Religion as Situated Knowledge for Social Transformation: The Case of the Mashobye Women's Manyano of Limpopo Province

Storia Seitisho
Lilian Cheelo Siwila

Abstract

Religion as a form of situated knowledge has historically influenced a gendered conception and acquisition of knowledge. As one of the dominant voices in society, it has created and maintained social hierarchies by discriminating the equal identity, interest and experiences of women. As a result, emerging ideologies, historical and socio-cultural factors normalized thought patterns of particularly an inferior and dependent perspective about women. In most of the African countries, missionary and colonial teaching undermined women's indigenous knowledge on food production and experiences as heads of households. Through the Victorian family model, women were removed from participating in agriculture to the domestic sphere where they had to perform duties of housewifery. In case of transforming a situation of poverty, hunger and diseases prevalent in Sub Saharan Africa and rural areas of South Africa in particular, religion constrained processes of positive knowledge construction as women's roles and activities were mostly limited to private space. The aim of this paper is to explore ways in which the Women's Manyano organization can be an agent of transformation to communities of women in the rural area for food autonomy and maternal health.

Keywords: religion, gender, food autonomy, social transformation, Manyano Women

Electronic ISSN: 2519-5476; DOI: https://doi.org/10.29086/2519-5476/2017/sp19a7

Introduction

It is an undeniable truth that religion has played a significant role in social transformation in general. It also seems rather impossible to imagine any kind of society without the influence of some kind of religion. In Africa in particular, this truth is affirmed by a commonly known phrase of one leading theologian Mbiti that '*Africans are notoriously religious*' (1991:1). This also finds expression from a female African theologian, Kanyoro, who reckons that *religion and culture encompass all areas of one's total life because in African indigenous thought system, religion and culture are not distinct from each other* (2001:158-159). Implicitly, African people experience their lives according to what is religiously or culturally acceptable or taboo. As situated knowledge, religion in the same way as culture continues to shape, influence even foster or obstruct life-giving experiences for individuals and communities. This is mostly because the interpretation of religious text and teachings is mainly done from one religion to another or one belief system to the next. Incidentally, African people are said to have always been religious and gender relations within indigenous societies are believed to have been 'inclusive, exclusive and flexible' (Sofola 2006:60). Yet, patriarchal norms and indigenous social hierarchies that deny women political, economic, legal and educational rights are believed to have been reinforced and perpetuated by the missionary introduction of Christian religion (Akyeampong & Fofak 2012:22). In fact, Johnson states that there is 'no country in the world where these rights are equally enjoyed by women and men in practice' (1993:25). Hence, feminist theologians like Phiri and Nadar (2002) critique religion of its oppressive nature to women's health in the way in which it influences women's thoughts, emotions, personalities and social relationships as they seek their relationship with God. This article emerges from a research project conducted among the Methodist Manyano[1] Women and Prayer Service Union of Limpopo province

[1] This is a Xhosa name originally given to African women's prayer unions in South Africa, originating in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. It is derived from the verb 'ukumanya' meaning 'to join' or 'unite', 'unity' or 'kopano' in Setswana or Sesotho. When the Methodist mission reached Natal at the end of the nineteenth century, a Xhosa hymn book was used. Thus it happened that a number of Xhosa words associated with the MCSA and Christianity entered the Zulu language. The term Manyano was adopted by the Methodists and has been used ever since to denote their church women's

in South Africa on food autonomy for maternal health. The article argues that traditionally in most African countries indigenous knowledge on household production and food autonomy was a woman's problem. They owned the power to the land and provided food for their families from the produce of their farms. The article further demonstrates how religion played an important role in removing women from the center to the periphery of agricultural production by introducing the Victorian model of a domestic housewife through missionary influence. The article concludes that although Christian religion is said to have destabilized African women's ability towards food autonomy, Methodist Manyano Women of Limpopo have proved that religion also has the potential to empower women with knowledge on food autonomy by revising women's indigenous knowledge on food production and experiences as heads of households. This is because Manyano Women's organizations have been proved to have the capacity to influence women's household views and perspectives. Hence the need to address the formation of Manyano movement.

