

Until He Releases Me from His Ancestors: An African Spirituality Pastoral Response to Wife Abuse

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Abstract

Marriage, for the Ndebele of Matetsi in Zimbabwe, is a spiritual practice, and they believe it is ordained by God and the ancestors. The process of marriage among the people of Matetsi is conducted according to patriarchal spiritual systems, which require a woman to be introduced to her husband's ancestors through certain rituals. This paper explores the traditional marriage rituals of the Ndebele of Matetsi that connect the bride to her husband's ancestors, and the role this practice plays in the way a wife makes decisions in the context of abuse. Written from the perspective of African feminist cultural hermeneutics, this paper seeks to explain how marriage rituals that connect a bride to her husband's ancestors imprison her in the context of abuse, and obliges her to remain married to her husband through 'thick and thin'. In addition, the paper offers a pastoral response that addresses the African spiritual nature of marriage in the context of abuse of women, with particular reference to the Ndebele of Matetsi, and suggests pastoral interventions in an attempt to liberate wives who are imprisoned by these rituals. This was an empirical study that followed a qualitative participant observation approach, which allowed the researcher to observe the customs and practices of the traditional marriage process in Matetsi, which she participated in her marriage process as a young woman.

Keywords: African spirituality, ancestors, Ndebele, pastoral care, traditional marriage, wife abuse, Zimbabwe

Introduction and Background

African spirituality is an all-inclusive process, which covers the historical, cultural, traditional, political, economic and religious heritage of Africa, including belief systems, symbols, rituals, festivals, folktales, songs, dance and culture. Masango (2006: 942) asserts the holistic nature of African spirituality and explains that it is expressed at all levels of society. Marriage, for the Nguni, particularly the traditional Ndebele of Matetsi in Zimbabwe, is a sacred spiritual convention. Once a woman has undergone marital rituals, they believe that she is connected to the ancestors of her husband and, therefore, is obliged to remain faithful to them (ancestors) till death, or, as they believe, till she crosses to the other side. This spiritual connection to the husband's ancestors is both exciting and, at times, scary – the latter because of fear of the unknown – for the wife. For the Ndebele in Matetsi, traditional marriage connects the bride spiritually and emotionally to her matrimonial ancestors.

The Ndebele of Matetsi have two forms of marriage celebrations. First, the traditional spiritual wedding legalises the marriage through rituals meant to introduce the bride to the husband's ancestors. Secondly, a Western 'white wedding' legalises the marriage through the signing of marital agreements in the presence of a licenced marriage officer. Both ceremonies are significant for the community of Matetsi, although the former holds more significance because of its spiritual nature. According to Dreyer (2011:np),

spirituality forms the core meaning in a person's life (what is important to me). This core of meaning is connected with self-perception (how I see myself). Self-perception has to do with life orientation (where I am in the world), which, in turn, is connected with a person's identity (who am I in the world).

Spiritualisation, according to Fotos (1994), is a process whereby humanity displays inherent qualities and attributes identified by the world's religions as characteristic of intrinsically spiritual human nature. In this paper, spiritualisation refers to the manifestation of spiritual virtues and attributes, where the spiritual (soul and spirit) element takes precedence over the physical (material) element. The spiritual element of African marriage includes *lobola* or bride price payment, and marriage rites and rituals, which is a lengthy process among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe. It starts with the sending of a messenger/go-between (*Umkhongi* or *idombo*) by the man's family to the

woman's family, proceeds with the process of marriage negotiations, up to the rituals/rites of marriage.

There is limited research on the spirituality of marriage among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe. The aim of this paper is to discuss the spirituality of marriage rituals performed by a bride in the process of marriage among the Ndebele of Matetsi, and to provide a pastoral response to the 'spiritualisation' of marriage in the context of wife abuse. This paper is divided into five sections. First, I will describe the feminist cultural hermeneutics and pastoral care approach, as the theories that guided the paper. Second, I will discuss the traditional marriage rituals of the Ndebele of Matetsi, from the payment of *isivula mlomo* (open mouth), to the welcoming of the bride by the groom's family, through to *ukuthelwa inyongo* (pouring bile from the gall bladder over the bride) after the traditional wedding ceremony. Third, I will discuss the methodological considerations of this article, which was the participatory observation method. Fourth, I discuss the process of the 'spiritualisation' of marriage and its consequences, which may, sometimes lead to wife abuse. Finally, I will discuss possible pastoral interventions that can be used to liberate wives, husbands and communities who are imprisoned by these rituals. I will also present concluding remarks.

Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics and the Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care

Feminist cultural hermeneutics emerged from African women's theologies. The theory was conceptualised by Kanyoro (2001; 2002) and Oduyoye (2001). Oduyoye (2001:12) states that,

Cultural hermeneutics directs that we take nothing for granted, that we do not follow tradition and ritual and norms as unchangeable givens, and that cultural relativism does not become covert racism and ethnocentrism. Life is to be lived deliberately, intentionally and consciously, and where this practice has been lost, we have to create awareness of life experiences and their implications. Experiences are to be analysed, not only for their historical, social and ethical implications, but also for their capacity to create what grows to become cultural norms.

