National Congress. Academics and politicians, especially those from the ruling party, were instrumental in the revitalization of Seme's memory with the aim of reconstructing a sense of African pride and patriotism, and justification of the domination of the ruling party. Moss Mashamaite has observed the significance of Seme's legacy that towers behind the ANC and the democratic South Africa. He wrote:

If you remove Seme from the history of the African National Congress it remains hollow and a lie. When you remove him you forget your pure African nationalism and with that you also forget the land issue which surprisingly still remains a struggle, even though four black men have ruled in the Union building so far<sup>3</sup>.

Invoking the ideas of Pixley Seme was intensified by the centenary celebrations of the ANC in 2012, where the party, in its attempt to rebuild its image which has been damaged by infighting, corruption and breakaways under the leadership of President Jacob Zuma, claimed it was still walking in Seme's footsteps. Current political discussions in the country have been around issues that include the growing gap between the haves and have not, religious, ethnic and political divides. Xenophobia and the loss of a spirit of patriotism among political leaders has led to the revitalization of a nostalgic,

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<sup>3</sup> Mashamaite, M. 2011. *The Second Coming: The Life and Times of Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the Founder of the ANC*. Cape Town: Chartsworld Publishers.

almost heroic, image of Seme. In spite of the provocation of Seme's spirit now and again when faced with leadership challenges, South Africans have not fully explored the relevance of his contribution to the negative impact of the new dynamics of the empire to the country and the rest of the continent. Although his ideas are still relevant for a continent still struggling to build a positive image of itself, Seme has remained relatively unknown and on the margins even within the ANC. He has remained a figure who is only invoked when remembering him would add value to the agenda of those who use his name. With the exception of a street named after him in Durban, there is no institution, building or even national monument that has been built in his name and honor. There is also no monument on the African continent that has been named after the father of the African Renaissance. Moss Mashamite was quite vociferous in his criticism of the ANC for marginalizing Seme's legacy.

However, the marginalization and relegation to the periphery, there are still traces of Seme and his ideas on the regeneration of Africa in the postcolonial context. These needs to be appropriated to the current context so that his legacy is more prevalent when one follows what Paul Ricoeur (2000), terms a narrative 'reconfiguration'. In this approach, contemporary narratives of Seme are politicized. In the words of Marie-Aude Fouré this means that they do not necessarily translate into actual political practices or economic measures enforced by the state, but rather constitute a shared political language employed in collective debates and controversies about politics, morality and national consciousness - a language intended, in short, to shape contemporary images of the nation (Marie-Aude Fouré 2014:1).

The question that may be asked is who was Pixley ka Isaka Seme? What makes him important for us to invoke his name, ideas and political theology in a democratic South Africa, a century after his work? An attempt to write about Seme must be welcomed because despite the brilliance of his career and enormous contribution to the struggle, not a lot of work has been written on him. In their book *Seme: Founder of the ANC*, Richard Rive and Tim Couzens lament the lack of written material on Seme in spite of the tremendous contribution he made in the political developments of South Africa. Other than Rive and Couzens's foundational work, there is only a biographical article by Seloape Tema (the then editor of *Drum Magazine*) published in July 1953 two years after Seme's death. At least two prominent people have written doctoral theses on Seme's 'Regeneration of Africa'. One was Kwame Toure or Stockley Carmichael, the founder of the All African

Revolutionary Party (AAPRP) in the US and, Morris Bishop the former Prime minister of Grenada. In 2012, Moss Mashamaite wrote a biography of Seme, where he highlighted Seme's pioneering work in the formation of the ANC, and the idea of an African renaissance<sup>4</sup>. Seme's name is certainly mentioned in a number of historical documents in passing and also in the papers and speeches that he delivered, but as noted, not much scholarly work has focused on his ideas and the empire. Furthermore, there is a clear gap concerning Seme's formative years in the 1880-1900s, leading to a misunderstanding of his work and ultimately of his contribution. Two reasons account for the lack of information on Seme's life and legacy. One relates to the fact that he himself did not write his autobiography, claiming that he did not have time to do that (Seme 2006). This is most probably because his Zulu culture did not encourage anyone to write about himself, for that is seen as beating your own drum. The second reason was Seme's fall from the leadership of the ANC in 1937, after an unsuccessful term which almost led to the collapse of the movement, because of bad leadership characterized by bad financial management and authoritarianism. This culminated with his gradual withdrawal from the leadership of the ANC to concentrate on other ventures, especially with traditional leaders and black farmers, and ultimately his death in June 1951, before the full impact of apartheid legislation. However those who had followed his work could see that history would remember his contribution. For instance renowned journalist of *Drum Magazine* observed that:

... Pixley ka I Seme has made a notable contribution for the development of our consciousness and national spirit both as a creative and driving force in our forward march. He has thus left his mark on our human history, and when that history comes to be written by African historians his name will certainly find a place of honor among the great men of our race (Tema 1953:12).

This article therefore explores how and why a shared memory of Seme, in association with a reconfigured African Renaissance political language, can be built and used to define and construct Africa's conception of renaissance,

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<sup>4</sup> Mashamaite, *The second coming: The life and times of Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the founder of the ANC*. Cape Town: Chartsworld Publishers, 2011).

liberation and citizenship today. It also seeks to make a contribution on how Seme's insights can be used to inspire patriotism and consciousness amongst its leaders to counter the negative impressions about the continent by the rest of the world.

## **Pixley ka Isaka Seme: The Making of Africa's Renaissance Man**

The best way to understand Seme's ideological orientation on the regeneration of Africa is to see how it is firmly rooted in his development from boyhood to adulthood. Pixley ka Isaka Seme was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1881 at Inanda Mission Reserve outside the coastal city of Durban. He was the son of Isaka and Sarah (nee Mseleku), who were committed members and leaders in the American Board Mission of the Congregational Church (Seme 2006)<sup>5</sup>. His father was a missionary worker and interpreter to the Rev. S.C. Pixley and his mother a devoted woman of the church. Seme's real name is not known even by his closest family members. He called himself by his father's name Isaac or Isaka in Zulu and Rev. Pixley's surname (Couzens & Rive 1993: 21). That is why he is known as Pixley ka Isaka Seme which can be translated as Pixley the son of Seme (Vezi 2008)<sup>6</sup>. He obtained his primary education at the local mission school run by the American Board Mission. He grew up under the watchful eye of the Rev. S.C. Pixley who took special interest in him. In 1895 at the age of fourteen he went to Adams Training School for Boys, where he studied and also helped by looking after Rev. Pixley's cattle (Tema 1953:11). Determined to get a better education for himself, in 1898 at the age of sixteen, he travelled to Brooklyn in the US to join John Dube who was doing his second year of ministerial education. At the same time, Rev. Pixley was also in the US at Boston, and through Dube and Pixley's financial support he started improving his English language in preparation for enrolment at Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. This was a boy's school founded by the

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Ellen Seme (Seme's daughter) 18 February 2009, Number C 1348 Ulundi conducted by Simanga Kumalo.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Vezi Seme (grandson) on 21<sup>st</sup> October 2008 at Inanda Seme's birth place, conducted by Simanga Kumalo.

well-known American Evangelist Dwight Moody, whose aim was to found an institution where boys would get a Christian education so that they could serve God in the world. His studies at Mount Hermon included studies in Theology.

At first Seme was not clear on what course of study he wanted to follow; he considered law, medicine or ministry. After completing his studies at Mount Hermon School in Boston, Seme was admitted to Columbia University in New York City where he read for a law degree with the intention of becoming a lawyer. In 1906 he went to Oxford University where he registered for a Bachelor of Civil Law and was a member of Jesus College. He came back to South Africa in 1910 and first settled in the Cape, where he worked as a lawyer. He married Miss Xiniwe in a Christian wedding service. They had a son named Quinton who later became a musician (Ellen Seme 2006).

After the death of his first wife, Seme moved to Johannesburg where he opened his law offices at number 54/5 Rosenberg Arcade on Prichard Street with Mr. Alfred Mangena (Ellen Seme 2006). These offices would soon serve as the founding base for the ANC because it was in them that he would run the movement. He was also working with Mr. Richard Msimang who was another lawyer and would also become one of the key founding members of the ANC. They also worked in close contact with D Montsioa, the only other African lawyer. So at the time there were four qualified lawyers in South Africa; these were PI Seme, A Mangena, R Msimang and D Montsioa. These were the same lawyers who conceived the idea of forming the Congress under Seme's leadership. Seme then married Princess Phikisinkosi (popularly known as Princess Phikisile) Zulu, the eldest daughter of king Dinuzulu, king of the Zulus<sup>7</sup>. They had three children, two

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<sup>7</sup> She was named Phikisinkosi because she had defied the king who had hoped to get a son as a first-born who would then take over from him. When he got a girl he named her Phikisile meaning she had defied the king, because she was a woman but could not be crowned as king as per the culture of the Zulu people at the time. Then she, in Zulu culture, became 'Iphosakubekwa' one who nearly became king. It is also important to note that Phikisinkosi was the elder sister to Princess Magogo Zulu who is Chief Mangosuthu's mother.



boys and a girl<sup>8</sup>. He bought a palatial house for himself in Sophiatown at 111 Bertha Street where he settled with his family.

In 1912 he pioneered the founding of the African National Congress, for which he was elected Treasurer General. He also raised money from the Queen of Swaziland which he used to start the organization's first newspaper Batho-Abantu. The aim of the newspaper was to document and disseminate the experiences of the African people in the Union of South Africa and to propagate the objectives and teachings of the Congress.

In 1911 Seme pioneered the African Farmer's Association, which mobilized black people to pool together their resources to buy fertile land for farming. This scheme led to the establishment of Daggakrall which was a settlement of, and initiated by black people, precipitating the enactment of the Natives Land Act in 1913 as government's response to stopping black people from buying land for themselves (1953:21). In 1928 Seme was honored by his *alma mater*, Columbia University, with an Honorary Doctorate of Law (LLD)<sup>9</sup>. In 1930 he was elected president of the ANC, a position he held till 1937. Unfortunately his 'conservative leadership style coupled with a lack-luster and autocratic attitude' (Couzens & Rive 1993:22) did not help the organization. By the time he was voted out in 1937, the Congress was almost defunct with no clear membership and bankrupt. He then concentrated on helping the Kingdom of Swaziland and Lesotho to gain their independence from Britain as well as running his law firm, which focused on representing black people who were suffering exploitation and oppression at the hands of white farmers, employers and police.

Seme died on 7 June 1951, at the age of 70, in Johannesburg. He belonged to the Anglican Church in Braamfontein and was buried at a funeral

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<sup>8</sup> The names of the children were Godfrey Silosentaba, Douglas Pilidi, Ellen, and Mamama. When he was a lawyer in Swaziland he had a relationship with Princesses Lozinja Dlamini and they had a son George Zwangendaba Seme. Seme gave him the name Zwangendaba because when he was born, Seme was not in Swaziland but overseas; he heard through messages that he had been born. When Seme was in Daggakraal he also had a relationship with another women and a son was born out of that relationship who was named 'Dumakude' (popular) which probably referred to Seme's popularity.

<sup>9</sup> Presidents of the African National Congress: 1912-2012. Pretoria: Department of Arts and Culture, p. 79.

conducted by Bishop Ambrose Reeves at Croesus Cemetery (Ellen Seme same interview).

## **Founding of the African National Congress**

In spite of the fact that Seme's name is not the most celebrated one in the contemporary political arena, even within the ANC, there is general agreement that the existence of the organization is attributable to the genius of Pixley ka Isaka Seme<sup>10</sup>. The ANC was Seme's brainchild whose roots can be traced to the speech that he made at Columbia University in 1906, where he spoke of the regeneration of Africa<sup>11</sup>. In his speech, Seme affirmed Africa to be a civilized continent in its own right that should not be judged in comparison with other continents. He viewed comparison to be impossible because Africa was civilized and developed in its own unique way, not one that followed the script of the west. For him this is what makes the comparison impossible or even unjustifiable. He argued that Africa would not fail to measure up to the other continents if it was to be compared to them; it is just that the yardstick used would not be adequate to do such measuring. The speech that he delivered in Bloemfontein in 1912 six years later was a culmination of the Columbia one. In Bloemfontein, it became a call to action for the African leaders to work together for the regeneration of their continent so that they could resist the domination by other nations (2012:82)<sup>12</sup>. The formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) (as the organization was known before the name was changed to the African National Congress (ANC) in the 1920s) was so that such an organization would mobilize against the negative influences and oppression by servants of the European empire, e.g. the Boers and the British, who had united to form the government of the Union of South Africa which excluded the Africans. So the speech was used as a tool of conscientization.

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<sup>10</sup> The highest honour bestowed on Seme is the building of a statue in his honour in Daggakraal in Mpumalanga, the community that he established in the early 1900s.

<sup>11</sup> See [http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/pdf\\_extract/5/XX/404](http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/pdf_extract/5/XX/404), 2009/08/20

<sup>12</sup> For more see 'Presidents of the African National Congress': 1912-2012, 82.

There are five characteristics that made Seme's movement stand out from others that had been established earlier. They are as follows.

*First*, it drew its membership from black people only, irking people like Jabavu who adopted a moderate approach which accommodated sympathetic whites. Seme realized that Africans had to fight our own battles and liberate ourselves instead of waiting behind whites and depending on their paternalistic attitudes. He was of the attitude that African people had to do it for and by themselves, to demonstrate that they had come of age.

*Second*, the ANC was a coalition of black organizations from all over the country including the three British protectorates Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. It was a *broad-church*<sup>13</sup>, which although had its clear agenda, was also committed to support the political work carried out by different regional organizations at the local level. It had a clear mandate and focus which was not narrowed to responding to provincial governmental issues, but was concerned about the state of Africans in the union as a whole. The underlying ideology was concerned with the re-building of Africa as a whole. In his speech he said that:

Chiefs of royal blood and gentlemen of our race. We have gathered here to consider and discuss a scheme which my colleagues and I have decided to place before you. We have discovered that in the land of their birth, Africans are treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water. The white people of this country have formed what is known as the union of South Africa - a union which we have no voice in the making of the laws and no part in the administration. We have called you therefore, to this conference so that we can together devise ways and means of forming our national union for the purpose of creating national unity and defending our rights and privileges (Couzens & Rive 1993:89).

*Third*, unlike the Bambatha rebellion (Guy 2006) which was led by traditional uneducated warriors using a violent confrontation, the SANNC was pioneered and led by graduates of mission schools, so its foundations

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<sup>13</sup> This term has been used to describe the coalition nature of the ANC which includes a number of groups with diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas.

were built on Christian principles and involved a commitment to a non-violent approach (J.L. Dube in Thabo Tshehloane 2008:92). In its ranks were clergy, teachers, doctors and lawyers. Seme's call was different from the call that had been made by earlier leaders of African nationalism, who had been mobilizing their people to engage in wars and fight the oppressive settlers using spears and warriors. He was calling for a different strategy which was to unite the people and fight the enemy, first as a united force and second by adopting non-violent and extra-parliamentary methods. People were now going to use the pen to fight for their freedom instead of guns.

*Fourth*, it was committed to the unity of African tribes and the promotion of unity in action amongst the oppressed people of the country. In the subcontinent people had divided themselves according to warring ethnic groups, and not even the culture of *Ubuntu* could stop them from fighting both the white invaders and each other for sovereignty and domination. Each ethnic group wanted to dominate and rule the other. It is in this context that Seme realized the need for unity across ethnic boundaries, saying 'All the dark races of the subcontinent' should come together to discuss their issues in a 'Native Parliament'. He said that:

The demon of racialism, the aberration of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basutos and every other native must be buried and forgotten .... We are one people (Joyce 2007:42).

For Seme and his colleagues, the time had come for the African people from different ethnic backgrounds to stop fighting amongst themselves had come. He stated bluntly that 'internal squabbles had already shed amongst us sufficient blood .... These divisions, these petty jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and all our backwardness and ignorance today' (Joyce 2007:42). He called them to unite and be committed to common nationhood (Walshe 1971:33).

*Fifth*, although with time it was later dropped, the idea of regarding traditional leaders as part of the African system of governance was a credible one. To some extent his commitment to African traditional leaders might have been motivated by the fact that he was married to a Zulu princess. This may have played a role in his own sense of being part of not just the educated

elite, but also the traditional elite<sup>14</sup>. In Seme's vision, the ANC built on the existing structures of African leadership, which people were attached to. He would later call upon the young educated Africans to cooperate with traditional leadership for the purpose of promoting education amongst the Africans. He said that:

I wish to urge our educated young men and women not to lose contact with your own chiefs. You make your chiefs and your tribal councils feel that education is a really good thing. It does not spoil nor detribalize them. Most of the misery which our people suffer in the town and the country today is due to this one factor, no confidence between the educated classes and the uneducated people ... (Holland 1989:34).

This was to encourage cooperation between the African traditional systems of leadership and the western models, so that the two can enrich one another and improve the rights and lives of the African people including those who live in rural areas. Here you see a Seme who is affirming the African models of governance and being critical of those who discarded such models in favor of the western form of democracy. Seme's belief in the African models has been vindicated by the ANC's elevation of the role traditional leaders in a democratic South Africa. In the current dispensation the traditional system of leadership is used alongside the democratic system and the two have been given the space to complement one another.