Formation of Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union in South Africa

A study by Kumalo (2009:89), found out that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa was the first to establish a Women's Manyano organization, in 1870 in Dundee, Natal. Gaitskel attributes the establishment of the Women's Manyano to the efforts of the wives of missionaries who mostly contributed by evangelizing African women, teaching them sewing and instructing them on the role of motherhood, wifehood and worker. This practice began in the Methodist Church and spread to the Anglican Church and American Board Mission (1997:18). Furthermore, the formalization of the MCSA women's organization, which is now known as the Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union, is said to have happened in the 1830's among the Tswana and Zulu mission stations through weekly sewing classes. As Manyano developed, Gaitskel notes that, by the 1880's, Eastern Cape Missionary wives grouped women together for Bible studies, prayer and testimonies which became the lifeline for women's groups to date (1997:18). As Oduyoye (2002) notes,

organization. Manyano is also called 'Methodist Women's Prayer and Service Union' (see Theilen (2003); Jacka (2014: 189).

women have founded religious associations, initiated church communities and created ministries to make churches effective despite cultural constraints and societal and religious prejudice against women. Hence, Cragg and Millard regard the emergence of Women's Manyano as the 'most significant development in the life of the African Church as the organization evangelized, raised funds and positively influenced its member's family life' (2013:53).

Manyano Women Movement and the Victorian Model of Housewife.

As stated earlier, Missionary wives' supported their husbands in evangelizing native Africans by focusing on teaching and training basic home making (Gaitskel 1997:18). In order to do this, native African women were organized into weekly meetings for sewing. These weekly sewing meetings developed into a 'class' (Laws & Discipline 2007:27) for instruction on motherhood and family Christian formation. This was because dressing in Western clothes was regarded as a sign of seeking baptism, Christian instruction and conversion (Gaitskel 1997:19). The teachings offered by these missionary women were meant to inculcate Christian ideals of marriage, fidelity, wifehood, morality, maternal and domestic responsibility as a standard for a new life. From this kind of teaching a gender perspective suggests that women were responsible for household reproduction, production and caring even though their ability to achieve food autonomy and maternal health was restricted (Theilen 2003:63). Despite the tremendous contribution missionaries made through evangelism and education, their perception of Western culture as superior to African culture influenced them to impose both Christianity and a Western way of life, worldview and ideologies by undermining local religion, tradition and culture that located African women in agricultural production. For instance, Clifford notes the influence of the colonial teaching that was based on the Victorian family ideology and 'the cult of true womanhood' (2001:12). It was presumed that women have a superior morality because of their maternal nature. Therefore, they could be trusted to impart good moral values to children and become suitable homemakers for their husbands or male relatives, thereby contributing to a more humane society (Clifford 2001:24). Furthermore, the family model imposed by female missionaries on their subjects provided an 'ideal answer for a family model against Western industrialization' (Gaitskel

1983). However, it destroyed the African communal food production system and progressively isolated African women from achieving food autonomy by removing them from the agriculture sect. The new family model of 'Male breadwinner, dependent housekeeping wife and mother and dependent school going children' (Gaitskel 1983: 241) entrenched women's dependent and consumer status to the detriment of family food security and poor maternal health.

Similarly, the Victorian model of housewife coupled with a Western influence viewed agricultural production as man's work and that women's involvement rendered them a '*Beast of burden'* (Gaitskel 1983:225). As such, western religion discriminated women from participating in food production as was practiced in the African society during the pre-missionary era and reinforced their dependent and subordinate status as homemakers. This set a socio-religious norm that saw men involved in the public sphere making political and economic decisions, while women were confined to a domestic sphere 'producing and raising male citizens to lead society' (Clifford 2001:12). In this way, the role of motherhood was socially and religiously valued and 'elevated above professionalism' (Mead 1976:9). Following all these changes the social responsibility that women held as heads of households in terms of food production and food autonomy was challenged and diminished.