This approach aims to liberate women from hermeneutics of culture and scripture that are oppressive. It begins with a hermeneutic of suspicion: women are suspicious of certain cultural and religious teachings that appear to dehumanise them. Phiri and Nadar (2011:83) highlight the significance of being critical about these practices, and remind us that feminist cultural hermeneutics affirms the life-giving nature of religion and culture, and rejects those elements that are life-threatening. This approach provides a critical lens for challenging women's internalised oppression. According to Oduyoye (2001:20), 'the hermeneutics and fundamental principles of our interpretation of Scripture and culture are related to distinguishing the 'good' – that is, the liberation from the evil that is oppressive and domesticating and which puts limitations where none is necessary'. This approach is a decolonial theory, which posits that women reject the colonial views of culture and religion and reinterpret them in a liberating way. The approach, therefore, appropriate for strengthening pastoral care in a context of internalised religio-cultural oppression and wife abuse. The 'spiritualisation' of African traditional marriage imprisons wives, who cannot escape through divorce the abuse they suffer, because they are said to be spiritually connected to their husband's ancestors. Pastoral care, in this context, draws from feminist cultural hermeneutics, which emphasises analysing cultural and religious variables that influence African women's experiences of marriage.

In this paper, feminist cultural hermeneutics is integrated with Emmanuel Lartey's intercultural approach to pastoral care. This approach is useful for reflecting on African women's experiences of wife abuse in the context of African traditional marriage, and understanding the spirituality of this marriage. According to Lartey (2003:33-34), the intercultural approach to pastoral care takes into consideration three basic principles. The first is *contextuality*, which requires the pastoral caregiver to consider every piece of behaviour and every belief within the framework in which it takes place, whether social, cultural or spiritual, because every belief or perception creates reality. Second, it considers *multiple perspectives*, such as the diversity of answers to a problem, by acknowledging that people understand reality and the world in diverse ways and, therefore, different understandings should be taken seriously by a process of listening and dialogue, because all perspectives could prove suitable for solving or dealing within a particular situation. Third, it prioritises *authentic participation*. This principle involves mutual concern for the integrity of other people and gives all people concerned the right to participate

and engage on their own terms in a discussion intended to find a solution. The liberation and empowerment functions of pastoral care emphasise the participation of pastoral care seekers in finding an answer for their challenges. Msomi (2008:40) argues that, for the healing process to take place, the worldview of the pastoral care recipient plays a vital role in the intervention. In a context of the spiritualisation of African marriage, and wife abuse, pastoral care should be relevant and contextual. Thus, Msomi (1992:12) argues that,

concern has to do with a quest for liberation of the person ... as well as passionate zeal that others be liberated in Christ in their own context, instead of being enslaved in a Christianity that is not their own.

The integration of the three principles of the intercultural approach to pastoral care and feminist cultural hermeneutics is critical for negotiating and discussing pastoral care interventions in the context of the spiritualisation of African marriage and wife abuse. Feminist cultural hermeneutics and the intercultural approach to pastoral care acknowledge that culture has a strong influence on the way African traditional women conduct themselves.

The key theme of feminist cultural hermeneutics is liberating women from life-threatening cultural traditions, by sifting through and reconstructing those traditions that have the potential to be life-affirming. Thus, integrating an intercultural approach to pastoral care and feminist cultural hermeneutics in the context of spiritualisation of traditional marriage and wife abuse helps the pastoral caregiver to negotiate for the institution of life-affirming cultural traditions, by reconstituting those that are life-threatening, with Christian values and symbols.

Methodological Considerations

This study followed the method of participant observation. Participant observation is a qualitative method, because the data collected through this technique is mainly qualitative (Iacono, Brown & Holtham 2009). Participant observation involves active participation and observation of a defined community within a particular physical and social environment by the researcher. This method allowed me to observe the customs and practices of the traditional marriage process in Matetsi, while participating in it as a young woman.

Participant observation allows the researcher to observe the group

while participating in their day-to-day activities (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). I am a woman who is a member of the Matetsi community. I managed to observe and participate in the traditional marriage process as a young bride, aunt, sister and mother. Therefore, I share my own lived experiences, and observations of the spiritualisation of traditional marriage by the Ndebele of Matetsi. Participant observation is a valuable method for enabling a researcher to produce ethnographic accounts that are focused on specific aspects of a society (Hammer, Fletcher & Hibbert 2017).

