AFRICAN JOURNAL OF GENDER AND RELIGION

Publication Information

Volume 29 No. 1 (2023)

E-ISSN: 2707-2991

Published semi-annually, in July and December, by:

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The African Journal of Gender and Religion is a **DHET Accredited Journal**

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Book Reviews

Editorial: Expanding Methodological, Literary and Cultural Frontiers within Feminist studies of Religion

Sarojini Nadar

Editor

In this issue of the AJGR our contributors continue to explore, document and reflect on the multiple and varied ways that religion and gender intersect in, and beyond the context of Africa. It contains scholarly reflections that preoccupy feminists across geographical contexts, disciplinary borders, theoretical boundaries and methodological frontiers. Our contributors address the complex question of how religion can either, (though often simultaneously), shape positive and negative norms related to gender. In this issue, this complexity is explored through various social and geographical contexts, as well as an array of texts - historical, literary, lived, and sacred.

Writing about Sarah Palin's vice presidential nomination in 2008, Gloria Steinem declared: "Feminism has never been about getting a job for one woman. It's about making life more fair for women everywhere. It's not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It's about baking a new pie."[1] While Steinem was speaking specifically about women in American politics, this applies to what many of us have felt in our collective feminist gut about mainstream academia too - apart from the pie being too small, the piece of pie that we get is often simply unpalatable. We need to bake a new pie! What are the ingredients for such a pie, and how does it look, taste and feel? Su'ad Abdul Khabeer, scholar-artist-

[1] Gloria Steinem. "Palin: Wrong woman, wrong message." *The Los Angeles Times,* September 2008.

ISSN 2707-2991

activist, showcases the possibilities of both form and content, in her piece "[In] Searching Our Mothers' Archives: Building *Umi's Archive* through Mourning Work."

Originally submitted as a "praxis" piece for the journal because of the ways in which Abdul Khabeer explores the creative and the speculative within historical archives, we were prompted by one of the peer reviewers to make this piece one of our "mainstream" articles, precisely because we align ourselves as a journal, with Abdul Khabeer's central contention that "Black feminist scholarship provokes us to reimagine archives in creative and speculative ways." Drawing on the physical archive and the digital space of an exhibition series curated by the author, Abdul Khabeer's article not only weaves together the important narrative of her *Umi,* Amina Amatul Haqq, but she surfaces her method of representation and analysis of the archive, as a means to interrogate how we do Black feminist work in the academy. She concludes that,

> "... though intimacy gives access to knowledge, it is not totalizing. It does not give you access to everything there is to be known because, as we know, our knowledge, wherever we acquire it, is always partial. However, intimacy does provide a more dynamic knowing. In colonial epistemologies, we are only supposed to approach our work with the "eye of a scholar" and that is what makes it legitimate research, valuable, and the hallmark of the Euro-American intellectual tradition. However, I have found using only one lens inhibits understanding. In fact, this project is at its best when I am all of those things at the same time, scholar, activist-artist, and child, opening up knowledge rather than foreclosing it as "objectivity" discourse presumes."

Abdul Khabeer's piece, in both content and form, provides a powerful and poignant challenge to the systems of knowledge-making, which we are, as feminist scholars, simultaneously implicated in, and contribute to. It is certainly a fitting way to open this issue of the journal.

In many ways, representation and analysis of the kind offered by Abdul Khabeer, constitutes an exercise in 'epistemic risk.' This is a subject that Pumla Gqola picks up in her article: "Religious Mapping, Epistemic Risk and Archival Adventure in Athambile Masola's *Ilifa.*" Like Abdul Khabeer, Gqola too is asking key questions about archives and power, through an examination of Masola's debut collection of poetry and her "uses of Christian vocabularies to amplify multigenerational African (women's) contribution to South Africa's intellectual and creative archives." Gqola argues that "[W]hereas all deliberate products of the imagination are an encounter with risk, additional danger attaches to a poetry project in which a contemporary African feminist attempts to write herself into a vanishing tradition." Gqola shows the ways in which Masola not just contributes to African literature, but how she linguistically subverts the missionary project of African literacy through this collection in isiXhosa, as well as how she theoretically (perhaps even theologically) punctures missionary attempts to create the ideal "Victorian-native" woman, through her feminist imaginative ends.

Continuing with the theme of missionary initiatives, in the third article, "Making Good Women: The bequeaths of colonial encounters in the making of the Clergy Wife in Ghana" the trope of the "good woman" is explored via the making of the "clergy wife" position in Ghana. Abene Kyere expands the literature on how missionary enterprises created the "ideal" Christian woman, to show how the making of the position of "clergy wife" (CW) set a utopian standard that remains to this day. The article traces "the complex historical 'formation' of the position of the CW in Ghana by showing that the education the girls received was gendered and domestic. While it might not have been a particularly enviable position to be a CW in the West, the Ghanaian case tells a different story," Kyere argues. She concludes that "[I]t was, indeed, a privilege for girls or young women to be recommended for the position. However, the position was consciously created through a Western-gendered ideology of expected roles and positions for men and women. A CW was, thus, expected to fulfill the missionary and Western concept of acceptable womanhood."

While Kyere seems to suggest that the Ghanaian clergy wife trope was 'created' and 'made' by western Christian missionary ideals, leaving little room for women's agency, Elorm Stiles-Ocran in her article, "Theology and Women's Agency in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence" demonstrates how women's agency comes to the fore, in a different situational context. Challenging the literature that seems to govern studies on IPV that "cultural norms and religion sustain women's experiences of IPV," Stiles-Ocran, drawing on "constructivist grounded theory to inductively analyze the stories of thirteen abused Christian women in a mainline church in southern Ghana," assembles and posits a more nuanced account of the relationship between theological beliefs and IPV. While not denying how "multiple systems, including informal social support networks, constrain survivors" she also demonstrates how the personal faith and individually constructed theologies of survivors, "serve as catalysts to their self-enactments and emerging agency, concluding that " these findings provide nuance to existing (and contested) conceptions of agency."

Exploring a different type of agency, that could arguably be considered a textual agency, Gertrud Tönsing, in her article "Losing the Lost Coin: Gender Doublets in the Synoptic Tradition," critically examines a literary tradition of parable gender doublets in the bible. She convincingly argues for the importance of placing such narratives (for example the woman with the lost coin, or the woman baking with leaven), within the historical Jesus tradition as gender parable doublets, since it likely demonstrates an intention to include historically female and male lived experiences within didactic illustrations. Notwithstanding the gender-essentialist framing of these roles, the inclusion of tasks traditionally designated "female" to illustrate 'higher' spiritual values about the kingdom of God within the historical Jesus tradition makes a difference to the authority such texts are granted in contemporary societies. In contexts where the bible is regarded as a sacred text authorising contemporary gendered norms, the deliberate

and conscious construction of these gendered doublets provides emancipatory possibilities for contemporary Christian women, which effectively challenge the later epistle instructions that oppose women's leadership and participation.

Moving from biblical mandates that prohibit women's full religious participation and leadership, in the final piece in this issue, Sonene Nyawo's article, "Deprivation of Land Tenure to Daughters of Mother Earth: The Case of Eswatini" shows how cultural mandates also limit and control women's access to economic autonomy and leadership. She demonstrates that "under Swazi law and custom, a woman can only be granted land rights by the chief through her husband, male relatives, or male children." Through three case studies, Nyawo's article reveals the limited utility of legislation which grant women equal access to property rights, in contexts where social and cultural norms dominate women's acquisition to such rights. The tension between legislative change and cultural gendered norms are once again brought to the fore in Nyawo's piece and indicates the ongoing challenges which must be taken up in feminist activist and academic spaces.

Overall, the contributions in this issue of the journal continues to expand the frontiers of scholarship at the intersections of the study of religion and gender. Cultural, social, literary, and religious scholarly landscapes are creatively and critically explored, to reveal how deep theorizing and intellectual reflection are key to the ongoing work of crafting emancipatory gendered conditions.

[In] Searching Our Mothers' Archives: Building *Umi's Archive* through Mourning Work

Su'ad Abdul Khabeer[i]

SHORT BIO

[i]Su'ad Abdul Khabeer is a scholar-artist-activist whose work explores issues of race and Blackness, Islam in the United States and hip-hop music and culture. She is an associate professor of American Culture at the University of Michigan.

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SUBMISSION DATE
9 April 2023

ACCEPTANCE DATE
10 July 2023

ABSTRACT

Black feminist scholarship provokes us to reimagine archives in creative and speculative ways and echoes everyday Black communities' deep investment in memory that rejects the idea of African people as a people without history. I enter this discourse through *Umi's Archive* is an interdisciplinary and multimedia research project that draws on my family archive to engage everyday Black women's thought to investigate key questions of archives and power. In this article, I describe my experience curating, preserving, and presenting the archive and how that became a process of de-disciplining myself, turning to intimacy and mourning to learn from Black women by searching in my Umi's archive.

KEYWORDS
Archive, intimacy, mourning

Introduction

In November 1971, Dick Gregory visited the Ohio State University (OSU) at the invitation of the student group, Afro-Am. In a letter written by my mother, then Audrey, to her childhood friend, Violet, she describes the Black US American comedian and activist's visit.

> *I was going to end the letter on page 4 but I went to see Dick Gregory & he was dynamite. He will be running for president of Ohio State University on the Afro-Am ticket. Even if he wins (a lot of whiteys are behind him) he still has to be approved by the search committee which is a bunch of old white racists. His educational background is better than any of the honkies that are on the board of trustees or the present president (of O.S.U) now. He told (Dick Gregory) how the food in America is unhealthy and unsafe for human consumption. A lot of brothers and sisters are giving up meat. It is*

ISSN 2707-2991

> *bad for you. I'm going to start reading some books about it before I preach too much. I heard once I finish reading, I won't want to eat nothing. Right now I plan on cutting down my meat & try to eat 1 1/2 meals a day instead of 4 meals a day (smile)... He also rapped about the war (He was 288 lbs and now he weighs less than 100lbs.). He is still fasting (only drinks fruit juices & water). Since he doesn't shit any more he says he'll still sit on the toilet & pretend he's shitting because he says people do the heaviest thinking when they're on the toilet (smile). He said white folks & black folks should organize a boycott of Thanksgiving (to stop buying turkeys) & or Christmas (to stop buying presents) in protest of the war. Once you hit the pocketbooks of those fat wealthy crackers, you hit the real power of the U.S. He said if you stop buying General Motors products you could paralyze the country & that the chairman of the board of G.M. would personally wake up tricky Dicky & tell him to stop the war! The whiteys can do it but Violet we know that they aren't into doing shit. They where (sic) long hair & talk about love & peace but when it comes to action they're full of it. Maybe they'll surprise us!*

The letter goes on to discuss the Black Panther Party (BPP) Communications Secretary, Kathleen Cleaver's, visit to OSU. It also enumerates the crimes of the US that Audrey describes as the "most racist, despotic, slick, sly, degenerate system in the world". These crimes are imperial, propping up puppet governments in the Congo and the Korean Peninsula, and national, she writes: "bs drug and prison reform, no one in the mafia is going to jail for drugs just our brother and sisters". The letter ends, exhorting Violet to raise her daughter as a revolutionary and closes with:

> *Well I better stop writing. Don't you think I should (smile) I hope you can understand my*
> *handwriting (hieroglyphics) Well tell everyone I said hello & tell me what they're doing*
> *(Lawrence, Joanne, Melvin, rocky, Nancy, Erika, Diane).*
> *Keep on keeping on.*
> *Power to the People. Blk Power to Black People*
> *Love, Audrey*
> *P.S. Survival is a bitch!*

My mother, Amina Amatul Haqq, was born Audrey Beatrice Weeks in 1950 in Harlem, New York. Her parents, Aubrey J. Weeks and Carmen M. Inniss Weeks, were also born in Harlem but were the children of immigrants to the United States from the then British colonies of Montserrat and Barbados, respectively. After serving in World War II, her father secured a rare position as a fireman and, as result, the family left an apartment in Harlem for a single-family home in Queens in 1953. Unlike her parents, my mother was university-bound, but not to the historically-Black college she wanted to go to but, instead, to the predominately white institution of OSU. She ended up at OSU in 1968 because my grandmother feared her outspoken daughter would be killed if she went "down south". Ironically, going to OSU did not keep her out of trouble.

> And if you go to the seventies, I was…embarking on a political journey. I was a member of the African Liberation Support Committee, Pan African Congress, Black Panther Party…the All African Liberation Support Committee… I got into my culture…when I went to Ohio State, we brought African dance to Columbus, Ohio. And I organized this group called the Uhuru Dancers – a hundred pounds ago…We shut the school down in 1970…we demonstrated on campus for Black studies. The white kids were against the war in Vietnam. So, we had sort of like a coalition. And I remember when the National Guard came, and this was first time I ever smelled tear gas…

In this interview, recorded a few months before her death, my mother, now Amina, describes her activism from 1968 through to the early 1970s.[1] She was active in student organizations that worked to raise political consciousness, were committed to Pan-Africanism, and helped to establish Black Studies at the university. Reading the letter for the first time in 2018 confirmed what I already knew: that her time in college was a key node in a lifetime of activism. I found the above letter, which was never mailed to Violet, among a collection of correspondence that included birthday cards and wedding invitations sent to my mother during the early 1970s. The correspondence was in a broken drawer buried deep in a basement closet of the Queens home. I found it while doing "death cleaning", a Swedish term

[1] Amina Amatul Haqq, interview by Rog Walker, Bronx, NY, May 16, 2017.

for sorting through one's things before death, although I was cleaning for those who had already passed on. I was death cleaning because my mother died suddenly in October 2017, five months after the death of her own mother, three days after I had been joking with her and making her rub my head during a visit home to New York to promote my first book, and a few hours after we spoke on the phone about her accompanying me on my next international research trip.

As the oldest of the family's two daughters and granddaughters, the responsibility of death cleaning for my mother and my family fell to me. I cleaned out the bedrooms and basements, file cabinets and bookshelves examining everything from family photos from the 1930s to personal emails to decide what to let go of and what to archive. The archive is a repository of the remarkable nature of my mother's everyday life, like being given her shahadah (testimony of faith) in 1975 by one of Malcolm X's "right hand men", or helping organize an economic boycott in Queens after the NYPD killed a ten-year-old Black boy named Clifford Glover, or protesting apartheid for African Liberation Day in Washington DC in 1972. As I went through her and my family's papers and belongings, I found the stories had much broader implications as Afrodiasporic and Black Atlantic narratives. The archive documents my mother's roots as the granddaughter of Caribbean migrants who came to Harlem in the early 1900s and narrates her experiences as a Black public-school student in the mid-twentieth century Jim and Jane Crow North. They tell stories of her activism as a college student in the Black Power movement as well as stories of faith and Black women's heartaches, seen in her unfulfilled quest to find "my own Malcolm", as she texted to a friend.

Black feminist scholarship provokes us to reimagine archives in creative and speculative ways.[2] This work echoes everyday Black communities' deep investment in memory that rejects the idea of African people as a people without history. I enter this discourse through "Umi's Archive", an interdisciplinary and multimedia research project that engages everyday

[2] Rosemarie Freeney Harding, and Rachel E. Harding. *Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015); Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. *First edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019).

Black women's thought to investigate key questions of archives and power, particularly asking what new knowledges arise from narrating stories that, officially, do not matter? Umi's Archive is a physical archive, cataloguing the personal and familial artifacts of the NYC based Black Muslim woman community activist, Amina Amatul Haqq, whom I called umi (Black Arabic for "mommy"). It is also a digital space as an exhibition series found at umisarchive.com. Umi's Archive is a generative, analytical space that examines the many facets of being Black and, most importantly, I offer it as an imaginative space where we remember the past so we can dream up the future we want.

The title of this essay is a riff off Alice Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers Gardens" where Walker uses the garden as a metaphor for the generations of Black women that preceded her, who, due to slavery and racialized gender oppression, could not be artists and thinkers and so invested their creative energies into other spaces, like gardens. For Walker, the task of her generation was to recover and fill in the silences for their mothers and grandmothers. I swap gardens for archives because what I narrate is a different, though related, relation to the past. Building on the liberatory impulses and struggles they inherited, Walker and my mother's generation did important work of recovery, reclamation, and preservation. Accordingly, my work is not to fill the silences but to listen to their voices toward building for the future. I also invoke the term because it has a gravitas that is worthy of the history she saved and preserved, without official license, as a fugitive practice.[3] A practice whose fugitivity, considering ramped up efforts to erase the past, is more critical than ever. In what remains, I walk through what happens when I am in the archive, after I found the letter, and the kind de-disciplining I learned by searching my mother's archive.