### **Seme's Pan-Africanist Ideas**

Seme's ideas were not just limited to South Africa, they extended to the rest of the African continent. Therefore, keeping his memory alive and nurturing his ideas in the contemporary context of globalization would not only benefit him and his legacy but would serve South Africa and the rest of the continent's development and pride. This is because Seme believed in the

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<sup>14</sup> Whilst working with the royal family of Swaziland he also married a Swazi princess named Lozinja Dlamini.

continent and its people's capabilities. In his speech he made a passionate plea to the leaders of the African people to unite across ethnic divides to work and struggle for their liberation, recognizing the intellectual, artistic and natural beauty and capabilities of its people to build and run their own societies. His call was an affirming attitude towards Africa which had always been referred to as a dark continent by its detractors (Richburg 1998: xiv). He asserted that 'I set my pride in my race over and against public opinion' (1912:82). In this speech he had invoked not only the scientific and intellectual abilities of Africa and its people but also its rich culture and religion which were rich and commendable to those outside the continent. Seme's positive views on African culture and religion have been confirmed in the new dispensation by the current South Africa constitution which explicitly protects the cultures and religions of people and has even led to the formation of a section 9 institution whose main objective is to protect people's cultures and religions against any form of onslaught.<sup>15</sup> Whilst the dominant tendency of colonial and settler policy was to undermine Africa and its people, Seme's point of departure was to affirm Africa and its leaders as entrepreneurs, philosophers and able leaders of their people who were being subjugated by the colonial powers. They needed to free themselves by organizing their people under one broad-based party that would champion their cause. It is with this in mind that we should not separate Seme's work of liberation of the South Africans from that of the continent as an s whole. Mike Muendane noted that:

The contribution of Pixley ka Isaka Seme is immeasurable. To start with, there would never have been any organization such as the African National Congress at the time it was created and in the form that it was; this would probably even have delayed the attainment of our freedom and indeed the freedom of the rest of the continent, not least because the ANC was the first liberation movement on the continent of Africa (Muendane 2008:2).

So, like his ideas, his work was for the liberation of the whole of the African continent. It was Pan-Africanist.

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<sup>15</sup> Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

## **Community Development**

Another contribution that Seme made was to see the connection between politics, law, land ownership and economic empowerment. This was demonstrated when he formed the African Farmers Association through which he mobilized marginalized black people, who were cramped and abused in farms, and encouraged them to buy fertile land, build their own settlements and do business farming. Through this association he bought large tracts of fertile land for Africans. A case in hand is the Daggakraal settlement in Mpumalanga. Selope Tema (1953: 12) records that:

He set up African Farmers Associations and an African settlement in Daggakraal in the Eastern Transvaal which gave impetus to the buying of land by Africans in the Transvaal. The Daggakraal settlement caused consternation among neighboring farmers, who declared that unless the buying of land by natives was restricted South Africa would never be a white men's country. Indeed it was not exaggeration that it was the Daggakraal settlement which precipitated the Native Land Act of 1913.

The issue of land is still a bone of contention in the democratic South Africa. The government, through the Department of Land Affairs has been trying to redistribute land amongst South Africa, to reverse the legacy of apartheid where 80% of the land was given to white minority, whilst leaving the black majority stuck in a small portion of land. The fact that even today over seven decades after Seme's death the land is still a thorny issue in South Africa proves, the visionary leader that Seme was. In the words of Tim Couzens,

The voice of Seme, the pioneer, newsman, the guardian of land tenure, the founder of African attorneys, the founder of the South African liberation movement, should speak to us even alter a century and his hand should reach out to nudge our memories, lest we forget again! (Couzens & Rive 1993:7).

From this we can see Seme as a man of vision and energy dedicated to the liberation of his people not only politically but also economically. The fact that his activities led to the enactment of new laws to prevent Africans from

buying land reveals the collusion between law and politics which ultimately lead to the oppression or disempowerment of people.

### **Seme and the Mentoring of the Youth for Leadership**

Seme had confidence in the youth, which he demonstrated by mentoring Lembede and launching him onto legal and political platforms. Mike Muendane has noted that:

When this noble Seme could not continue to wield influence on his contemporaries because some of them could not fully understand, appreciate or fathom his vision of an Africa that was free, united and the centre of art and science, he realized that the best option was to approach it through the youth. The youth had nothing to unlearn, while Seme's contemporaries had to unlearn the colonial mentality that drives darkness from the land (2008:3).

His last significant contribution was when he took Anton Muziwakhe Lembede (1914-1947) under his wing so that he could do his law articles, and then relinquished the ownership of his law firm to him. Lembede is credited with being the father of Black consciousness in South Africa. Holland notes that Lembede was 'hostile to whites, despising the eagerness with which blacks tried to emulate them'. He was not 'himself preying to the temptations of smart clothing and material status symbols, which he identified as the root cause of the black people's sense of inadequacy' (in Holland 1998:42). Lembede would advocate black pride. He would say, 'Look at my skin, It is black like the soil of mother Africa. It is the black man's duty not to allow himself to be swamped by the doctrines of inferiority' (Holland 1998:42). Seme's protégé advocated a philosophy of African exclusivism. He argued that, 'Africa is a black man's country, Africans are the natives of Africa, and they have inhabited Africa, their Motherland, from time immemorial: Africa belongs to them' (in Holland 1998:42).

Lembede would go on to work with Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo to form the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) for which he was president. Although Seme was more conservative and



accommodative of whites compared to his younger colleague Lembede, he marvelled at his intelligence to a point of selling his law firm to him as one who would run with the baton of the freedom of his people and the project of the regeneration of the African continent. Unfortunately Lembede died at the relatively young age of 33. Like Lembede, Seme had been a committed Africanist. He once observed 'I yearn for the glory of Africa that is lost and I shall strive to restore it with what remains of my life' (Muendane 2008: 4).

### **Facilitation of Independence of Other African Countries**

Another contribution that Seme made, which has been underplayed, is the role he played as advisor to the British protectorates of Lesotho and Swaziland, helping them to negotiate their concessions, the return of their land from white settlers and finally in gaining their independence. Seme worked hard as the advisor to King Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, helping him to draft documents and appeals on how he could gain power over his people and undermine the British high commissioner who ruled the country on behalf of the British Empire. His other commitment was in Swaziland, where he became legal advisor first to the Regent Prince Malunge ka Mbandzeni, then to the Queen mother Labotsibeni (after Malunge died) and later to the young king Sobhuza (Matsebula 1988:204). Unlike the monarchies from the other protectorates, Seme became very close to the Swazi royal house, advising the king and helping him to write petitions to the British leaders, and ended up by accompanying the Swazi delegation to England to negotiate the independence of the country (Matsebula 1988:231). Seme became the glue that brought together the traditional leaders of the South African tribes and the ANC. Therefore it is not surprising that when he needed funds to establish the ANC newspaper *Abantu/Batho* he spoke to the Queen Regent of Swaziland Labotsibeni Nxumalo who donated an amount of \$3,000. Seme used this paper to highlight the plight of the black people so that they could receive sympathy from those who could help. An example of this was the Swazi situation where he began to write about their issues in the paper, building a case for their concessions that had been taken over by the British. Hildah Kuper puts it this way, 'In it (*Abantu/Batho*) he gave *inter alia* publicity to the Swazi grievances against concessionaires and steadily helped build up a

case that Sobhuza would eventually present before the courts' (1978: 46).

In 1922 and 1924, in his capacity as the Swazi nation's attorney and legal advisor to the royal family, he accompanied the then Paramount chief of Swaziland King Sobhuza to England to present the grievances of the Swazi people to the High Commissioner. He was responsible for drafting the petition, an eighteen page document, where the royal family raised their grievances against the way the empire was treating them and started calling for independence. His contribution to the liberation of these African countries was not forgotten. This was confirmed by his daughter who said:

My father died in June 1951; nineteen years later in 1968 Swaziland gained its independence. The king of Swaziland, Sobhuza, invited me to be part of the independence celebrations, to witness when the British government handed the country back to its rightful owners arguing that my father had made the independence possible. Unfortunately he had died without witnessing that day. I was treated with respect and I felt proud of the work that he had done for the Swazi people (Ellen Seme, same interview).

As if that was not enough, Seme, on behalf of Sobhuza, bought a six-stand plot at Sophiatown, where a big house was built to accommodate the Swaziland Branch of the African National Congress. Sobhuza himself used to come to this house once a year (Kuper 1978:101). The house was adjacent to one that was owned by King Dinuzulu ka Solomon, king of the Zulus. Seme also worked for Tswana chiefs, representing them in their own case of working for their liberation and constituting their own governing structures (Kuper 1978:176). His work in Swaziland affirms Seme's commitment to the liberation not only of the black people within the South Africa borders, but rather of the African people as a whole. He is seen as someone who reached out to other African ethnic groups and labored for their freedom. His view of the liberation of the African people went beyond the South Africa borders, a point further illustrated by the way in which his speeches and dreams were later invoked by leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah and others when they embarked in the liberation project of the African people. This presents us with evidence that Seme's broader vision and work was the freedom of the African continent against the oppression and negative impact of the empire.

## **Lessons from Seme's Legacy**

There are a number of lessons that can be picked up from Seme's legacy that would benefit not only the South African society but the continent of Africa as a whole as it seeks to liberate itself from the trappings of bad governance, dictatorship, ethnic wars, poverty and economic disempowerment by the West. Democracy as it is in the west has struggled to adapt in the South and it is possible that a new form of democracy that takes into account traditional forms of leadership can provide a solution if we accommodate some of the forms of African traditional leadership as Seme did. Ethnicity is one of the problems facing not only the continent, but here in South Africa we have recently witnessed xenophobic attacks and we constantly live in fear that they might come back to haunt us. Seme's teaching was that such ethnic violence was bound not only to destroy those who are the immediate victims, but Africa as a whole. Seme held together politics and religion in a creative tension. The same religion that had been used to colonize Africa was turned around and used for his advantage. Seme made use of these connections to go to the US and Oxford where he got the best education, making him one of the finest African lawyers in South Africa. Education is liberation and religious communities need to contribute to the education of the poor and marginalized people of Africa so that they can reach their fullest potential and ultimately contribute to the liberation of us all. Seme teaches us that religion can be used for liberation and empowerment of the people. Politics and religion in creative tension contribute to the development of democracy and human progress.

## **Seme's Weaknesses**

### ***Uncritical Acceptance of African Traditional Leaders***

Seme emerged at a period when the collaboration between the magistrate's office, the merchant's business and the missionary's stations had made its appearance in black communities and had eroded the traditional powers of chiefs and traditional system of leadership. His was convinced that Africa could make a contribution in the development of the world meant that he invested a lot of effort in involving the traditional leadership structures and systems in the ANC and also in work that he was doing. For him African systems of governance needed to be retrieved as assets that could add value

in the development of a democratic society. Therefore it is not surprising that he invited chiefs to the Bloemfontein conference and even his address started by saluting them. Some African intellectuals have criticized Seme that by choosing to work with through traditional leaders he was shortsighted about the kind of leadership needed to take the African struggle forward which would better be carried through intellectuals than traditional chiefs (Masilela 2003:14).

### ***Exclusion of Women's Issues in the Struggle***

Another weakness in Seme's legacy is the fact that he does not seem to have appreciated the oppression suffered by African women, nor did he appreciate the contribution they had made in the development of Africa. In all his speeches starting with the 'The Regeneration of Africa' for which he got an award, to the one he delivered during the inauguration of the ANC, there is no mention of women. Therefore it is not surprising that when the ANC was formed in 1912, women were excluded from membership until the following year. This is in spite of the fact that there were women of impeccable credentials such as Nokuthela Dube, Charlotte Maxeke and others who deserved membership because of their contribution to the struggle for the rights of the Africans.<sup>16</sup> Charlotte Maxeke was the first African women to qualify with a Bachelor of Science degree from an American University, had been the key person in the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa, and had started a number of schools including the Wilberforce Institution at Sharpeville in the Transvaal. Seme and his colleagues were trapped in the patriarchal tendencies of their culture which ignored women's experience of triple-oppression and their ability to contribution in the liberation of the African people. It can be said that Seme was a child of his own time when it comes to issues of gender equality.

However there is a need for us to build on his ideas in spite of the fact that there are weaknesses that we can see. We cannot of course build on his ideas and complete his dream unless we stick assiduously to the foundation he left for us. We may of course differ on the methods but not on the fundamentals. These fundamentals are consciousness of self as Africans,

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<sup>16</sup> See also R. Simangaliso Kumalo 2012. *Pastor and Politician*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, p. 61.

instead of according to colour, self-determination of the African people, the restoration of land, unity of tribes into nationhood and the unity of the continent. We must identify the progressive forces associated with Seme's dream and work towards unity of purpose. To unite with the enemies of Seme's ideals to fight other progressive forces is treachery and will destroy the gains of the liberation struggle that Pixley ka Isaka Seme envisioned and committed to.

## **Conclusion**

Unlike many of the leaders of the ANC and the struggle for liberation in South Africa who have been commemorated through the use of their names in naming roads, public buildings and institutions but very people hold Pixley ka Isaka Seme's name in high esteem. This article has highlighted the need for Seme's legacy to be celebrated and his name to be honored. In spite of the shortcomings that Seme might have had in his career, this article has demonstrated that he made a tremendous contribution to the liberation of South Africa. It has also demonstrated that his ideas focused not just on South African society but on the continent and the world as a whole. It brings our attention to the fact that Seme is one of the earliest African leaders to work for the regeneration of Africa, which is now popularly known as the 'African Renaissance'. It also adds value to the debate on land redistribution and development in South Africa as it retrieves knowledge about how Seme sought to address these critical issues in the early days of the ANC. This article is just a small limited contribution to the legacy of Pixely ka Isaka Seme.

Indeed this article attempts to create a place of honor for Seme's name in the history of South Africa, for the rest of the continent, as well as for present and future generations who will have to tell the story of liberation and the heroes who were behind it. Future leaders needs to be reminded that Seme stood for a unique civilization which has its roots, aspirations and bias towards Africa and the development of its people. Remembering Seme must enable a the development of a new narrative that encourages the building of a new nation, one that is founded on the cultural and intellectual assets that Africa possesses, that were articulate in Seme's award winning speech on the regeneration of Africa. This must be so, especially if something new is to

come out of Africa, as Plinny noted '*Ex Africa semper aliquid Novi*'. Africa has to bring something new rather than mimicking the empire.

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Simanga Kumalo	Sicelo Seme	21 October 2008	Inanda
Simanga Kumalo	Vezigama Seme	21 October 2008	Inanda
Simanga Kumalo	Ellen Seme	18 February 2009	Ulundi

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# **Applicability of Translatability Theory to European Missionary Masculinity Performance in Africa: Contestations and Reflections**

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## **Abstract**

The article argues that the process of translation was deeply entrenched in the European missionaries' masculinity/ies ideological and political interpretation of Christian faith which was transposed into African worldviews. In this way, translation was not an innocent endeavour but was fraught with European gender and imperial ideologies as a given necessity for Christianity and as part and parcel of the gospel message for the African people. The article therefore proposes a way forward for emancipating African masculinities in African Christianity in the context of gender justice and equality.

**Keyword:** Kwame Bediako, African Christianity, Missionary Masculinity, Translatability, African Masculinities, Culture

## **Introduction**

Kwame Bediako is numbered among the pioneers of African Theology. His work which is of great interest for this article centres on the African culture's contribution to the affirmation of African Christian identity in the midst of historical context of political and economic struggles. Bediako demonstrated that Christianity in Africa has become part of African religion and culture



which also acts as an interpretive category for its authenticity. It is this succinct observation that raised the interest to study the development of African Theology. Our encounters with Bediako have been insightful both through his various published works and in person when he was appointed as an Honorary Professor in the School of Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (now the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics). Yet Bediako became internationally renowned following publication of his seminal 1995 book, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-western Religion*. Isabel Phiri, who was the director of African Theology in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, used this book as key text in her postgraduate class on African Theology in 2009 in which Chammah Kaunda and Kennedy Owino participated as Honours and Master of Theology students respectively. One of the requirements for the students was to read this book from cover to cover and make a critical book review. Thus, in this article the aim is to continue this conversation with Bediako on the key translatability motif as an overview of his theology.

To engage Bediako's thinking fruitfully, the article is situated within the ongoing conversations in African Christian theology and African women theologies. Of significant in this conversation is the applicability of translatability to gendered questions in relation to issues of masculinity/ies. Within this framework the intention is to ask fresh questions from the past for the modern African era. Bediako (1992: xii) believed that:

It is possible to ask fresh questions of the Christian tradition of the past, questions which can in turn illuminate the task of constructing local theologies and the doing of theology in our religious pluralistic modern world.

Bediako invites African scholars to consider the implications of modern history of Christianity in Africa and how it intersects with global Christian faith for constructing local theologies. Some pertinent questions for this endeavour may be raised: to what extent did the 19<sup>th</sup> century European missionary process of translating Christian faith in African worldview take into cognisance European gender ideological and political worldview? To what extent did the European missionaries self-perception as 'enlightened, superior and civilised' masculinities inform the process of translating Christian faith in a context such as Africa where men were perceived as

‘primitive, un-civilised and labelled as boys (immature)’? There are no easy answers to these questions but are raised here as a contribution to an on-going discussion on the issues of masculinities within African Theology.

## **The European Missionaries’ Masculinities: Framing the Topic**

Bediako (1992:163) suggests that ‘any absolutisation of the pattern of Christianity’s transmission should consequently be avoided and the nature of Christian history itself be re-examined’. It appears that Bediako was grappling with the terms applied to the great commission related to concepts of ‘conversion’ and ‘disciplining’ of the nations. For instance, he argues that:

Applied to Christian history, the terms of the great commission ... would lead to the realisation that no Christian history anywhere ever ceases to be a missionary history—a history of conversion, a history of the constant seeking and application of the mind of Christ to the issues and questions within a particular context, culture or nation ... (Bediako 1992:165).

Emerging from this observation, European missionaries ‘masculinities can only be understood from historical perspective. Hilde Nielssen (2007:48) argues that to understand the white fathers’ construction of their masculinities should be seen in relation to the forms of knowledge production and consumption which formed a part of the cultural production of colonial era. This is in line with the observation by Newton Brandt (2006:39) who affirms that as we reflect on masculinity at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is imperative that we look back and analyse the general trends, ideas, ideals and traditions which functioned as substratum for Western missionaries’ self-understanding.

Analysing the white fathers’ masculinities requires that translation of Christian beliefs, traditions and practices be engaged through examining their endeavour. To this task we begin by asking the question: in what ways did the European missionaries translate their masculinities among their converts in Africa? Are there ways in which European missionaries’ process of conversion and ‘discipleship’ was accompanied by translation of their masculinities into African men thereby colonising them?