To narrate the lived experiences involved in the spiritualisation of African traditional marriage and wife abuse, as experienced by the women of Matetsi, I employed a feminist research approach, because it acknowledges the contributions of women to knowledge creation, and new ways of learning about the worlds of women, their subjective interpretations of their worlds, and experiences in society (Harding 1993). This approach legitimises subjective knowledge and allows for complexity and contradictions (Harding 1993). In feminist research, researchers are gendered, and their gender shapes their experiences of reality in a gendered cultural context (Fanow & Cook 1991). The significance of this approach is that it allows me to position and locate myself as a Ndebele woman and member of the Matetsi community. When I was a young woman in this community, I underwent some of the traditional marriage rites. Over the years, I have observed young women going through the same marriage rites. As an ordained minister of religion, I have heard women in pastoral care sessions lamenting that the African traditional marriage rites that were performed when they got married hinder them from leaving their abusive husbands. Feminist research emphasises the significance of reflexivity, which involves a process of self-awareness and self-consciousness, to research one's own position in the research process, and to reflect on one's interaction with the process (Fanow & Cook 1991).

Reflexivity and the positioning of the self in this research approach is a resource that allowed me to achieve a more vigorous form of objectivity (Harding 1987). Accordingly, my socio-cultural position and identity as a Ndebele woman from Matetsi, and a female pastor journeying with women experiencing the 'Catch-22' of the spirituality of African traditional marriage and, at times, wife abuse, shaped my research agenda, as well as the research process of this paper. Advocates for feminist research argue that the significance of its use lies in the fact that theorising begins with the researcher's own experience (Gelsthorpe & Morris 1990:88). The feminist dictum, 'the

personal is political', is significant for this article, because my personal qualities, experiences and political perspectives not only influenced the title of the article, but also the outcome and the very knowledge obtained (Hammersley 1992). As a result, this research is political and pastoral, because feminist research requires the fusion of knowledge and practice.

The Process of African Traditional Marriage among the Ndebele of Matetsi

Marriage is a significant transition among the Ndebele, because it is a symbol of adulthood and independence from the parents of both the man and the woman. This is confirmed by Mbiti (1969:133), who asserts that marriage in Africa is existential, a drama, a duty, a requirement, and a rhythm, in which, under normal circumstances, all must participate, or face exclusion and rejection by society.

The peak of marriage among the Ndebele is the payment of *ukangazizwe* (know me) (Chisale 2016a: 60). *Ukangaziwe* is paid after the payment of *isivulamlomo* (open mouth). The *isivulamlomo* is required by the bride's family, which charges the *umkhongi* or *idombo* (groom's messenger or go-between) before he or she states the purpose of the visit to the bride's family (to request their daughter's hand in marriage). After the payment of *isivulamlomo*, which, among the Ndebele of Matetsi, is money, formal marriage negotiations start and, if the request is accepted, the groom is charged *ukangaziwe*. These arrangements should be settled before all other *lobola* (dowry) requirements.

The Ndebele of Matetsi do not prioritise the full payment of *lobola* before a marriage can be finalised through a wedding or before the birth of children (Amanze, Sibanda, Madembo & Mahlanga 2015). As long as a part of *lobola* and other marriage requirements, such as *isivula mlomo* (open mouth), *ukangaziwe* (know me), clothes for the parents (both mother and father), and *inkomo yeqolo* or *kamama* (mother's cow) and other cultural commodities or funds are paid, the wedding ceremony can take place and the bride is allowed to join her husband and they can start their life together. Settlement of part of *lobola* qualifies marriages to be recognised and respected by the family, the clan and the entire community (Gunga 2009:172). For the Ndebele of Matetsi, the remainder of *lobola*, which, in most cases, are cows, is expected to be paid once the couple has children (Amanze *et al.* 2015). The

cows are said to express appreciation, by the groom to his in-laws, for the offspring that came through their daughter, and are a sign of commitment to the marriage (Mangena & Ndlovu 2013).

After paying part of the *lobola* and other marriage requirements, the marriage rituals are performed to approve the marriage. Traditional Ndebele marriage rituals are used to gain approval for the union from the ancestors. These rituals start with a farewell ritual, which includes *isithundu* (the head of the family performs a ritual at the family's kraal, informing ancestors that their daughter is now married and is leaving the family, hence, the family is soliciting their blessings and protection). In this ritual, traditional herbs are prepared, placed in a traditional calabash and put on the bride's head. The family head uses a traditional cooking stick, known as *uphehlo*, to stir the herbs while chanting words of success, fertility and prosperity for their daughter. Personally, I did not go through the *isithundu* process, because, firstly, no one knew which herbs to use and, secondly, because I come from a Christian family. At that time, I was a vicar or student pastor, so many rituals were ignored and avoided to accommodate my faith. After performing *isithundu*, the bride goes through a process of *Ukufohliswa isibaya* (leaving her home via the back of the family kraal). This means saying goodbye to the family and her ancestors, though this goodbye is not permanent, because it is believed that her ancestors will continue to protect her, even if she has joined other ancestors. Thus, marriage signifies a transition from one life to another, making it a life crisis, because transition brings crisis (Terian 2004:230). I only went through the traditional ritual process of *Ukufohliswa isibaya*, and it made me belong and appreciate my identity as a Ndebele woman in the presence of my in-laws.