Citations + Canon + Archival Authority

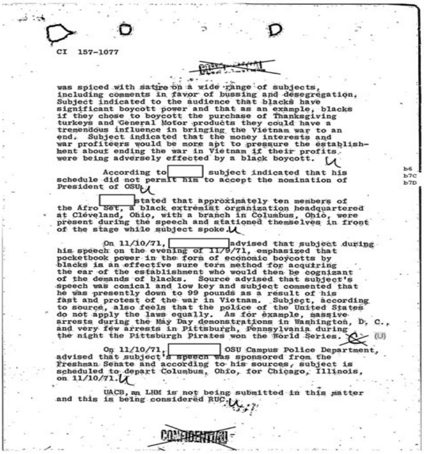
My mother's reference to Gregory piqued my interest and made me laugh out loud – asé to Dick Gregory who is hilarious in the third person and 40 years after the fact. I decided to search online to see if I might find a newspaper clipping about Gregory's visit. I anticipated getting a hit or two

[3] K.T. Ewing, "Fugitive Archives: Black Women, Domestic Repositories, and Hoarding as Informal Archival Practice," *The Black Scholar* 52, no. 4 (2022): 43–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2022.2111653.

that I would have to delve deeper into. However, the first relevant result was not from a news organization but, instead, an almost 500-page Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) file on Gregory. Gregory had visited OSU a few times, including the visit my mother writes about and, by that time, had been under FBI surveillance for four years under J. Edgar Hoover's Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). COINTELPRO targeted groups the state considered a danger to national security, which included organizations such as the communist party, Students for Democratic Society, the BPP, The Nation of Islam, and individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dick Gregory. Hoover's interest in Gregory, who he considered to be a militant Black nationalist, led him to direct FBI agents to develop "a counterintelligence operation to alert the mafia organization, La Costa Nostra (LCN), to Gregory's attack on the LCN" to "neutralize" him.[4] With respect to Black nationalist and radical groups, COINTELPRO established special agents in 41 cities, including Cincinnati where the report on Gregory to the FBI was sent.

The confidential report, released with redactions under the Freedom of Information Act, indicates either an undercover agent or a paid local informant conducted surveillance of Gregory and the student group, Afro-Am, in coordination with local Columbus law enforcement and OSU campus security. As I read the clandestine report, I was struck by the points of correspondence and dissonance in Audrey's and the FBI's accounts. Both speak to Gregory's weight loss, his comments on Thanksgiving and General Motors, and his suggestion for an economic boycott. However, where Audrey wrote Dick Gregory "said white folks & black folks" should boycott, the FBI reports that "subject indicated that...war profiteers would be more apt to pressure the establishment if their profits were adversely affected by a black boycott". Considering that a multiracial call to boycott was more in line with Gregory's politics and, frankly, a more effective political strategy, the FBI's claim that Gregory advocated for a Black-only boycott is telling.

[4] Kyle Swenson, "J. Edgar Hoover Saw Dick Gregory as a Threat. So He Schemed to Have the Mafia 'Neutralize' the Comic," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/08/22/j-edgar-hoover-saw-dick-gregory-as-a-threat-so-he-schemed-to-have-the-mafia-neutralize-the-comic/.



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was spiced with satire on a wide range of subjects, including comments in favor of bussing and desegregation. Subject indicated to the audience that blacks have significant boycott power and that as an example, blacks if they chose to boycott the purchase of Thanksgiving turkeys and General Motor products they could have a tremendous influence in bringing the Vietnam war to an end. Subject indicated that the money interests and war profiteers would be more apt to pressure the establishment about ending the war in Vietnam if their profits were being adversely effected by a black boycott. U

According to [redacted] subject indicated that his schedule did not permit him to accept the nomination of President of OSU. U

b6
b7C
b7D

[redacted] stated that approximately ten members of the Afro Set, a black extremist organization headquartered at Cleveland, Ohio, with a branch in Columbus, Ohio, were present during the speech and stationed themselves in front of the stage while subject spoke. U

On 11/10/71, [redacted] advised that subject during his speech on the evening of 11/9/71, emphasized that pocketbook power in the form of economic boycotts by blacks is an effective sure term method for acquiring the ear of the establishment who would then be cognizant of the demands of blacks. Source advised that subject's speech was comical and low key and subject commented that he was presently down to 99 pounds as a result of his fast and protest of the war in Vietnam. Subject, according to source, also feels that the police of the United States do not apply the laws equally. As for example, massive arrests during the May Day demonstrations in Washington, D. C., and very few arrests in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the night the Pittsburgh Pirates won the World Series. (U)

On 11/10/71, [redacted] OSU Campus Police Department, advised that subject's speech was sponsored from the Freshman Senate and according to his sources, subject is scheduled to depart Columbus, Ohio, for Chicago, Illinois, on 11/10/71. U

UACB, an LHM is not being submitted in this matter and this is being considered RUC. U

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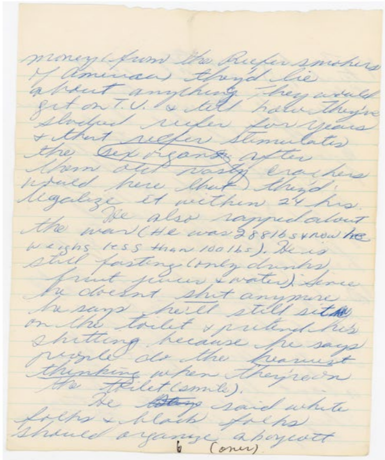


money (from the Reefer smokers of America) they'd lie about anything. They would get on T.V. & still have they've smoked reefer for years & that reefer stimulates the sex organs after them old nasty crackers would here that they'd legalize it within 24 hrs.
He also rapped about the war (He was 288 lbs & now he weighs less than 100 lbs). He is still fasting (only drinks fruit juices & water). Since he doesn't shit anymore he says he'll still sit on the toilet & pretend he's shitting because he says people do the heaviest thinking when they're on the toilet (smile).
He said white folks & black folks should organize a boycott
6 (over)

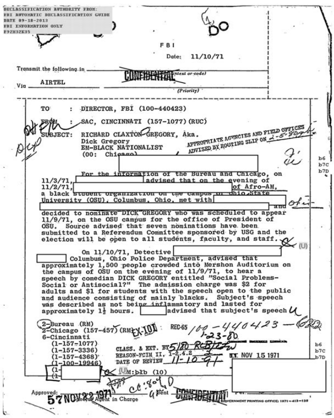
Image 1 "He said white folks & black folks should organize a boycott..."

Image 1

I found another correspondence/dissonance particularly chilling. Audrey writes that Afro-Am nominated Dick Gregory to run for president of OSU, but does not describe being at the nomination meeting, *in contrast* to the FBI: "[Redacted name] advised that on the evening of 11/2/71 [Redacted names] of Afro-Am, a black student organization on the campus of OSU met with [Redacted names] and decided to nominate Dick Gregory". Notably, when researching Afro-Am, I found an article in the official, student-run university paper, *The Lantern*, that negatively reported on Afro-Am's decision to keep all student meetings private even from the local student press.[5] This archival juxtaposition reiterates what we now know about FBI surveillance of the period in which, through a series of techniques including phone taps, informants and agent provocateurs, anonymous letters, and incendiary publications, the US government sought to inspire chaos and disunity within

5 "Lantern Notes Seized," *The Ohio State Latern*, June 28, 1971.

and between Black Nationalist organizations.[6] Furthermore, considering recent disclosures of contemporary surveillance of "Black Identity Extremists" and Muslims, this archival find demonstrates the historical continuity of state repression.[7] However what I focus on here is what this juxtaposition revealed to me about the question of citations, archival authority, and who gets to be a knowledge producer.



DECLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY FROM:
FBI AUTOMATIC DECLASSIFICATION GUIDE
DATE 09-18-2013
FBI INFORMATION ONLY
E92M32K35

FBI

Date: 11/10/71

Transmit the following in ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ (Type in plaintext or code)

Via AIRTEL (Priority)

TO : DIRECTOR, FBI (100-440423)

FROM : SAC, CINCINNATI (157-1077) (RUC)

SUBJECT: RICHARD CLAXTON GREGORY, Aka.
Dick Gregory
EM-BLACK NATIONALIST
(00: Chicago)

APPROPRIATE AGENCIES AND FIELD OFFICES ADVISED BY ROUTING SLIP ON 2-5-80

[redacted]

For the information of the Bureau and Chicago, on 11/3/71, [redacted] advised that on the evening of 11/2/71, [redacted] of Afro-AM, a black student organization on the campus of Ohio State University (OSU), Columbus, Ohio, met with [redacted] and decided to nominate DICK GREGORY who was scheduled to appear 11/9/71, on the OSU campus for the office of President of OSU. Source advised that seven nominations have been submitted to a Referendum Committee sponsored by USG and the election will be open to all students, faculty, and staff. (U)

On 11/10/71, Detective [redacted] Columbus, Ohio Police Department, advised that approximately 1,500 people crowded into Mershon Auditorium on the campus of OSU on the evening of 11/9/71, to hear a speech by comedian DICK GREGORY entitled "Social Problems-Social or Antisocial?" The admission charge was $2 for adults and $1 for students with the speech open to the public and audience consisting of mainly blacks. Subject's speech was described as not being inflammatory and lasted for approximately 1½ hours. [redacted] advised that subject's speech

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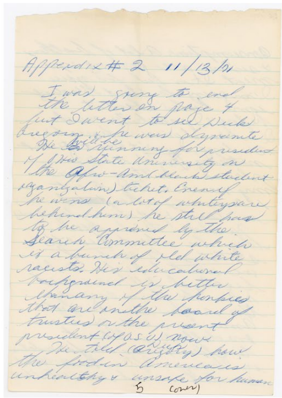

Appendix #2 11/13/71

I was going to end the letter on page 4 but I went to see Dick Gregory & he was dynamite. He will be running for president of Ohio State University on the Afro-Am (black student organization) ticket. Even if he wins (a lot of whiteys are behind him) he still has to be approved by the Search Committee which is a bunch of old white racists. His educational background is better than any of the honkies that are on the board of trustees or the present president (of O.S.U.) now.

He told (Dick Gregory) how the food in America is unhealthy & unsafe for human

5 (over)

"...but I went to see Dick Gregory and he was dynamite. He will be running for president of Ohio State University on the Afro-Am (black student organization) ticket."

Image 2

When, honestly, retracing my steps, I realized that I initially looked for a newspaper clipping on the impulse to verify or corroborate my mother's account. This impulse exceeded what I see to be a general instinct, from scholarship to gossip, to gather evidence to double-check new information. Rather, I moved to corroborate because my scholarly training had taught me that the account of a young, unknown (to some) Black woman student, would not be considered authoritative on its own, quite unlike how the FBI, despite

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6 Mattias Gardel, *In the name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

7 "Leaked FBI Documents Raise Concerns about Targeting Black People Under 'Black Identity Extremist' and Newer Labels," *American Civil Liberties Union*, http://www.aclu.org/press-releases/leaked-fbi-documents-raise-concerns-about-targeting-black-people-under-black-identi-1. Adam Goldman and Matt Apuzzo, "With cameras, informants, NYPD eyed mosques," *Associated Press*, February 23, 2012.

a legacy of documented unreliability even by the agency's own admissions, is still considered an authority. Black women are objects of study, objects of desire, and objects of consumption, but are rarely considered as intellectuals, people who think and whose thoughts of epistemic significance. Yet when reading the FBI report in comparison to her own account, my interest was no longer in verifying her account but providing accuracy to the archive itself that then turned into a motivation not to verify as much as rectify, which later became something altogether distinct.

Recovery has long been the aim of Black memory-work that scholars locate as first emerging as "an abolitionist tool in the nineteenth century" Black Atlantic.[8] Critically, Black memory-work continues to be an everyday *and* scholarly endeavor as Black Study continues to have political urgency. Yet, this tradition of recovery and vindication is in tension with contemporary scholarship that questions if recovery is even possible and if recovery will reproduce the systems it means to challenge. In her oft-cited essay, Hartman, upon uncovering the name of a black girl murdered on a slave ship, concludes "my account replicates the very order of violence that it writes against by placing yet another demand upon the girl, by requiring that her life be made useful or instructive, by finding in it a lesson for our future or a hope for history".[9]

McKittrick, engaging Hartman, also notes the ways we pull Black history from "documents, ledgers and logs" and asks when,

> the death toll becomes the source…how then do we think and write foster a commitment to acknowledging violence and undoing it's persistent frame, rather than simply analytically reprising violence?[10]

Relatedly, David Scott critiques what he calls "a narrative of continuities" that defines the anthropological approach to the African diaspora, focused on African retentions in order to prove Black humanity.[11] According to Scott, this

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8 Laura Helton et al., "The Question of Recovery: An Introduction," *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (125) (2015). https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-3315766: 2.

9 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 14.

10 Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 18.

11 David Scott, "That Event, This Memory: Notes on the Anthropology of African Diasporas in the New World," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 3 (1991): 261–84.

leads to seeking to endow Black people with an "authentic past, that is anthropologically identifiable, ethnologically recoverable and textually re-presentable".[12] Yet, by creating a past that makes sense anthropologically, we end up reproducing colonial logic through a quest for "referential accuracy".[13]

References become citations and citations build canons and canons, like cannons, are weapons that preserve and take lives. Accordingly, Ahmed identifies citational practice as a progenitive technology that "reproduces the world around certain bodies".[14] In this context, I came to understand the call to "Cite Black Women" more expansively. The call turned campaign, led by anthropologist Christen Smith, exhorts "people to engage in a radical praxis of citation that acknowledges and honors Black women's transnational intellectual production"[15] This call to recognize Black women as epistemic resources, as producers of knowledge, is a call to reject and upend the colonial logics that undergirds the canon – the body of work that defines what counts as knowledge and worth knowing. It vitally interrupts the ways our scholarly work, with all its "liberal" tendencies, operates in concert with violence, both within and beyond the academy, that targets Black women's lives and thoughts, for death.

Returning to Audrey's letter with a perspective more grounded in these decolonizing theorizations, I recognize the FBI's account as not only dubious but a mid-twentieth century bureaucratic rendering of the old fear of the African danger to the colony. Furthermore, I am no longer seeking to verify what Audrey/Amina/Umi said but, rather, I cite a Black woman and take her account seriously as an authoritative, and still fallible, source of knowledge. Building on Clyde Wood's classic history, *Development Arrested*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues we should approach "archives as proposals rather than proofs" and that "proposals are evidence of struggle".[16] Evidence that,

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12 Scott, "That Event, This Memory," 263.

13 Scott, "That Event, This Memory."

14 Sara Ahmed, "Making Feminist Points," *feministkilljoys* (blog), September 11, 2013, https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/

15 "Our Story," *Cite Black Women*, accessed April 5, 2023, https://www.citeblackwomencollective.org/our-story.html.

16 Ruth Gilmore, "Introduction," in *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (Verso, 2017): xiv.

as Yusuf Omowale reminds us, "we have always been present." (Omowale: 2018).[17] Thus, my analysis of Audrey's letter ultimately moved me away from colonial logics that demand we "verify" a Black past and toward practices of listening, reading, and creative speculation that build new archives that propose new possibilities.

Curating, Preserving and Presenting the Archive

Finding artifacts, like this letter, motivated another impulse: to share. I immediately knew there were people, even outside my mother's networks, who would see themselves in the archive, learn from it, and be moved to act because of it. Accordingly, I wanted to make her collection open to the public. However, before I could do so, I had to complete some key tasks: deciding what to keep, learning how to preserve and then managing curation, and what it would mean to represent the archive to others.

Deciding what to keep was my first task as a memory-worker/death cleaner and was guided by memory. Certain items, like the letter to Violet, would spark a memory. In this case, it was Umi's stories about her political radicalism in college. The item might carry details that provide greater historical context and its tone and texture can bring those stories to life. Some items would also teach me new things, such as the FBI's surveillance of Gregory and Black Students at OSU, as would seeing items in relation to each other. In my mother's 1968 high school yearbook, one classmate's autograph message calls her a "stone black woman" whose dancing "makes you think" while another, white, classmate's autograph chides her that she would get more bees with honey than vinegar. Her Black consciousness is also mapped on her college transcripts. As a student she took multiple years of Swahili, the Black Studies courses she fought for, and a marksmanship course, underscoring how serious she was about her political commitments.

This task of deciding what to keep was also driven by my mother's archival practice. She was not formally trained in archival methods but did intentionally preserve objects, thereby giving them significance, what Ewing terms as "fugitive archival practice".[18] Fugitive archives are the domestic

[17] Yusef Omowale "We Already Are," *Sustainable Futures*, September 3, 2018, https://medium.com/community-archives/we-already-are-52438b863e31.

[18] Ewing, "Fugitive Archives," 44

collections found in Black US American communities, curated through the preservation practices often mislabeled as hoarding, of Black women who grew up during the Great Depression through to the Baby Boom.[19] Ewing argues that "their experiences with racism, erasure from public records, and difficulties with homeownership" impressed upon them the importance of preservation, while barring them from the means or access to formal preservation schemes, thus, making theirs a fugitive practice.[20] I would not say my mother was a hoarder, but it often felt like there was too much stuff in too little space. We often bickered playfully during my visits home when I would encourage her to get rid of "stuff". She knew more than I how significant her "stuff' was and I remain grateful she "paid me no mind".