To understand patterns of European missionary masculinities there is a need to look back over the period in which they evangelised among African people. The European missionaries came to Africa in the period in which ‘racial’ superiority and the notion of imperialism became a patriotic necessity (Beynon 2002: 47). John Beynon (2002:35) notes that during this period masculinity was associated with mobility, toughness, and adventurousness a ‘manly virtue’ that was a prerequisite for Christian inter-cultural missions. It is to this fact that Noll mentions the need for ‘counting the cost’ as regards to cross-cultural expansion and that missions did not take place without a high cost (Noll 2000: 283). Thus, the martyrology (list of martyrs and other saints) of these centuries of Christian missions in relation to ‘Christian men’ crossing frontiers to spread the gospel was to a certain extent a story of masculine toughness that despite the premature deaths of missionaries that was an endless recital in the West, men still gave their lives abroad for the endeavours of Christian missions. This in itself indicates that social, religious and cultural beliefs that could have surrounded missionary gender ideologies in specific historical conditions might have been inseparable from the translation process. To engage Bediako further on this, it is important to examine his argument on the theory of translatability by highlighting some of its contentions.

### **Delineating the Theory of Translatability**

Scholars have framed Christianity in universal terms which ideally mean that Christianity both transcends and is culturally bound for assimilation and appropriation (Bediako 1995: 123; Sanneh 1983:165-166). In this sense, Christianity as translatable refers to its ability to ‘be articulated, received, appropriated and reproduced into potentially infinite number of cultural contexts’ (Tennet 2010: 325). Lamin Sanneh (1993: 73) argues that Christianity is ‘essentially translated religion linguistically and theologically’, and this is the basis of its ‘relevance and accessibility’ to any persons in any culture where it is transmitted and assimilated (Bediako 1995: 109). Sanneh (1993:167) further argues that:

Translation assumed that the abstract ‘word of God’ would find its true destiny when embodied in concrete local idiom, lending credence to the

theological insight that the ‘word of God’ had always carried the burden of the incarnation, and that its historical manifestation in Jesus Christ concentrated and made visible a process that is occurring throughout history.

In other words, Christian faith finds its habitation and locus in the receptor culture through the process of indigenous assimilation and appropriation. In this regard, Sanneh (1993) stresses that Christian faith in Africa has not expanded at the expense of African religio-cultural values because the missionaries had no control or possession over its assimilation. For him, the missionaries were unable to be bias through the process of translation. Tinyiko Maluleke (1996) feels that this observation is debatable. He thinks that a rational desire to disentangle Christianity from the outworking of colonialism and imperialism does not erase the painful experiences of those who were at the receiving end of religio-cultural and political suppression and economic exploitation. This argument shows that translatability as a concept is a contested phenomenon. Four aspects can be identified from the above:

The first is Christianity is intrinsically translatable. Scholars contend that translatability theory is intrinsically the nature of Christianity. It is the basis for the universality of Christianity (Bediako 1995; Sanneh 1983). According to Bediako (1995), what is significant about Christian faith is that it takes on new forms and shapes as it incarnates in various cultures. In this sense translation is seen as being the inherent ability and vulnerability of the Christian faith in that the Gospel becomes one with the receptor’s culture. The ultimate example of translatability is therefore the incarnation of Jesus who is perceived as becoming a human being at a particular time and in a specific socio-cultural and historical human reality.

The second point that Bediako and Sanneh make is that translatability is not just a translation of languages but also a translation of concepts and ideologies. This means that translation is more than the act of textual message translated from one language to another. Rather, it is also a translation of concepts, ideologies, meanings and world-views. Unfortunately, Sanneh and Bediako seem to view translation like a robotic and mechanical process were the passive missionaries’ witnessed Christian faith extracting itself in its purity from their cultures and translating itself into Africa cultures. When we understand that translatability is a political ideology, then we begin to

understand that the missionaries utilised translation to achieve total control of the African mind and render them subservient to colonial domination and exploitation. For instance, in her research on translation of the Setswana Bible, Musa Dube (1999) insists that translation has often been used as an instrument of colonizing spaces and minds as the colonised begun to read the Bible in their own languages imbued with their subjugators' world-view and value systems. For Dube (1999: 41) translation was a nightmare planted in African cultural space, warning African Christians to detest from 'dangerous and deadly beliefs' of African cultures. It is a highly volatile theory laden process fraught with ideological and political endeavours that are concealed with personal interests and notions of power. Sanneh and Bediako seem to depict the process of translation of Christian faith like an innocent endeavour (Katongole 2005; Maluleke 1997; Ngodji 2010; Dube 1999). Birgit Meyer (1999:85) in her research among the Ewe people of Ghana discovered that the missionaries through translation constructed the Ewe culture and religious systems as 'heathendom' and implicated the Ewe people's personal conception. Meyer (1999:85) then argues that 'by diabolising Ewe religion as a whole, the moral entailed by it were declared satanic and inappropriate for Christians'. On the one hand, Meyer believes that the way the missionaries presented themselves as standard for Christian life, in turn had a great deal of influence on African converts' perception of Christian life who mimicked European missionaries' notions of political authority, economic power and male-dominance as was presented by European male missionaries as ideal masculinities.

Such an argument highlights the need to understand translation as much more than a technical translation of words and idioms from one language into another, rather the process itself is controlled by the translators who also have unconscious biases and often read their projected meanings in the translated idioms. The translator may also project their particular world-views, feelings, values, practices, beliefs and theo-ideological orientations in the process of translation. Maluleke (1996:9) rightly argues that 'a constructive way forward is not to attempt a denial' of missionaries' imposition of their cultural values and translating their world-views and ideologies in their proclamation of Christianity in Africa.

Thirdly, Sanneh and Bediako underline that African people assimilated and appropriated the Christian faith on their own terms and this

provided them with resources to occasion their liberation and social transformation, where colonialism had conceived to destroy their cultural life and heritage. Sanneh (1989: 1993) believes translation worked against both missionaries' cultural domination and colonial suppression and exploitation. Emmanuel Katongole (2002:215) thinks that the Sanneh and Bediako's idea of 'indigenous assimilation' is significant because it shows that Africans were not passive victims in mission but active agents who shaped Christianity according to their contextual needs and cultural experiences. This does not in any way sanction Sanneh and Bediako's seemingly perception of Christian faith like an independent entity unaffected by the carriers and completely protected from human manipulation. The fact that Christianity is translatable and indigenously assimilated does not in any way eliminate the crucial role of the missionaries in corrupting and destroying the value systems of African cultures (Maluleke 1997). The systematic destruction of the indigenous inhabitants and their way of life can therefore be only understood in interrogating imperial power at the disposal of the translators. Robert Young (2003:144) notes that in *the Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon (1963) write of how Europeans translated black Africans into 'natives' 'and inscribed with the schizoculture of colonialism as devalued other'. They were decerebralization and 'made to see themselves as alienated from their own culture, language and land' (Young 2003:145). The process of translating black African did not begin with the translation of the Bible but translation of the people themselves as 'a copy of the original' European people (Young 2003: 139). The European missionaries sought to redefined and translate African way of life in European lifestyle. However, Sanneh (1989:51) and Bediako (1995:119-120) are right in their affirmation that translatability empowered African Christians to resist against the Western missionaries hegemony. Translatability in this case is understood as a catalyst for transformation and a key aspect in African struggle for emancipation.

Fourth, Christianity is an African religion hence it is now indigenous religion. Bediako (1995:123) persuasively argue that 'it is only by a serious misconception that we call it [Christianity] a Western religion'. There is something misleading about this assertion, especially when it is put under the microscope of the various researches that have been done on translation as demonstrated by Musa Dube (1999), Birgit Meyer (1999) and Martin Ngodji (2010). Some African scholars such as Katongole (2002:215) do not support this logic on two grounds: First, he detects that the language and logic of

translatability is not new, it has been propagated by missionaries and only serves to promote a presumed universality. Second, he affirms Maluleke's (1996) reluctance that the foreignness of Christianity cannot be resolved at an intellectual level, however sophisticated it might be because the empirical evidence suggests that African people continue to experience the foreignness of Christianity in their weekly Sunday worship. The contention over the indigeneity of Christianity poses a question whether translatability is a onetime event with a definite ending in the past or a process that leads to indigeneity? It seems that translating the Bible into the vernacular languages did not completely decolonize Christianity from the Western worldview. Both Maluleke (1996) and Katongole (2002) are under the impression that Sanneh and Bediako's attempt to prove the 'non-foreignness' of Christianity utilising the notion of translatability rest at an ambiguous premises and is not plausible. Thus, Ngodji (2010) stresses that in evaluating any translation; the agency of the translator should be put under scrutiny for they can easily manipulate the translation to fix into it their own agenda and endeavours. Ngodji (2010: 53-54) uncovers some of the current issues posing serious challenges to the Bible translation in Africa. Issues such as using gender sensitive language and HIV and AIDS remain at the fringes of Bible translation. Nevertheless, if we affirm Maluleke's (1996) assumption that Sanneh and Bediako as a merely proposing a mechanism whereby the search to unhinge Christianity from colonialism could finally be established, two issues can be raised: first translatability continues to happen at various levels in African Christianity. Second, Bediako's theory of translatability did not take into serious account the potential nature at which for instance, the translations of gender ideologies become apparent in the process of theological and linguistic assimilation. This raises a question: to what extend is translatability theory applicable in engaging a gendered analysis of masculinity/ies and in what ways does translatability emerge as a continuous process in African Christianity?

## **Contours in Theorising European Missionary Constructs of Masculinities**

The contestation on translatability theory requires bringing on board the gender dynamics of the theory. It is worth noting that African women

theologians levelled accusations against African male theologians for ignoring gender injustice in their theology of liberation (Phiri 1997; Njoroge 1997; Oduyoye 2002). To a certain extent Bediako's theory of translation could be categorised under such 'gender wanting' African scholarship. Thus, we seek to relate concepts of masculinity and hegemony to translatability theory by examining three issues as follows:

First, it is significant to understand masculinity/ties. Here masculinity refers to a specific gender identity belonging to individuals who have specific experiences of what it means to be a male person (Morrell 2001; Connell 2000; Whitehead 2002). According to Beynon (2002:56), masculinity is viewed as a set of practices into which individual men are inserted with reference to upbringing, family, area, work and sub-cultural influence. Hence, in the light of these definitions, masculinity/ties are an outcome when men configure their identities in diverse environments of social, cultural, religious, political and economic factors. These are variables that impact men as they seek to assert their masculine sense of self in the process of identity construction. Thus, there is no uniform masculinity but a multiplicity of masculinities. In fact, it is now accepted to employ the term 'masculinities' to match the cultural constructions and expressions of masculinity.<sup>1</sup> The conception of masculinities, as captured by Beynon (2002:2), entails that men are not born with masculinity as part of their genetic make-up; rather it is something into which they are acculturated and which is composed of social codes of behaviour which they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways. For the purpose of this article, the definitions are drawn from two sociologists of masculinity Stephen M. Whitehead and Frank J. Barrett (2001: 15) who argue that:

the nearest that we can get to an 'answer' is to state that masculinities are those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organisational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine. So, masculinities exist as both a positive, inasmuch as they

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<sup>1</sup> Since there is no monolithic masculinities but 'masculinities' not all men have the same form of masculinity but a number of masculinities exist along a wide spectrum which comes to existence as men act (Morrell 2001: 4).



### *Applicability of Translatability Theory to Missionary Masculinity*

offer some means of identity signification for males, and as a negative, inasmuch as they are not the 'other' (feminine).

This shows that culture is not only imperative in examining how men seek to enact their masculine sense of self but also, equally central to re-examine is the 'religious cultures' and traditions as a process which men and women throughout history have engaged to understand their gendered lives. Christian theology and traditional beliefs as a 'sub-cultural influence' have formed a set of gender ideologies that are constantly being reproduced (and translated).

Second, the concept of hegemony as it applies to the studies of masculinities describes and differentiates diverse masculinities taking different forms. Connell (2000) examining the definite of social relations within masculinities argues that there are relations of power and hierarchy. There are dominant and others are subordinate or marginalised masculinities. He (2000:77) defines the concept of 'hegemony' in this way:

The concept of 'hegemony', deriving from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women.

Sociologists have unveiled that not only do hegemonic masculinities applies to male domination over women, but also exert equally dominance over other forms of masculinities (McClintock 1995; Morell 2001; Connell 2002; Mbembe 2006; Lusher & Robins 2009; Mutekwa 2013). Empirical evidence suggests that 'hegemonic masculinity', as a form of masculinity that is currently ascendant and dominant, is constructed not only in relation to femininities but also in relation to subordinated and marginalised masculinities (Messner 1995). This defines successful ways of 'being a man' in particular contexts at a specific time.

Third, is the issue of hegemony and missionary masculinities? The

question of what constituted an ideal masculine identity among European missionaries in Africa leads to examination of what must have informed the construction of masculinities among European missionaries in modern period and how the resultant forms of masculinities were evident in their mission practices in Africa. However, one setback that we encounter is: how do we weigh or ideologically measure the European missionary character as relates to Bediako's theory of translatability? To address this concern, we argue that missionary masculinities were hegemonic masculinities.

The term 'hegemonic missionary masculinities' is one that has no popularity even though we intend to engage with this further within the context of Christian missions. The missionary adventure like its colonial counterpart was largely undertaken by European white males. Thus it was essentially a patriarchal mission adventure (McClintock 1995; Connell 2000; Mutekwa 2009, 2013; Tjelle 2014). Achille Mbembe (2006: 169) argues that 'the war between races was constructed as a war between men, but a war in which the main assets were women's bodies'. It is therefore not out of line to classified European missionary masculinities as hegemonic masculinity because the male missionaries themselves publicly presented their masculinities as ascended and dominant group of men and in a leading positions within the context of Christian missions in Africa during modern colonial period (Tjelle 2010, 2014). Kristin Tjelle (2010:3) noted on the mission field in Africa, the 'original and idealistic idea of a Christian brotherhood' between European missionaries and African pastors was abandoned by missionaries. Tjelle (2010:3) discovered that the notion of Christian brotherhood 'was replaced by an ideology of a father-son relationship between the white missionary and the black pastor, where the latter was understood as a youth who had not yet reached the level of manhood'. The missionaries functioned within the political paradigm of the colonizers that bequeathed boy masculinities on African men. As such, though their superior masculine sense of self as men perceived African women and men as subordinate and inferior within the context of Christian missions. The missionaries defined African masculinities as 'primitive' which were to be aided from un-civilization into civilized era (Reeser 2010:151). African men were perceived 'as full of libido and pre-civilized' because their gender and racial category were classified as underdeveloped and as such African men were categorised as boys (Reeser 2010:152; see also Mutekwa 2013). The modern prevalent idea of muscularity in Africa are

implicitly linked to 19<sup>th</sup> century European missionaries and colonialists definition of what meant to be a man which negated African own definition of manliness. Two observations can be derived from this: The first, and central to the thesis of this article is the observation that Christianity emerged and to a large extent was presented as a 'Western', muscular and manly faith and as such Christ was presented in masculine terms. In the way the missionaries presented Christian faith were gender overtones through which linguistic and theological ideas easily found penetration in the translation process. This established a departure point from which Christianity was perceived as superior religion. The perception that Christianity was superior created a nostalgic mind-set among European missionaries that at no value was the Christian faith to strike a negotiation and dialogue with any African 'primal' and traditional religions in that they were deemed as 'pagan' and 'primitive'. In this case, the thinking of the European missionaries towards the African world was influenced by their European sub-cultural thought that Christianity was superior and equal to none and that missionaries masculinities were in themselves superior and civilised and African masculinities savagery and uncivilised. This also shows that European missionaries defined Christianity as monotheistic religion. This resulted in missionaries' hostility and suspicious toward other religions and ways of life.

Even though Bediako has explicitly argued that Christianity is now 'a non-western religion' on the basis that Christian religion is translatable into non-Western context, the struggle to remain to what extent can translation be regard as an innocent endeavour which can epistemologically delinked from the influence of European missionaries hegemonic masculinities. The fact that African Christians did not discard most Western value-settings as the basis of assimilating the Christian faith is an indication that some translations of the gospel message were very Eurocentric. Hence, translatability as an appropriate historical framework is questionable on the nature through which missionaries masculinities persisted as hegemonic and Africans in this case perceived as subordinate at the receiving end.

The second reason is difficult to separate between the relationship of Christian missions and imperialism. Paul Gundani (2004) narrates this double sided undistinguished nature of imperialism and Christian missions by indicating that it is precisely because of the special relationship that existed between the cross and the crown that we treat missionaries and traders as bedfellows in their sojourn to Africa. They shared the same faith and world-

view, and bore one mandate from the crown. The argument is that the process of colonial domination embedded violence was evident in African colonies and was deeply entrenched in the process of missionaries approach to evangelisation which undergirded the basis of translation of Christian faith into local cultures. The question is: in what ways did such confusion convict and guide the views and hegemonic attitudes of the missionaries in the process of translation? Gundani (2004: 300) observes:

The superiority complex was a by-product of centuries of European prejudice about Africa. Fantasy and fiction about Africa was an integral element of the perception embedded in the European mind of the Middle ages. The missionary and trader found themselves victim to this perception. A fixation with evil prevented the missionaries from seeing that God had been to Africa before them.

Although this is a fact that Bediako (1995) refutes, it leaves a desire to re-examine the issue. The fact that Africans sort not only for political independence but also for spiritual freedom is enough evidence that conversion through translation of the Christian faith went side by side with the imposition of Western cultural hegemony. The missionary hegemony was clearly seen in its resultant suppression of African indigenous thought patterns by labelling them as ‘primitive, uncivilised, barbaric and of pagan origin’. This was done on the basis of articulating Christocentric claims of Christianity through the European cultural lenses as the criteria through which an African person must abandon their Africanness.