When a bride reaches her husband's homestead, marriage rituals continue. A cow or goat is slaughtered for her, and then an elder of the family takes her to the family kraal, where the process of *ukuthelwa inyongo* (pouring bile from the slaughtered animal's gall bladder on the bride) takes place. I did not go through the process *ukuthelwa inyongo*, because I married into a Malawian family with a matrilineal tradition. However, I have observed other young women getting married in this community and going through this process to be introduced to their husband's ancestors. The empty gall bladder is put around the neck of *isanyongwana* (bridesmaid), to show the bride's family that the bride has been introduced to the ancestors of her husband's family. As soon as this has been done, the bride is spiritually connected to her husbands' ancestors, and she can participate in any rituals that are performed

by the groom's family, because she is now one of them.

Performing these rituals confirms that marriage is a life-and-death relationship between the bride and the groom and his ancestors. I have observed that, in the Matetsi community, some couples choose to skip the traditional rituals and only go through the Christian part of the marriage ceremony. For such couples, their spiritual connection to the husband's ancestors is unknown to them since they were not properly introduced to the family's ancestry. Though the Christian marriage connects the bride and the groom spiritually, it emphasises their relationship as two people, rather than two families, including the ancestors. This connection is taken from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, where it declares that a husband and wife become one flesh upon marriage (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8; Matthew 19:5-6). From a Biblical perspective, the spiritual and physical connection is between the two (husband and wife), compared to the traditional Ndebele marriage, where two clans are connected by the bride spiritually and physically migrating from her biological family and joining the husband's family and ancestors.

The Spiritualisation of African Traditional Marriage, and Wife Abuse

Marriage is a rite of passage among the Ndebele of Matetsi, and represents different stages of life for men and women. In heterosexual marriages, which is the only accepted form of marriage in Matetsi, a woman leaves her family and ancestors and joins her husband's family and ancestors. She also migrates from her family church and joins her husband's church. Thus, marriage requires a strong spiritual adjustment for the wife.

Once all *lobola* has been paid, the husband takes the full title of fatherhood of his children (Gunga 2009), and the wife joins the husband's ancestry permanently. Thus, if she dies after all the *lobola* has been paid, she is buried with her husband's family and her husband's ancestors. She becomes an ancestor of her husband's family. Among the Ndebele, ancestors do not have gender and age: Both men and women can be ancestors. I have observed and witnessed families where ancestors choose as an ancestor a child over adults. Ancestors are referred to as *abadala* (elders). Sometimes there are children who are said to have *abadala*, meaning the child is used by ancestors. Thus, when that child dies, at any age, she or he qualifies to be an ancestor, while most adults, particularly those who have good character and conduct,

qualify to be ancestors because of age. Rituals that are performed when someone who qualifies to be an ancestor dies. In emphasising the significance of rituals for Africans, Oduyoye (2004:79) argues that,

African religion gives a major role to rites of passage. An individual's path through life is monitored, marked, and celebrated from even before birth to death and thereafter, and the events in the life of a community echo this same cycle. Throughout a person's life, several rituals may be celebrated.

Marriage is a significant ritual for African people, because marriage increases the pool of ancestors (Oduyoye 2004). A wife who joins her husband's family increases the pool of ancestors when she gives birth to sons, thereby she guarantees the return of ancestors through reincarnation, since sons will marry and have children in turn. This belief makes the African worldview a cycle of life and death (Kalu 1991).

Marriage rituals have consequences when a woman is abused by her husband, because she does not have the power to dissolve the marriage without inviting the ancestors and the extended families back to the drawing board. In contexts of domestic violence or wife abuse, the spiritual meaning of the traditional marriage rituals forces women to stay in their marriages through thick and thin. Leaving is in vain, because they are spiritually tied to this family. The traditional marriage rituals symbolise that marriage can never be dissolved. Even in death, the deceased remains part of the family, as she has become part of the husband's ancestors. Even if she chooses to leave the marriage when her husband dies, her husband's family calls her back to return to mourn the death of her husband; she is the one who sits on the mattress and the one who covers herself with a blanket, even in scorching heat. This confirms that, in Matetsi, marriage is an everlasting union between a husband and wife. Some people argue that certain rituals can be performed to break this union if a couple wants to divorce. However, attempts to break the connection with a husband's ancestors will be in vain, especially when there are offspring involved, and when a woman is married through traditional marriage. Children will always link the wife to her husband's ancestors.