Take, for example, receipts. Umi had become her mother's legal guardian and as a result, had to submit a yearly accounting to the local court, demonstrating she was not misusing her mother's savings. Accordingly, she would save receipts from purchases she made for my grandmother. I found these receipts in all sorts of places, typically held together by a paper clip and stored in an envelope that had come as mail but now served as a kind of file folder. She *saved* these receipts that tell a story about class, race, and bureaucracy, but she did not *preserve* them. The receipts were haphazardly collected and some had faded despite only being a few years old. They were in a different state than another receipt in the archive. This receipt was for an Arabic language course Amina took in the summer of 1977 that is in such pristine condition it looks as if it was only written yesterday. That receipt was stored in a folder that was kept in bookshelf cupboard with related materials from the period when she was a new Muslim. While both kinds of receipts have significance, paying attention to how *she* preserved things helped me understand what was significant to *her* and, thus, what *I* should keep.[21]

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19 Ewing, "Fugitive Archives," 44

20 Ewing, "Fugitive Archives."

21 I used this method with my mother's large library. I hired a research assistant, Carl Hewitt, to create a catalog of the books. I determined what books were particularly significant to her by their age, by her marginalia, or if they related to themes that were emerging for me in the archive. The rest I gave away to the book lovers in her life. Books were also donated to Believers Bail Out for distribution to incarcerated Muslims, in line with my mother's politics. I also engaged a similar process with her smaller music collection and very LARGE wardrobe.

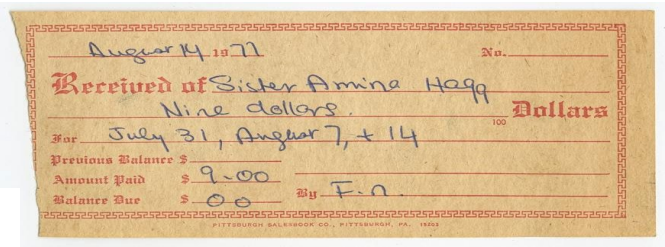
August 14, 1977 No.
Received of Sister Amina Hagg
Nine dollars 100 Dollars
For July 31, August 7, + 14
Previous Balance $
Amount Paid $ 9-00
Balance Due $ 00 By F.A.
PITTSBURGH SALESBOOK CO., PITTSBURGH, PA. 15203

Image 3

Image 3

After deciding what to keep, I also needed to think about *preservation*. Like my mother, I do not have formal archival training but, unlike my mother, I do have a tenure track position at a research university that gives me access to those with that expertise. After following my friend, colleague, and oral historian, Zaheer Ali's, lead (he first impressed upon me the importance of preservation), I went to the librarians at my university who helped me further evaluate my needs, including appropriate storage materials from high-end to lower-end hacks that I purchased based on the latitude of my research and personal budgets. I also hired research assistants who learned with me and taught me about how to organize materials, create metadata, and a finding aid for the archival materials that are currently in about 30 archival boxes in a spare closet in my university office suite.[22]

Now I faced the task of managing both *curation* and *representation*. Another good friend and artist, Leslie Hewitt, played a key role in my thinking about presenting the archive to the public. She encouraged me to think about the artifacts in relationship to each other and how the physical representation of that juxtaposition could be an opportunity to not only share the archive but provoke audience thinking. Inspired by her suggestion, I initially planned on producing a one-woman show based on the archive, employing the research-to-performance and performance ethnography methods I had used

[22] Dr. Jallicia Jolly and Enno Knepp worked with me at different stages of the project. My office building is relatively new and fairly temperature-controlled, but I am seeking more security archivally-speaking. My long term goal is to donate materials to a library.

in previous work.[23] That plan was forestalled by COVID, so I pivoted, like everyone, online.

In the spring of 2021, I launched a six-part online exhibition series on the archive.[24] Exhibitions were expository and interpretive, exploring themes culled from my analysis: Black Muslim women's spirituality; love and relationships; dance and Black identity; Black Power; and the African Diaspora. Archival objects featured date from the late 1920s through to 2018 and span multiple continents. I curated each exhibition, determining its collections and the 800 plus archival items included. I wrote descriptions introducing audiences to the historical significance and implications of these ordinary and extraordinary objects: photos of Black soldiers in Iran during WWII; a picture of my grandmother as a girl in the 1930s outside Yankee Stadium; a first-edition autographed copy of Angela Davis' *Women, Race and Class*. Each exhibition was accompanied by a livestream discussion between an expert-interlocutor and myself and the series included three solo performances that I wrote and performed. The exhibitions reached audiences of over one thousand users with over twenty thousand views.[25]

Most items were exhibited in a somewhat standard museum-style format, however, I found montage and juxtaposition to be key tools in the presentation of the archive's audiovisual materials. There were hundreds of VHS cassette tapes in the archive. A few were Hollywood blockbusters and independent films, but the overwhelming majority were either related to Islamic studies and dawah (propagation) or were Umi's recordings of

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23 My first book, *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in there United States*, is paired with my performance ethnography, *Sampled: Beats of Muslim Life*, a one-woman show grounded in the tradition of embodied knowledge and the research-to-performance methods inaugurated by anthropologists Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham.

24 I was the recipient of the Soros Equality Fellowship in 2019 that supported the exhibition series.

25 This success was made possible by the team of eight people, including Kareem Lawrence, Belinda Bolivar, Maysan Haydar, Fatima Hedadji, Belquis Elhadi, and Zainab Baloch, who I worked with on everything from web design and research to social media posts. They were my sounding board and key supporters. I also want to acknowledge the librarians, particularly the digital research team at the University of Michigan, who played a fundamental role in helping me actualize the exhibition series from creating metadata to building an effective team. I also worked with a digital imaging specialist, Sally Bjork, also at the University of Michigan, to digitize artifacts for the series. The full digitization of the archive is a monumental task that I am still contemplating.

television programs. The former included three lectures, “Africa: The Sleeping Giant”, “The Solution to South Africa: Christianity, Communism or Islam”, and “The Birth and Death of Christianity” by Khalid Al-Mansur, a Black US American, that were delivered in South Africa and recorded and distributed by Ahmad Deedat’s Islamic Propagation Centre. Recorded television programs were divided between soap operas, the Oprah Winfrey Show, and news programs. This included mainstream and local network news coverage of Black history, incidences of anti-Black violence, and post-9/11 content, but mostly episodes of the news program *Like It Is*, a Black public affairs news program hosted by journalist Gil Noble from 1968–2011. I cannot overstate the significance of *Like It Is* to this archive. I have many memories of watching *Like It Is* or being told to watch *Like It Is*, or phone calls telling my mother to “turn on *Like It Is*!” to catch whatever deeply informative and educational content was on that Sunday. *Like It Is* reflected the political and social interests and commitments my mother had and are threaded throughout the archive.

Considering the significance of the show, I included these recordings in the exhibition using montage. I worked with the filmmaker Shireen Alihaji to create a video montage of clips from *Like It Is* episodes interspersed with white tv fuzz. For the fifth exhibition, we created an eight minute montage that includes a segment from the May 1999 *Like It Is* episode “Malcolm X: Three African American Women who knew him” in which the three women (activists Khadijah Canton, Vicki Garvin and Jean Reynolds) praised Malcolm’s radical thought; a few key seconds from mainstream network news show ABC 20/20’s 1998 coverage of Hollywood support for political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal; part of a speech delivered by political prisoner Imam Jamil Al-Amin/H. Rap Brown at a Muslim-led rally for Bosnia in Washington, D.C. in 1993; a clip from a *Like It is* interview with civil rights movement leader Gloria Richardson on the impact of Imam Jamil; a segment from the show’s December 1998 episode “The Question of Leadership” where civil rights leaders Rev. M. William Howard, Dr. William Strickland, Pastor Prathia Hall, and Howard Dodson reflected on Black political leadership; and a closing clip from the African Burial Ground Dedication in New York City covered by *Like It Is* in October 2007 where long-time activist and New York City council member, Charles Barron, brought Eloise William Dix to the podium to speak in honor of her theretofore unsung work without which the remains of the Africans found in New York City would have been

forgotten and desecrated.[26] My simple note to exhibition visitors upon encountering the montage was "an invitation to contemplate the legacies of Black Power".

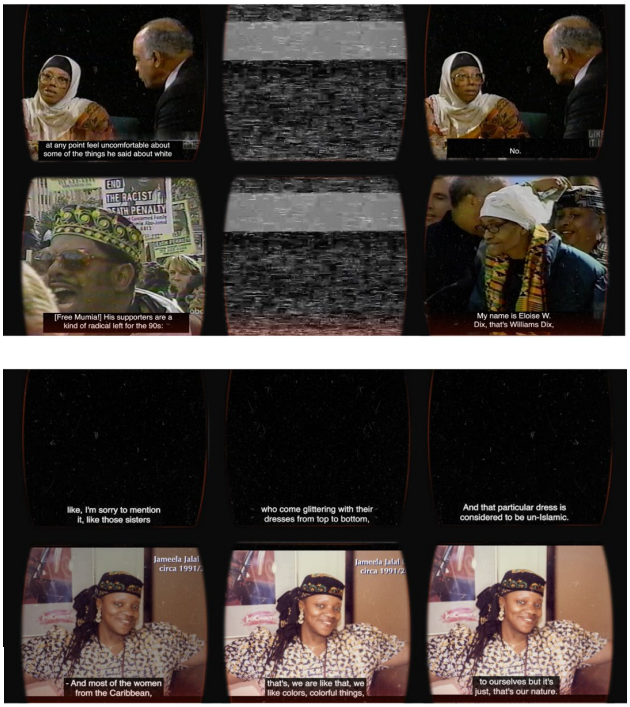

Image 4

Image 4

I also used montage and juxtaposition in the collection #BlackinMSA. Riffing off the social media hashtag,[27] the collection offers a historical perspective

[26] In 1991, 15,000 intact human skeletal remains of enslaved and free Africans were found in a construction site in lower Manhattan. Community outcry and activism led to the reinterment of the remains and a memorial site.

[27] Using the hashtag #BlackInMSA, the anti-racism organization, MuslimARC, initiated a conversation on the experiences of Black Muslim undergrads with the national student organization, the Muslim Student's Association. Since then, the hashtag has been used to raise awareness of anti-Blackness in Muslim campus groups and beyond.

on relationships between Black and non-Black Muslims through Amina's experience with the Muslim Students Association, an organization founded in 1963 to support students from majority-Muslim nations studying at North American universities.[28] I created a video montage called "Modesty: Two Perspectives" that juxtaposes the voices and commentary of two Muslim women, an Arab immigrant woman and a Black US American woman. In the first audio clip, the Arab immigrant woman is lecturing at a session of the 1976 MSA conference. She is instructing women on modest dress and explains that the clothing women wear should not make men or others look, making "glittering jewelry" and "glittering threads…un-Islamic". Immediately following these remarks is audio from an oral history interview I conducted in 2013 with one of Umi's best friends, Jameela Jalal Uddin (d. 2018). In this excerpt of the interview, she explains that, despite this kind of instruction, Black Muslim women chose to practice modesty differently. They embraced a definition of modesty informed by their cultural backgrounds and, accordingly, embraced color and looking "pretty as a woman should". She considered that as part "of our [female] nature...and if someone else admire it, that's on them". The contrast of these two points of view is striking and made even more so by putting them side by side, giving exhibit visitors a more visceral access to the liveliness of the debate that ensues to this day. I incorporated these tools, montage and juxtaposition, in other collections as well as they are more dynamic forms of representation that better reflect the multidimensionality of lives lived.

Intimacy as Knowledge and Tradition

As part of my research for *Umi's Archive* I searched for my mother's college boyfriend, Jeff. He and she were more than romantic partners, they were partners in the struggle as students at OSU from around 1969 through to 1972, a powerful moment in world history. Upon viewing the online exhibitions, Jeff wrote me a letter praising the work, stating "it has the eye of a scholar, the passion of an activist and the heart of a child".[29] I thought to myself, "yes, that's it!". Later, I was listening to an interview with the activist

[28] In 1983, MSA expanded to become the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and, today, aspires to facilitate the religious, cultural, and civic development of all Muslims, irrespective of migration status. Both MSA and ISNA have been simultaneously useful and alienating spaces for Black Muslims in North America.

[29] Jefferson Guinn, e-mail to author, June 30, 2021.

Malkiah Devich-Cyril where they spoke about the tremendous grief Black people experience, noting "instead of being crushed under the weight of this grief we turn it into something beautiful and useful, right? We do *the mourning work* (emphasis mine)".[30] And I said to myself, "yes, that's it!". And, while preparing this essay, I returned to historian Jennifer Morgan's insight that "those who work on the subaltern, on people and places that are understood as outside of or marginal to the archival project of nation building" have "long grappled with a scholarly induced malady, a relationship to the research that positions us *always on the brink of breakthrough and breakdown* (emphasis mine)".[31] And I said to myself, "yes, that's it!".

The "it", here, is my work on *Umi's Archive*, the mourning work that requires my scholarly training, my political commitments, *and* my heart to produce knowledge that is meaningful and even, perhaps, decolonial. I respect the warning from indigenous scholars that "decolonization is not a metaphor" and have hesitated to call it such. Yet I do see this work in the way that Scott, Hartman, McKittrick, and others offer us as a means for resisting and undoing colonial logics of the dualism between mind and body, the primacy of the written word, the absence of spirit, and the fallacy of objectivity. A resistance and undoing that manifest not only in the kind of work that is produced but in the work process itself.

Take for example, my feelings. As obvious as this might be for others, it took me a while to recognize how much feeling this project evokes for me. I, of course, was and will always grieve my mother's passing but, I had, despite what I know better, still bifurcated the research project of "Umi's Archive" from my own grieving process. In this binary, grief was crying after remembering, again, that she is gone, or feeling joy from a good memory or good dance session. The research was different, it was analysis that came with some wonder and reflection, but it was not *feeling*. Yet you cannot escape the feeling. I have come to note that when working with archival materials there is a point where the grief, the feelings, rise and will not be ignored. I cannot tamper down the feeling of sadness—the bittersweetness

30 Radical Grievance with Malkiah Devich-Cyril, June 30, 2022, in *The Emergent Strategy Podcast*, https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/emergentstrategy/episodes/Radical-Grievance-with-Malkia-Devich-Cyril-e1kktn6.

31 Jennifer L. Morgan, "Archives and Histories of Racial Capitalism: An Afterword," *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (125) (2015): 153–61, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-3315862.

of her absence *and* presence— having left so much for me to still learn from and share with others. Indeed, at "the brink of breakthrough and breakdown".

When these feelings arise, it is time to take a break. This is a small, yet significant, act because by recognizing feelings and giving feeling space, I break a bit of the hold colonial logics has on me. I was operating by the "ambient belief that feeling and thinking are separate", a binary that gave rise to secular regimes of knowledge and scientific rationality.[32] I realized, with reflection, that despite all my personal and scholarly knowledge, I was still underestimating how deeply eurocentrism and white supremacy shaped our structures of feeling, something my Umi, not inconsequentially, never underestimated. So, pausing and feeling is part of what it means to do this work, how I do this work, and continue to develop my own practice for these moments.

Feelings also informs how I access the archive and my analytical frames. I *feel* so much because of how deep my relationship was and that affords me an intimacy with the archive and an intimate knowledge of it. There is a collection of audio cassette tapes from the Islamic studies classes my mother took in the mid-1970s. These classes were held in New York City and Northern New Jersey, initiated by fellow Black Muslim women converts and friends, Kareemah Abdul-Kareem and Aliyah Abdul-Karim, and taught by Dr. Sulaiman Dunya, an Egyptian scholar trained at Al-Azhar. The classes cover topics such as ritual prayer and in the recordings my mother asks *a lot* of questions, pushing, at one point, Dr. Dunya's patience, who on all the tapes is a very measured and open teacher. In one of the recordings, she asks about a famous verse of the Qur'an and while doing so, stumbles over its name: ayat al-Kursi. I immediately picked up on her uncertainty, how she stumbled. It stood out to me because she was the one that taught me that very verse when I was a child. I am uncertain if another ear would have noticed the stumble as significant, but I do know that it was my close experience with her and that ayat that gave me access to the significance of the moment and what it marked about her narrative. Hers is not the only voice in the recordings. There are voices of other Black women who are also new Muslims, but I only recognize one voice, Kareemah Abdul-Kareem's.

[32] Donovan O. Schaefer, *Wild Experiment: Feeling Science and Secularism after Darwin* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022): 5.

Yet as they ask question after question to their teacher—these women did not come to play—I hear or rather *feel* their urgency and eagerness to learn and understand. Feeling that offered me a deeper and different vantage point towards understanding the conversion narratives of the period. It helped make sense of all the religious literature from that period that my mother held onto. It amplified the significance of what conversion meant to these individual women and to the broader conversation of Islam, spirituality, and the Black experience in the United States. Critically, I gained this knowledge from feeling what I heard them feel.