## **Way Forward for Articulating Masculinities in African Christianity**

Finally, three abstractions can be suggested as way forward in an ongoing process of translation of Christianity faith into concrete African idioms.

The first is there is an urgent need to decolonise African masculinities. As highlighted above, many African men are now trapped in the masculinities that were introduced by European missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The articulation of masculine domestic domination, economic control and exclusively male public leadership represent a double-

colonization for African women who were disempowered by both European missionaries and colonialist and African men. Although these masculinities have been critiqued by women, there is still a need for decolonising them. The decolonization of African masculinities will require not only a restructuring of the way African men are to conceptualise themselves, but also the ways in which African masculinities can be gendered so that they do not reproduce pre-colonial power relations. The argument is that if missionaries' hegemonic masculinities were the organizing principle that structured African masculinities through translation, then any attempts at decolonization and theorising the possibilities implied by the notion of African masculinities must take account the missionary-colonial 'context in which these particular subjectivities' were constructed (Matahaera-Atariki 1999:111). In the words of Frantz Fanon (1963: 2):

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men .... Decolonization, therefore, implies the urgent need to thoroughly challenge the [missionary-colonial] situation.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to rethink missions as gender reconciliation. A theology of Christian missions must begin with an understanding that mission is a mission of God—*Missio Dei*, in which women and men are called, first and foremost to the ministry of gender reconciliation in partnership with God. Women and men are called to take part in Christian mission in partnership as agents of God's missions in the world. Women and men are sacred before God and their gender subjectivities and identities must be affirmed as sacred relationship with each other. The mission of God is a mission of justice and such a mission of gender justice and demands mutually respectful and loving partnership between women and men. This approach to missions seeks to curb the gender imbalance that was introduced and reinforced by missionaries in certain African receptor cultures, a phenomenon most common in some cases where missionary hegemony has persisted. A mission endeavour which begins with a

worldview that those at the ‘receiving’ end have nothing in common with the ‘message carriers’ (who are in fact part of God’s mission) stands the risk of a dangerous theology of missions that will not withstand confrontation and aggression, a factor that contributes to failure. The arrogance that missions is primarily about bringing salvation and redemption to godless Africans who must emulate European lifestyle is the resulting Euro-centric mono-cultural missionary attitudes that could not escape the temptation of seeking to translate Western Christian values as part of the Christian faith. This is a fact that African people are still battling with even to the present age.

Third, the task of the African church is to challenge and critically, innovatively and creatively reclaim and reconstitute some life-giving and affirming aspects of African traditional models of masculinities within the context of emerging paradigms of life-giving-affirming-and-preserving masculinities informed by human rights and gender justice and equality. Speaking as an African woman theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2002) contends that a church that consistently ignores the implications of the gospel for the lives of women—and others of underclass—cannot continue to be an authentic voice for salvation. She (2002:97) further argues that ‘not until that we can say that what hurts women also hurts the entire Body of Christ, will we in truth be able to speak of “one Body”’. The history of mission in Africa has been one of male superiority and dominance that were reinforced through translation of gender ideologies under missionary hegemony as part of the Christian faith.

## **Conclusion**

This article looked at four key principles that underline Bediako’s translatability theory as engaged with by African theologians. It demonstrated that missionary masculinity/ies were hegemonic masculinities in that African people and cultures were perceived as subordinate to European missionaries and culture. Missionaries worked tirelessly to suppress the forms of masculinities that seemed to hinder the process of evangelisation in the quest to civilise ‘the dark continent’ with the gospel message. The Implication of missionaries’ hegemonic masculinities in mission was an ecclesial concern that either depicted the church as ‘the church for the people’ in hierarchical terms beginning with the missionaries at the apex and women relegated to the

very bottom of the pyramid. Centre to the life of the church is missions and this makes the church missional by its nature to all of God's people. To conclude in the words of Anthony Bellagamba (1992:63) who argues that:

Mission does not exist to destroy what God has done in the world through people's cultures and religions. Rather, it consists in bringing all this to perfection, in and through Christ in an explicit or implicit way.

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# Prophets never die? The Story of Bishop P.J. Masango of the St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission

Sibusiso Masondo<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Bishop Petros Masango rose to prominence at St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission and eventually became a leader of one of the splinter groups that resulted from the split that occurred after a long drawn out court battle with the founder Ma Christinah Nku. This article is an exploration of his life and teachings through the lenses of his official biographer Rev. JB Mhlongo. We explore his childhood, marriage, conversion, calling, ministry and prophecy. Mhlongo, in the title of the biography calls him the famous prophet. The theme of the spirit and its influence runs through his narrative. The story of Masango represents the failure of African Christianity to break away from the dominant western Christian paradigm when it comes to the subordination of women and according them equal status.

**Keywords:** St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission, Bishop Petros Masango, Ma Christinah Nku, prophet, South Africa, biography

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## **Introduction**

St. John's Apostolic Faith Mission belongs to the African Indigenous Church category. The church has had a protracted history of conflict and schisms. At the core of the conflict and schisms were contestations over leadership and control of the church and its resources. One of the major distinguishing features of this church is that it was founded by a woman, Ma Christinah Nku in 1939 at Evaton outside Johannesburg. In the words of anthropologist and theologian Linda Thomas,

Acting upon a vision she believed came from God, Mother Nku launched her own church, which drew upon precolonial African religious practices and imported Christianity (1999:20).

Thus making this church both African and Christian (Masondo 2001). Consistent with the politics of gender in the AICs in the 1960s and 1970s, the source of the major schism in 1971 was the non-recognition of a woman's leadership. The church constitution had a provision for an Archbishop and head of the church which was the 'senior male position of the church' (West 1975:65). Ma Nku had by-passed this provision through the appointment of her husband Lazarus Nku. The situation changed when Mr Nku died in a train accident in 1967. As long as her husband or appointee was archbishop, Ma Nku had all the power and authority. However, the situation changed with the election of PJ Masango who 'was not prepared to play second fiddle' (West 1975:67). Ma Nku then appealed to her spiritual authority but was challenged in court by Masango using the constitution of the church. The Pretoria High Court found in favour of Masango in 1971.

Mhlongo's interpretation of the church split lays a lot of the blame at the feet of Johannes Nku. He acknowledges that Ma Nku was a gifted woman who received revelations from God about the founding of the church. She even had the vision of a church building with 12 doors which was built in Evaton. On the occasion of the official opening of the building Masango had a prophecy or vision. In this prophecy he saw the building standing empty, grass growing in it and a bird flying in and out. This, he says, was not well received by those who were in attendance. Bishop Johannes Nku was said not to have been a member in good standing in the church and was not fit to be Archbishop. Bishop Masango was one of the people who voiced that opinion

and then trouble started which ended up in court. During court proceedings, it is claimed, the Holy Spirit instructed Masango to observe the gown that was worn by the trial court judge. After the trial he was told to make a gown similar to that and wear it. The gown symbolized triumph.

Mrs Christinah Nku (fondly referred to as Mme Christinah or Ma Nku), ... was born to farm labourers in the Viljoensdrift district, Helbron, and baptized in the NG Sendingkerk, troubled by ill-health and experienced visions. In her constant search for health she joined the Apostolic Faith Mission and was in contact with other Zionist leaders who had been part of the original Dowie - Le Roux congregation in the 1920s (Kruss 1985: 165).

Healing is one of the major attractions of AICs. Rev JB Mhlongo, the official biographer of Bishop Masango pointed out that St. Johns was a church for those who are ill and no one goes there willingly but through a special calling. Healing, through the use of holy water, was central to the theology and practice of the church. St. John's had become a national church and had branches in both Lesotho and Swaziland before the split in 1970, which left it divided into two factions, one led by Mrs Nku in Evaton and the other led by Bishop Petros Masango in Germiston. The source of the conflict was a leadership dispute, which ended up in the Pretoria Supreme Court, which confirmed Bishop Masango as the leader of the church. Even though the Masango faction won the case in court, they still regarded Ma Nku as their spiritual mother. Ma Nku features prominently in their prayers, sermons, and narrations of their history. She is also credited for healing and guiding Masango to become the leader that he was. According to social anthropologist Martin West, Ma Nku confirmed that 'I have saved his life, ordained and anointed him, and made him what he is today directed by the Holy Spirit' (1975:66).

Prophets, like the ancestors, are seen as mediators between the people and God. Paul Makhubu (1988:59) noted that,

The custom of not approaching the king or any senior person directly, creates the mental attitude with which an African would approach God. No ordinary man could talk to a king face-to-face. This was considered to be extremely disrespectful, and carried a heavy fine, or the death penalty, depending on circumstances. In the same way God cannot be directly approached; someone must act as a go-between.

The designation of prophet includes both the biblical prophets as well as those who were responsible for the founding and growth of St. John's. In the popular narrative of St. John's there is an acknowledgement of other prophets who came before the advent of the church and prophesied about it and its future role. For St. John's, a prophet is someone who is a seer, healer, and a spiritual parent. Theologian P. O. Abioje (2010:790) defined the prophet as 'someone who speaks divine words and engages in divine actions (such as protest activities against injustice) that can save or liberate people from oppressive and exploitative situations, and from ignorance'. Prophets are 'gifted' people with a message that would help to transform people's lives. Mhlongo articulates this point very well with the claim that Masango went to heaven where he met with three Roman Catholic bishops who showed him the suffering of the people. He was shown naked, needy weak, sick and struggling people in general. The prophet is meant to alleviate the suffering of the people and give them direction for their future. However, prophets are not the final authority but mere conduits for the message of God. Talking about God this way characterises Him to be the God of history. He is not only historical but He was active in history, shaping St. John's to be what it is today through messages and revelations given to His prophets at different times in history. Mhlongo was at pains throughout his book to say that all the revelations to the prophet (Masango) have come to pass. Because of all this evidence of reliability, people can trust his God. Mhlongo used scriptural references (Acts 12: 7-10; Peter) to indicate that this man belonged to a special class of prophets and anointed people.

### **The Prophet Masango (1906-1984)**

Geoffrey Nelson (1987: 121), echoing Max Weber's words, pointed out that prophets claim that their authority is derived directly from God. Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane of the ZCC demonstrated this attitude when he refused to be questioned by the Truth and Reconciliation during his church's submission. All questions were answered by his aides (Petersen 1999). The claim on its own is not enough as it has to be legitimated through an extraordinary narrative deeming the individual in question a special person or an anointed one. There has to be something extra-ordinary that sets this person apart from ordinary members of society. Such narratives create a

mystique around the person thus confirming that s/he has a special calling to serve people. Furthermore, the individual in question is said to be endowed with 'supernatural, superhuman or exceptional powers' (Dow 1969: 306). The prophet is able to operate outside the realm of everyday routine. His/her powers are able to defy rationality and logic. Partly, this is the attraction of this figure among the oppressed because they offer a radical solution to their problems without relying on the provisions of traditional logic. Moreover, 'by accepting or believing in the leader's extraordinary qualities, the followers legitimize his claim to their obedience' (Dow 1969: 307). The narratives are then edged into the history and tradition of the group. This is also true of church founders like Isaiah Shembe and Engenas Lekganyane. During my fieldwork in a St. John's congregation in Crossroads, Cape Town, I met an assistant pastor who claimed to have been in the company of Bishop Masango in Johannesburg. He related a number of stories about the miracles that he experienced while in his company. One of those stories was that there was a big service at Jabulani (Soweto) where Masango was officiating. It was a beautiful day and one could not spot a cloud in the sky. At about 12 noon, Masango dismissed the congregation and told them to rush home as a huge storm was coming. Immediately after that pronouncement, clouds started gathering and later heavy rain fell. This and many other stories are told by individual members to show that Masango was a unique, gifted and special person.

Mhlongo reported that Masango was born on a farm at Wakkerstroom in province of Mpumalanga on January 1, 1906. He was the second son of six boys and four girls. His parents lived on a white owned farm. The fact that he was a special person was noticed and confirmed before he was born. For anyone to make claims about prophecy, leadership or position of authority there had to be a mysterious event before they were born. While his mother was pregnant with him she saw a rainbow in the well where she fetched water. The amazing thing about her sighting of the rainbow is that it appeared when she was close to the well and when she moved away it disappeared. When she reported the matter to other people, including white owners of the farm where they stayed, she was told that she was going to give birth to someone great. After his birth he was named Ndumbela. In the Shembe narrative, Isaiah Shembe's mother is said to have swallowed a flower before he was conceived indicating that an extraordinary individual would be born. For the followers, insertions of such events in the

narrative serve to legitimize claims made by the leader.

In the childhood narrative Masango is portrayed as a special child who was constantly surrounded by the miraculous or mysterious. First, in the community there were games where all children participated. Masango used to run faster than older boys. During the race two angels appeared one on each side and carried him to run faster than other boys. Second, when playing with other boys making clay oxen, his oxen always won over others something reminiscent of the Biblical story of Moses and his snake eating up all others. Third, he was a lucky charm for his mother during the cultivating season. He was given seeds to plant and those produced higher yields. His mother even asked him to place eggs in nests of incubating hens and in his case all eggs would be hatched and produce chicks. Masango's miracles were not only evident to Black people but to white people in the area as well.

African thought conceives marriage, first and foremost, as a heterosexual union whose fundamental aim is to build a family through having children. Through this institution both men and women get onto the next level to attain full humanity. In fact marriage, 'is the acceptable social structure for transmitting life, the life that preserves the vital force of humans, families and clans' (Magesa 1998:115). Catholic theologian Laurenti Magesa (1998:116) further asserted that,

African marriage is ultimately anchored in God, the main sustainer of life, and the principal preserver and transmitter of the vital force. For this reason, much of what takes place in marriage has overtly religious characteristics and significance.

Furthermore, he described marriage as an alliance between two families thus AmaZulu call the initial processes *ukwakha isihlobo esihle* (to build good kinship).

Mhlongo claims that Masango had a vision of a woman that he was going to marry a few years before he left Wakkerstroom for Johannesburg. He had a vision of a MoSotho woman. In the vision he was told that she was in Johannesburg. When he eventually got to Johannesburg he met the woman in the vision and they got married in 1937 and had seven children. It was during this time that he got extremely ill. Mhlongo does not give any details about the circumstances of their meeting as well as their wedding. He only says that the woman's name was Seipati Annah Morotsi. She became a very



powerful figure in the church ministering alongside her husband. She is one of a few women whose names are mentioned among the prophets of the church. In the popular church narrative she is revered and affectionately referred to as Mme Annah.

Mhlongo claims that as a result of his illness Masango died and ascended to heaven. During his ascent to heaven he saw three heavens and the 7<sup>th</sup> heaven where prophets are initiated (*bethwasiswa*), and that is where he was also initiated. The fact that he underwent his initiation in heaven sets him apart from other prophets who were initiated by other prophets. While in heaven he was approached by three Roman Catholic Bishops who showed him the suffering of people on earth due to disease, ignorance and poverty. He was then instructed to return to earth in order to deliver nations in bondage. The bishops anointed him with oil and then gave him new names Petros John (after Apostles Peter and John), instead of Ndumbela. It is said that Masango testified that he felt the oil penetrating his brain and bones. His power was going to be double as embodied it both Peter and John. After his return from heaven, he had seized to be Ndumbela but he was an embodiment of Apostles Peter and John. The spirits that operated as Peter and John in the New Testament live across ages and get embodied in different bodies in different eras. Among his followers he is also affectionately referred to as the 'double engine' because of this anointing. The bishops blessed him and told him that whatever he touches will be blessed. On the third day he gained his consciousness. A word came to him saying that he must have the baptism of John at a river. He told his superiors at the American Board Organization Church but they rejected his plea. Masango, who was brought up in the American Board Church, could not find any joy in the church. He tried to explain his visions to church authorities but they either ignored him or found him irritating. In fact, '*kwahamba kwahamba basebembiza ngohlanya ngoba wayekhuluma izinto abangaziqondi* (as time went on they started calling him a mad man because they had no insight on the mysteries he was sharing)' (Mhlongo 6). As time went on leaders in his church became impatient with him. They even called him a mad man. His sister by this time was aware of the existence of Ma Nku, she encouraged his brother to go and see her at Evaton.

Masango's illness is nothing uncommon to people with an ancestral calling. Some are inflicted with illnesses that no one can detect and only become better after the acceptance of the ancestral call. Masango was ill and

had exhausted various avenues to arrest the situation but to no avail. He only got his healing after visiting and joining Ma Nku's church.

## **The Coming of the Prophet is Foretold**

The dominant Christian view is that the coming of Jesus was foretold by Isaiah and other prophets hundreds of years before. Each of the prophets gives a description of a messianic figure who will save people from oppression. The figure of the prophet is someone who is a liberator or emancipator. Because of the magnitude of Masango's gift and the work he was to carry out, his coming had to be foretold like that of Jesus. It had to be announced by renowned prophets. Mhlongo reported that the coming was foretold by Walter Matita who was the founder of the church of Moshoeshe in Lesotho and Ma Nku.

Historian Marie-Louise Martin (1964) recorded that Prophet Walter Matita (1885-1935) was born with a complete set of teeth. They were lost and he found them when died and went to heaven at age 25. On his way to heaven he went through a number of worlds. Haliburton reported that:

The pleasure loving Mattita was called from 'the quicksands of sins'. He died and went to 'where the heaven of the stars meets a higher heaven' and was questioned by seven men. He was quickly sliding towards Satan - as he tried to block his way at every opportunity. After his release from the clutches of Satan he was taken up. 'Here a court was assembled, the King on a higher throne, twenty four elders wearing golden crowns around him, four strange creatures each with four heads and five wings, and last of all Moshoeshoe and his war general Makoanyane, the two of them wearing sheepskin trousers' (Haliburton 1975:114).