Observations and congregants who have confided in me confirm that the majority of women of Matetsi experience emotional abuse – physical battering is condemned and a punishable act by the kraal head (*sabhuku*) and

the chief (*induna*) of the community. Emotional violence is not considered a form of abuse in Matetsi. This is confirmed by Chisale (2016b), who argues that, in some African marriages, emotional violence is informed by patriarchal definitions of marriage, which demand that a wife honours and submits to her husband. Dreyer (2011:2) argues that patriarchy teaches ‘women to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others and, in doing so, they disappear into the background’. Emotional abuse that was reported by women who confided in me as their pastor includes derogatory name-calling, infidelity, failing to provide for the family and the upkeep of the wife, controlling behaviour, stalking, surveillance of behaviour, physically abusing children, withholding benefits from the wife, failing to have sexual intercourse with the wife and lack of commitment to marriage. None of these abuses are punishable acts in the Matetsi community. Some women experience physical abuse, but are afraid to report it, because they fear humiliating the husband. The marriage oath ‘for better or worse, in sickness and in health’ (Chisale 2016a) has a strong influence in how the women of Matetsi make decisions relating to their marriages. This oath often forces them to ‘suffer in silence’. The spiritualisation of marriage makes it difficult to fight wife abuse. Some women choose to conceal their suffering and only share their experiences as a third party. Below I recount the case of a female congregant in Matetsi, which highlights the spiritualisation of marriage in the context of wife abuse.

Several women who have experienced abuse in their marriages have come to me and said: *‘Revered, I have a friend experiencing abuse by her husband, how should she deal with this?’* Some will say, *‘My sister is abused by her husband, I don’t know how to help her’*. As I probe further, I realise that the friend or sister that is being referred to, is actually the person talking to me and seeking pastoral advice. This paper was conceptualised and motivated by a congregant who came to me, seeking pastoral advice. She approached me after a church service, saying she sought pastoral advice for her friend, who was experiencing seriously wife abuse. In her words: *‘Reverend, my friend is afraid that her husband will end up killing her because he keeps on scolding and promising to kill her for disapproving of his infidelity and the way he wastes money whilst neglecting his family’*. After a long dialogue and listening attentively and actively, it became clear that the ‘friend’ was in danger, because the congregant described various forms of physical, emotional and sexual domestic violence that her friend was being subjected to. I asked whether the friend has considered leaving the marriage, but she responded by saying, *‘No! She*

says, she is waiting for him to release her from his ancestors, then she will go back to her family'. When I questioned her about how he will release her from his ancestors, I wanted to know if the couple had performed some ritualistic covenant that could endanger the wife if she left without breaking it. In her answer, the woman took me through the process of African traditional marriage in Matetsi and all the rituals that are performed when a woman marries. She explained why release by the husband's ancestors is important to her friend.

I surprised to learn that some women would rather die in abusive marriages, while waiting for the husband to release them from their ancestors, than to leave without being released. I was also bewildered to learn that some women are too embarrassed to narrate their experience of violence perpetrated by the husband to a pastor; they would rather narrate their story of abuse as a third party. I wondered if, perhaps, some people consider a pastor and ancestors to be irreconcilable, which forces them to conceal their identity when seeking pastoral intervention by a pastor.

Spiritualisation of African Traditional Marriage and Wife Abuse: Pastoral Interventions

The spiritualisation of African traditional marriage among the Ndebele people of Matetsi may sound like fiction, but it is a reality experienced by women in that area. The problem is not the spiritualisation of marriage, but the consequences of that spiritualisation. Integrating feminist cultural hermeneutics and the intercultural approach to pastoral care, as conceptualised by Lartey (2003) is helpful in journeying with women who are trapped in abusive marriages because of the spirituality of African traditional marriage. Feminist cultural hermeneutics and Lartey's three principles of an intercultural approach to pastoral care should be used in the process of guiding the pastoral-care seeker towards liberation. I have been helpless in observing women in Matetsi who are imprisoned in abusive marriages because of the spiritualisation of marriage. Some are infected with HIV by their husbands¹. In pastoral care, responding to a situation of spirituality and abuse should involve sensitivity to and knowledge of the care-seeker's worldview, particularly culture and religion. It emerges from this article that, since rituals and marriage in Matetsi are

¹ This is a confidential issue, but women have confided in me, as clergy, about their HIV status, and that their husbands infected them.

connected, the pastoral caregiver should understand and respect their significance, while negotiating for the community's protection and liberation. According to Moyo (2014:216), 'from a pastoral perspective, in situations of pain and suffering, rituals are coping mechanisms for various rites of passage. They give comfort to individuals and the community who cast their cases on a transcended and almighty God'.

Some women in Matetsi seem to be trapped in loveless and abusive marriages, because, for them to leave the marriage, the husband and his family have to perform rituals to release her from his ancestors. There are no rituals for divorce among the traditional Ndebele of Matetsi, because marriage is a lifetime union between two families. If a husband is not satisfied with his wife, who may fail to give him heirs (male children), because the woman is barren, or because the husband no longer loves the wife, which are the reasons that usually causes couples to separate, the traditional Ndebele culture in Zimbabwe allows the husband to have a polygamous marriage.