As I return to the Black feminist scholarship that inspires me, I am reminded that I am not alone in my feelings and that the kind of intimacy that comes from deep relation is not limited to mothers and daughters. In the epilogue of *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories, A Memorial*, Karla FC Holloway narrates the story of her visit to Billie Holiday's grave as part of her research for the book in which visiting tombstones became "an intimate, sojourn among my cultural kin".[33] At Holiday's gravesite, she sings "God Bless the Child", causing an older white couple nearby to ask her if she knew Billie Holiday. Holloway describes her response: "Before I could help it, I heard myself say oh yes, she's my great aunt. Of course, it wasn't all true, but at that moment I *felt* like kin".[34] To *feel* like kin, here, is not about blood but, rather, informed by the ties that can, and have, bound Black people to each other from our fictive kin in diaspora ("sippi" to play cousins) to the fierce protective affect everyday Black folk have for Black heroes of all stripes.[35] I feel this feeling in Barbara Ransby's introductory reflection in her biography of the civil rights leader, Ella Baker, where she describes her "journey into Ella Jo Baker's world" as a "personal, political and intellectual journey" and makes no apology for admiring Baker because "she [Baker] earned it".[36] Likewise, I feel this feeling in Sisonke Msimang's reflection on writing about Winnie Mandela to protect her from the "gendered double-

33 Karla FC Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories, A Memorial* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 197.

34 Holloway, *Passed On*, 197.

35 In a practice seen throughout the Diaspora, "sippi" was used in Suriname to refer to the person who traveled the middle passage with you and continues as "sibi" to indicate a close non-biological bond (See Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*). In the US, "play cousin" also describes non-biological familial ties.

36 Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2.

standard" in which a man's sexual life is rendered inconsequential to their political legacy but, for a woman like Mandela, results in her complex and dynamic political life being demonized and made into a jezebel tale.[37]

Msimang is keen to point out her objective is not hagiography; she does not "downplay Winnie Mandela's violence". Yet, her feelings lead her to make a critical analytical intervention to use "intimacy and familiarity" as tools to write about and to Mandela in modes of admiration and disappointment.[38] Intimacy and familiarity producing both feelings of admiration and disappointment reminds me of the mother-daughter relationship. As much as familial intimacy can blind you to the imperfections, as is feared, it can also make flaws more apparent due to both the proximity and the complicated relationship between mothers and daughters and/or in my case single mothers and oldest daughters. Indeed, all feelings are not "good". Russert also writes about finding disappointment in the archive in another setting. Working on the friendship albums of free Black women in nineteenth century Philadelphia, she does not find the "narratives of resistance" she expects. Rather, she finds the women's cultural production "steadfast" in its "fidelity" to the gendered conventions of the period.[39] Critically, Russert chooses to lean into, rather than dismiss, the disappointment and finds it analytically generative.[40] She comes to see that fidelity to conventions indexes an attempt to project stability at a time where Black women's lives were precarious because, much like today, the project of freedom was incomplete.[41] In each of these instances Black feminist scholars narrate developing a deep and intimate relationship with the ancestors they write about and embrace this intimacy in a direct challenge to the thinking/feeling binary.

Critically, though intimacy gives access to knowledge, it is not totalizing. It does not give you access to everything there is to be known because, as we

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37 Sisonke Msimang, "Winnie Mandela and the Archive: Reflections on Feminist Biography," in *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa*, ed. Desiree Lewis and Gabeba Baderoon (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021), 15–27.

38 Msimang, "Winnie Mandela and the Archive: Reflections on Feminist Biography."

39 Britt Rusert, "Disappointment in the Archives of Black Freedom," *Social Text* 33, no. 4 (125) (2015): 21.

40 Rusert, "Disappointment in the Archives of Black Freedom."

41 Rusert, "Disappointment in the Archives of Black Freedom."

know, our knowledge, wherever we acquire it, is always partial. However, intimacy does provide a more dynamic knowing. In colonial epistemologies, we are only supposed to approach our work with the "eye of a scholar" and that is what makes it legitimate research, valuable, and the hallmark of the Euroamerican intellectual tradition. However, I have found using only one lens inhibits understanding. In fact, this project is at its best when I am all of those things at the same time, scholar, activist-artist, and child, opening up knowledge rather than foreclosing it as "objectivity" discourse presumes. Moreover, as Devich-Cyril theorized, drawing on all those dimensions is the hallmark of a Black Radical Tradition, one that I step into when I am moved by "all the things" to build something beautiful and useful, to build Umi's Archive.

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Religious Mapping, Epistemic Risk and Archival Adventure in Athambile Masola's *Ilifa*

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SHORT BIO

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SUBMISSION DATE
20 January 2023

ACCEPTANCE DATE
14 May 2023

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I offer a feminist reading of Athambile Masola's award-winning debut collection of poetry, *Ilifa,* focusing on her use of religious imagination. I demonstrate how Masola's repeated use of religious metaphor, language, and Christian location illuminates more than aspects of religious community, piety, and belonging, important though these are. In *Ilifa,* specific appearances of religious language, as well as the rhetorical uses to which religious imagery and the disruption of Christian iconography are put, reveal the poet's understanding of the making of transgenerational southern African feminist publicness. Her deployment of Christian vocabularies amplifies multigenerational African (women's) contribution to (South) Africa's intellectual and creative archives. While her religious references are not confined to Christianity, I limit myself to Biblical references to better tend to the intersections of feminist mapping, epistemic risk, and the poet's engagement with two centuries of South African isiXhosa literary archive in print. Masola references these intellectual entries into publicness to negotiate her own admission into literary public life. I surface the context and conceptual landscapes of Masola's own poetic project.

KEYWORDS
Religious imagination, literary archive, isiXhosa literature, African feminism, South African women's poetry

Introduction

> For black women, especially, the story writes an entry into the world of creativity, of (re)writing the self, and of authoring alternative visions of the world.[1]
>
> To use language with awareness that we are de-forming it, deliberately changing its meaning by changing its context, is an exercise fraught with danger. We may be misunderstood by those with whom we agree because they do not understand the new contexts in which we use old words. Or we may evoke agreement

[1] Barbara Boswell, *And Wrote My Story Anyway: Black South African Women's Novels as Feminism* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press 2020), 7.

ISSN 2707-2991

> from those with whom we disagree, because they too have not understood the new context which de-forms, re-forms, and trans-forms the meanings of the words we use. But this is a risk we take in attempting to make ourselves understood. Perhaps there is no other way to create new language.[2]

Whereas all deliberate products of the imagination are an encounter with risk, additional danger attaches to a poetry project in which a contemporary African feminist attempts to write herself into a vanishing tradition. When her polyvalent project also seeks to arrest this disappearance, she is obliged to do more than problematize erasure. Athambile Masola's debut collection of poetry is one such project and, in what follows, I illuminate her uses of Christian vocabularies to amplify multigenerational African[3] (women's) contribution to South Africa's intellectual and creative archives. I do so as a way of reading the context and conceptual landscapes in which to locate Masola's own poetic project. Subsequently, I show how Masola's Christian religious imagination enacts her place in a tradition of African literature and literacy, inaugurated by the first generation of missionary educated Africans over two centuries ago. In other words, what she puts to use in her feminist and religious imagination is recourse to the rhetorical and linguistic repertoires of the literary traditions within which *Ilifa* roots. Finally, I outline the subversive uses through which Masola extends religious imagination to feminist imaginative ends.

Historically,

> in Southern Africa, it was with the arrival of the printing press in the 1800s that educated, Christianised, African men emerged as writers of religious texts to enable the Christian missionary conversion of

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2 Carol P. Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (New York: Beacon, 1995), iii.

3 In this essay, I sometimes refer to Xhosa, Black, and African women's scripted (literary) traditions interchangeably in relation to specific phenomena under discussion. This is not a universal conflation but a recognition of how Masola's text engages aspects of all three, concerned as it is with multiple entries (and erasures) of Xhosa, Black, and African women's public contributions in the political, creative, and intellectual arenas. The interchangeable application is only when what is discussed applies to all three.

> Africans. Later, with the introduction of newspapers, there was an alternative to the religious texts.[4]

Literacy, literary expression in print and Christianity have enmeshed histories.[5] Religious references and lenses were an integral part of how missionary-educated, literary Africans – among whom was Soga, the first ordained Christian minister in southern Africa – negotiated their place in the world and asserted authority from which to speak as literate and literary agents.[6] Such Christian *public* articulation, through the pulpit and the published word, could easily co-exist with vibrant Xhosa identity. Analyzing the first century of written Xhosa literature, focusing on Soga (1929–1871), SEK Mqhayi (1875–1945), and Nontsizi Mgqwetho, Nxasana argues that they

> believed that Africans had to incorporate into their very identity both education and Christianity: importantly not only to make sense of the African past and present condition but in order to have hope for the future and for Africa's renewal.[7]

Masola's deployment of religious imagination is "an archeological exercise" that unearths muted aspects of the past while making different futures possible.[8] For the pioneers like Soga, Mqhayi, Mgqwetho, as well as Masola publishing two centuries later, multiple imaginative universes offer productive literary resources.

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4 Athambile Masola, "Journeying Home, Exile and Transnationalism in Noni Jabavu and Sisonke Msimang's Memoirs" (PhD diss., Rhodes University, 2020), 14.

5 Sydney Zanemvula Zotwana. "Literature Between Two Worlds: The First Fifty Years of the Xhosa Novel and Poetry" (PhD diss., University of Cape Town, 1993); Thulani Litha Nxasana. "The Ambivalent Engagement with Christianity in the Writing of Nineteenth- and early Twentieth-Century Africans in the Eastern Cape", (MA diss., Rhodes University, 2009); Pamela Maseko. "The Intellectualisation of African Languages with Particular reference to isiXhosa", (PhD diss., Rhodes University, 2011).

6 Gareth Griffiths, "Conversion, Identity, Resistance in Colonial and Postcolonial Spaces: The Writings of Tiyo Soga, 1829-1871," in *The Future of Postcolonial Studies,* ed. Chantal Zabus (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 69-84. See also Duncan Brown. "My Pen is the Tongue of a Skilful Poet: African-Christian Identity and the Poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho," *English in Africa* 31, no. 1 (2004): 23 – 58.

7 Nxasana, "The Ambivalent Engagement," 2.

8 Thulani Nxasana, "The Journey of the African as Missionary: The Journals and Selected Writings of the Reverend Tiyo Soga," *English in Africa* 38, no. 2 (2011): 61.

Masola's recourse to "religious imagination" anchors itself in generations of African literary and intellectual work, here in isiXhosa, wherein Africans are referenced not "as subjects" but "as masters in the production of knowledge".[9] Paula Cooey's "religious imagination" akin to Nxasana's enabling Christian idiom[10] is productive lens. Like her,

> [b]y 'religious imagination' I mean imagination whose creativity is governed by and expressed through religious imagery; a person who exercises religious imagination may or may not be conventionally pious in relation to religious institutions.[11]

Reading Masola's work through the lens of religious imagination lays bare the significance of missionary-educated Africans whose Christian connections were unapologetic, on the one hand, as well as their treatment of Christian text as literary resource, on the other.

Ilifa (2021) is a highly intertextual collection of fifty-one poems thematically divided into three sections: Umyalelo wentombi (On Feminine Instruction), Uthando (Love) and Apha (This Place). The collection's title refers to both direct inheritance and legacy creation, highlighting the poet's location in an established isiXhosa literary tradition *and* her own contribution to a (future) legacy, a space clearing.

The two epigraphs to this paper come from feminist literary scholars Barbara Boswell and Carol Christ, both of whom approach women's literary engagements with taken-for-granted archives seriously. Boswell's book *And Wrote My Story Anyway: Black South African Women's Novels as Feminism* is both "a history of black South African women's fiction"[12] in English and "takes as a point of departure, the fundamental power of stories to shape and transform lives".[13] Boswell underscores how literary imagination creates more than the explicit project between the covers of a book, but a tangible imaginative world where the existence of a future novelist and essayist

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9 Pamela Maseko, "Exploring the History of the Writing of isiXhosa: An Organic or an Engineered Process?," *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 12, no. 2 (2017): 81. https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2017.1400218.

10 Nxasana, "The Ambivalent Engagement", 92.

11 Paula M. Cooey, *Religious Imagination and the Body: A Feminist Analysis*. (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

12 Boswell, *And Wrote My Story*, xiv.

13 Boswell, *And Wrote My Story,* 1.

(Boswell) or poet and essayist (Masola) is possible. In other words, Boswell teaches us that some creative texts inaugurate literary traditions and specific writer subjectivities. For Boswell, it is an encounter with Bessie Head's writing about Cape Town, Boswell's hometown, that opens the possibility of Boswell's own future writing career when a younger Boswell begins to think about her context as worthy of literary signification. Furthermore, Boswell establishes that Head generates future Black women's creative universes by centering creative women protagonists across her novels.

I use Carol Christ's citation to foreground the slipperiness of language in the context of creative projects that seek to intervene in the intersections of language and inherited religious rhetorical strategies. For Christ, space clearing demands what Guyanese-British author, Grace Nichols, calls "a battle with language"[14]: a necessary risk at the seams of legibility. Since imaginative language relies on recognition and newness, it is haunted by misreading. For example, it is possible to misrecognize Masola's project as merely partaking in religious poetic tradition, wrestling with piety and meaning. Equally likely is a misreading of *Ilifa* as only a feminist literary archival endeavor to surface an existing, albeit obscured, century of women authored literature in isiXhosa so that she may take her place as heiress.

Importantly,

> [b]ecause the activity of imagining and the objects imagined depend on pre-existing social and material conditions, and because the objects are further shareable with others through visual, verbal, and audial symbol systems, imagination, both as activity and as condition, is necessarily social, however individually exercised.[15]

To work in a literary tradition requires deployment of its literary strategies, techniques and gestures. Masola's repeated use of religious metaphor, language, and Christian location illuminates more than aspects of religious community, piety, and belonging, important though these are. In *Ilifa,* specific appearances of religious language, as well as the rhetorical uses to which religious imagery and the disruption of Christian iconography are put, reveal

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14 Grace Nichols, "The Battle with Language," in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. Selwyn R. Cudjoe (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux, 1990), 283-289.

15 Cooey, *Religious Imagination*, 4-5.

the poet's understanding of the making of transgenerational, southern-African feminist public articulation. In her study of Black women publishing in 1930s South Africa, Corrine Sandwith establishes that,

> normative Western print genres were not simply reproduced in African spaces but rather became sites of improvisation, refashioning, and indigenization thus opening the way for the development of alternative print cultural practices and a female-centred African modernity, which sought to refashion the cultural dominant to new and more emancipatory ends.[16]

The tradition in which Masola writes and the linked one Sandwith studies are distinctive. Masola's deployment of Christian vocabularies amplifies multigenerational African (women's) contribution to (South) Africa's intellectual and creative archives since "in literary works, the structures of ideology are not only thematic but disperse in every element of the work",[17] which becomes even more evident in my discussion of Masola's Preface later in this article.

Contesting claim to a legacy

At the Braamfontein, Johannesburg launch of the collection held at the independent bookshop, The Commune, Masola's interlocutor and feminist activist, Kwezilomso Mbandazayo, highlighted that the title *Ilifa* is at once apt and provocative. Mbandazayo outlined how "*ukubanga ilifa*" (to lay contesting claim to inheritance) is sacrilegious in Xhosa cosmology. Masola's title choice is disruptive in a manner resonant of the artistic tradition *iimbongi.* Technically (oral) poets, although sometimes misleadingly called "praise poets", *iimbongi* are allowed to speak about the unspeakable, to have complete free reign over the word and what they create and critique with it; that is, poetic license. It is their entitlement. Historian Nomathamsanqa Tisani is especially instructive on this matter when she writes of Mgqwetho as follows:

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16 Corrine Sandwith. "Progressing with a Vengeance: The Woman Reader/Writer in the African Press," in *Comparative Print Culture: A Study of Alternative Literary Modernities*, ed. Rasoul Aliakbari (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020), 143.

17 Diah Ariami Arimbi, *Reading Contemporary Indonesian Muslim Women Writers* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 18.

> [w]ithin African knowledge systems there are provisions for "transgression" of assumed social boundaries. Those with special gifts and abilities are given recognition and are accorded space to be. In many ways Mgqwetho is a prime example of a gifted woman . . . A proper analysis of Mgqwetho as *imbongi,* historian, preacher and public commentator must be undertaken within an understanding of a Xhosa woman whose gifts are acknowledged by editors, and the general reading public. Mgqwetho's acceptance and recognition by the African community can be deduced from the fact that for about ten years she enjoys the 'poetic license' of *imbongi* as she tackles contentious topics, like drunkenness, immorality, religiosity, licentiousness and even cowardice.[18]

Masola goes beyond taking poetic license. She invests "*ilifa*" with generative conceptual capacity not conventionally associated with that word. In her Preface ("*Intshayelelo*"), the poet declares, "*Le mibongo ndiyibhalela intombi endakhe ndayiyo",* which loosely translates to "I write these poems to/for the girl I once was".

Traces of this girl are everywhere in the poems that follow. She is a girl with multiple relationships to self: socialized into proper, religious heterosexuality in the opening poem "*Umyalelo wentombi*", unable to recite her full ancestral lineage poem, or 'clan names' in "Coconut", caught between the demands of a private school education that on the one hand would have her make sense of her life only through the lenses of her English speaking life, and on the other, a mother who refused to surrender her to this world. This "girl" appears as a persona with multiple ways of surviving in the shadow of violence in "*Wakrazulwa*", and in numerous poems, navigates mutating senses of self in private and public, including in the terrain of sexuality and intimacy.