For instance, women and girls were taught to be good wives and mothers in a way to produce 'progressive wives' (Parpat 1996) or 'home makers' (Gaitskel 1983:223).*As a woman taking a course in domestic science was reported as saying, 'it would bring me in the way in which my husband would like…those who are learning now will not think they are improving…but when they go back they will find out what they know'* (Fraser 1943:240 in Parpart 1996). It was also because acquiring domestic training was seen as a sign of conversion and accepting Christian morality and ethics. Subsequently, it was this Western view of married women as the 'angel' in the domestic sphere and African appreciation of women as 'custodians of traditional knowledge' which made the integration of Western and African ideologies seemingly look like it was favouring women. However, missionaries' wives imposition of Victorian family model when training their African converts mainly redefined the concept of home and work for African society. This model formed the basis of the teachings and activities of Women's Organizations, later known as Manyanos. Even though it helped carry the Christian message to indigenous people, it not only contributed to the

destruction of the African communal food production system but progressively denied African women capacity towards food production, allocation and distribution. This finds credence from studies which suggest that Christianity was introduced in Africa to agricultural societies where women and men shared in the 'hardships and benefits of subsistence production' (Mead 1976:3). While the Victorian family ideology and 'the cult of true womanhood' provided an 'ideal answer for a family model against Western industrialization' (Gaitskell 1983:244), it contributed to poverty and food insecurity in most African societies. This became vivid when men begun to leave the rural agricultural sect to work in the city as miners or other industries. This migration left women with no male figures to continue with food production to the detriment of food security in the homes.

Research Method and Theoretical Framework for the Study

Empirical research for this study took place in the rural village of Mashobye situated in Vhembe district with the Manyano Women Movement of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Mashobye village forms part of the 27 villages that make up Thulamela municipality in the Northern part of rural Limpopo Province of South Africa. Limpopo is 'classified amongst the poorest provinces of South Africa with the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape'[2]. Mashobye village experiences poverty exacerbated by patriarchy, historical, socio-economic, political and gender inequality, and currently, poor service delivery like most rural villages in South Africa. Women head most of the households in this area because most men of working age migrate to cities in search of work. In addition, young people move to neighbouring towns to access institutions of higher learning as there are no tertiary institutions in the village or in close proximity.

This study employed a qualitative approach to data collection through the use of focus group discussions with 8 Mashobye Manyano women. The focus group discussion with these church women was intended to find out their perception of food autonomy and how religion can play a role in improving food autonomy for their households. The study generated a number of themes. For this study we will address only two of the themes which are; the role of

[2] For more information, see Department of Agriculture: Republic of South Africa, 2002, 22-24.

situated knowledge on women's effort to attain food security and the role of religion in enhancing women's effort for food autonomy. On the issue of situated knowledge, one of the key outcomes for this study was that, even though women in Mashobye are hard-working to attain food autonomy, they lack beneficial information like knowledge of the South African government's rural development Integrated Food Security Strategy[3] (IFSS). The body (IFSS) is meant to offer rural communities, particularly women and youth, skills, employment and income to redress their food insecurity status. IFSS is the South African democratic government's initiative consisting of six pillars aimed at overcoming poverty and increasing income and job opportunities in rural areas. In particular, the objective of Pillar 1 is to overcome rural food insecurity by increasing participation in food security in productive agriculture. A report by De Cock *et al.* states that 'women headed households are more affected by food insecurity than households headed by men (2013: 275)'. This is partly due to lack of information, inequality in income distribution and lack of asset ownership. Hence, FAO advocates for empowering rural communities, particularly women, to produce their own food for subsistence or income generation.[4] In this way, MWM emerge as an effective force to improve knowledge on women's autonomy to food production by mobilizing women using their weekly meetings.