In instances of impotency or sterility on the part of the husband, the wife is expected to stay in the marriage. Occasionally, the younger or older brother is encouraged to help his brother with some of the roles he is struggling to perform and, in the process, keep his brother's wife happy and preserve the family name. It is significant that impotence is prevented in African Ndebele men, particularly those of Matetsi. Traditional Ndebele from Matetsi, men are physically, sexually and psychologically prepared for marriage through different rites of passage and rituals. A man who experiences symptoms of impotence is given *imbiza* (traditional herbs) by a village traditional healer as part of his preparation for marriage. The herbs are meant to boost the man's sexual strength and fertility and to satisfy his wife or wives. The motivation for this practice is that Ndebele of Matetsi believe that traditional marriage is a covenant that is not meant to be broken by anyone or anything in this world, except God and the ancestors. Two themes should be considered in negotiating pastoral interventions in the context of the spiritualisation of African marriage and wife abuse in an African context, in particular, among the Matetsi. These are authenticity (honesty) and gender sensitivity.

Authenticity

It is difficult to escape the internalisation of spirituality, since people create reality from spiritual beliefs and perceptions. However, spirituality is flexible,

and people, particularly women in abusive marriages, should be guided in their spiritual journeys and encouraged to reject life-denying spiritual beliefs. God and ancestors are life-affirming forces, as a result, imprisoning the self in an abusive marriage while believing that it is the wish of God and ancestors, is hyperbole. Feminist cultural hermeneutics agitates for the extraction of what is liberating from culture, religion and the Bible (Dreyer 2011). Kanyoro (2002: 9) argues that religion or 'culture is a two-edged sword that gives women their identity, integrity, and way of life yet reinforces its patriarchal forms of domination on every woman and girl'. Authenticity or truth opens up dialogue, as the community is able to comprehend the 'binarism' of culture and sift life-affirming cultural teachings from life-denying ones. In the Matetsi community, the community authorities charge a man who physically beats his wife two cows or goats, which he gives to his wife as a form of compensation and apology to her and the ancestors. One goat or cow is given to the wife as an apology, and the other goat or cow is meant for the ancestors and community, and is slaughtered and cooked at the homestead of the kraal's head. Community members are invited to participate in a feast. Emotional abuse, which is very common in this community, is not accounted for in traditional interventions.

An intercultural approach to pastoral care recommends that contextuality is considered. Pastoral interventions should consider every form of behaviour and belief within the framework in which it takes place (Lartey 2003). The social, cultural, economic, political and environmental contexts of the pastoral care-seeker should, thus, be taken seriously, because each context has a strong influence on how the pastoral care-seeker interprets her life experiences and reality (Lartey 2003:33). As a result, in negotiating pastoral interventions, the pastoral care-seeker's worldview is very important. In this case, the pastoral caregiver should apply the pastoral cycle to probe the what, who, why and how questions, before interacting and extending intervention to the pastoral care seeker. Questions such as the following should be asked: What is the community's view or worldview of marriage and wife abuse? Who are the gatekeepers of this worldview? Why are they protecting this worldview? What should be done to engage them and how should a pastoral caregiver/clergy negotiate for respectful healing and liberation in this community?

A pastoral caregiver can be innovative and authentic in extending pastoral care to a community that is spiritually conservative. Wife abuse happens where relationships are broken down in a couple and, in African

contexts, broken relationships include the community, due to the communality of Africans (Kanyoro 2001). The role of a pastoral caregiver in this context is to advocate for reconciliation, forgiveness and healing. Reconciliation can be done by providing alternative rituals that are just and psychologically fulfilling, in order to help the couple, as well as the community, to work through their differences.

Certain rituals that are performed among the Ndebele for reconciliation, forgiveness and healing. Reconciliation and forgiveness are significant for healing a broken relationship between a husband and wife; and between the couple and the community at large. Since divorce is forbidden among the traditional Ndebele of Matetsi; a pastoral caregiver or clergy should consider context in providing pastoral care, and look for life-affirming rituals performed by the Ndebele to promote forgiveness, reconciliation and healing, and substitute some traditional elements with Christian elements. In theological terms, this is known as enculturation. The most life-affirming ritual for forgiveness and reconciliation among the Ndebele is *ukukhumisana umlotha*, (share in the licking of ashes from each other's hand). This is a ritual that reconciles broken relationships and leads to forgiveness and healing. If the other party does not want to forgive, then she or he abstains from the ritual. Intensive counselling and various interventions are used to reconcile the two parties before the process of *ukukhumisana umlotha*. This resonates with the principle of authentic participation proposed by the intercultural approach to pastoral care. Everyone participates in the healing process of the victim – the perpetrator and the community.