The presence of Moshoeshoe and his war general on this panel is of interest as their dress is also different from these others- they represent a particularly African traditional sense. It could be interpreted that Matita was instructed to tell Africans to return to their cultural and traditional roots. While in heaven, Matita was taught by an angel how to read and write. After his return to life, he spent forty days and nights on the mountains without food. Upon his

return to his community he started preaching conversion to Christianity embracing a bulk of missionary teachings. His followers insist that he was an authentic prophet with a direct line to heaven, unlike Lekganyana and Shembe who got their healing powers from a 'famous witch-doctor at Kokstad' (1964:120).

According to Mhlongo, Matita, who never met Masango, prophesied that a prophet will come from the north with amazing powers. This prophet has a jurisdiction to work in all four corners of the earth, in other words, there is no limit to his territory. He also saw in that vision a blue belt with white trimmings- it was said to be powerful and will take over all the denominations with an exception of a few like the Roman Catholic Church. The prophecy clearly indicates that this prophet will not be confined to any specific locality as his powers were greater. Incidentally, Masango was sent by Ma Nku on Episcopal visits throughout the country and neighboring countries like Lesotho and Swaziland.

Ma Nku also prophesied that a man from the east with amazing prophetic powers would come. No person will ever work like him and the heaven will use him mightily. When Masango was brought to St. John's in 1941 it was confirmed that he was the man in the prophecy. Since he was a sick man, Ma Nku put him through all the healing and cleansing processes until he was fully restored and healthy. He also got his wish of a Johanine baptism by immersion. Ma Nku is credited by all factions at St. John's for 'washing' Masango. The symbolism of 'washing' indicates that there was dirt that cluttered his path. Through the cleansing process his true potential was realized. Upon becoming a member and participating in the activities of the church his gift started to show. During his early days at St. John's a voice came upon him and told him that there will come a time when he will have to leave his job and work fulltime as a minister and healer. Since he was still new he never took that seriously.

According to Mhlongo Masango and his disciples undertook a visit to Israel in 1974 and he was well received. The situation in Israel was tense and there was always a threat of violence. During that visit he was approached by a high ranking government official who asked him to pray for peace in the country. In the narrative one gets an impression that the government of Israel acknowledged that Masango was a prophet. In keeping with his grand narrative of the power of Masango, Mhlongo said that while in his hotel bombs going off next to the hotel and he advised that people should return to

their rooms because calmness was going to prevail. This is reminiscent of the story of Jesus calming a violent storm that threatened the lives of his disciples.

From Israel he went to Rome and visited the St Peter's basilica: it was like a homecoming to him as a man who was an embodiment of St Peter. According to Mhlongo prior to his arrival in Rome there was a miracle in the aircraft. There was turbulence in the air and the aeroplane he was traveling in nearly crashed. The prophet Masango interceded with the angels for safe landing and everyone was grateful to him. According to Mhlongo, in explaining the incident, the prophet said 'I saw a snake (tonardo) holding the plane trying drag it down so that it can crash. Suddenly an angel bearing a sword came, and cut the head of the snake' (n.d. 27).

## **Education Dilemma**

South African socio-economic, political and religious landscapes were drawn through Western Christian ideals. Formal education was a crucial aspect of the new landscape. For survival and respectability a person had to produce proof of qualification. African Christians had an interesting dilemma in their quest to embrace the foreign religious traditions and remain true to their African heritage. Pre-colonial African culture was oral and wisdom, customs, and traditions were transmitted orally. The missionary establishment privileged and valorized literacy to the point of demonizing anyone who was not literate. This point is made very clear by Isabel Hofmeyr (2002) in her discussion of African interpretations of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. In these translations and interpretations of the book ignorance is equated to illiteracy- ignorance is thrown into the flames of hell.

## **Ways of Dealing with the Dilemma**

Mhlongo is at pains to explain that Masango grew up in an environment where there were no schools except a Lower Primary School on the farm. The school went up to standard 2 (grade 4). Masango studied at this school until standard 2 and there are no further details about his schooling. Mhlongo simply makes a jump and introduce a spiritual element. He tells us that the

Holy Spirit was responsible for his education until he became a doctor of divinity. In fact, the

presence of the Spirit is often linked to the gift of leadership in the Bible. A leader is seen as a person with more 'power' than those being led. In the Bible, this power has its source in the Spirit (Anderson 2003: 180).

The major assumption in the Bible is that such a spirit is from God. In African cosmology the spirit realm is privileged over the physical realm. The happenings in the realm of the spirit affect the physical. Making claims about receiving education at the spirit realm was meant to undercut any criticism of the lack of formal education. At the same time it reinforces the idea that this is a special individual who learnt what most learn in seven years in a matter of hours or days. The spiritual claim makes his education superior to formal education that children receive from the school system.

## **Teachings**

Teachings at St. John's, like in most early AICs, were adapted from the teachings of John Alexander Dowie's movement. At the core of his teachings was faith and purity. Like other AICs, St. John's was against alcohol, smoking, sexual immorality, theft, murder, and other anti-social behavior. Mhlongo narrates how Masango's work led to the conversion of criminals. A case in point was a man named France who was a petty thief who came out of jail and was ministered to by Masango and ended up being one of the disciples. This is an example of number of criminals who were converted through Masango's work.

## **The Community of Prophets**

The community of prophets exists in both the physical and spiritual realms. John Mbiti's idea of the living-dead is helpful in this regard as it creates scope for the presence of the departed members of the family in the community. Because of their closeness to the Supreme Being, ancestors have extra powers, and limitless vision. They are perceived as mediators between

the Supreme Being and the people. Prophets in AIC cosmology are perceived as mediators between the people and God. They communicate messages from God to the people, and also intercede on behalf of the people. Throughout the biography of Masango, Mhlongo deliberately uses biblical verses to place Masango within the community of prophets. In a literary move that sought to assert Masango as an authentic prophet from God (Anderson 2003:181), Mhlongo claims that when Masango was taken to heaven he did not find Mrs Nomapuleti Florah Ludlolo (nee Radebe) of Cancele, Transkei, who is famous as the 'Mother of Cancele', meaning that she was a fake prophet who embodied a spirit of an anti-Christ. Becken (1983) goes through the details of her story and how she lost favour with the community and the people who came to her place. The reader is not told who Masango saw in heaven.

According to Mhlongo, prophets have a dual existence. He justifies this assertion through the story of transfiguration (Mark 9:2-9; Matthew 17:1-13). Prophets do not die but they simply change their form of existence. They travel through time and space and are not confined to any group of people or generation. The spirits of prophets live continuously through embodiment by different people in different generations. According Engelke (2007) Johane Masowe claimed to be a John the Baptist. For him, John the Baptist is not an historic figure, the historic figure is an embodiment of the spirit that has perpetual existence. He did not believe in the Bible. Every message is always fresh from the throne of God. The Holy Spirit uses the preacher to deliver a message from God 'live and direct'.

## **The Prophet Sees his Departure**

In African thought, especially among AmaZulu, it is held that elderly people can sense when they are about to die. They set their affairs in order by conferring blessings to their children. Mhlongo enumerates a number of instances which indicated that Baba Masango knew that his time had come. First, Baba Masango told the January 1984 national conference, which was his last one, that a voice told him to hold the tombstone unveiling ceremony of his wife Mme Annah two weeks before conference because he did not know where he would be in February. The ceremony happened with many circuits in the church not having been invited. Second, he had visions that are related to death. According to Mhlongo he had visions of bishops taking or

leading coffins to the graveyards. He asked the conference to pray for bishops in the church. He then posed a question to *abahlahlubi* (seers) about what they see about him. None of them said anything. Third, he made a few announcements but the most notable one was where he changed the date of Umgidi wase Clermont from July to the first week of May. Clermont is one of the major centres at St. Johns and this event was of great significance. According to Mhlongo Baba Masango never gave the reasons for the change and no one questioned it. Fourth, four days after the conference he delivered a sermon on the kingdom of heaven as a place of eternal rest for the saints. Baba Masango died five days after the final prophecies aged 78 and was buried on the premises of the Katlehong headquarters. The mausoleum that was erected in his honour has made this a significant sacred site for church.

## **Conclusions**

The spirit is the life blood of AICs and the Newer Pentecostal Churches (Daneel 1993). It is the source of revelation (prophecy, illness detection, nature and impact of evil, knowledge on healing, knowledge on myth and ritual). It is also the transport between various realms of existence- it connects people to these realms of existence. At St. John's every congregation starts services by singing the song, '*Ngena nathi, asinawo amandla okungena sodwa*' (start or enter with us, for we do not have power or strength to start or enter on our own). Other AICs also spend a sizeable amount of time during their meetings inviting the presence of the spirit. Their services do not work without this important component. The spirit is asked to participate in the event by influencing its direction. The people without the presence of the spirit are incapable of having a meaningful and successful service. The spirit is expected to come and manifest in signs and wonders. The spirit is experienced more during healing events.

The article in part dealt with a case of a male Prophet who took over a church that was established by a woman. The prevailing patriarchal system did not allow for a woman to be the head of the church. Masango's genius is that he did not part with the old beliefs and practices but he inserted himself as the new authority. He acknowledged Ma Nku as his spiritual mentor or parent. He gave credit to Ma Nku for starting the church and that also rubbed

off his followers. His explanation for wrestling control from Ma Nku is that the church was losing direction and he brought it back on course.

In isiZulu there is a saying that kings or chiefs do not die but they bow out gracefully (*Inkosi iyakhothama*). They are never ill but are shaken (*inkosi iyadunguzela*). In African thought death is when the spirit is released from the confines of the physical body to the world of other spirits. Funeral rites have to be managed properly for the safe passage and incorporation into the world of ancestors. Prophets are living spirits that enter human history at certain points to transform the human condition. The historical figures are simply human embodiments. Masango, in this case, was an embodiment of two prophetic spirits (Peter and John). Like all charismatic leaders, Masango had to constantly provide proof to his followers that he was truly called through the performance of extra-ordinary acts. For Mhlongo, Masango was an extra-ordinary person. In fact, ‘Baba Masango was not simply human but a creature from heaven’ (n.d. 22). He would not be seen for days and then emerge with intriguing messages like ‘Today I was with a congregation of the Prophets and they told me that I will do amazing things with amazing power and this church will grow bigger’ (n.d. 22).

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# Critical Perspectives on Beyers Naudé as Post-colonial Theologian

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## Abstract

Beyers Naudé (1915 - 2004) was the foremost anti-apartheid and liberation theologian that emerged from the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa during the twentieth century. In his early life and early years as a minister, he was formatively influenced by his family's anticolonial (read 'anti-British') loyalty in the wake of the Anglo-Boer war, and commitment to a pro-Afrikaner ideology. With his growing knowledge of the impacts of the apartheid ideology on the black majority population in South Africa, he started inter-denominational Bible Study groups, founded the pro-liberation inter-denominational and inter-racial journal *Pro Veritate* (1962) as well as the well-known Christian Institute (1963). He became committed to and developed an inclusive ecumenical Christian message as confessing public theologian. This was formatively influenced by his knowledge of the German *Kirchenkampf* and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his own lectures and sermons Naudé developed his own distinct analyses of the apartheid system, and an own distinct post-apartheid theology. Due to the analogy between the effects of British colonialism on South Africans and apartheid on black South Africa, Naudé's theology can rightly be labelled a post-colonial theology.

**Keywords:** Beyers Naudé, apartheid, *Pro Veritate*, the Christian Institute, public theology, German *Kirchenkampf*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, post-colonial theology

Already on 23 March 1952, just before the 300 year commemoration of settler colonialism by the apartheid regime, Beyers Naudé gave an address to Afrikaner youth, making reference to the Christian calling, attitudes and faith

in African context (Naudé [1952]2006:17-19)<sup>1</sup>. This is one of the first instances where it is evident that for him, the church is more inclusive than that recognised by the official DRC<sup>2</sup> of the time. With inputs from Naudé himself, scholars deduce that it was roughly during the period 1952/ 1953 – 1963 that he experienced a growing unease with apartheid and how it was supported by the Afrikaner-dominated National Party and the mainly white Afrikaner DRC. His growing unease came to a head in his contribution to and unwavering support of the Cottesloe resolutions (1960)<sup>3</sup>, his subsequent alienation from the DRC, and his resignation of his position as minister of the DRC Aasvoëlkop congregation on 22 September 1963 – with final meeting 3 November 1963. In my article I provide some seminal perspectives that give insight to Beyers Naudé as post-colonial theologian. As such, I deal with the marked discursive influences on him and how these in their own ways contributed to him becoming the foremost ecumenical originating from the

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<sup>1</sup> It is significant that Naudé in this early address already refers to both ‘liberation and salvation’, and that his ecclesiology is inclusive – where he refers to the future ‘flourishing of all nations’ vis-à-vis that of a ‘single nation’ in African context. More markedly, his more conscious statement about the Christian’s moral obligation to concretely give expression to the inclusive nature of the church (with regard to ‘rasse- en volksverhoudinge’ [‘race- and national relations’]) vis-à-vis the view of ‘total apartheid, in all spheres of life’ – a view propounded by a Dr. G.D. Scholtz in his book *Het die Afrikanervolk ‘n Toekoms?* [*Does the Afrikaner People have a Future?*] and an Afrikaner ecclesial conference in Bloemfontein – is made in 1954. The rationale is that those who propagate apartheid have not completely thought through the consequences of this position. Metaphorically and in the light of the text of Luke 14:28-30, they are busy building a building that will remain incomplete vis-à-vis embracing the truth of the gospel with regard to the unity of the church. (Bosch [1985:68] mentions that Naudé already mentioned his concerns about apartheid to him and Nico Smith in 1950 while they assisted him in his congregation in Potchefstroom as young theologians.)

<sup>2</sup> If Naudé was concerned about three hundred years of settler colonialism, he was also convinced that there will be change to this history in South Africa in the fourth century.

<sup>3</sup> Cf ‘Cottesloe Consultation Statement’ in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1983: 148-153).

DRC, the notion of him being a ‘public theologian’, and a selection of his theological contributions from post-colonial perspectives.

## **Post-colonial Theory and Leadership**

Much of post-colonial discourse does not deal with concrete leadership in post-colonial contexts. It deals mostly thematically with the post-colonial condition, and asks questions related to colonialism – the ‘conquest and control of other people’s lands and goods’ (Loomba 1998). Such post-colonial discourses are often available in an array of the critical study of different genres of literary representation<sup>4</sup>, and how to move beyond them (or not). These contributions are often dealt with theoretically but in some cases, also as to how they impact empirically on people – especially on colonised, or formerly colonised people(s). Such theorising may engage and expose the inbuilt racism, sexism, exclusionary and exploitative economic and labour relationships (since the time of slavery), and a general collusion of the production of knowledge and colonising power. Recognising the discursive contributions post-colonial theory has made to scholarship, it has though also been criticised, not least, that it mainly functions as a discourse by scholars in the Western academe for consumption by students in modern classrooms in the Western world. In distinction to such an approach, and in African context, though, the article departs from a different premise.

The founding assumption of the article is that in African contexts, post-colonial discourse is (or should be) characterised by anti-colonial and anti-apartheid discourse, discourses of resistance and liberation, and a discourse that embraces humanitarian values and human rights focused on the values of equality, the human dignity of all and social justice beyond the colonising and apartheid paradigms. Needless to say, such discourse also focuses on the contributions of not only anti-colonial institutions and organisations, but also individuals who have provided leadership in this context. Such individuals could be linked to Hegel’s ‘great men [people!] theory’, because they have not only ‘made a formative contribution to life’ but also ‘personified the spirit of the times and anticipated the spirit which

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. especially Fanon (1961; 1986); Young (1990a:119-126); on Spivak cf. Young (1990c:175); on Said (1978) cf. Young (1990a:126-140) and on Bhabha (1983) cf. Young (1990b:141-156). Cf. also Loomba (1989).

was yet in the process of birth’ (cf. Villa-Vicencio 1985:12; cf. also Hegel n.d. ¶32-36). Naudé in his role as anti-apartheid – and by implication, anti-colonial – public prophetic theologian and activist, and propagator of the Christian ecumenism of the church internationally fits this description. He and others like him formatively contributed not only to the critique of apartheid (and by implication colonialism) but also to a new discourse which paved the ways for new forms of social existence in peace and justice beyond colonialism and apartheid. As such, his discourse is future oriented because it is on the one hand critical of the then current colonial or colonising dispensation, but on the other hand also looks forward via the development of a future discursive formation and dispensation to a future that would transcend the current situation. Focusing on religion, Bosch’s (1985:62) analysis is apt, where he says that if a religion (or a denomination for that matter) does not have ideological legitimacy in a society, such a religion or denomination should continuously strive to make a contribution toward humanising that society. Such an approach is future oriented and a continuous challenge, i.e. to make a contribution towards ‘social change’. He also points out that at the time of writing (mid-1980s), black South Africa interpreted its context as ‘one of injustice and oppression’ and that here religion was used as a challenge to the apartheid ideology.

It is my contention that it is in both these senses that Beyers Naudé can be understood as a post-colonial theologian. Not only did he emerge as a fierce critic of apartheid in his own time and context – throwing his life into the fray existentially – but he also substantially contributed to a future-oriented post-colonial and post-apartheid confessing Christian theological discourse<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> As will become clear, my contention is that Naudé should first and foremost be seen as post-colonial theologian – ‘post-colonial’ in a historical sense of ‘coming after colonialism’ (and not just in terms of the ‘condition of postcoloniality’). This is evident in his numerous references and assumptions about his rejection of British colonialism, and his attempt in his ecumenism to not only reconcile or unite white and black but also the Afrikaner community impacted on by the Anglo-Boer War – and which has been used as critique of Britain in Afrikaner ideology – and English speaking South Africans. This was part of the ideology in terms of which he grew up, but in his dramatic and radical historical re-positioning as national and

## **Early Influences on Beyers Naudé**

Beyers Naudé came from a family with deep roots in Afrikaner South Africa (Villa-Vicencio 1985:3f; Ryan 1990:4-39; de Gruchy 2015:81). Born in an Afrikaner family in the shadow of the Anglo-Boer War, he was named after one of the Boer generals, a close friend of his father's. His father was a very influential minister in the DRC (cf. Ryan 1990:4-19), and it was under his influence that Naudé had an evangelical conversion and decided to study for the ministry (Durand 1985:47; de Gruchy 2015:82). Given the close links between the then National Party and the DRC, his family shared the vision of the National Party, which was pitted against British colonialism, and also propagated forms of racial segregation. Significantly, he also came to the fore as a leader amongst his peers, eventually serving as *primarius* of his hostel, and SRC president at Stellenbosch University (Ryan 1990:20f). In terms of Naudé's theological studies at Stellenbosch, de Gruchy (2015:82f) informs us that Naudé studied under professors who were committed Afrikaner nationalists and 'strict neo-Calvinists (Kuyperians<sup>6</sup>)'. They not only opposed 'liberal theology' and 'evangelical missionary piety' but also the theology of Karl Barth. They defended 'conservative theological and political positions' and did not engage apartheid and nationalism critically. Professor B.B. Keet in Systematic Theology though, was not only critical of apartheid but also propagated Barthian discourse as an alternative Reformed theology.