The ability to make and implement personal decisions was highlighted as an important contributing factor to food autonomy for the achievement of nutrition outcomes among the women. As most participants in the group were heads of households, they argued that household responsibilities will entail the need for more knowledge on how to produce their own food. Women in this focus group discussion argued that the right to appropriate knowledge on food production affects their capacity to food security. According to the above responses, food autonomy gives women the capacity to make independent decisions that give them a sense of achievement. Further, Mead notes that women need to be concerned with what role they can have in shaping decisions that affect them (1995:11).

[3] This is the South African government strategy under the Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Department of Health and Social Development and Public Works focused on improving rural food insecurity.
[4] For more information, see Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). See www.fao.org. (Accessed on 22 May 2015.)

Beneria and Sen argue that economic agriculture disadvantaged women by 'creating class distinctions and emphasizing gender' (1981:290). The contribution of religion, gender, and key economic institutions needs to be addressed on topics relating to food autonomy and maternal health. Research results have shown women's participation in food production, or their desire to do so, and the shift in family headship this is despite maintenance responsibilities confronting most women as heads of households. Hence, this study found that women perceived societal responsibility towards household responsibilities are in many cases treated as though they have been fixed either by the Creator or culture. This is in contrast to indigenous African culture in which women were equated to the earth, had the right to land and respected as food producers and sustainers of life (Maimela 1995:28). Thus, women participation in food production enabled them to determine access to the quality and quantity of their individual and family food and nutrition because they could influence food allocation and distribution.

Religion as Situated Knowledge

Although religion has demonstrated some kind of transformation, the kind of transformation demonstrated can also be questionable. The historical negative portrayal of women has formed part of the Christian message through biblical interpretation and church teachings. From Augustine's classical view expressed in patriarchal anthropology to Aristotle's view of society as a 'hierarchy of graded subordination' (Ruether 1993:95), 'male was to govern female' (Clifford 2001:19). This was influenced by teachings such as: man created in the image of God and while women qualified only by association to a male (Ruether 1993:95). The portrayal of Eve as a 'gateway to hell, rendered all women 'morally weak, prone to sin, and needed to be kept under control to prevent a fall into sin and disorder' (Ruether 1993:90). This patriarchal ideology enabled the male gender to gain preeminence while the female gender was denied education, socio-economic, ecclesial and political participation. The religious distortion on social perceptions and ways of thinking that emerged is captured by Sofola's argument that whenever alien powers dislodged African men of their position of power they would dislodge their female counterparts from their own positions of power (2006:68). Thus, the idea of women participation in food production requires that religious ideologies that were put forward by missionaries be put to scrutiny of their

essence to create space for women emancipation. Therefore, a feminist standpoint theory, which addresses the theory of knowledge, becomes a relevant framework to analyze the power of knowledge in either subjecting or empowering women to make independent decisions. Several authors who have worked with this theory argue that feminist Standpoint theory begins from the lives of the oppressed. The differences found in these lives will produce differences in standpoint projects. It also raises important questions for feminists in relation to epistemological stand obtained. Nielsen (1990) further argues that standpoint epistemology begins with the idea that less powerful members of the society have the potential for a more complete view of social reality than others due to their disadvantaged position. The author further argues that according to standpoint epistemology the disadvantaged group has advantage to be more knowledgeable than the dominant group. Therefore, from the feminist standpoint theory, the kind of transformation that religion introduced in this study can also be questionable. This is because religion as a form of situated knowledge has historically influenced the way in which knowledge about the other gender (woman) is conceptualized and acquired. The other characteristic that is prominent in religion is the concept of power which is also a distinctive kind of obstacle to the production of knowledge in feminist standpoint theory.

The problems of knowledge, be it secular or religious, is central to feminist theorizing. Unless religious knowledge is taken into scrutiny it will continue to destabilize androcentric, mainstream thinking in the humanities and deny women of their social status as knowers. This is because knowledge and power cannot be separated. In concluding the concept of knowledge and standpoint theory Helen E. Longino asks a crucial question which needs to be understood in the context of this study saying:

> … why then is women's standpoint, in particular, a resource?... In the modern period, with its dichotomizing of public and private, women's symbolic place has been 'in the home,' in the private sphere. In the consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s and 1970s many women, consigned to the private domain as a site for (white middle-class) feminine fulfillment, learned how to describe their experience in terms they could own. Their struggle against mystified ideological descriptions of women's place can, however, be thought of as one occasion for the creation of rupture, rather than… its only occasion.