The Preface ("*Intshayelelo*") is book ended with quotations from the poet Nontsizi Mgqwetho and novelist Victoria Swaartbooi. Taken from work published in the second and third decades of the twentieth century, respectively, these literary invocations reveal as much about Masola's

[18] Nomathamsanqa Tisani. "Review of *The Nation's Bounty: The Xhosa Poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho* edited by Jeff Opland," *Kronos*: *Southern African Histories*, 34 (2008), 322.

approach to women's literary traditions, language, and publicness as do her own words sandwiched between Mgqwetho's and Swaartbooi's.

These two early twentieth century authors writing in isiXhosa function for Masola, akin to how Bessie Head's imaginative energy is outlined in Boswell's own Preface: as a literary energy that enables "a space into which I could enter, dream different dreams, and imagine myself as a creative being".[19]

Mgqwetho, "a visionary whose points of reference were entirely biblical, and yet her poetry consistently addressed contemporary social and political issues",[20] is currently the best-known Xhosa woman poet of her time following the republication of a collection of her poems in 2007 with translations by the leading scholars of Xhosa literature, Jeff Opland and Abner Nyamende, and pre-eminent literary translator and feminist intellectual, Phyllis Ntantala. Until then, Mgqwetho had fallen into obscurity despite her stature in her day. In that volume, Opland writes:

> the poetry she left behind claims for her the status *of one of the greatest literary artists ever to write in Xhosa*, an anguished voice of an urban woman confronting male dominance, ineffective leadership, black apathy, white malice and indifference, economic exploitation and a tragic history of nineteenth-century territorial and cultural dispossession.[21] (Emphasis mine)

Opland's evaluation of Mgqwetho rhymes with her status as a historic and thematic reference point in Masola's own poetic debut. Swaartbooi's 1934 novel, *uMandisa*, is often credited as either the first novel by an African woman, or the first feminist novel by an African woman.[22] Margaret Daymond et al.[23] and Barbara Boswell's reminders of the out-of-print novels,

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19 Boswell, *And Wrote My Story*, xii.

20 Nxasana, "The Ambivalent Engagement," 95.

21 Jeff Opland. ed., *The Nation's Bounty: The Xhosa Poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), xiv.

22 Mfusi Cynthia Hoza, "Patriarchal Self-Inflated Pompous Image Deflated: A Feminist Reading of Swaartbooi's *UMandisa,*" *South African Journal of African Languages* 32, no. 1 (2012): 63 – 70.

23 Margaret Daymond, Dorothy Driver, Sheila Meintjes, Leloba Molema, Chiedza Musengezi, Margie Orford and Nobantu Rasebotsa, eds., *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region*, Vol. 1 (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2003).

Intyatyambo Yomzi[24] and *UThandiwe wakwaGcaleka*[25] by Lilith Kakaza point to a more complex story of firsts.

The epigraph from Mgqwetho, taken from the newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* sometime in 1924, reads, "*Asinakuthula umhlaba ubolile*" (italics in original), translating to "We dare not keep still while the land decays" or, more poetically, also as "We have no peace in a world in disarray". There are obvious overlaps in the two meanings in both the collective voicing of psychic and material discontent is evident. The literal meaning exhorts the listener to intervene in the crisis whereas the second engenders curiosity.

A much longer excerpt is taken from Swaartbooi:

> *Zintombi zeAfrika qhubani eyenu indima ekubuyiseni nasekuyinyuseni iAfrika, elilizwe lokuzalwa kwenu. Xa siyenzileyo ke indima yethu ngabanye, singahlali sisonge izandla, kofaneleka xa sithi, 'Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika, makuphakame uphondo lwayo!*
> (Women of Africa, take charge in restoring and elevating Africa, this land of your birth. As protagonists, rather than sitting with folded arms, we appropriately declare, "God save Africa, let its horn [glory] sound.")[26]

The excerpt from Swaartbooi's novel provides a clearer sense of the intended tone than Mgqwetho's, although Swaartbooi's addressed audience is a fictional one and Mgqwetho's a historic one. Both assume direct address where writing is intervention and call to action.

Masola's chosen gestures of self-introduction surface a variety of discourses: she draws a direct line between herself as a writer and the literary traditions of Mgqwetho and Swaartbooi. To enter an existing literary tradition is to be in conversation with its strategies and thematic concerns, tending to its irritations and modes of address. Given the omission of Mgqwetho's and Swaartbooi's work from the canon, as well as pervasive accusations of African feminism's newness, Masola's gesture matters. It establishes her in a long line of African feminist literary presence.

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24 Lilith Kakaza. *Intyatyambo Yomzi* (Alice: Lovedale Press,1913).

25 Lilith Kakaza. *UThandiwe wakwaGcaleka* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1914).

26 Victoria Swaartbooi, *UMandisa* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1934).

Such emphasis on transgenerational women's literary presence confronts the ongoing erasure of Black women's historic and contemporary intellectual and creative energies in the (re)making of South Africa, which Simamkele Dlakavu writes, "we have witnessed . . . in school curricula, our media, history books, museums and heritage sites".[27] Dlakavu highlights the deliberate institutionalized unremembering. Mgqwetho and Swaartbooi function as literary reference points for Masola's own project, reaching into the past and the present to highlight the multifaceted, multigenerational sites within which African women have "engaged in activist-intellectual projects to build a more humane society through our time, voices (written, signed, made verbal), labour, physical presence, ideas and political strategies to build" different senses of possibility.[28]

Introducing herself as a poet by claiming a long lineage of women authors in the same language of her poetry also highlights the world-making effects of women's creative energies in the manner articulated by Dlakavu above. Whereas the missionary-educated, and indeed, the Xhosa literary tradition is often articulated in reference to the great men from this tradition, their women peer pioneers are seldom accorded the same attention. Mgqwetho and Swaartbooi are not merely symbolically resurrected in Masola's poetry collection, they are part of the path clearing way to the past which makes Masola's project possible, as well as how she charts future possibilities as a strategy against unremembering. More than forgetting, "unremembering is a calculated act of exclusion and erasure"[29] and partakes in "a much wider field than simply collection, recollection and recalling and is itself a commentary on the (dis)junctures between memory and history".[30]

Writing shortly after Mgqwetho's re-introduction in 2007, Duncan Brown is particularly illustrative of the *unremembering*:

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27 Simamkele Dlakavu, "'Say No, Black Woman': *The Giant is Falling* and the Erasure of Black Women in South Africa," *Agenda* 31, no. 3-4 (2017), 5. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2017.1391615.

28 Dlakavu, "'Say No, Black Woman'," 5.

29 Pumla Dineo Gqola, *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 8.

30 Gqola, *What is Slavery,* 8.

> Nontsizi Mgwetho was a Xhosa poet who published between 1920 and 1929 in the newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* (The People's Spokesman[sic]). She is one of the first black women poets to have produced a substantial body of work: 95 poems and three articles appeared between 23 October 1920 and 4 September 1926; and two more poems appeared after a two-year gap on 22 December 1928 and 5 January 1929. Jeff Opland and I have been the only critics to write on Mgqwetho (besides a brief discussion by Deborah Gaitskell in an article on women's prayer groups (1997), and even briefer mentions in Hofmeyr (2004) and Daymond *et al* (2003). Her work was discovered by Opland in its archival locations, and edited and translated by him (with assistance from Phyllis Ntantala and Abner Nyamende) in the recently published volume *The Nation's Bounty: The Xhosa Poetry of Nontsizi Mgwetho* (2007).[31]

In place of unremembering, Masola invokes a collective memory and a century-long Black South African feminist literary tradition. These historic women writers held significant stature during their time and were considered major writers. Writing in the press, they were not unicorns or peerless, even if "[t]he prominent writers were mostly men from the mid-1800s until the 1970s in South Africa".[32] Though a minority, a significant number of women wrote in the same avenues. Indeed,

> [w]hile there were women writing at the same time, especially in newspapers in the late 1800s (Daisy Makiwane began working at *Imvo Zabantsundu* after 1888) and early 1900s, such as Adelaide Tantsi and Ellen Pumla Ngozwana, most of their writing has not been preserved in the same way as male writing.[33]

They have been obscured through critical neglect that has led to their being disappeared from public view and exclusion from the canon. Through modes of reception and memorialization (or erasure),

> different expectation created for would-be elite men and women had consequences for the kind of intellectual cultures women developed

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31 Duncan Brown, "'Modern Prophets, Produce a New Bible': Christianity, Africanness and the Poetry of Nontsizi Mgwetho," *Current Writing* 20, no.2 (2008), 78. https://doi.org/10.1080/1013929X.2008.9678302.

32 Masola, "Journeying Home," 14.

33 Masola, "Journeying Home," 14.

> later for themselves in the 20th century. The gendered nature of intellectual and public work (such as speeches and letter writing) allowed men to be men of politics, educational leaders, clergymen, writers etc.[34]

The valuation of these kinds of writing was further bolstered by patriarchal evaluation even when women produced standalone literary texts.

Religious imagination as literary device

The deployment of religious imagination is an intertextual one because the "source domain is religion and culture-specific".[35] There is an activation of background knowledge – recognition of Christian idiom and reference that is then transformed as part of a repertoire to comment on a situation that is apart from the religious. This creates new meaning and positions the newly crafted perspective as one of importance.

In what follows, I analyze specific poems in *Ilifa,* mapping three specific uses of religious imagination by Athambile Masola*:* to construct the overlapping of Christian consciousness and public space taking; to contest religious patriarchal collusion in the making of femininity; and, to assert belonging in a complex literary tradition with established intertextual repertoires though which importance and gravity are established.

Christian references are found in numerous poems in this collection across the three sections. Poems like "*Izwi elidala*" create a refrain through which religious consciousness permeates otherwise mundane activities, reinforcing this sense in which Christian intertextuality is part of the construction of a subjectivity and a sense of public articulation. In this poem, for example, each of the three stanzas has a speaker whose concern is interspaced with an italicized religious reminder, "*Ekuqalekeni ube ekho uLizwi*" (In the beginning was the Word/Voice): the world was created through words (or the uttering of the words) because "*ilizwi*" is both "word" and "voice". Each speaker's worried commentary focuses on their child's or grandchild's adventures in the world: knee scrapes, reckless life choices, low self-esteem in transactional relationships, and other life challenges.

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34 Masola, "Journeying Home," 16.
35 Arimbi, *Reading Contemporary Indonesian*, 13.

Mundane and abstract concerns are intertwined and after each listing the intertextual reference to the Christian creation story reinforces the love expressed by the speaker to the addressee. Each stanza's beloved is addressed gently, claimed, and assured of their value which that is immediately reinforced with the Biblical incantation. Love is in the words and the Word/Voice.

The poems "*Umthandazo"* (Prayer), "*Indebe Yam Iyaphalala*" (My Cup Runneth Over), and "*Imvuselelo*" (Spiritual Restoration) offer linguistic play on different declarations of the speakers' entitlements to take up space. Here, Masola relies on religious language and symbolism to narrate and mediate the quotidian. In such poems, "writing becomes a way of resisting the exclusion and erasure of their experiences".[36]

One staging of this is in the presentation of the historic South African Women's March to the Union Buildings in August 1956. Here, imaginatively, in "*OoMama Bomthandazo*", a poem Masola previously published in the co-edited anthology *Kauve!!* a co-edited anthology,[37], she imagines the marching women's prayers, attentive to available surviving material while filling in the blanks. It is a recognition that when taking women's historical, political, spiritual, and creative work seriously, "classifications and boundaries, such as those between fiction and testimony, self and other, personal and political become more difficult to maintain".[38] Masola journeys imaginatively into the psyche and conversations of the marching women imagining the many worlds women's words, dreams, and prayers have created. The joint prayer troubles multiple "classifications and boundaries" as well as the margins of the public and private lives of women, whether they are hyper-visible or obscured.

In a seamless dance between women's radical political public-space claiming and prayer, Masola writes:

9 August 1956

A re rapeleng	Let us pray

[36] Masola, "Journeying Home," 13.

[37] Boitumelo Mofokeng, Mothobi Mutloatse and Athambile Masola, eds., *Kauve! The Women's March of 1956 to Pretoria, 64th Anniversary* (Johannesburg: Skottaville, 2020).

[38] Jessica Murray, "Tremblings in the Distinction between Fiction and Testimony," *Postcolonial Text* 4, no. 2 (2008): 3.

Modimo Ntate	God the Father
Modimo Mora	God the Son
Modimo Moeoa O halalelang	God the Holy Spirit
Ntate rona yamahodimong	Our Father who art in Heaven
O Morena wa marena	You are Lord of Lords
Namhlanje siza kuwe	Today we come to You
Sicela uvikele ubumnyama	Keep the darkness at bay
Xa sibheka ePitoli.	As we head to Pretoria.
Sithandazela iingane zethu	We pray for our children
Imindeni yethu	Our families
Ngale mini ibaluleke kangaka.	On this very important day.
Hamba nathi njengoba wahamba namaSirayeli entlango.	Go with us as with the Israelites in the desert
Lo msebenzi wokubhukuqa umbuso ngumsebenzi esiwuthwaliswe nguwe Moya oyingcwele	This business of overthrowing the state is one you have tasked us with, Holy Spirit.
Dira ho nna diqhalane	Scatter my enemies
Ke hloletswe ke wena	You will conquer for me
Le matla, Le khanya ka ho safeleng	The power, and everlasting Light
Amen!	Amen!

Here, as in the poems discussed above, faith and religious language are part of the construction of a public sensibility that includes ways of re-making the world, contesting dominance, and the unapologetic and hopeful creation of a better future across the personal-political axis. Strikingly, the prayer seamlessly moves through different South African languages, implying both different speakers and reminds the reader of the prayer's status as a collective, rather than individual appeal.

The phrase "*oomama bomthandazo*" is not commonly understood to carry political significance. Despite established radical histories and longstanding traditions of political positions taken by some religious communities against apartheid, *oomama bomthandazo* are framed in ways consistent with coalescing patriarchal nationalist and popular narratives of Black women as self-sacrificial, pious, and submissive mothers.[39] Masola's reference is

[39] Substantive bodies of academic critique exist on this trope of the long suffering, stoic mother of (South African) nationalism. In South Africa, the most voluminous feminist

unlike this collective memory. Instead, her project rhymes with another feminist articulation, that of political scientist Lihle Ngcobozi's reading of the rich tapestries of Manyano women's social, economic, and political cultures and the century-long traditions in South Africa as constructing a counterpublic set of narratives to citizenship. Ngcobozi's reading of Manyano women complicates longstanding intersections between women's religious and political organization. Whereas "*oomama bomthandazo*" are broader than and inclusive of Manyano women,[40] Ngcobozi's arguments are relevant for Masola's poetic representation here.

In Masola's poem, the continuity of prayer as it moves through different languages maps space, pointing to the many towns, villages, and cities the marchers travelled from. Religious imagination is part of the shared vocabulary of members the oldest Black women's organisation, its role in

writing against this rendition has been in response to the TRC re-inscription of women's political passivity and the reinforcement of the "mother Africa" trope, cf. Sheila Meintjes and Beth Goldblatt, "Gender and the truth and reconciliation commission," *A Submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Witwatersrand, South Africa: University of Witwatersrand* (1996); Nthabiseng Motsemme. "The meanings in silence: Memory," *Rhodes Journalism Review*, no. 24 (2004): 4-5 and "The mute always speak: On women's silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *Current Sociology* 52, no. 5 (2004): 909-932; Zoë Wicomb, "Five Afrikaner texts and the rehabilitation of whiteness," *Social identities* 4, no. 3 (1998): 363-383. For feminist critiques of representations of the stoic Black mother in cultural texts and popular imaginaries, cf. Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African literature and the politics of gender* (London: Routledge, 1994); Susan Z. Andrade, "Rewriting history, motherhood, and rebellion: Naming an African women's literary tradition," *Research in African Literatures* 21, no. 1 (1990): 91-110. For a more focused, sustained engagement with this trope with specific reference to Black women's religious formations, see Lihle Ngcobozi's outstanding studies "Lizalise Idinga Lakho [Honour Thy Promise]: The Methodist Church Women's Manyano, the Bifurcated Public Sphere, Divine Strength, Ubufazi and Motherhood in Post-Apartheid South Africa," (MA diss., Rhodes University, 2017), and *Mothers of the nation: Manyano women in South Africa*. (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2020).