Other formative theological influences were Johannes du Plessis, 'a former professor of missions, who had been sacked from the post for heresy, but clearly on political grounds'<sup>7</sup> and G.B.A. Gerdener professor in church history and history of missions. Similarly, it was especially a strong commitment to the 'missionary calling of the church, a commitment nurtured by the pietist and evangelical impetus of the Van Lier, Vos and Huet tradition

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international ecumenical theologian, this focus remained part of his call for an ecumenism that is based on social justice and the human dignity of all.

<sup>6</sup> As is well-known, Abraham Kuyper founded the Dutch Free University in Amsterdam in 1880.

<sup>7</sup> It needs to be noted that Keet supported Du Plessis and has not supported the apartheid ideology. Significant is especially his short book, *Whither South Africa?* (1955) in which he destroyed biblically-based theological arguments in support of apartheid. He already criticised the theological propagators of apartheid in his writings in the DRC *Kerkbode*, dated from 1939.

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in the Dutch reformed Church' that impacted Naudé in the pre-Cottesloe years<sup>8</sup> (Durand 1985:48). Another influence on him was Dr. Ben Marias, a senior minister in one of the congregations Naudé served. Marais was famous for his anti-apartheid stance<sup>9</sup> – 'he condemned racial segregation' (de Gruchy 2015:85) – and especially for his book, *Die Kleurkrisis en die Weste*. [*The Coloured Question and the West*.] (1952) (cf. Ryan 1990:36f)<sup>10</sup>.

Once Naudé entered the ministry, he took on leadership positions in the church (cf. Ryan 1990:36f), not as an academic, but specialising as pastor, 'whose well-constructed sermons, preaching and biblical teaching was widely acknowledged and influential' (de Gruchy 2015:84; cf. also Ryan 1990:31). He eventually became a member of the secret Afrikaner organisation, the

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<sup>8</sup> This tradition stood over and against the neo-Calvinist Kuyperian tradition as it was developed in South Africa by DRC nationalist-oriented theologians (Durand 1985:47f). Durand (1985:40) points out that the Afrikaner theological interpretation of the Kuyperian tradition, especially hinged on Kuyper's cosmological theology. It combined with a very conservative Reformed Christology and as such prevented critique from a sound and inclusive Christology.

<sup>9</sup> Marais was a student of B.B. Keet and already wrote against apartheid in the DRC *Kerkbode* during the 1930s as a student. This continued during the 1940s and culminated in his book of 1952 (cf. Durand 1985:46).

<sup>10</sup> This book was significant in that it included questionnaire responses on apartheid by internationally acclaimed theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, J.H. Bavinck, H. Berkhof and Franz Leenhardt, who all rejected racial segregation unanimously (cf. Ryan 1990:37). In an interview Naudé commented that the book made an immense impact on him with regard to its 'biblical understanding of church, of race, of human dignity, of the unity of the church, of the whole pattern and structure of the [DRC]'. This generated much doubt in Naudé, especially with regard to his toeing the line of the secret organisation, the Broederbond. It was also during this time that he started with some serious theological studies outside those of his student days – to which he was not seriously committed. He focused on the 'interpretations of the Bible, church history in South Africa and other countries, and on the role of race in the Christian church'. For the first time he also seriously studied Barth and the works of other modern Dutch theologians (cf. Ryan 1990:37).



Broederbond (of which his father was a founder-member), and was elected to the leadership of one of the synods of the DRC (de Gruchy 2015:81; Ryan 1990:31f). He served in six DRC congregations, with Aasvoëlkop his last. He delivered his last sermon as Dutch Reformed minister in 1962, left the church, and took up the full-time editorship of *Pro Veritate*. In 1963, he also collaborated with fellow Christians to found the ecumenical organisation, the Christian Institute. He was forty-eight years old.

Prior to these events though, we can trace at least three important formative influences on the life of Beyers Naudé, that brought him to the decision to resign from the DRC and to take up the editorship of *Pro Veritate*. *First*, one of the most significant influences on him was certainly the struggle of the Afrikaners to rebuild themselves as an ethnic group following the Anglo-Boer War. In this context, de Gruchy (2015:81) refers, to the post-war experience of ‘the defeat of [the Afrikaner] and ... years of economic depression ... [and] hardship’. He says that the war generated much resentment among Afrikaners – which included the Naudé family. In their response, they supported Germany during the First World War and were ‘sympathetic’ to Germany during the Second (de Gruchy 2015:81; cf. also Ryan 1990:6-8; 32f).

It was his family’s response to the Anglo-Boer War<sup>11</sup>, coupled to their commitment to the DRC and the then National Party, together with his own leadership roles, that Naudé would later draw on for his empowering work for the liberation of South Africa. de Gruchy (2015:81f) points out that it was quite ironic that ‘Naudé would later use the values in support of

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<sup>11</sup> Durand (1985:43,39) elaborates pointing to the post-war period as a period of the ‘awakening of Afrikaner nationalism’ and Afrikaner ‘civil religion’, i.e. the fusion of ‘Scottish evangelicalism, Kuyprian so-called neo-Calvinism, and secular romantic nationalism’ as expounded by Moodie (1975; cf. also Bosch 1985). Bosch (1985:63-65) shows that, even though the Cape Church did not support the so-called Great Trek (c. 1838), Afrikaner disaffection of the British government goes back to this period. What is significant for our purposes though, is that following the Anglo-Boer War, the white church did recognise the horizontal or socio-economic dimensions of the gospel (Durand 1958:43f). The church engaged the upliftment of so-called poor whites. The problem was that this concern did not include members of other race groups. Durand (1985:49f) labels this the DRC’s ‘schizophrenia’.

Afrikaner liberation from British oppression in his rejection of Afrikaner Nationalism and support for black liberation’.

On the one hand, then, and similar to the Afrikaner critique of the British colonising and imperial forces<sup>12</sup>, he would be an outspoken critic of white Nationalist-inspired apartheid and foster a Christian resistance of the apartheid ideology – as it functioned in both church and society. On the other hand, he would dedicate his life to the promotion of the ecumenical movement and the ecumenical understanding of Christianity. Given his background and that of his family, the analogy here certainly holds true for his phenomenal contribution to the critique of the racist apartheid ideology and governments throughout his life (especially since 1963 to his death in 2004) and his life-long dedication to develop an alternative Christian ecumenical confessing discourse.

*Second*, in 1953, Naudé was part of a youth study group visiting the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Holland, France, Italy, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland over a six month period (cf. Ryan 1990:38). It was during this trip that he encountered numerous questions about apartheid, the DRC’s race policies and injustice in South Africa’s political dispensation, but also the ecumenical church movement. It included his exposure to the significance of the German *Kirchenkampf* [Church Struggle] during the Second World War, that came into being as a response to the established church in Germany’s support of National Socialism and Hitler. On his return, he took up ministry at Potchefstroom, and attended a meeting of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod – an ‘ecumenical body albeit one critical of the World Council of Churches but also of liberal theology’ (de Gruchy 2015:85). de Gruchy (2015:85) points out that, even though theologically conservative, this body rejected apartheid. Another influence on Naudé was his learning from white Dutch Reformed missionaries working in black

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<sup>12</sup> It needs to be borne in mind that this critique escalated into the Afrikaner rebellion against the Union government’s decision to support Britain against Germany in the First World War (cf. Bosch 1985:65f). Beyers Naudé was named after one of the Boer generals and close friend of his father. With reference to Albertyn’s (1947) critique of the exploitation of Afrikaner labour due to industrialisation and the urbanisation of the Afrikaner, Bosch (1985:67) calls this developing anti-British theology an Afrikaner ‘liberation theology’.

congregations about the injustices and hardships apartheid policies caused in black communities.

In addition, and prior to the Cottesloe Consultation, Ryan (1990:46-52) traces a number of events during the 1950s which conscientised Naudé about the true nature of the impacts of apartheid on South Africans, as well as the dire poverty in which many people lived – Black, Coloured and Indian, in terms of the racial categories of the time. During this period he also engaged members of the Boederbond, as well as fellow ministers from the DRC about moving beyond the apartheid ideology (cf. Ryan 1990:45,47,48,49). He realised though that these as well as ordinary Afrikaner Christians would not accept his position. He also knew that if he would break with the church, it would be at considerable cost to him and his family. Even so, it prepared him for his role in the Cottesloe Consultation and his leadership of young Afrikaner dissident theologians and ministers, especially missionaries<sup>13</sup>.

A *third* influence, and jointly so, was the Sharpeville massacre (1960) and the Cottesloe Consultation organised by the World Council of Churches from 7 to 14 December 1960.

On 21 March 1960, a crowd of black South Africans descended on the police station of Sharpeville near Vereeniging to hand in their passbooks in protest against the apartheid government. In response police opened fire on the crowd and killed sixty nine people. Some were women and children and some were shot in the back as they were fleeing. There was world-wide condemnation of this event. The South African government justified the event and declared a state of emergency (cf. Bosch 1985:69). This was a very important event, in so far as that it drew a response from the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC sent Dr. Robert S. Bilheimer to South Africa to consult with the WCC member churches, the DRC churches of the Cape and Transvaal as well as the Nededuitsch Hervormde Kerk. The outcome –

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<sup>13</sup> Apart from Naudé's critical leadership in the break with Kuyperian theology, as it was influenced by especially the *Kirchenkampf*, Bonhoeffer and the black experience of apartheid, at a more general level, Durand (1985:50f) points to the impact of Barth on the young Afrikaner theologians of the early 1960s, and later Berkouwer. On this point Durand differs from Vorster (1984) who argued that there was no significant paradigm break with the DRC Kuyperians but only a new development of a more critical anti-apartheid theology derived from a new value system.

after numerous discussions and visits, was the organising of the Cottesloe Consultation. Naudé was one of the DRC delegates (cf. Ryan 1990: 52 - 59).

The Cottesloe organising committee decided to request submissions from the participating churches on the following topics (cf. Ryan 1990:56):

- the factual situation in South Africa;
- the Christian understanding of the gospel for relationships among races;
- an understanding of contemporary history from a Christian viewpoint, particularly with regard to rapid social change;
- the meaning of the state of emergency in South Africa; and the
- witness of the church in respect of justice, mission and cooperation.

During the consultation – which generated a substantial communal spirit among delegates from the different race groups – it was decided to prepare a Cottesloe resolution, that member churches could take back to their different church structures for discussion and approval. Even though some representatives from the English speaking churches felt the resolutions did not go far enough, in DRC circles it was perceived to be revolutionary and against the apartheid policies of the government of the day. The most significant to be noted here are:

... that all races had equal rights to share in the privileges and responsibilities of their country, that no Christian could be excluded from any church on the basis of race, that there were no scriptural grounds for prohibiting mixed marriages but that ‘due consideration would be given to certain factors which may make such marriages inadvisable’, that the migrant labour policy was unacceptable, that the policy of job reservation for whites should be replaced with a more acceptable equitable system, that South Africans of all races had the right to own land wherever they were ‘domiciled’, that a policy which permanently denied such people the right to partake in government was not justifiable, and that there was no objection to

direct representation of Coloured people in parliament<sup>14</sup> (cf. Ryan 1990:60).

During the formulation of these resolutions, the Hervormde Kerk representatives withdrew from the consultation. And following the adoption of the resolutions, virtually all the DRC representatives withdrew their support due to pressure from the then Prime Minister, H.F. Verwoerd, and the Broederbond. Beyers Naudé stood firm (Bosch 1985:69-71; Ryan 1990:63f).

Following this event, Naudé was systematically marginalised in the DRC structures, he resigned from the Broederbond, left the DRC, and founded both the ecumenical journal *Pro Veritate* (1962) and the Christian Institute (1963). Reflecting on this chain of events, he points out that it dawned on him, that change in the DRC would only be possible, if he and others like him would leave the church and ‘to be the voice of prophecy and to challenge the church and prepare the way for renewal’ (cf. Ryan 1990:71).

I now turn to three seminal perspectives on Beyers Naudé as public theologian.

## **Beyers Naudé as Public Theologian**

In order to come to an understanding of Beyers Naudé as public theologian, we can draw on the contributions by Ackermann (2003; 2005), and de Gruchy (2005; and 2015).

## ***Beyers Naudé as Connected Critic***

In her contribution Ackermann (2003; 2005) draws on a paper by Ronald Thiemann (2003). Having referred to a number of explanations of the term<sup>15</sup>,

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<sup>14</sup> Though still moderate, these resolutions were nevertheless against all forms of scriptural and theological justification of apartheid. It also spelled out a critique of key apartheid ideological constitutional and legal tenets.

<sup>15</sup> Ackermann (2005:68) points to the fact that the use of the term ‘public theology’ is of recent origin. She then briefly reviews a selection of scholarly views on ‘public theology’, quoting (Koopman 2003), Hollenbach (1979), Marty (1986), and Simons (1995).

Ackermann gives her own definition in practical theological context. Regarding all theology as ultimately also public, she mainly highlights the fact that ‘theology lives in the tension between theory and praxis, between what we believe and what we do about what we believe’. If public theology is practiced in the interests of serving the kingdom of God, it should also include a ‘critical consciousness informed by social analysis, a concern for justice, the creative use of human imagination and the willingness to risk actions that express our hope for a better world’ (Ackermann [2003] 2013:69). Such a public theology also assumes that the church is ‘sensitive’ to the ‘public order’ in which it exists and operates (Ackermann 2013: 69).

Furthermore, Ackermann (2005:74) draws on views of Ronald Thiemann (2003). She points out that his understanding of ‘public theology’ is closely related to the notion of the ‘public theologian as connected critic’ and that churches understand themselves as ‘public theological institutions’. ‘Connected criticism’ he says:

... oscillates between the poles of critique and connection, solitude and solidarity, alienation and authority. Connected critics are those who are fully engaged in the very enterprise they criticize, yet alienated by the deceits and shortcomings of their own community (Thiemann 2003, in Ackermann 2005:69).

Ackermann then uses Thiemann’s notions of *connected critic*, *solitude and solidarity*, and *alienation and authority* as heuristic devices to provide an understanding of Beyers Naudé as public theologian. For the *first*, she refers to his change from his nationalist, Afrikaner household and his ministry in the DRC to his becoming a critic of this same discursive complex while remaining an Afrikaner in heart and soul so to speak. As such, he functioned within the space of ‘loyalties to one’s family, friends, church and people on the one hand, and the injustice and suffering caused to the majority of South Africans on the other’ (Ackermann 2005:70). Similarly, she then also refers to Naudé’s critical connection to the DRC and his commitment to the Christian Institute (CI) and his broader understanding of the church in the international ecumenical movement. Quoting from *Pro Veritate* of May 1976, she enlightens on Naudé’s purpose with *Pro Veritate*: ‘... bringing every facet of life into obedience to Christ [which] means rejecting the heresies of

racism, apartheid and “Christian Nationalism”<sup>16</sup> (Ackermann 2005:71). Since the founding of the Christian Institute (CI) on 15 August 1963, it was especially the black population that found itself increasingly drawn to the CI and Beyers Naudé<sup>17</sup>.

On the *second*, Ackermann (2005:72f) refers to the years of Naudé’s banning and house arrest (1977 – 1984). These are generally referred to as his ‘lean years’. Even so, he could see individuals and made the most of it – with a constant stream of black Christians and black leaders visiting him, especially members of the Black Consciousness Movement. In this latter focus, and also in his assistance of young black people who wished to join the ANC, lies his solidarity with the liberation movement during this time.

*Third*, having started on his own path and commitment to the liberation of South Africa in 1963, Naudé’s progressively and increasing alienation from his own people on the one hand and his authority in the international ecumenical movement on the other could only grow. His alienation from the white Afrikaner church increased with his support of the World Council of Churches’ Programme to Combat Racism, and his writing of ‘The Parting of the Ways’ in *Pro Veritate*. In his view, and with its support of the abhorrent racist ideology, the DRC has been continuously separating and isolating itself from the world Christian community. On the other hand, he increasingly became one more voice among the many voices of the number of white but especially black leaders (from Nxele to Bhambhata,

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<sup>16</sup> Significantly, de Gruchy (1985:15) adds that the early issues of *Pro Veritate* ‘also show how much the editor and authors were influenced by the Confessing Church struggle in Nazi Germany, and especially by the Barmen Declaration of May 1934’. In this sense, *Pro Veritate* was connecting with and drawing on the response of the church to oppression and injustice in the past, for inspiration in the present.

<sup>17</sup> Where initial statements in the press about the work of the CI reflected theologically on its aims – ‘to serve Christ’; to believe in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and foster the unity of believers, it progressively developed to encapsulate ‘the centrality of the black viewpoint for the future of Christianity and of justice in South Africa’. The CI and Naudé’s writings represent ‘a prophetic voice’ that also laid the foundations for ‘a prophetic ecumenical movement’ (cf. de Gruchy 1985:16; and Walshe in de Gruchy 1985:17). In these senses, Naudé and the CI became voices of the future.