> The anticolonialist writers Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi described similar struggles of the colonized against the ideology of the colonizer (1993:6).

Hence this study would continue to argue that knowledge drawn from Victorian model of housewife has had influence on the Manyano Women's movement in different ways.

Effects of the Victorian Model of House wife to Women Manyano Movement

Accordingly, the domestic ideology offered married women the status of 'angel' in a private and child-centered home, which found resonance with the African worldview of women as respected custodians of morals, culture, and rituals (Akyeampong & Fofack 2012:24). Yet, this model had a number of contributing factors on women. First, it prioritized Christian ideals on African mothers about their 'vital role of safeguarding female chastity, marital fidelity, maternal and domestic responsibility' (Gaitskel 1983:225). Second, it socialized African women into dependence on males for subsistence living and drove them to passivity. Third, it reinforced women's role of service and selfless giving to others at the expense of women's personal needs. Essentially, this characterized the nature of being an African Christian woman from which 'women had almost no way of freeing themselves' (Maimela 1995:27) from an ensuing dependent, consumer status and, particularly, their inability to achieve food autonomy. This domestic ideology continues to influence and even normalize women's struggles with household responsibilities in general, as societal expectation and assumption. Instead of living a life in a community of equals as promised by the Christian faith (Galatians 3:27-29), women are reduced to a status of 'survival strategists' (Bam 2005:10) as they face a life of worry, anxiety and a struggle for adequate food and subsequent maternal health.

In this way, missionary training created a 'social location' which reinforced prevailing socio-cultural norms and practices as MWPSU's beliefs, desires, and actions. As Clifford 2001:32 suggests, such a context enables dominant voices, values and ideologies to reinforce experiences and thought patterns of subjugation. Similarly, women's actions were constituted and influenced by the meaning inherent in the Church teachings that were

experienced in the weekly motherhood class. Despite envisaged Christian beneficial ideals, these women lost the status of worker and provider to that of 'consumer and dependent' (Jacka 2014:189)[5]. This entrenched the Western social assumption that women's duty is to 'satisfy men's needs', further affirmed by biblical interpretation and teachings that the 'female role as that of a helpmate' (Ruether 1993:95). In this way, Methodist Manyano Women's Prayer and Service Union teaching contributed towards women's inability to achieve food autonomy, thus limiting the promotion of maternal health. This negative influence on women's lives and their development could also be attributed to the 'unquestioned erroneous beliefs about women from developed Western countries to developing societies' (Mead: 1995:3).

Victorian Model of Housewife as a Space of Knowledge Production on Food Autonomy

Although this study has found out that Victorian family model disadvantaged women in as far as knowledge on food production is concerned, we also argue that Victorian family model can also be used as a catalyst for knowledge production on food autonomy among the Manyano women. The church comprises of individuals who are to live their values and beliefs in a way that will shape, influence and inform social responsibility among its members. For instance, Christians working to empower the poor to produce their own food, express hope for the world in which the poor are relieved from poverty and where equality and dignity is a possibility. In the world where only the few elite enjoy economic resources, this study found out that Manyano women have the power to use the same Victorian model through classes to encourage the women to attain food autonomy. This is demonstrated in the way in which the group studied used the same space to return to agriculture production and introduced food gardens within the church premises.

The women lived out their responsibilities as citizens by articulating goals towards social justice through food autonomy. Our study found out that the church as a trusted institution by the community has a responsibility to help the poor to theologize their own experiences, reasons and factors of poverty in

[5] See also Jacka (2014:189).

a way to create more just and equal societies. The Manyano Women Prayer and Service Union (MWPSU) through the Victorian model can be an empowering alternative in response to their experience of lack of food autonomy among many rural women in South Africa.