40 In their majority and most established forms, "*oomama bomthandazo*" include Manyano women (Methodist Women's Guild, founded in 1907) with their symbolically important uniform of black skirts, pantyhose, black formal shoes, red coat-shirt and white hats with standard Thursday meetings, Anglican Women's Guild, and St Anne's Sodality (Catholic 'guild' named after Jesus' maternal grandmother, established in 1934 in southern Africa) with black skirts, pantyhose, black formal shoes, a purple shirt-cape and black hats with standard fortnightly meetings. Each has a daughter association with equally complex structures, uniforms, and codes. For an in-depth study, see Ngcobozi *op cit.*; Beverley Haddad, "Church Uniforms as an Indigenous Form of Anglicanism: A South African Case Study," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 14, no. 4 (2016), 156-171.

the largest women's political march in South Africa's history, and answers an often-asked question about the locations of the organizational capacity to bring twenty thousand women to Pretoria to march on the Union Buildings. Finally, this rendering of the consciousness of the women at the march on 9 August 1956 places them in the tradition of the literary women discussed earlier in this paper by symbolically mapping an unbroken tradition of women's religious imagination that survives in different guises even if obscured, erased, and minimized from the outside.

A second deployment of religious imagination is at play in the poem "*Umyalelo wentombi*", which lists ideal characteristics of a properly socialized woman:

Ukhuthale	Be industrious
Ube nembeko	Polite
Ube nes'dima	Upright
Unyamezele.	Endure.
Intombazana ayilali emini	Daytime napping is not for girls,
Ukwazi ukuququzela.	Instead, be energetic.
Ungabhentsi	Do not sit with legs wide apart
Ungathethi gqithi	Neither loquacious
Ungabiz'amehlo	Nor an exhibitionist be
Ungakhwazi	Do not raise your voice.
Umlenze, iqhiya	Pantyhose, headwrap
Ispaji, unondrokhwe	Purse, petticoat
Umthandazo.	Prayer.

The unidentified speaker authoritatively lists ideal feminine attributes and taboos which make up the composite idealized femininity in the outlined society. There are clear links between the femininity, comportment, and embodied lessons in this poem, and the uniform of the Manyano women. In stanza 4, the shorthand communication is in code. For example, "*umlenze*" literally means "a leg" but in this context it refers to the proper form of leg presentation. Similarly, the other clothing items listed reflect modesty rather than styling choices. In the previous stanza, what is forbidden is "*ukubhentsa*", a particular way of sitting with legs open. Here, a proper woman's position is written on her body, underscoring the "ambiguous status of the body as both location and artifact of human imagination".[41] Indeed, Masola must be aware that,

[41] Cooey, *Religious Imagination*, 8.

> [t]he more we understand about the body and the role it plays as object of and vehicle for the social construction of reality, the clearer the inseparability of knowledge, value, and power becomes. This inseparability makes inescapable the perspectival character of all claims to knowledge; it intimately links knower and known to the particular historical, material context in which the knowing relation occurs. This inseparability forces us to reexamine old questions in new ways and to raise new questions as well.[42]

The stylistic choices are not just expressions of personality or preference; they are important social cues for onlookers. Importantly, the instruction is as religious as it is socio-political. Prayer is not just the punctuating end to the poem. It has been anticipated in the call to industriousness, modesty, perseverance, restraint, and proper comportment. It climactically breaks the 4-2-4-2 line structure of the preceding stanzas, making it rhetorically the final statement on the matter of proper feminine instruction.

The teaching is akin to Christian education against sloth, laziness, boastfulness, and pride. The first line, instructing against daytime napping for girls and women, anticipates the poem "*Intombi ezilala emini*" later in the same collection. As a feminist poet, however, Masola troubles the expectation when the poem "*lintombi ezilala emini*" ends up being a celebration of these taboo-breaking women from a speaker who watches them with amusement and admiration. Modesty is equally complicated in a poem named after a slur, "*Isifebe*" (The Whore), in which Masola stages the "limits of culture, especially the limits of language"[43] and employs religious imagination to underscore the "double role religious symbols can play, both to enforce and to disrupt the continuity of the cultures in which they take hold or from which they emerge".[44]

The poem "*Isifebe*" is a short one, reproduced here in full:

NgeCawa ucula uSiyakudumisa.	On Sunday, she sings the Te Deum.
NgoMvulo uyaphangela.	On Monday, she goes to work.
NgoLwesibini usentlanganisweni yesikolo sabantwana.	On Tuesday, she attends a meeting at her children's school.

[42] Cooey, *Religious Imagination*, 5.
[43] Cooey, *Religious Imagination*, 7.
[44] Cooey, *Religious Imagination*, 8.

NgoLwesithathu ubukela uMzansi Magic.	On Wednesday, she watches Mzansi Magic.
NgoLwesine uya emanyanweni.	On Thursday, she goes to Manyano.
NgoLwesihlanu yi-nice-time negals.	On Friday, it's nice-time with the gals.
NgomGqibelo udibana no Temba;	On Saturday, she meets up with Temba;
Okanye uXolani,	Or Xolani,
Okanye uSam.	Or Sam.
Ok'salayo ufumana le nto ayifunayo.	Basically, she gets exactly what she wants.
NgeCawa ucula uSiyakudumisa.	On Sunday, she sings the Te Deum.

For Masola, "*Isifebe*" is not the woman who is beyond the pale. She is quite ordinary, in a gesture of writing against the patriarchal deployment of the label whore/slut. Indeed,

> [b]ecause women who enjoy sex and/or have it freely, and people who are same gender/sex attracted threaten the logic of patriarchy by fudging numerous boundaries ready-made for surveillance and punishment, the words accorded to these transgressions are powerful. At the same time, however, it is the mere naming as such that brings danger [….] Patriarchy needs these names as stamps on those individuals who are deemed safe to violate and render outcasts.[45]

Importantly, the woman observed in this poem defies easy characterization. Irony is used to chart and process conflicting versions of femininity under patriarchy: virtuous women versus whores. Read within the larger context of the poems in *Ilifa*, this woman adheres to the instructions to be "industrious" and "energetic" to impressive effect. Masola's humorous rendition is of a woman's capacity for adherence to feminine instruction, attentive parenting, and commitment to her own pleasure. Masola's complex feminist staging of the granularity of women's lives dislocates patriarchal ideals and interpretative lenses.

The subject's commitment to Christian religious life is evident not only in Sunday observation, but in the choice of additional participation in Manyano, the Methodist Women's Guild work. She chooses to be an industrious and

[45] Pumla Dineo Gqola, *Female Fear Factory* (Cape Town: Melinda Ferguson, 2021), 75.

an attentive mother, a friend, and a woman who attends to her own spiritual, financial, entertainment, and sexual needs. Her multiple partners are listed in matter-of-fact manner in the poem, rendering their numbers mundane. Yet, the detailed listing of her week's activity by a speaker removed from the poem's subject hints at the surveillance that women are placed under in patriarchal societies for the purposes of categorization as one kind of woman rather than another. Masola stages this patriarchal surveillance to reveal it for what it is: a reduction of women's lives and complexity.

An excellent example of Masola's third use of religious imagination is evident in the poem "*Wakrazulwa*" (He was ripped apart) where pain is "voiced" "not only through language but through a symbol system laden with religious meaning, meaning she appropriates even as she challenges it".[46] The titular phrase is familiarly applied only in relation to Jesus' crucified body and cloth in isiXhosa. Its use in this third context highlights the extremity of the violence and pain, placing it out of the ordinary. This elevation is particularly striking here in its application to a woman's heart and body in the aftermath of rape. Her wound, not always visible, is a consequence of another's sinful violence. Masola writes:

Yeyani na le mikrozo kule ntliziyo yakho?	What lacerations are these on your heart?
Xa ndikujonga umgumqaba-qaba	You are the picture of health
Xa ndikubuza uthi akhontw'ibitheni	Claim not a care in the world
Xa uhamba ufana nomntu wonke	Your stride unspectacular
Uncuma njengomntu wonke	Your smile ordinary
Uhleka njengomntu wonke	Your laugh habitual
Kodwa	Yet
Wakrazulwa.	You were ripped apart.
Intliziyo yomntu uyayazi	You know the human heart
Wazibonela ngamehlo akho.	Saw it with your own eyes.
Amehlo omntu ayathetha.	A person's eyes communicate.
Ngakumbi umntu omaziyo.	Especially someone you know.
Wagqibela nihleka, nigigitheka	One minute you were laughing, giggling
Kumnandi	Deliciously
Kodwa wothuka xa ephezu kwakho	The next he was on top of you.

[46] Cooey, *Religious Imagination*, 6.

Waphelelwa ngamandla wakubona intiyo yakhe.	His hateful eyes draining your energy.
Wakrazulwa ngenxa yokungabi naw' amandla,	Torn and sapped,
Wakrazuka.	You tore.
Wopha.	Bled.
Inxeba elingapheliyo.	An unhealing ulcer.
Wanenxeba likaYesu.	Yours Jesus' wound.
Mawuhlanjululwe	Heal
Mawuhlanjululwe	Heal
Mawuhlanjululwe	Heal…

Masola's metaphorical comparison of the addressee's rape injury to Jesus' crucifixion wounds is striking. It establishes the addressee's wound as an enduring hurt that is not always treated with the attention it deserves from its society. Recounting the rape primes the reader to anticipate Jesus' appearance. Its unfolding recalls Jesus' transition from intimacy (preceding the Last Supper) to betrayal (Judas Escariot, Peter's Denial) to the wounding (the Passion) and the long aftermath. As with Jesus, there is an afterlife for the addressee. For the addressee, the violation casts a long shadow whereby redemption and healing are infinitely delayed.

Here, Masola scripts an "example of religious imagination at work making up and making real a self and its world, directly out of the pain".[47] The use of "*wakrazulwa*" and the crucifixion metaphor is Masola's scripting of rape's significance. If, as in "*Ilizwi elidala*", the world was made through the w/Word, it can, therefore, be remade through the same. Therefore, although the metaphor of the crucifixion is a death metaphor, it recalls a tradition in which a different end is possible. Diah Ariami Arimbi writes of how "[l]iterary representations become one way among others trying to portray women's strategies that will give them maximum control over their lives and bodies".[48] Arimbi's hopeful reading makes even more sense upon consideration of the last three lines of Masola's poem. The repetition of the desire for healing and redemption clearly points to an unfulfilled wish or prayer. Yet the triple

47 Cooey, *Religious Imagination*, 4.
48 Arimbi, *Reading Contemporary Indonesian*, 14.

reiteration is illustrative of Masola's religious imagination in generative ways. In Christ's passion, Peter denies Jesus three times before the cock crows, a betrayal foretold at the Last Supper. At the same time, the prayer for healing is repeated three times in the concluding three lines of Masola's poem, symbolically undoing the betrayal and consequential harm. For readers familiar with the Christian tradition, the relevance of the number three will be clear for its substantively more positive denotations: the third day of resurrection, the Holy Trinity, the Three Wise Men, most importantly for my purposes here. In an intertextual gesture, such a closing is not only hopeful but also generative.

Conclusion

The girl evoked in the Preface to *Ilifa* has been socialized into specific articulations of femininity, love, and negotiating space, all of which are religiously punctuated, enabling the kind of transgenerational textual reading proposed by Bhekizizwe Peterson in which there is "transmission of a number of recurring tropes across generations".[49]

Thus equipped and recalling that "one of the goals of feminist literary criticism, which is to help find alternatives to androcentric experience and analysis in order to more accurately interpret women's texts",[50] it is possible to recognize how much more than feminist revision is present in Masola's text, where the poet demonstrates dual awareness of her vulnerability and her resources. The former stems from the fickleness of archives, her vulnerability, and the precarity of her location as an African woman writer given the enduring unremembering. Masola also understands that such location is always under question because of the intersections of the logics of colonial heritage and African patriarchal canonisation processes.

At the same time, equipped as an accomplished literary historian who studies the same literary traditions to which she contributes, Masola chooses in *Ilifa* to "invite readers to identify with the protagonist and participate in the author's creation of new matrifocal history"[51] and literary space.

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49 Bhekizizwe Peterson, "Spectrality and intergenerational black narratives in South Africa," *Social Dynamics* 45, no. 3 (2019): 2. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2019.1690757.

50 Janice Crosby, *Cauldron of Changes: Feminist Spirituality in Fantastic Fiction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 1.

51 Crosby, *Cauldrons of Changes*, 4.

Producing a text that is thematically and structurally concerned with the intersections of women's entry into publicness, Masola is aware that in South Africa, and for the missionary-educated generations, religion became a resource for navigating entry into public life and public articulation, and navigating the world as individuals and subjectivity more broadly as a group. Religion and Christian language were also resources for making written literary meaning in the African missionary tradition.

While her religious references are not confined to Christianity, I limit myself to Biblical references to better tend to the intersections of feminist mapping, epistemic risk and the poet's engagement with two centuries of the South African isiXhosa literary archive and intellectual entries into publicness to negotiate the poet's own entry into literary public life. To do so offers a way of reading the context and conceptual landscapes within which to locate Masola's own poetic project and, therefore, make sense of its complex engagements with tradition.

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Making Good Women:[1] The Bequeaths of Colonial Encounters in the Making of the Clergy Wife in Ghana

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SHORT BIO

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SUBMISSION DATE
11 April 2023

ACCEPTANCE DATE
27 June 2023

ABSTRACT

There is a vast body of literature on how Africans have historically interacted with Christianity. One area in the discourse claims that Christianity and its extension, western education, shaped and in some cases succeeded in changing the gendered ideals and the very social fabric of society. This article deepens and adds nuance to the argument that missionary education shaped young women into prospective wives for clergymen in Ghana. Examining various works of literature, archival materials and in-depth interviews, the article reconstructs the trajectory of the clergy-wife position and concludes that missionary education aimed to remold the gendered spaces of Ghanaian society through the education of girls. However, this missionary ideal of a good woman who exemplified all the tenets of a godly Christian wife was to be found in the Clergy wife (CW). The paper concludes that the CW position led to the creation of a privileged class of women and, thus, through this creation, the missionary project of creating an ideal woman could be deemed successful.

KEYWORDS
Clergy wife, Ghana, Women, Missionary education, Christianity

Introduction

The historical study of the role of the clergy wife (from here CW), especially in Ghana, is much more recent than the creation of this role for women.[2] Indeed, the CW position was a result of Martin Luther's break with the Catholic church. A clear sign of doctrinal difference, Luther and the other reformers took wives, making the CW an established part of almost all other Christian denominations. The focus of this paper is to trace the historical formation of the CW in Ghana to understand how young Ghanaian girls were trained by Western educators to be CWs, simultaneously establishing the model for 'proper wives' for the emerging clergy group and the middle class

1 The title of this paper was inspired by Jean Allman's work on Asante women and colonial encounters.

2 This is in reference to the geographical area located in West Africa that was known in colonial times as the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast was renamed Ghana after it attained independence in 1957.

ISSN 2707-2991

between 1880–1950. This paper argues that the CW position, like Christianity, was alien to Ghana and that the role of the CW came into being through the creation of the "new" Christian woman, mother and wife, by western missionaries and teachers. It further contends that unlike in the West, the formation of the CW took a different route in Ghana. Consequently, how it was perceived in the West was different from its reputation in Ghana, as these women were seen to belong to a class of women considered to be privileged in their times. While there is a vast body of literature on the complex encounters between the missionaries, colonial regimes and African women, literature on how some colonized women such as CWs emerged from such encounters is lacking. This gap is a result of the tendency to lump these women into categories such as "Christian women", or more especially "wives of clergymen and missionaries". This obscures their very identity and essence in their specific place in the history of what Parry aptly terms as "colonized women's history".[3] Broadly, this paper contributes to the body of work that seeks to chart a historical map of our understanding of how a particular group of women emerged and occupied space within the colonial period, with particular emphasis on CWs.

Mainly qualitative, the primary data for this article was gathered through archival research as well as personal interviews with clergymen, CWs, and older men and women who had missionary training.[4] Interviews were conducted between 2017 to 2023. These interviews were in two parts: the first occurred between 2017 and 2019 for my PhD thesis; the second was further interviews conducted between 2020 and 2023 with participants I had been unable to contact or who were unavailable during the earlier interview process. The first part of this paper examines the history surrounding the Western CW. This is followed by a discussion on how Christian colonial education molded African and Ghanaian girls. The last part focuses on the

[3] Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, "Aspects of elite women's activism in the Gold Coast, 1874-1890," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 463 – 482.

[4] The inteviews were mainly carried out in the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions of Ghana, the two most populous cities in the country. Participants were selected from different denominations to cover the broad categorizations of denominations in Ghana (Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches). Participants were purposively selected, especially for those who received missionary education. This also led to snowballing as some participants recommended their surviving class mates or relatives who also received missionary education or were informed about the era.

selection of CWs among girls who received colonial education. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

The changes in the domestic arrangements of the clergy, from celibate to married priests, marked a profound turn in the history of Christianity. Martin Luther, the proponent of the Reformation, married an escaped nun, Katy Von Bora. In what Anne Llewellyn Barstow describes as an "experiment of clerical marriage", women in post-reformation marriage to the clergy found themselves in an ambivalent position and were not always the most welcomed figures.[5] This was because they represented the very epitome of the reformation. These women were so hated that, for instance, the wife of Archbishop Cranmer of England is rumoured to have travelled around in a chest to prevent being lynched. She and her children eventually fled to her home in Germany.[6] Indeed, the marriage of priests was largely rejected, especially in England until after the 1800s. This tense and unfriendly atmosphere did not initially allow their wives to be active participants in ministry work. To vindicate her place in the manor, the CW was expected to be an exemplary wife, just as her husband was an exemplary Christian husband. Among missionaries who came to Africa, Kirkwood notes that missionary wives, "were often married for the job; when a young missionary wife died, her widower would seek a replacement, very often from within the wider family circle of a missionary family".[7] A woman in such a position was expected to be her husband's helpmeet, not his equal, nor his competitor but one who knew the balancing act of making her husband's work a success without overshadowing his significance in the field. As intimated by Kirkwood, for the missionaries, especially those in Africa, "it was believed that the wives would serve as models of the female behaviour, and their husbands demonstrate the merits and virtues of the monogamous family."[8]

5 Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 52, no. 1 (1983): 3–16

6 Barstow, "The First Generation of Anglican Clergy Wives," 6–7

7 Deborah Kirkwood, "Protestant Missionary Women: Wives and Spinsters," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions,* ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 26.