From an intercultural approach and in an Christian context, a pastoral caregiver can implement the contextuality and authentic participation principles by, for instance, encouraging the couple and the community to use ashes to mark a cross on each person's forehead as a symbol of forgiveness. Ashes are traditionally used as a symbol of forgiveness and reconciliation after a bad relationship or fight between people or communities. For the Ndebele of Matetsi, ashes symbolise the end of fire, something that is dangerous and harmful, and as a result, *ukukhumisana umlotha* confirms the end of a harmful and damaging relationship. In a theological sense, ashes symbolise mourning, mortality, and penance (Esther 4:1ff and Job 42:6). Using ashes to mark a cross on each other's foreheads reminds the disintegrated people that the cross reconciles the world to God through Jesus Christ and enables them to live in love and harmony (Romans 5:8). The cross is a sign of forgiveness of sins and

a gift of peace, hope and justice (Louw 2008:184).

Another ritual for forgiveness and reconciliation amongst the Ndebele of Matetsi is *ukudlelana emganwini* (eating from one plate). This ritual also takes place after intensive counselling and interventions by the elders. It leads to reconciliation and healing of broken relationships. Significantly and alternatively, the clergy can serve the warring parties Holy Communion, through sharing in eating the 'body of Christ from the same plate' and drinking the 'blood of Christ from the same cup', which is considered to be a true symbol of forgiveness. This ritual promotes gender equality between a husband and wife, as well as between a husband, wife and community. By sharing in Holy Communion, the couple and community are reminded what Jesus had done for the world, by forgiving sins through death on the cross and resurrection from the dead (1 Peter 3:18; 1 Corinthians 27-31). Louw (2008:185) argues that, 'when a ritual, for example Holy Communion, is celebrated, it communicates support, grace, love, reconciliation, and sense of belonging'. It helps the victim or the perpetrator to experience forgiveness that facilitates healing. Christian symbols, such as Holy Communion and the cross, break down the hierarchical order of marriage, where men are all-powerful and patriarchy is internalised, routinised and naturalised. These symbols promote a communal life in which women and men are equal and are encouraged to live in peace with each other, other creation, and God. Africans live in a community of relationships and, as a result, healing and liberating a single person is not viable. This is impossible, because, if the community remains corrupt and oppressive, the healed and liberated person will be re-contaminated and corrupted, requiring pastoral interventions to be repeated (Chisale 2018). Thus, to escape this cycle, the whole community should be included in the rituals to achieve reconciliation and healing. Extending pastoral care to one person is hopeless in African communities, since Africans are communal, therefore, I propose that communal pastoral care should be inclusive of everyone.

Louw (2008:180) argues that pastoral care scholars agree unanimously that pastoral care in an African context must be a social and community issue – the community and the network of relationships are the intervention. Chisale (2018) asserts that 'the interaction of women with the community challenges pastoral care initiatives against domestic violence not to isolate the broader community. The brokenness of a community member means the brokenness of the entire community'. Lartey (2018) calls this pastoral intervention 'communio-pathy', which according to him, 'is entry into the pain and passion

of a whole community'. He argues, furthermore, that targeting the whole community is significant, because,

Healthy communities produce healthy people. Just as hurt people hurt people so whole people heal people. Individuals who receive excellent therapy and whose inner lives are repaired only to return into unwholesome social circumstances will soon be re-infected and need to return for individual therapy. The goal of pastoral care is always the creation of healthy communities in which ALL persons can live humane lives (2018).

In many traditional African communities, a woman is not married to her husband only, but into her husband's community. Thus, the abuse she experiencea may seem separated from the community she married into (because it happens in private spaces), yet, in real African traditional life, it is connected to the community, because her ordeal is spiritually unhealthy, and fragments her from the broader community.

It emerged from this article that a woman married through an traditional African marriage ceremony deals with abuse differently from someone married only through the civil marriage. For a woman who was introduced to her husband's ancestors, marriage is not a contract, but sacred and ordained by ancestors and God. As a result, walking out of the marriage is not an option, because there are spiritual forces involved. A wife's connection to her husband's ancestors is a fragile ground to walk on, thus sensitivity and empathy by the pastoral care giver and those around her are important, particularly if that connection is hurting the woman A pastoral caregiver should be sensitive, clear, compassionate and careful when journeying with an emotionally abused woman, who is trapped in her marriage because she fears the wrath of the ancestors. It is important to conscientise the victim that ancestors and God are not evil, but rather protect life – thus, they do not approve of the abuse she is experiencing. A pastoral caregiver should include the community into which this woman married, as well as her biological family community in the caregiving, because the two communities can influence how the woman responds to the abuses in her marriage. By doing this, the caregiver will be authentic to the African worldview. Bible study can be conducted to conscientise the community about the true challenges caused by some of their cultural worldviews. From the perspective of feminist cultural hermeneutics,

this will help community members to authentically sift, deconstruct and reconstruct cultural worldviews that are oppressive and dehumanising, and protect those that are life-affirming. Jesus is the best model a pastoral caregiver can use, particularly, scriptures that were used by Jesus to empower and liberate marginalised and oppressed members of communities, such as women, children, orphans, widows and the disabled. Authenticity should guide the pastoral caregiver to be faithful to gender dynamics in pastoral care.