MWPSU empowered women in the domestic sphere, according to the Victorian ideology. The MWPSU can also use the same model through feminist ideologies of oneness and united sisterhood, organized support groups for women amidst absent or migrated husbands, and return to agricultural production as breadwinners. The women can use the Manyano spirit to achieve food autonomy and promote maternal health among themselves. The following statement confirms this:

> *Manyano helped me a lot, without it we would not have survived... It is just that if MMWPSU cannot help us produce our own food, nothing can help us if we don't stand up for ourselves*[6] *Manyano can help us kick-start an income generating project and we will sustain it*[7].

Mashobye women expressed faith that the organization can empower them beyond spiritual needs, towards the achievement of food autonomy and in promoting maternal health. In fact, these responses from the women show that African women are keen to obtain knowledge on food production. Therefore, the effectiveness of MWPSU teachings and activities in promoting this knowledge is inevitable through weekly prayer meetings, pastoral visitation and outreach projects where women continue to live out their faith. In this light, responses from participants were also appealing for MWPSU to develop a holistic model that will empower women to respond to challenges currently facing women in Sub Saharan Africa. Accordingly, MWPSU mission happens in a country where the Apartheid government's forced removals and community re-settlement were used as tools of oppression to deny Africans the right to food and participation in the economic mainstream. Therefore, Manyano women in this area were appealing to MWPSU to restore women's ability to produce food as a way of reclaiming the lost dignity of food autonomy as Africans through the loss of land.

[6] Response from participant (P1), in-depth interview held 20/11/2015.
[7] Response from discussion group (DG3), held on 21/11/2015.

One of John Wesley's imperatives was the 'preferential option for the poor' (L&D 2007:238), which the MCSA still believe holds a strong calling and motivation to redress poverty and social inequalities. In addition, the MCSA endorsed the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, acknowledging that 'women are frequently victims of violence and of misinformation by media and anti-justice structures' (2007:233), amongst other things. Hence, the achievement of food autonomy can help transform MWPSU's dependent, subordinate and vulnerable status particularly prevalent in the rural social location, to equal participation with men. The following statement affirms these views:

> *Even though the organization is too small, almost not there, Manyano can unite women to join hands, help us to share ideas to start something together to create income and support each other to reduce this suffering from hunger*[8].
>
> *I would like other Manyanos to be aware that there are women struggling and suffering and that they need help*[9].

Studies have shown that the empowerment of women through skills training, material and economic resources and enabling access to necessary information will reduce poverty, improve nutrition and reduce diseases. In addition, MMWPSU's passion and motivation to produce food is particularly motivated by its 'gendered role' and 'social obligation' for household food provision and distribution. It is also a way of enabling the achievement of women's 'functionings' towards enhanced agency and well-being (Jacka 2014:189). Moreover, the condition of poverty, malnutrition and maternal mortality prevalent in most rural areas of Sub Saharan Africa, and Mashobye in particular, can be transformed when MWPSU is able to 'construct a guiding vision for women's liberation' (Clifford 2001:37), from lack of food autonomy which hinders maternal health. Moreover, MWPSU responses also reveal Mashobye women's dependent and vulnerable status because of their lack of food production, even though they have access to family backyards. Accordingly oppressed people tend to have a low self-esteem and to accept

[8] Response from discussion group (DG1), held on 25/04/2015.
[9] Response from participant (P4), in-depth interview held on 04/06/2015.

oppressive patriarchal conditioning 'as if it is the way things are meant to be' (Clifford 2001:28). Hence, Clifford reckons that transformation results from conscientizing the poor, and women in particular, about dominant and oppressive views, systems and structures, by closing the gap between the language of liberation and reality (Clifford 2001:36-37).