8 Kirkwood, "Protestant Missionary Women," 27.

This was the model of a CW wife that followed the missionary husband to the "wilderness" of Africa to propagate the gospel.[9]

There is an appreciable body of literature on the role that Western CWs played alongside their husbands in the propagation of the gospel in Africa, especially in the Southern part of Africa. Most of the themes that emerge from the literature on missionary CWs relate to their contributions toward their husbands' work as missionaries. The largest part of these contributions is on the missionary CWs' training and education of African women and girls. While the missionary men were preoccupied with the spiritual aspect of missionary work, their wives concentrated on organising women into Bible groups and forming schools for girls.

Joan Millard records a number of both missionary wives and African CWs who could either be described as helpers or partners to their husbands, depending on the level of commitment they showed in the work.[10] Millard provides snapshots of the lives of African CWs, such as Mrs Magaret Makiwae, Miss Maggie Mtywaku of Peelton, and Charlotte Maxeke to mention a few. These women were described as remarkable women who worked alongside their husbands to ensure that their husbands' calls were successful. One striking difference between the missionary CWs and the African CWs was that the African CWs had all received training in schools that had been set up by the missionary CWs. Catherine Whitehead's[11] work which explored girls' education in Africa notes that although the educational landscape for girls changed over the course of history, the initial idea that had prompted girls' education by missionaries was a deep-seated perception of Africans as inferior to Europeans. The focus of education for African girls was, therefore, based on a domestic curriculum that sought to transform African girls into the missionaries perception of acceptable standards of womanhood based on an European model.

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9 Abena Kyere, "For God and Man: A Study of the Clergywife" (PhD diss., University of Ghana, 2019).

10 Joan Millard, "Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Missionary Wives in South Africa: Equal partners or historical non-entities?," *Missionalia* 31, no. 3 (2003): 59–72.

11 Clive Whitehead, "Education in British Colonial Dependencies, 1919-39: A Re-appraisal," *Comparative Education* 17, no. 1 (1981): 71 – 80.

There is a gap in understanding the formation of the CWs, especially in Ghana. This can be attributed to the fact that the CWs and the work they undertake are not perceived to be as important as the work performed by their husbands. One significant work on CWs in Ghana is by Jane Soothill.[12] Soothill's work looked at the roles that CWs play in contemporary Charismatic churches in Ghana and the conflicts that arise from their positions.[13] What is lacking is substantial work that examines the historical ways in which the position of the CW came to be instituted in Ghana. By paying close attention to how missionary CWs and European colonisers sought to train and educate girls to become "proper" women, this paper reconstructs the trajectory of the CW position in Ghana. It broadens the literature by showing how Western and colonial misconceptions of Africans generally, and African women specifically, led to the colonial project that created a social class of women who were meant to serve as wives to an emerging middle class and, in the process, constructed a distinct class of privileged women who became CWs. This work is important not only because it furthers our understanding of Christianity and colonial intervention in the identity formation of African women but also adds to scholarly works, such as that of Jean Allman on Asante women and their colonial encounters. While the colonial agenda, as Allman shows, was to reconstruct motherhood, the process was not linear and the Asante women were active determinants of the outcome of the process.[14] This meant that the need to transform Ghanaian women into the assumed roles as "proper" mothers and women was not always successful.

Let us create Women in our Christian Image

The need to train and re-train African women into acceptable, "proper" women was a common feature of the historical encounters between Africa and colonial missionary education. This was one of the crucial reasons for the creation of schools and training centers, especially for young African girls. Even before the training of young girls in womanhood projects gained ground, especially in formal settings such as schools, missionaries and CWs

12 Jane E. Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power. Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Boston: Brill: 2007).

13 Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power.*

14 Jean Allman, "Making Mothers: Missionaries, Medical Officers and Women's Work in Colonia Asante, 1924- 1945." *History Workshop Journal* 38, no. 1(1994): 23 – 47.

had taken it upon themselves to re-train African women. Through their Eurocentric lenses, Europeans developed very negative perceptions about the place and positioning of African women in African societies. European missionaries held on to the perception that beneath the charming infantile exterior of the African woman lurked a ravenous sexually-loose human, whose soul and being required immediate redemption. For instance, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch noted that

> the 'early missionaries' views were distorted by their prejudices; they found the traditional African kinship model and methods of upbringing incompatible with Christianity and emphasized women's apparent licentiousness and shamelessness.[15]

There was, therefore, the need for "women missionaries to introduce and make real the Christian ideal of marriage and the family"[16] to Africans. However, as has been rightly noted by Allman, "those entrusted with making 'proper' mothers in Britain's African territories – missionaries, nurses, teachers and women medical officers – carried with them the social baggage".[17] The "social baggage" that these "trainers" carried meant that the product of their education was to be a different African who met the requirements of what was considered proper Christian and Western education.

Efforts by women missionaries, especially CWs to organize women into Bible Study Groups and other groups were seen as one way to provide women with the needed education. The aim of such groups included educating women on how to be mothers, wives, and good Christian women. For instance, Deborah Gaitskell provides an example of a South African women's prayer group's mandate. The resident CW, Mrs Burnet, in her speech in 1916 exhorted the women to pray for their families and "train their children for the Lord".[18] The women in the prayer group were admonished

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15 Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women. A Modern History,* trans. Beth Gillian Raps, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 45.

16 Allman, "Making Mothers," 34.

17 Allman, "Making Mothers," 25.

18 Deborah Giatskell, "Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women's Christianity," in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (London: The International African Institute, 2005), 180.

to: a) Sweep and clean the house every day; b) Keep your things and your family clean and good; and c) If you have children, teach them the Christian faith. Do not let them run naked. (AP. African Women's Prayer Union (Manyano) Rules).[19]

Women in Kumasi in the Asante (Ashanti) region of Ghana received similar instructions from European missionary women and medical officers who were working among the Asantes women. The women in Kumasi were also instructed on child health care and motherhood. This was taken further by the Methodist mission teachers and students (Ghanaians) who went into the town on weekends to visit homes. Indeed, some of the teachers took it upon themselves to bathe, clean, and powder children in their bid to show Asante women how to care for their children.[20] The similarity of instructions and training between these two societies (Mayano in South Africa and Kumasi in Ghana) separated by great geographical distance proves the consistency of the Western colonisers' ideas about Africans and what was needed for them to become proper women. In Kenya, Eleanor Higgs notes that Christian Mothers' groups became the fora for the instruction, propagation, and promotion of the colonial ideal of motherhood and mothering in Kenya.[21] Scholars like Deborah Gaitskell have argued that such instructions went beyond the creation of gendered identities and responsibilities to the creation of race differentiation and superiority, and further to what Jean Allman describes as "maternal imperialism".[22] The underlying reason for directing African women on how to maintaini their homes and families was the instructors' belief that African homes and family arrangements were deficient. This invariably meant that a new African mother and wife had to be created, one who was better than the unconverted, one who could not be morally disparaged. Additionally, apparent from the above instructions given to the women of the prayer group is the superior feeling and orientation of the white CW who had the burden of teaching these African women basic hygiene and good Christian home management.

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19 Giatskell, "Devout Domesticity?", 180.

20 Allman, "Making Mothers," 37.

21 Eleanor Tiplady Higgs, "From "Imperial Maternalism" to "Matricentrism:" Mothering Ethics in Christian Women's Voluntarism in Kenya", *The African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 25(1), 2019: 24. https://doi.org/10.14426/ajgr.v25i1.896.

22 Allman, "Making Mothers," 35.

We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that organising the women together and teaching them also provided the colonial CW with a sense of purpose and responsibility. Most of these wives had relocated with their husbands to Africa although they themselves were mostly not on any contractual arrangement with the churches and did not have clearly defined rules of engagement.[23] They had, as was the norm, followed their husbands into the "wild" because the men were either missionaries appointed by the church or colonial officials who had been transferred to Africa. In their situation, wives found that the responsibility naturally fell on them to be in charge of teaching the women. While some were trained, most of these women did not have the training to undertake such responsibilities, and instead relied heavily on the cultural knowledge and assumptions of the European good wife and mother.[24] Later, more unmarried women will be sent to the field to serve as teachers.[25]

These efforts at training and re-training older women were not always successful. Indeed, cultural barriers, the issue of race, and Western women's belief of their inherent superiority were stumbling blocks to the transmission and receiving of the message. To most of the African women included in the training, it was seen, at best, as a pastime that allowed them to spend time with the 'white women' and obtain foreign items such as powder and medicine, and, at worst, it was a form of amusement. Thus, the Asante women for instance attended such meetings "on their terms and not because they wanted to learn a "'better' way".[26] The Ghanaian women were quick to recognize the superior position that these white women assumed and while they would engage them, they were not ready to abide by the new norms of womanhood and motherhood that were the motivation of such

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23 Valentine Cunningham, "God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary's Wife: Mary Hill, Jane Eyre and Other Missionary Women in the 1840s," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 85, 97.

24 Millard, "Nineteenth and Early Twentieth," 62 – 63.

25 Kirkwood, "Protestant Missionary Women," 32; Cecillie Swaisland, "Wanted-Earnest, Self-Sacrificing Women for Service in South Africa: Nineteenth-Century Recruitment of Single Women to Protestant Missions," *in Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions,* ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 76.

26 Allman, "Making Mothers," 40.

meetings. However, the training of girls did not have these nuanced dynamics, as will be evident in the discussions below. In young African and Ghanaian girls, the colonialists and missionaries found the perfect targets for their resocialization agenda.

Making Women: Ghanaian Girls and Colonial Education

From the ongoing discussions, it can be noted that that inability of the CWs and other women missionaries to retrain older African women led them to redirect their energies to training younger girls. This seemed more productive as younger children were more likely than the adults to uncritically imbibe new knowledge. In this respect, the Methodists, Basel mission, and Catholics were some of the first missions to set up girls' schools, especially in Ghana. These schools were more like training centers that aimed to "mould proper Christian women and mothers through daily routine".[27] A disturbingly common idea of making a new woman, wife, and mother acceptable to Western sensibilities propelled the education of young African girls. Indeed, to produce the right kind of women, the missionaries sought to alter the very physical appearance of African girls. In a letter to a friend, Mrs. Price, the daughter of Robert Moffat, recounted that "In civilized and especially Christian countries, a slender figure is admired, unlike the fat African model…the more civilized and more Christ-like the Bakwena become, the more they would admire slenderness and not fatness".[28] The purpose of the educational tenets was to reorganize converts' original understanding of their gendered roles and expectations. Miescher, for instance, relates that, "they [Presbyterian] outlined the gendered behaviour of male and female converts, their relations towards children, their work, etc, as well as their behaviour towards authority [which] was to be altered to suit the new Christian being".[29]

Missionary education began with the aim of producing young men who could read and write, primarily to serve as interpreters and, eventually, as

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27 Allman, "Making Mothers," 35.

28 Adrian Hastings, "*Were women a special case," in Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions,* ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 115.

29 Stephen Miescher, "The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity in Ghana," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* New Series, no. 9 (2005): 103.

missionaries. Women were not needed to train natives who could be literate enough to spread the gospel. As a result, a group of young educated men were created and came to be known as *Akrakyefo* (an Akan word meaning "the educated ones"). David Kimble observed that "the main openings for mission-trained Africans lay naturally in the mission field. The brightest boys were trained as teachers, interpreters, catechists, or local preachers and some of them proceeded to ordination".[30] These educated young men were noted to have a "sense of privilege of belonging to an educated elite minority"[31] that could read and write and had access to western products and lifestyle. In the same vein, as will become evident in this paper, the best girls would be selected as wives for these men, especially for catechists, local preachers, and men who intended to be ordained.

Fiona Bowie concisely sums up how "girls in mission schools were usually prepared to be good wives and mothers based on a European model, and their education was largely domestic-cooking, cleaning, sewing, laundry work, hygiene and so on, as well as farming".[32] The need to provide a correspondingly educated African wife arose as a result of the emerging educated African husband. There was no doubt that an educated Christian man would need a wife who could run a household and organise the domestic domain to suit his new status. The ideal of a monogamous Christian household was espoused as the model family and it went without saying, for instance, that the catechists and priests were expected to be the ones promoting such ideas through their domestic arrangements.
There is a clear connection and semblance in the instructions and training that young girls in these schools and institutions received. A report, for instance, given about the missionary Catherine Langham in the Mashonaland Quarterly Journal of 1915 in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) reveals that:

> After nearly thirty years working under the auspices of the SPG at a variety of mission schools throughout Southern Rhodesia, she

[30] David Kimble, *A Political history of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 62.
[31] Miescher, "The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity," 121.
[32] Fiona Bowie, "Introduction: Reclaiming Women's Presence," *in Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions,* ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 13.

> recognised a specific need for a school where African women could be prepared for marriage with men from the emerging social elite who had received a Western-style education and who were working as professional men, teachers, priests and government clerks.[33]

Modupe Labode also reiterated that:

> Boys were taken into a home (home schools) to learn how to live in a civilized manner and prepare for their future, public roles in society. This training was not an end in itself, and the end of education for boys was to produce leaders. The girls were supposed to learn how to provide suitable homes for such leaders.[34]

Vocation and training centers that were set up in Ghana, then the Gold Coast, bore the same trappings of the provided domestic training. The idea of educating girls was also steeped in Western gender ideals that clearly defined gendered roles and expectations. Adasi rightly observed that the wife of missionaries "concentrated on teaching girls and women in the basic European education of reading and writing, in female roles of housewifery and cookery, needlework".[35] Writing on the legacy of the Presbyterian Ministry in Ghana,[36] Botchway mentions the Abokobi[37] Girls' Institute, stating that it:

> produced well-educated and trained young women as prospective wives of local Ministers, Teacher-Catechists, Evangelists, and other men in the congregations. Church agents and responsible families rushed to the Abokobi Institute to choose life partners. Thus, from its introduction in 1860 up to 1905 when it fizzled out, the Abokobi

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33 Kirkwood, "Protestant Missionary Women," 36.

34 Modupe Labode, "From Heathen Kraal to Christian Home," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions,* ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 131.

35 Grace Sintim Adasi, *Gender and Change. Roles and Challenges of Ordained Women Ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.* (Accra: Gavoss Education PLC, Ltd, 2016), 25.

36 The Presbyterian Ministry was started by the Basel Mission of Switzerland. The first missionaries arrived in Ghana (then Gold Coast) in 1828.

37 Abokobi is one of the communities located in the Ga East Municipality in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. In 1854, Basel mission settled and set up their townships known as Salems and Abokobi was one of them.

> Girls' Institute produced competent, resourceful, industrious wives and mothers for church and country.[38]

A Catholic vocational school for girls that was instituted in Cape Coast, Ghana, in 1940 is noted to have grown "out of a domestic science course for girls preparing for marriage".[39] Housecraft, needlework, and laundry were some of the main courses which young girls could study. A course in domestic science was taught at all levels, from grade one to four as well as at advanced levels. The content of these courses varied according to the level. Courses taught in grade one included the art of cleaning, laundry, and cookery. Grade two courses involved topics such as the ideal home, the family's food, and family wash (which included baby clothes, bath, sleep, routine, and diet). At the advanced level four, the course was divided into two main categories: the young wage earner, and the wife and mother. For this paper, the focus is on the course for the wife and mother. There were two courses under this category: Native Marriage and Christian Marriage and its Sanctity, and Preparation for Motherhood. Topics under the course on marriage included dangers of expensive weddings and foods suitable for weddings. Topics on motherhood included pre-natal care, diets, clothes for baby, diet for baby, etc It is noteworthy that the main aim of these courses was:

> To train useful independent citizens and good homemakers…Girls should learn how to be thrifty in matters of dress, but at the same time they should be encouraged to take pride in a neat and attractive appearance, and the work they do should not only help them to become good wives and mothers but perhaps might also enable them to earn money by doing simple dressmaking, needlework, and embroidery.[40]

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38 Francis Botchway, "Origins, Heritage, Birth of Presbyterian Church of Ghana," accessed March 3, 2019, https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Origins-Heritage-Birth-of-Presbyterian-Church-of-Ghana-383219.

39 Information taken from Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, Ghana. From the document titled: Catholic Vocation Schools in Cape Coast, Gold Coast, 1949.