Plaatje and Dube; Luthuli; Mandela; and Biko to mention just a few) (cf. also Ackermann 2005:74f).

### ***Beyers Naudé as Ecumenical, Confessing Theologian in Solidarity with the Other***

With regard to de Gruchy's contribution to this topic, we can refer to his chapter focusing on Beyers Naudé as public theologian (2005).

In his analysis, de Gruchy (2005) refers to Naudé's and the CI's participation in the drafting of the *Message to the People of South Africa*<sup>18</sup> (1968) and then thematises three shifts in his career, the shift from DRC minister to the *ecumenical* church, the shift from *confessional* to *confessing public theologian*, and his *solidarity with the other*. Discursively, *The Message to the People* declared apartheid 'a false gospel, a false ideology' and called upon South African Christians 'to reject [apartheid] unequivocally'<sup>19</sup>. This sent shockwaves through the white Afrikaner and white Christian establishments. Even so, it was in this atmosphere that Naudé *first*, functioned as ecumenical public theologian. He regarded the international church as 'one', and called on the church to proclaim 'the gospel of salvation and liberation' as well as the 'transforming of human beings in society' (de Gruchy 2005:83). In this regard – as was already evident in his constructive contribution to the Cottesloe Declaration, Naudé embraced the World Council of Churches, The Reformed Ecumenical Synod, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Catholic Church – relationships which were rejected by the white Afrikaner DRC, especially after Cottesloe. In terms of the latter, de Gruchy (2005:84) says Naudé was 'a

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. 'South African Council of Churches', 1968 in de Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (1983:154 - 159).

<sup>19</sup> de Gruchy (2005:83) comments that *The Message* was compared to the Barmen Declaration in Germany. He also quotes from the Message: 'that the apartheid ideology could not be squared with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Similar to the impact of the Barmen Declaration that the German Confessing Church produced, *The Message* challenged the Christian conscience. Different from the Barmen Declaration though, it was an overtly 'political document' though (cf. de Gruchy 1985:20f).

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Reformed theologian to his fingertips; he was Catholic in his breadth, in his commitment, in his vision, and in what he was doing'. Empirically, for instance, his ecumenical views found expression in his organising of multi-denominational bible study groups – which were rejected by the DRC.

With regard to the *second*, de Gruchy (32005:85) distinguishes between a 'confessional' and a 'confessing' theologian. Whereas the 'confessional theologian' subscribes to the confessions of a church – such as the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and the decisions of the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) to which the DRC subscribed – the 'confessing theologian' shifts from this position by publically saying what is meant by these confessions 'in terms of the issues of the day'. Rather than being a 'false patriot' and propagating a 'false gospel' as *The Message* says, what was needed, was reconciliation that embraced the engagement of the gospel with society – i.e. how the gospel impacts 'education, ... social structures, ... health policy, ... economics, law, and so forth' (de Gruchy 2005:86)<sup>20</sup>. In order to give expression to this vision, Naudé set up SPROCAS, the Study Project of Christianity in Apartheid Society with six country-wide commissions in South Africa<sup>21</sup>.

The *third* theme, *solidarity with the other* is exemplified in Naudé's third shift – from white to black. This relates to his numerous published views that there can be no 'reconciliation' in South Africa without 'justice',

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<sup>20</sup> In propagating this focus, Naudé was certainly influenced by his missiological background, especially as it was informed by the contextual engagement of not only the 'spiritual welfare' of the black people of South Africa, but the 'appalling suffering of the blacks under the apartheid system' (cf. Durand 1985:49).

<sup>21</sup> This would also put the CI on a road where it would not primarily be concerned about converting white views to an anti-apartheid stance, but that it would wholeheartedly commit to the 'black struggle for justice and liberation'. In this regard Sprocas-2, that mainly focused on the black community, played a vital role (de Gruchy 1985:22-24). On the international stage de Gruchy (2005:87) also refers to Naudé's engagements with famed Johannes Vercuyl from the Netherlands, and Dorothea Sölle in a discussion on liberation, the environment and peace. de Gruchy comments: 'This notion of a confessing church that would confess faith publicly around these issues remained with him throughout'.

the embracing of ‘liberation theology’ and the ‘option for the poor’. Institutionally there were three important events in Naudé’s life that impacted on his ministry. These are the SAAC conference on racism (1974) – that lead to the adoption of the resolution on conscientious objection to military service – the 1976 Soweto uprising and the death of Steve Biko. All these also impacted on the CI’s ‘anti-apartheid stance’ in defining ways<sup>22</sup> (cf. de Gruchy 2005:88f).

### ***Beyers Naudé, South Africa’s Bonhoeffer?***

It is very significant that someone like John de Gruchy, the author of *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (1979) has recently published an article in which he compares Beyers Naudé and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (de Gruchy 2015). Without going into detail, we can point out that it is possible that Naudé already encountered the significance of Bonhoeffer during his visit to Germany in 1953 (de Gruchy 2005:85).

In his article, de Gruchy also refers to Eberhardt Bethge’s statement during his visit to South Africa in 1973 that Naudé was South Africa’s Bonhoeffer. Following his painstaking comparison with regard to this statement, de Gruchy (2015:89) concludes:

Both Bonhoeffer and Naudé became involved in the church struggles in their respective countries against racist ideologies; both ran foul of their respective church authorities because of the stand they took; and both had a remarkable influence on younger theologians and pastors,

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<sup>22</sup> de Gruchy (1985:17 ) comments on the fourteen years of the existence of the CI, saying that ‘there was ‘a gradual shift in theological orientation. It was always ecumenical in emphasis, but for most of the sixties its theological orientation was Reformed and its main source of inspiration was the Confessing Church struggle in Nazi Germany. Towards the end of the sixties until its demise, its orientation was more influenced by black and liberation theology’. So the CI would move from an initial propagator of the Confessing Church movement that criticised the institutional church’s failure to play a prophetic role against apartheid to a movement that cultivated church unity in the face of racism and injustice.

not in the formal academic setting, but through biblical expositions, lectures and sermons. Both also risked their lives in solidarity with the oppressed; both were accused of treason and banned from speaking by the state; and both were secretly involved with those who were seeking to overthrow their respective governing regimes.

As Christians, both functioned as ‘faithful witnesses to the gospel against the tyrannies of oppression that confronted their nations’.

Thus, Naudé’s notion of the ecumenical movement was thoroughly impacted by the German confessing church. As such, it was especially after Cottesloe and as editor of *Pro Veritate* and Director of the Christian Institute, that Naudé became internationally well-known in international ecumenical circles. His ecumenical understanding was however not confessional in the sense above, but he functioned as an engaged and confessing public theologian – which in the context of apartheid – had parallels with the confessing church of Second World War Germany. de Gruchy (2015:88) argues that Naudé’s ecumenism grew as he continued to visit the ecumenical church internationally, because he was continuously called on to address audiences in the church and the work of the CI in South Africa, and that he often ‘drew parallels between the church struggle in South Africa and the German *Kirchenkampf*’. During these visits he also referred to the Barmen Declaration and Bonhoeffer’s<sup>23</sup> role. In his mind, the main role of the CI was to establish a South African confessing church movement.

## **Theological and Contextual Contributions**

Naudé himself as well as his peers stated that he was not a very dedicated student of theology during his student years. This changed though with his

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. especially de Gruchy’s ‘Beyers Naudé: South Africa’s Bonhoeffer? Celebrating the Centenary of the Birth of Beyers Naudé – 1915-2015’ (2015). Amongst others, he points out that the fact that Naudé was the only South African that attended the first Bonhoeffer Congress in Kaiserwerth in 1971, is an indication of Naudé’s high esteem he had for Bonhoeffer and his legacy in his own life and work. It is also significant that attending Bonhoeffer scholars regarded Naudé as ‘the leading voice in the church struggle against apartheid’.

rising consciousness of the immoral, unjust and iniquitous nature of the apartheid system. In addition to his own immersion in theological studies in response (cf. footnote 7 above), what stands out is his organising of ecumenical Bible Study groups (since the late 1950s); his organising of contextual study groups (though SPROCAS) and his own commitments to deliver lectures and to preach an inclusive biblical ecumenical gospel. What stands out for me here – in addition to his numerous editorials and articles in *Pro Veritate*, lectures and sermons – are the two sermons he preached when he left the DRC and his inaugural address when he took up the full time Directorship of the Christian Institute published as *My Decision* (c. 1963); his Edgar Brookes Lecture at the then University of Natal, titled *Black Anger and White Power in an Unreal Society* (1971); and three sermons from *Vreesloos Gehoorzaam* [*Fearlessly Obedient*] (2013).

### ***My Decision***

In this publication by the Christian Institute, Beyers Naudé's three sermons were titled with texts as follows and delivered on the following occasions.

- 'Obedience to God', Acts 5:29: 'We must obey God rather than men'; DRC Congregation Aasvoëlkop 22 September 1963; on the occasion of his announcement that he would take up the directorship of the Christian Institute in permanent capacity (*My Decision* pp. 3-11).
- 'Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer', Jeremiah 23:29: 'Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?' Farewell sermon to the DRC Congregation Aasvoëlkop 3 November 1963 (*My Decision* pp. 12-20); and;
- 'Reconciliation', 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 on reconciliation. Inaugural address on Sunday 15 December 1963, in the Methodist Central Hall, Johannesburg (*My Decision* pp. 20-27).

The first two sermons can be taken as part of his farewell to the DRC – even though he was still hoping at the time that he would retain his ministerial position in the DRC. (This was eventually declined by the DRC commission to consider his application.) After some initial exegetical comments of these

two texts, he applies the *first text* to his own decision to leave the DRC, and the decisions the congregation, the DRC, ministers in the DRC and ‘other churches’ in South Africa need to make in response to Acts 5:29. On his own decision, he says that he could not leave *Pro Veritate* and the Christian Institute and continue with his pastoral work as if nothing is wrong in South Africa. This was because this text had great significance for him – it meant a choice, to ‘obey God rather than man!’ He could only choose to obey God and he therefore had to go<sup>24</sup> (‘Obedience to God’ pp. 7f).

He then challenged his congregation that he was leaving, the DRC, ministers in the DRC and ‘other churches’ in South Africa to make a choice ‘to witness to the truth of God’s Word in the spirit of the prophets and the reformers’; to make a choice between ‘obedience in faith and subjection to the authority of the Church’; ‘to live by [God’s] word’; to make a choice between ‘the Kingdom of God, or our people’ (‘Obedience to God’ pp. 7-9). He continued to say that the church needs to develop greater Scriptural illumination on the ‘burning questions of Church and state, of kingdom and people, of race and colour’. It was called on to respond to these issues and ‘not to remain silent’ (‘Obedience to God’ pp. 9f).

From ecumenical perspective, it is significant that Naudé opposes the choice between the kingdom of God and ‘people’ [*volk*], the Afrikaners. He also challenges believers to recognise and critically engage ‘injustice where injustice has occurred (also against the Afrikaner)’. His inclusive call to transcend natural exclusionary social systems is also evident in his challenge to all ‘churches and peoples and languages and races’ (‘Obedience to God’ p.11).

In the *second text* on Jeremiah, Naudé again provide some exegetical comments and then proceed to apply the text. Significantly he says about Jeremiah – and this is the contextual analogy – that ‘He was called upon by God to pronounce some of the most searing judgements against his own people that we have ever heard from the lips of a prophet’. This was during a time that Israel’s own existence as a people was challenged (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p.12).

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<sup>24</sup> The DRC, who ironically elected Naudé as moderator of the Southern Transvaal synod on 26 March 1963, asked him to resign as editor of *Pro Veritate* at the same synod (cf. Ryan 1990:74-76). In terms of his own conscience, he could only make one choice.

Reflecting on ‘the Word of God’ in Jeremiah, he also said that it does not only function like a hammerblow, but also as a word that ‘continually reconciles, recreates, renews’. As such it is the ‘light of ... life, the hope of ... existence, the power for ... struggle for each community, each group, each nation, each country’ (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p. 14).

He then talks about how people, including believers, tend to evade the prophetic challenge, by following false prophets, following tradition rather than the Word, do not follow through with the demands of the Word during the working week. This however leads to destruction. In South African context, the consequences are that people at the time have been writing about this in the newspapers. This, Naudé sees as good, because it impacted on the church, so that the church can engage the crucial issues in society, such as ‘marriage and family life, labour and technology, disease, prayer and healing, race relations, the threat of the atomic bomb, the vocation of the church with regard to the state, the whole question of moral values’ (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p. 18).

He concluded the sermon by referring to his leaving the congregation for good. And that he can only hope that they will remember him as someone sent by God and someone who ‘continually tried to summon [them] and bind [them] to the obedience to God’s Word’ (‘Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer’ p. 19).

In the *third text* on ‘Reconciliation’, Naudé again makes some exegetical comments, especially on the issue that this theological principle is unique in religion – i.e. the Christian message of reconciliation. It ‘means ... the supreme act of sacrificial love of God to restore the true relationship between God and [humanity] and vice versa’ (‘Reconciliation’ p. 21).

Central related concepts are ‘forgiveness’; that the offer of reconciliation was made to the world – characterised by ‘people and nations gone astray, lost in their hatreds and strifes, their fears and prejudices, their selfishness and waywardness, their disunity and bitterness’; that God’s gift is based on the ‘incarnation of the Word; it impacts on relations to all human beings’ (‘Reconciliation’ pp. 21-23). Naudé concludes by saying that no reconciliation is possible ‘without conversation’ and an acknowledgement of the ‘deep-rooted prejudices of the past still keeping Afrikaans- and English-speaking people apart, as well as the baseless fear of many whites toward [blacks] and the senseless hatred of many blacks toward whites’. In terms of the Christian message, a ‘new mutual trust [can] be built’ between people

beyond their prejudices and exclusionary practices ('Reconciliation' p. 24f). In Christian context this calls for a 'new commitment' to the kingdom of God though. This message he regarded as more important for social unity than any secular political, educational, economical or social message ('Reconciliation' p. 26).

### ***Black Anger and White Power in an Unreal Society***

This text was Naudé's 1971 lecture as part of the Edgar Brookes Lecture series at the University of Natal. Naudé says that the lectures derives from the eruption of violence at the Gelvandale Coloured township in Port Elizabeth. This was followed by pronouncements of black leaders on the 'frustrations, bitterness and anger' about apartheid and police brutality among black people. Reflecting on the nature of the 'social system of cultural and racial separations which the Whites have built', Naudé says he cannot but term it an 'unreal society maintained by White power and now being threatened by Black anger' (Naudé 1971:3).

Naudé (1971:3-8) then expands on this view by providing critical perspectives thematically on why this is an 'unreal society'. It is unreal, he says: 'morally'; 'politically'; 'economically'; 'educationally'; and 'socially'. He explains this diagnosis as follows.

- *The morally unreal society*: Naudé regards the claims that South Africa is a Christian country, with a Christian government as mockery. The reason is that it does not adhere to the basic Christian command of 'love to God and love of one's neighbour'. He also points to nearly a hundred legal acts on the basis of which so-called 'separate development', and 'separate freedoms' are enforced.
- *The politically unreal society*: Naudé points to the so-called homeland policies of the apartheid regime, indicating that they are both 'unrealistic and unrealizable', i.e. that it is a political system that claims full racial and ethnic equality of people living in the so-called homelands. This claim to equality is a mockery too as twenty three years after the related laws were promulgated, it is 'a political system and structure where a much larger number of people have less political rights than at any time of the history of our country'. Claims with regard to South Africa being a democracy, are also a mockery.

Rather we have an ‘oligarchy practiced and controlled by a small White minority with the deliberate and intentional exclusion in political participation of four-fifths of the population’.

- *The economically unreal society*: The society is unreal in that the economy, the laws that protect it, and economic privileges remain in the hands of a ‘small white minority’. In contrast, he argues for a system which would allow all to share ‘more equally’ in it.
- *The educationally unreal society*: Naudé regards the ‘separate schools’ system as ‘irrational’ and that it has been evolved and implemented to the detriment of the majority of the inhabitants of South Africa. This is so not only with regard to the educational separation between Afrikaans and English, but also White and Black. The claim for education for ‘separate languages and cultures with separate identities [that] require separate facilities’ is a mockery because it does not treat people equally. He also criticised so-called Bantu education, because it derives from ‘pseudo-educational (but in fact purely ideological) presuppositions’. Moreover, it is not supported by black people, is ‘educationally unsound, economically wasteful, culturally harmful, and politically distasteful’.
- *The socially unreal society*: Here Naudé reflects on the structure the White minority developed for the ‘social separation of people from different races and colours’ even in the same geographical area. He also singles out the mixed marriages act as ‘twisted’, as ‘serving ideological ends’, and distorting of ‘the Biblical concept of sex and marriage’.

Reflecting on these perspectives on South Africa’s ‘unreal society’, Naudé says that this has been ‘rejected by all civilized communities as not in keeping with the ethical values, cultural norms and economic demands of the world to-day’ (Naudé 1971:7). Reflecting then on the black response and the apartheid suppression of resistance and retaliation, he singles out five factors which provide hope in the then current depressing circumstances (cf. Naudé 1971:8-10). These are:

- The completion of the forces of decolonisation on the African continent, but then still excluding South Africa;



*Critical Perspectives on Beyers Naudé as Post-colonial Theologian*

- The world's recognition of the 'dangers which racialism in any form constitute to sound human relations and to world peace'.
- The crucial role of the 'black labour force in the South African economy, and the fact that the large and evergrowing lack of White skilled labour necessitated the relaxation of job reservation laws and the training of many Blacks for skills.
- The discovery of the 'serious and ever enlarging gap between the affluence and economic development of the First (Western White) World and the poverty and economic backlog of the Third (Non-Western Black) World.
- Finally, the emergence of Black Power consciousness and 'a new call for Black Power and Black Identity'.

With the rising tide of Black criticism of White apartheid and privilege, Naudé asks what could be expected in the near future. 'He provides six 'prophetic' perspectives (Naudé 1971:11-13).