History of Apartheid and its Effect on Food Autonomy

As we close our discussion, we find it unfitting to end this study without reflecting on one of the major hindrances to women's ability to attain food autonomy. Feminist theologians claim that 'social location has a profound bearing on women's experiences' (Clifford 2001:250) of oppression and suffering, particularly because of its 'cultural conditioning of African women's thinking' (Kanyoro 2004). In addition, Koch suggests that the 'invasive poverty prevalent among most black South Africans resulted from their forced resettlement to arid and parched homelands', which was the Apartheid government way of reserving commercial farming land for White commercial farmers. Implicitly, the Apartheid government by denying Blacks the right to land, undermined 'food production for human consumption, ignored women's definition of what constitutes farming patterns, prevented production of adequate food, and separated women from mainstream development and conventional economic criteria' (Beneria & Sen 1981:283-285. This created a social location in which communities' and traditional livelihoods are displaced through land distribution. As a result, South Africa is rated amongst the 'most unequal societies in the world' (De Cock *et al*. 2013:271), a status mostly traceable to the colonial government and Apartheid regime. As patriarchal institutions, these government's food production systems reinforced African women's lower status through 'land privatization and property rights', land seizure, capital accumulation, and land accumulation, promoting racial discrimination, class stratification and unequal gender relations. Consequently, Apartheid benefited 55 000 Whites with ownership of 85% of the land, while 12 million Blacks inhabit only 17.1 million hectares of land – of which only 2.6 million hectares constitutes arable land[10]. A transformation for women's ability towards the achievement of food autonomy will require an intentional

[10] UNFAO, World Food Insecurity and Malnutrition,18.

inclination towards food models that commit not to 'more food but less hungry people, not higher production but greater distribution' (de Gruchy 2003). Essentially, a need to move away from the Apartheid and colonization views that reinforces a lens of tradition and culture through which women continue to be denied equality and justice. This will go hand in hand with theologizing cultural and traditional practices among rural communities that subordinates women to the same level as 'minors, children, and servants even alongside men's property'. Recognizing that with limited capacity for independent decision making, women's ability to achieve food autonomy will remain a challenge while vulnerability to poor maternal health, including malnutrition, continues to increase.

Conclusion

The history of women and agriculture has always been read through the social science lens with little attention to how religion can be related to issues such as food autonomy. In this study we have deliberated the way in which religion has contributed to the positioning of women in the agricultural setting of society. Through the use of the Victorian model of housewife, we have discovered that, through the use of the Victorian model of housewife, missionaries' wives contributed to the removal of African women from the food production agricultural duties. The removal of these women later affected food security in the homes hence the study called for a revisit of the role of women in food production for food autonomy. We therefore, conclude the study by stating that Manyano women can use the same Victorian model of gathering women for lessons to train women on food production by introducing household gardens. One of the calls of the MCSA is to facilitate women's access to reproductive health rights and food security (L&D 2007:283). Directing the organization's teachings and activities towards food production could form a response for MCSA to take the side of the poor and a call on poverty alleviation through the empowerment of rural women in particular (L &D 2007). In this way, the Church is directed towards 'advocacy and activism' as well as radical measures- to 'address levels of poverty, land reform and just wages … (Abrahams 2010:8).That is, religion as situated knowledge can be expected to have consequences for the transformation of knowledge within all spheres of society.

References

Abrahams, I.M. 2010. *Give us this day our daily bread. The Presiding Bishop's Address to the 120th MCSA Conference, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, September 2009.* Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House and Book Depot.

Akyeampong, E. & H. Fofack 2012. The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications – Part I: The Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 6051.

Bam, B. 2005. Women and the Church in (South) Africa: Women are the Church in (South) Africa. In Phiri, I.A. & S. Nadar (eds.): *On Being Church: Women's Voices and Visions.* Geneva: World Council of Churches.

Beneria, L. & G. Sen 1981. Accumulation, Reproduction and 'Women's Role in Economic Development': Boserup Revisited. *Signs* 7,2 *Development and the Sexual Division of Labour* Winter: 279-298.

Buffel, O. 2010. Preferential Option for the Poor in the Current Context of Poverty in South Africa: Doing Liberation Theology in the Footsteps of Simon Maimela. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXVI: 99-113. Theology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa. n.p.uir.unisa.ac.za >bitstream > handle > Buf … (Accessed on 10 April 2016.)