Gender Sensitivity

Feminist cultural hermeneutics emphasises that culture is not static, but transforms as time progresses and, as a result, culture should be re-examined and be re-interpreted in a way that embraces the dignity of women (Kanyoro 2002). Thus, being conscious of gender dynamics in pastoral care is critical and can augment women's dignity, because women or victims are sometimes silenced by the gender of a pastoral caregiver. Women of the Ndebele of Matetsi community are socialised to respect and set boundaries regarding the sharing of private or marital issues with men. It is considered taboo for a woman to share her marital problems with a man, including her father, uncles and brothers. A male clergy is no different from other men, according to the Ndebele cultural worldview. Lartey (2003) emphasises the significance of cultural sensitivity when extending pastoral care to a care seeker. Moreover, Louw (2008:153) confirms that, 'within an African perspective the human being cannot be understood separate from cultural issues and values'. In African contexts, not all women are comfortable sharing their lived experience of abuse with a person of a different gender, because of cultural beliefs and socialisation. Chisale (2018) argues that, in a context of wife or domestic abuse, 'the clergy and pastoral caregivers, who are often men, should be aware of the role they play in silencing female voices'. Male clergy should not deny that some victims of abuse could see them as accomplices in their abuse, because of their gender, and may expect biased interpretations of gender in the Bible and culture.

Common sayings in the Matetsi community are *amadoda wonke ayafanana* (all men are the same) and *amadoda yizinja* (men are dogs). Although these sayings are generalisations, communities build their lived realities on these generalisations and myths. This challenges clergy and pastoral caregivers to be sensitive to communities' gender generalisations and

myths. An intercultural approach to pastoral care encourages using multiple perspectives in extending authentic pastoral care. Understanding the community's gender generalisations and myths will speed up the healing process of the victim, perpetrator and community. If the clergy is married, his spouse could help to shepherd the flock and, in particular, extend pastoral care and counselling to congregants.

This collaboration of the clergy and their spouses addresses the so-called gender gap that exist in pastoral care and counselling, due to diverse cultural worldviews. Ma Mpolo (1990:12) argues that contextual pastoral care to African communities should focus on the importance of understanding parishioners' or clients' worldviews. The participation of clergy's spouses may help to extend the intercultural approach to pastoral care; the clergy may find themselves in a culturally different environment. Pastoral care scholars such as Mucherera (2000), uses the term *half-breed*, while Augsburg (1986) proposes *interpathy* for extending pastoral care to a community that has a different culture than that of the pastoral caregiver.

In spiritually and culturally conservative communities such as the Ndebele in Matetsi, women confide in women and men confide in men, particularly about sensitive issues such as the wellbeing of their marriages. Unmarried clergy should partner with clergy of the opposite sex, so that they are spiritually and culturally relevant in their pastoral interventions. It is important to note that the motives of unmarried clergy when they extend pastoral care to care seekers of the opposite sex could be looked at with suspicion. Some care seekers may misinterpret the empathy of an unmarried clergy, and interpret it as affection – holistic healing cannot take place in the midst of such misunderstandings. Instead, it may lead to a build-up of multiple crises, female clergy may be sexually abused by male care seekers who misinterpret her empathy, or female clergy could be accused by wives who feel insecure, of having an extramarital affair with their husbands. Similarly, single male clergy's empathy for women may be misinterpreted as seeking sexual relationships with women who seek pastoral interventions.

Conclusion

The spiritualisation of African marriages challenges the church's pastoral care ministry to be authentic to the Gospel by being flexible to the cultural worldviews of congregants. The church in Africa cannot separate people from

their cultural beliefs. Rather, it is necessary to consider context in ministry and to inculturate the Gospel to the worldview of traditional Africans, so that they can experience love and liberation of 'Christ in their own context, instead of being enslaved in a Christianity that is not their own' (Msomi 1992: 12). As a result, integrating an intercultural approach to pastoral care and feminist cultural hermeneutics can be significant for guiding pastoral caregivers' journey with victims of abuse, who cannot escape the abuse due to the spiritualisation of African traditional marriage. Pastoral care is an important ministry of the church, which can liberate and empower congregants from the chaos of life. If pastoral care is not relevant, it is likely to destroy rather than build, reconcile and heal African communities. Wife abuse is a scourge that destroys the fabric of life, by causing chaos in women, men, children and the community at large. The church should, therefore, empower every human through word, creed and deed, while being sensitive and relevant to every person's cultural and spiritual worldview.

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