- The political awareness of all Black communities in South Africa is going to gather increased momentum.
- Existing Black organisations will be gaining more support and new all-Black movements will emerge. Everywhere voices will arise to africanise ....
- Increasingly there will be an organisational and/ or psychological link-up with Black organisations in other parts of the world.
- If the pace of change towards full political, economic and social participation on a basis of justice is not substantially increased in the near future for all Black groups it is inevitable that the existing bitterness and emerging anger will lead to the eruption of violence.
- The architects and protagonists of the concept of separate development will very soon discover ... that the hope of voluntary full acceptance of apartheid by the Blacks as envisaged and idealised by the Whites, is turning into disillusionment.
- The position of organisations usually described in the terms of 'White liberal' or 'White controlled' will increasingly become unenviable – meaning that there will be an inevitable Black withdrawal from such organisations, in order to go-it-alone.

Looking back at history, at 1971 when Naudé gave this lecture, with his own prophetic forecasts, we can just marvel at how right he was. This also applies to his statement that: ‘Under such conditions and in such a climate the task of reconciliation will become increasingly difficult’ (Naudé 1971:13). This is so, because he sees an ever greater danger of an escalation of the situation in South Africa to violent engagement – White versus Black and Black versus White. Rather than going this route, he argues that violence should be rejected, and that the country should rather follow a path towards peace. Central to this, is the quest for justice for all. He also says: ‘To meet Black anger with duplicity or delay is dangerous. To try and meet it with brute White force is fatal’ (Naudé 1971:14).

Naudé (1971:15) concluded his lecture by saying that the initiative is now in the hands of those who attended the lecture – ‘... to heed and to act to build a responsible society where there will be freedom and justice for all’.

### ***Fearlessly Obedient***

The third section under this heading on Naudé’s theological and contextual contributions comprises my selection of three sermons from Naudé’s collection published as *Vreesloos Gehoorsaam [Fearlessly Obedient]* (2013:185-187; 199-202; 203-206). These are:

- ‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ in which he answers the question: ‘How would you summarise the goals and aims of the Christian Institute?’, sermon based on 2 Corinthians 5:1-6:9, at Yeoville Anglican Church, 22 February 1976.
- ‘God’s Message for his Church’ delivered at the time of Naudé’s house arrest, the suspension of the DRC from the Reformed Ecumenical Council, and some statements that would eventually lead to the Belhar Confession. The sermon is based on 2 Chronicles 7:11-20; 1 Peter 2:4-9; and Matthew 21:12-16, delivered at St. George’s Anglican Parish, Parktown, Johannesburg on 17 October 1982.
- ‘An Authentic Confessing Church’, focusing on the three features love, unity and justice – including gender. The sermon is based on Acts 2:42-47; and Isaiah 59:21-60:5 – delivered at St. Alfred’s Anglican Church, Pretoria on 6 May 1984.

In his *first sermon*, his exposition of the goals and aims of the Christian Institute, Naudé divides his tripartite answer into two sections each – a theological reflection followed by an application to the Christian Institute. The theological reflections deal with the themes of:

- A prophetic ministry;
- A reconciling ministry; and
- A liberating ministry.

On *prophetic ministry*, his exposition is contextual in that he regard the Old Testament prophets as examples as to how to ‘proclaim and interpret the course of [historical] events in the light of God’s will for his people’. This means that the prophets have taken ‘cognisance of all current events in the life of the people of God, especially as they related to social evils deeply affecting the life and witness of the People of Israel’; and an involvement in the relationship between ‘church and state as it was called upon to interpret political events and actions in the light of God’s will for his people and when necessary, to pass divine judgement on actions of both political and church leaders’. This meant political action, but this is so because ‘religion and politics can never be fully separated’. Third, the prophets and prophetic schools ‘were called upon to pass judgement and grace upon leaders and people in both state and church. Whenever there were glaring situations of injustice, exploitation, spiritual and moral decay, there the voice of the prophets were heard (‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ p. 185). In these senses, the Christian Institute, *Pro Veritate*, SPROCAS and various of his public statements, have all engaged in the prophetic ministry.

On the *reconciling ministry*, Naudé (‘A Valid Christian Ministry’ p. 186) points out that all societies internationally experience ‘forces of separation, division, estrangement leading to tension, bitterness and enmity’. In such contexts, in a ‘situation of conflict and estrangement between [person] and [person], group and group, culture and culture, race and race, religion and religion, nation and nation’, the Christians worldwide are called on to engage the difficult task of ‘bridging divisions, recovering unity and creating true community’. With regard to the CI, Naudé says that it fostered reconciliation on the basis of justice – the two cannot be separated – and ‘solidarity with the oppressed’, both White and Black.

On the *liberating ministry*, his theological reflection turns on the fact

that the central tenet of the Christian faith is the belief 'Christ frees and liberates, [that] Christ is busy restoring his Kingdom of love, peace and justice on earth and he calls upon [all] to pray for the coming of that Kingdom'. This, he argues should impact on the international realities of 'oppressed groups and communities, [who are] suffering because of economical injustices, political exploitation and the denial of their basic human rights and a lack of opportunities, people crying out for liberation from intolerable conditions'. He then asks that Christians should reflect on how the Christian message – liberation in the Christian sense – impacts not only on 'personal, spiritual experience', but how it impacts 'the social, economic, political spheres of life' ('A Valid Christian Ministry' p. 186). The CI includes both these senses – 'personal liberation', as well as how this impacts on the liberation 'blacks are seeking' and 'whites need' ('A Valid Christian Ministry' p. 187).

In his *second sermon* on 'God's Message for his Church', Naudé ('God's Message for his Church' p. 199) first reflects on the notion of the physical building of the St. Georges Anglican Church in Parktown, on the significance of Israel's temple and the fact that such buildings signify the divine presence among people. He points to the fact that St. Georges was built in 1904 – 'two years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War which brought so much bitterness between Boer and Britton in South Africa' – and this building as well as the Israelite temple should signify God's life, love, comfort and justice in 'obedience to Christ'. However, if the believers do not adhere to these values, 'the people will be uprooted from the land, its witness will be rejected, its life will be destroyed; but equally, if [the church] obeys God's purpose, it will flourish and prosper, it will become a source of life, of justice expressed, of liberation and reconciliation for all people of the land' ('God's Message for his Church' p. 199). Naudé also reflects on the suspension of the DRC and the NHK from the Reformed Ecumenical Council – a body that declared apartheid a heresy – and the irony that the DRC at one point declared the CI as heretical. But now, a body representing seventy million Christians worldwide has done this. He regarded this as a 'moment of truth' for the DRC and NHK. He then continued to challenge the congregation – as well as all Christians – to engage in the challenge as to how 'faith relates to the political, the social and economic policies of our country'. The problem is that many churches in South Africa continue to refuse 'to speak out' and 'to act'. It is because of the evasive action by the church in

South Africa that the crisis in South Africa is ‘deepening’ and the conflict is ‘sharpening’. Rather, if the church engages these challenges, he says, that he is convinced that there will be a ‘new life ... a new unity, a new recognition of the dignity of the person will be discovered as we again make clear to the world that God’s image is to be discovered and to be honoured in every person, regardless of culture or race or colour or creed and a new authentic expression will be found in true reconciliation that will come about in and thorough Christ’ (‘God’s Message for his Church’ p. 201). With regard to the statements that would lead to the Belhar Confession later on, Naudé provides a brief statement of the main themes<sup>25</sup> and then points out that it forms ‘the basis of a united non-racial Reformed Church of South Africa. A church with its arms wide open to people of widely-diverging cultures, races and social standing as the church, the Body of Christ’ (‘God’s Message for his Church’ p. 201).

In his *third sermon*, ‘An Authentic Confessing Church’, a sermon on Acts 2:42-47 and Isaiah 59:21-60:5, Naudé (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204) reflects on the notion of the ecumenical. He starts off by referring to where the word appears in the Bible, viz.:

- The Roman Empire (Luke 2:1);
- The world in general (Luke 4:5; 21:24)
- The inhabitants of the world (Acts 17:6,31); and
- The cosmos (Hebrews 2:5).

In his interpretation though, he regards the ‘ecumenical’ as ‘God’s purpose for the whole world’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204). His sermon is divided into two parts, each reflecting on the three main characteristics he has identified for what ecumenical stands for. These are that the church constitutes:

- A community with a new dimension of love;
- A community with a new experience of unity; and

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<sup>25</sup> These themes are: 1) God’s concern for his church; 2) the true unity of all believers; 3) the meaning of reconciliation; 4) the challenge of justice; 5) and the price of obedience.

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- A community with a new understanding of justice.

He mentions these three in addition to others such as: ‘respect for human dignity, humility, purity’. Reflecting then on these characteristics, he says that *love* stands for the Pentecost event, that it is not related to the ordinary concept of ‘goodwill, sentimental attachment or purely human ties of friendship’ but ‘love ... offered to every human being regardless of religion or class or race or sex ... [that drives] out all fear towards any person’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204).

With regard to *unity* he says that the coming of the Spirit ‘transcended the existing divisions of class, of culture, of tribe and neighbour, of race and sex’. This does not mean a denial of differences, but rather ‘an acceptance of [the] ... rich diversity of human society on condition that these differences were not made a principle of separation or division among believers’. Such unity should find visible and concrete expression in the church, or ‘otherwise could lead to division, separation and conflict’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204).

With regard to the community’s new understanding of *justice*, it is significant that he says that the outpouring of the Spirit caused the Christians to start ‘... to break bread from house to house, to share their income and possessions, to extend this care for people’s material need to new Christians and thus to make available in love the resources of the rich for the needs of the poor’. And referring to the appointment of deacons for the Greek-speaking widows, he points out that this gesture means that the Christians ‘... discovered the real meaning of justice in distribution and freedom of each individual believer to give or withhold as he/ she felt urged by God’s Spirit and of a deep concern for truth and justice in all their dealings with each other’ (‘An Authentic Confessing Church’ p. 204).

Having provided a description of the characteristics that should characterise the ecumenical, he then proceeds to elaborate on the implications these characteristics have for the Christian faith. In other words, what does it mean to live in love; to live in unity; and to live in justice? On *love*, he says:

- It uncovers and brings into the open deep-seated forms of prejudice and bias towards people of other groups, class, races, or religions and removes them not by force, but [embraces them in] love;

*Critical Perspectives on Beyers Naudé as Post-colonial Theologian*

- It creates a new sensitivity for the needs of all human beings, a new concern for all who are suffering for whatever reason; and
- It strengthens the urge to reconcile opposing individuals and groups as well as conflicting interests and systems ('An Authentic Confessing Church' p. 205).

On living in *unity*, Naudé points to the fact that such unity is a crucial issue facing the church as whole in South Africa. He elaborates as follows:

- That it confronts the DRC with the declaration of apartheid as a heresy; and the statements by the NG Sendingkerk;
- That it challenges the multiracial churches supporting the ecumenical movement and their members to move beyond mere verbal declarations on church unity towards real unity in which all are included - Black, Coloured, Indian and Afrikaans.
- That it challenges all churches to be unified, regardless of their cultural or language backgrounds as well as political policies or laws forcibly separating people ('An Authentic Confessing Church' p. 205).

Coming to the community as a new grouping with a new understanding of justice, he argues that the justice the church proclaims does not include only Christians, but that it is 'undividable'. Similar to the Christians at Pentecost who were challenged to share income and possessions, Christians are challenged to share their wealth, especially where we have an affluent minority. They are challenged to constructively engage 'the black poverty of millions in our land'. Reflecting on the realities of the 1980s he also asks for the critical Christian engagement of the 'serious discrimination in education between white and black' and 'the policy of forced removals and resettlement of millions of people' ('An Authentic Confessing Church' p. 205).

When he summarises his notion of the ecumenical in South Africa he says there is a need for Christians of all denominations to:

... become part [in] South Africa of a confessing movement, a confessing community proclaiming the Lordship of Christ and living

out the life of the Kingdom of God in obedience to Christ ('An Authentic Confessing Church' p. 206).

## Critical Perspectives

Against the background of the argument above, we can deduce and proffer a number of critical perspectives on Beyers Naudé as post-colonial theologian.

1 Throughout Naudé's *oeuvre*, there are indications that his growing up in the shadow of the Anglo-Boer War, impacted on the analogies he drew between the Afrikaner discontent against the British and that of Black resistance and critique of apartheid. There is one difference though – and this is typical of the values embedded in post-colonial criticism – that namely the diversity and pluralism of the post-colony is to be strived for (and not merely acknowledged) and not that of single ethnic resistances and oppressions. In Naudé's case, this took on the character of his all-inclusive ecumenism that includes Afrikaner, English, Black, Coloured, and Indian, into a single multiform unity.

2 In his role as public theologian Naudé was exemplary in his commitment to be a connected critic. He always formed part of the existential issues of his day, took an existential decision to leave the DRC, and start afresh on a new ecumenical road. In this it is apt to describe him as an ecumenical, confessing theologian in solidarity with the other. Foundationally influenced by the German *Kirchenkampf* and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his own resistance against apartheid and his prophetic propagation of the end of apartheid as well as a prophetic justice for all, placed him on a road of confrontation with the apartheid security state. This did not lead to his death – as in the case of Bonhoeffer – but severe marginalisation by his own church and people, and ultimately house arrest for seven years (1977 - 1984).

3 Throughout his ministry – and starting with his questioning of the legitimacy of the apartheid ideology in the early 1950s – Naudé practiced as confessing theologian. In post-colonial contexts, this stance and positioning is similar to the anti-secular postmodernist scholarly discourse that acknowledges the realities and challenges posed by people's religious



commitments. In post-colonial contexts, the significance of Christianity – as in Naudé’s case – but also the equitable recognition of fellow religious people to their own religious commitments, must be acknowledged and accepted in the public sphere. In this sense, the question must be asked as to the message of the leaders in the religions on this point. Judging from Naudé’s sermons, his own stance was accommodatory and inclusive of all people despite their diversity. As we know, he also worked hand in hand with the South African Communist Party since the 1980s – whom he criticised earlier in his career – but without relenting on his commitments to social and cultural justice. What stands out though is his relentless commitment to values such as the human dignity of all, social justice, equity, and religious ecumenism.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have tried to provide an overview of some of the seminal perspectives that may give us some insight into us appreciating Beyers Naudé as post-colonial theologian. I have overviewed some discursive influences on him, how these contributed to his choices and commitments to the ecumenical movement, his life as a ‘public theologian’, and a brief selection of his theological contributions mainly derived from sermons.

One cannot disown one’s own history, upbringing and often, the parameters and constraints that set the framework(s) for live. Yet, as is evident in Naudé’s life and commitments, one can make choices that transcend such backgrounds. Given his own background and his early decision to become a minister in the DRC, these did not neutralise his own conscience-based decisions. As he came to understand the true inhuman nature of the apartheid system and its scholarly paradigm, he finally did not waver to take the decisions to start *Pro Veritate*, the Christian Institute, and to dedicate his life to the fostering of a local Christian ecumenical movement that impacted internationally. That he did this as confessing public theologian, as someone who continued to spread the message of the gospel irrespective of humanly-made systems of exclusion and human denigration, makes him a truly constructive contributor to liberation, freedom and social justice. In this sense his message also transcends his own time and context. It was not only relevant in his own time but is also relevant today in all race, tribal, religious, gender, class and social systems contexts characterised by a variety of forms of marginalisation and oppression.

As is evident from his own prophetic ministry, this did not only derive from the critical voice of the prophets – to ‘judge’ or ‘pronounce grace’ as he said – but to also provide pointers to the future. In this Naudé was exceptional, and it is also this future-oriented message that needs to be heard today. If exclusionary and oppressive regimes continue to impact society without a critical account to justice, reconciliation and peace, the world will increasingly become a worse and not better place to live in.

Finally, it is significant that Naudé’s ecclesiology derives from Pentecost, the paradigm and dispensation of the Spirit. Ultimately, it is this context in which the prophetic voice and ministry of the church internationally must be understood – in terms of the dimensions of love, unity and social justice inclusive of all humanity. As such, Naudé’s theology provides important insights for post-colonial contexts still characterised by humanly-made exclusionary and repressive socio-economic systems and academic paradigms. These, in addition to his message of the equitable human dignity of all, constitute some of his most seminal contributions to theology in his capacity as post-colonial theologian.

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ARTICLES

- Chammah J. Kaunda and R. Simangaliso Kumalo* Editorial: Empire Religions, Theologies, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems ..... 1

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- Lilian C. Siwila* The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in African Women’s Theology of Understanding Motherhood and Maternal Health ..... 61
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**The Question of Identity in South Africa**

- Sokja F. John, Chammah J. Kaunda and Ntokozo C.M. Madlala* Contesting the ‘Born Free’ Identity: A Postcolonial Perspective on Mzansi Stories ..... 106
- Federico Settler and Mari Haugaa Engh* The Black Body in Colonial and Postcolonial Public Discourse in South Africa ..... 126
- Mutshidzi Maraganedzha* A Normative Approach: Can we Eliminate Race? ..... 149

**Biographical Theology**

- Roderick R. Hewitt* Bob Marley’s Redemption Song in Conversation with de Gruchy’s Olive Agenda ..... 169
- R. Simangaliso Kumalo* *Ex Africa semper aliquid Novi!* Pixley ka Isaka Seme, the African Renaissance and the Empire in Contemporary South Africa ..... 190
- Chammah J. Kaunda, Kennedy O. Owino and Isabel A. Phiri* Applicability of Translatability Theory to European Missionary Masculinity Performance in Africa: Contestations and Reflections ..... 212
- Sibusiso Masondo* Prophets never die? The Story of Bishop P.J. Masango of St. John’s Apostolic Faith Mission ..... 231
- Johannes A. Smit* Critical Perspectives on Beyers Naudé as Post-colonial Theologian ..... 247
- Contributors ..... 282
- Editorial Associates (1994 - 2015) ..... 286