Clifford, A.M. 2001. *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Cragg, D. & J. Millard 2013. *Open Doors Methodism in South Africa 1883-1933.* Salt River: Methodist Publishing House.

De Cock, N., M. D'Haese, N. Vink, V. van Rooyen, L. Staelens, H.C. Schönfeldt & L. D'Haese 2013. Food Security in Rural Areas of Limpopo Province, South Africa. Original Paper, Food Sec. (2013) 5:279. DOI 10.1007/s12571-013-0247-y, 271-275. link. scholar.sun.ac.za>handle. (Accessed on 22 June 2015.)

de Gruchy, S. 2003. *Biotechnology as 'Cultural Invasion': Theological Reflection on Food Sovereignty and Community Building in Africa*. *Scriptura* 82: 82 – 93.

Gaitskell, D. 1983. Housewife, Maids or Mothers: Some Contradictions of Domesticity for Christian Woman in Johannesburg, *Journal of African History* 24: 241-256.

Gaitskel, D. 1997. Power in Prayer and Service Women's Christian Orgniza-

tions. In Elphick, R. & R. Davenport (eds.): *Christianity in South Africa's Political, Social & Cultural History*. Cape Town: Creda Press (PTY) LTD.

Gould, K. 2015. Deep Food Autonomy. A Paper Presented at Indigenous Research Center of the Americas, Department of Native American Studies: U.C. Davis, 2004. Available at: http://www.escholarship.org/help_copyright. html#reuse.accessed. (Accessed on 22 October 2015.)

Jacka, T. 2014. Left Behind and Vulnerable? Conceptualizing Development and Older Women's Agency in Rural China. Australian National University. *Asian Studies Review* 38,2:189.

Johnson, E.A. 1993. *She Who is the Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Kanyoro, M.R.A. 2001. *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*. London: Sheffield Academic Press.

Kumalo, S.R. 2009. *Methodists with a White History and a Black Future in South Africa: An Ecclesial and Socio-Political History of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.* Johannesburg: Upper Room.

Maimela, S. 1995. Seeking to be a Christian in a Patriarchal Society. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 9,2,November:27-42.

Mbiti, J.S. 1991. *Introduction to African Religion.* Second Edition. Dar es Salaam. East African EducationalPublishers Ltd.

Mead, M. 1976. A Comment on the Role of Women in Agriculture. In Tinker, I.B. & M.B. Bramsen (ed.): *Women and World Development*. American Association for the Advancement of Science. Washington D.C: Overseas Development Council.

Nielsen, M.J. 1990. Introduction. In Nielson, J.M. (ed.): *Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in the Social Sciences.* London: Westview Press.

Oduyoye, M.A. 2002. Preface: Naming Our Mothers. In Phiri, I.A., D.B. Govinden & S. Nadar (eds.): *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Parpart, J.L. 1986. *Women and the State in Afirca*. Department of History. Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. Working Paper #117 May 1986.

Phiri I.A, D.B. Govinden & S. Nadar 2002. *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Ruether, R.R. 1993. *Women-Church Theology and Practice*. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers.

Sofola, Z. 2006. Religion and Changing Gender Discourse. In Sackey, B.M. (ed.:) *New Directions in Gender and Religion: The Changing Status of Women in African Independent Churches*. Oxford: Lexington Books.

Van Reken, C.P. 1999. The Church's Role in Social Justice. *Calvin Theological Journal CTJ* 34: 198-202.

Theilen, U. 2003. *Gender, Race, Power and Religion: Women in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Post-Apartheid Society*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. (Studien Zur Interkulturellen Geschichte Des Christentums.)

Longino, H.E. 2013. Feminist Standpoint Theory and the Problems of Knowledge. *Signs* 19,1,Autumn: 201-212. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/ stable/3174750. (Accessed on 22 March 2013.)

Storia Sietisho
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu-Natal
storias@msn.com

Lilian Cheelo Siwila
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Siwila@ukzn.ac.za