40 Information was taken from Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, Ghana. From the document titled: "Catholic Vocation Schools in Cape Coast, Gold Coast, 1949".

From the excerpts above it is clear that girls' education was considered important in preparing girls for marriage, although women were also considered as active participants in the workforce who required relevant education to succeed in those areas. The use of the word 'perhaps' clearly indicates that the primary expectation from this education was not for women to become income-earners but, rather, for them to become wives and mothers. Thus, while the outcome of men's education was to be active participants in the workforce as earners, women were educated to perfect the art of domestic duties.

The Best Girl for the Clergyman: Requirements for the Selection of a Clergy Wife

As noted earlier, only the best of the trained girls were selected as wives for the clergymen, men who held respectable positions in both the missionary circles and society at large. Since the best of the educated, trained boys were reserved for the church, to work as catechists, local preachers, and clergymen, the best of the educated, trained girls were reserved as wives for such men. Archival records, historical scholarly pieces, as well as interviews with women who attended such institutions, and other relevant key informants, provide rich sources for piecing together the story of the Ghanaian CW.

Archival records document the story of the missionary Thomas Birch Freeman and his Ghanaian wife. Both Reverend Freeman's first and second wives died shortly after they arrived on the Gold Coast. The western coast of Africa was nicknamed the "Whiteman's grave" as a result of the number of European lives that were lost due to tropical diseases such as malaria.[41] For his third wife, Freeman was advised to marry a native woman, who was in the person of Rebecca Insaidoo.[42] Insaidoo was identified as a young woman who had received missionary training and taken further studies in European and Christian home-making with her cousin, Madam Fosua Parker (an European and Christian-trained woman). The records note that Insaidoo attended the School formed by Mrs. Wrigley in September 1836

41 Adasi, *Gender and Change*, 2016.

42 Information on Mad. Rebecca Insaidoo taken from the Public Records and Archives Administration Department from file titled, "Mrs Rebecca Freeman".

and there she had a good training in English and sewing in addition to the good tuition she had already had from Mrs. Sarah Parker in Domestic Science and Nursing, and thereafter she became very helpful to the missionaries.[43]

The training that Insaidoo received made her useful to the Europeans and it was recorded that when the Governor Winniett became ill, it was Insaidoo who nursed the governor back to good health. It was aptly noted that:

> Amongst the Female members of the Mission, and who would understand the language, and who would be able to take care of him, the choice fell on her, Rebecca Insaidoo, who was of a good disposition, amiable, willing, and ready to help always, and who had a good knowledge of attending to and nursing a European. She lived with him as a godly Matron, a good housewife and a very ready help to the Mission and the Missionaries; a very good mother, until her husband Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman was called to his rest on the 10th day of August 1890.

Again, in 1868, Sophia Afia Nyam, a young woman from the Akuapem royal lineage, was selected to be the wife of Theophil Opoku, the first Ghanaian to be ordained as a priest by the Basel mission. Sophia was educated and trained in home sciences and domestic training from the Basel mission.[44] Another story recorded the Ghanaian Presbyterian reverend minister, Rev. E.K.O Asante and his wife, Felicia Animaa Ntim. Their story also falls within the pattern of Freeman and Insaidoo. When Rev. Asante needed to marry, his mother assisted him in selecting a wife. The young woman who was selected was Felicia Animaa Ntim, who had "proper Presbyterian qualifications, [was] raised in a teacher's household, and had recently graduated from the Agogo Girl's School which sought to educate girls as Christian wives and mothers".[45]

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43 The school is now known as the Wesley Girls High School, one of the most renowned girls' high schools in Ghana.

44 Ulrike Sill, *Encounters in the Quest of Christian Womanhood: The Basel Mission in Pre- and Early Colonial Ghana* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010).

45 Miescher, "The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity," 90.

In an interview with the Principal of the now Agogo Principal Women's University College, she revealed that pioneering Presbyterian schools that were set up for girls in Ghana were established to train girls to serve as wives for the emerging middle-class men, especially those who worked in the church. The Principal further shared that, the training in the Agogo Girls School, as it was then called, was tailored to suit the requirements of what she termed "the Presbyterian woman's training", who was expected to be,

> A well-behaved, well-mannered, hard-working and God-fearing woman. She was to be the first woman to be considered when a clergyman or a man of repute wanted a wife. I am a priest and I can attest to the fact that pastoral work requires a very well-prepared spouse. Of course, there was always the underlying colonial perception that Africans needed to be trained to be 'proper'. However, these institutions also provided the first batch of women who could read and write and that should count for something. If you look at it from that perspective, then these women could be said to have been privileged in their days because they received an education which allowed them to be part of the new class of the "educated" as far back as 1931 when the school admitted its first batch of students.[46]

In other interviews, women who received training in Agogo reminisced about their time at the school. They stated that Agogo's training turned them into "good women", indicating that the training was "strict" and the principals and teachers ensured that rules were followed to the letter. The training entailed house management, cooking, house cleaning and other academic subjects. One woman who attended the school recalled that men who needed good wives came to Agogo:

> Men from Akropong Training College, other men and especially clergymen came to seek wives among us. I was recommended to my husband and it was always a great honour for a girl to be recommended. I was hard-working, loved nature, and I was calm and very neat. When my husband needed a wife, I easily came to mind. Everybody said I was the one to be married and my training too had prepared me for that so I was not found wanting. I was

[46] Grace Sintim Adasi, Principal of the Agogo Presbyterian Women's College of Education, interview by Abena Kyere, July 31, 2022.

> educated, and I had received training which ensured that I could be a good wife. I think that is why most of us were recommended as wives. In our culture, when you are about to marry, your mothers sit you down and teach you how to marry, but Christianity is not our culture. The men went to school to be clergymen or do whatever, so it was right that we also went to school to receive training to be their wives. Any man was lucky to find an Agogo-trained woman as a wife.[47]

There are observable patterns in the narrations above. Whether from archival records or in the interviews with living persons who had attended these schools, all the wives were recommended or selected due to their Christian educational background. Further field interviews proved that such a pattern was, indeed, the norm in the time frame under discussion. In the absence of a parent, a young clergyman or catechist[48] in need of a wife would often, as is the Ghanaian custom, share his desire with his family or a respectable elder in the church. If the young man had a woman in mind, her Christian and educational background was thoroughly verified and further recommendations were made based on her character. If there was no young woman in mind, the elder either consulted with other elders of the church for a recommendation or consulted teachers at the girls' schools to assist. This is when the best of the girls who were being trained were then recommended to be married. A young woman to be recommended for this position was, among other things, expected to possess exceptional qualities. Coming from a good Christian family was considered an added advantage and as vital as good character traits. This is reminiscent of the stories of Rebecca Insaidoo and Animaa Ntim above.

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47 Betsy Gladys Addo, interview by Abena Kyere. August 10, 2022 at Agogo, Ghana (Madam Betsy indicated she was 80 at the time of my visit).

48 It must be noted that the position of a catechist functioned almost like that of a priest. This is because most towns and villages did not have priests, and catechists performed all the roles expected of a priest. Again, although some Although Ghanaian Christians qualified for the position of priest, the racist stance of missionaries prevented the early ordination of Ghanaians, who were, thus, left to occupy positions such as catechists. This is significant since a young woman who married a catechist could be equated to one married to a priest.

According to an eighty-five-year-old catechist's wife who received missionary education and training, the prospective bride was expected to come from a good Christian home.[49] It was also anticipated that she was:

> Respectful, patient, hardworking, and welcoming. She should not be selective, should not be talkative, should be ready to listen, have a deep interest in God's word, and above all should know how to cook properly. However, the first and the last (respectful and good culinary skills) characteristics were most cherished in such a woman.[50]

The insistence on the last two requirements (respectful and possession of good culinary skills) for a CW is borne out of the reputation of the manse as a place of hospitality. A clergyman explained that the manse, (popularly known as the 'Mission house' in Ghana) was everyone's home.[51] This was because the clergy and his home was a symbol of hospitality, and anyone who wants advice or any form of help could freely walk in for assistance. In the case of travellers, especially Christians, the manse served as the first point of call. In such instances, the most obvious anticipated sign of welcome was food and any wife in a manse who did not know how to cook was considered an embarrassment to the husband and the church. Indeed, not only was the wife expected to know how to cook, but she was also expected to know how to cook numerous types of food, both local and European (especially in the colonial past), so that if her husband was ever to entertain a foreign missionary, her cooking would be acceptable. It is important to note that these expectations continue to be required of CWs. Thus, with the required missionary training, the right family background, and a recommendable character, a young woman stood in the enviable position of being recommended as a CW. To be a CW was, therefore, perceived as a position of privilege.

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49 Maama Akweley, interview by Abena Kyere. July, 2018 at Abokobi, Ghana. Abokobi was one of the earliest places Presbyterian missions settled and set up schools for girls in Ghana.

50 Ibid.

51 Ebenezer Bosomprah, a final-year student of the Trinity Theological Seminary, Interview by Abena Kyere. August 3, 2018.

Concluding Remarks

Gender relations was one of the areas in which the most damaging effects of colonial encounters were felt by African women. From the erosion of their powers to sidelining them politically and, sometimes, actively collaborating with existing patriarchal structures to oppress women. But it also provided the space for women to be mobile in the newly emerging African elite and middle class. In this paper, I have discussed how the Christian and colonial authorities sought to shape women into what they considered the right form of womanhood. While this did not succeed with older women, educational institutions successfully trained young girls to be suitable Christian wives. It must, however, be noted that these women were not "created" in isolation but rather side-by-side with men who equally needed educated wives. Although, in comparison to their male counterparts, the education of the women was rather inadequate, it provided the women with an opportunity to be part of an emerging elite social class. Moreover, it was these schools that later morphed into educational institutions that produced female teachers and public servants. It has been recorded that these women also began to see themselves as an educated group who could only marry men from their "class". Indeed, there was the fear that such women would renounce an uneducated husband.[52] This is perhaps the kind of privilege alluded to by some of the voices in this paper.

Particularly for the women who became CWs, the position was, indeed, considered a privileged one. Subsequently, the norm in Ghana is that the CW is held in high esteem and respected by the congregation.[53] While the old requirement for gender-specific education may no longer be obligatory, the expectations, roles, and privileges of CWs continue to hold the same weight in faith communities or churches. For instance, CWs are offered special seats in church, are honored with special titles, and are the recipients of gifts that range from items to domestic service.[54] In later African Independent Churches, the above conventions of conduct and

52 Denzer LaRay, "Preface: Nothing So Sweet," in *Women Writing Africa, West Africa*, and the Sahel, ed. Esi Sutherland-Addy and Aminata Diaw (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005), 189.

53 Kyere, "For God and Man," 122.

54 Kyere, For God and Man," 123.

responsibilities, along with the privileges applied when it was instructed that the CW,

> [s]hould dress in a special way, be honoured with a special seat in church, and be called spiritual mother, no matter how young she may be…she must learn to take delivery of babies and, where spiritually competent, should be allowed to conduct evening prayers, Friday clinic, and to preach. It has also been agreed that if they have zeal, wives will be trained to become prophetesses.[55]

Respondents insisted that women continue to be recommended for young clergymen who needed wives. In the absence of missionaries or a school where such wives could be selected, young unmarried clergymen intimated that they sometimes relied on other CWs or older women to recommend a woman from the congregation as wives. Similarly, in the absence of training schools, some denominations have CW associations where they have constant meetings to discuss issues pertaining to their roles, how they could be helpful to their husbands' jobs and, what is expected of them. Older CWs in such associations serve as mentors to younger and newer CWs, although such mentorship was not considered by some CWs as effective for the roles they were expected to play in either the church and society. In one instance where I had the chance to attend the annual meeting of the Presbyterian Clergy wives, one of the concerns raised was the lack of formal and organized training they received before becoming CWs.[56] As a result, the CWs petitioned the chair of the district to make arrangements in former preparatory schools, such as the Agogo Women's College, where wives or fiancées of clergymen could receive some months or weeks of training before their husbands were ordained. They complained that the expectations on them as CWs required receiving some form of formal or organized training, as it was done historically when the schools were initially set up to train prospective wives. The CWs were did not request for the re-institutionalization of a Domestic Science education that girls received under missionary guidance. What they suggested was the introduction of some basic, structured training and knowledge in the roles required of them and the requisite skills to successfully play these roles. In other words, the CWs

[55] Brigid Sackey, *New Directions in Gender and Religion: The Changing Status of Women in African Independent Churches* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 167.

[56] 22nd Biennial Conference of Asante Akyem Presbytery Ministers' Spouses Conference of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana July, 2022.

were articulating a realization of a knowledge gap that, by their estimation, did not exist when girls attended preparatory schools before marriage. This request implies that the CWs felt that the missionary effort to mold girls into "good women" was to a large extent, an effective enterprise that needs to be revisited. Perhaps they believed they could take a leaf out of the pages of what it meant to be trained to become a "proper woman".

This article traced the complex historical "formation" of the position of the CW in Ghana by showing that the education the girls received was gendered and domestic. While it might not have been a particularly enviable position to be a CW in the West, the Ghanaian case tells a different story. It was, indeed, a privilege for girls or young women to be recommended for the position. However, the position was consciously created through a Western-gendered ideology of expected roles and positions for men and women. A CW was, thus, expected to fulfill the missionary and Western concept of acceptable womanhood.

Undoubtedly, the creation of the CW position has left in its wake a stupendous weight of expectations that continues to be required of the women who find themselves in the position. Considering the circumstances in which it developed, these women have been held to a moral and cultural standard that sets them apart from other wives. The absolute conviction that they are "the best" has steadily transformed into an established set of expectations for CWs throughout Ghana's Christian history. Consequently, the CW position that came into existence bears a different history and position to that of the Western CW. The processes through which these women were molded illustrates, to a large extent, the success of the missionaries' bid to create a new kind of African and Ghanaian woman who operated within a monogamous, Christian home.

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Ebenezer Bosomprah, interview by Abena Kyere, August 3, 2018.

Theology and Women's Agency in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence in Ghana

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SHORT BIO

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SUBMISSION DATE
24 March 2023

ACCEPTANCE DATE
17 July 2023

ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a growing problem in sub-Saharan Africa that limits women's agency. Various studies have found that cultural norms and religion sustain women's experiences of IPV, inspiring various theories among feminist scholars and within religion on women's agency. This study determines whether and how theology contributes to the agency of IPV survivors. I draw upon constructivist grounded theory to inductively analyze the stories of thirteen abused Christian women in a mainline church in southern Ghana. My findings indicate that multiple systems, including informal social support networks, constrain survivors while simultaneously serving as conditions for their personal faith and individually constructed theologies. Indeed, these serve as catalysts to their self-enactments and emerging agency. These findings provide nuance to existing (and contested) conceptions of agency.

KEYWORDS
Intimate partner violence, Christian theology, agency, religious agency, self-advocacy, Ghana

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a growing concern in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), inspiring debate on the controversial role of religion in the region. For example, Nyambura Jane Njoroge maintains that patriarchal theologies restrict women from active participation in the home and church and perpetuate their experiences of IPV.[1] This controversy has inspired discourse among feminist scholars on the significance of religion in relation to women's agency in the context of IPV. Drawing on interviews with Christian female survivors of IPV in a mainline Protestant church in Ghana, this paper explores the nature of the agency that emerges from the meanings that abused Christian women conceive of their experiences with IPV and church theology. Adopting a constructivist grounded theory (CGT)

[1] Nyambura J. Njoroge, "The Missing Voice: African Women Doing Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997): 81–82.

ISSN 2707-2991

approach, I analyze survivors' experiences and responses to partner violence and church theologies with the aim of providing nuance to the existing discourse on agency among IPV survivors in religious contexts. I briefly review the most relevant research in the Ghanaian context and then position my research in relation to theoretical feminist arguments regarding the intersection of religion/theology, agency, and violence. Subsequently, I describe the methods of empirical study used, present the empirical results, and analyze the connections among them before offering conclusions.

1. IPV in Ghana

IPV is a social scourge with dehumanizing effects on women's health, rights, and development.[2] The World Health Organization (WHO) conceptualizes IPV as any act of domination or aggression against women or other persons by their partners or ex-partners that results in economic, sexual, physical, verbal, or psychological harm.[3] In SSA, 44% of women experience IPV.[4] Statistics in Ghana indicate that 28% and 20% of women and men, respectively, experience some form of domestic violence nationwide.[5] Furthermore, gendered inequity is endemic in all structures of Ghanaian society despite the Affirmative Action Plan of 1998,[6] meaning that relatively few women are represented in public office or in decision-making roles. Ghana's 1992 constitution and the country's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provide policies and institutional frameworks for reporting abuse, such as the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit, yet studies report that sociocultural norms stigmatize women and men who speak out.[7]

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2 Janet Henshall Momsen, *Gender and Development*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010).

3 World Health Organization, *Responding to Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence against Women: WHO Clinical and Policy Guidelines* (Geneva, 2013), vii.

4 Muluken D. Muluneh et al., "Gender Based Violence against Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Cross-Sectional Studies," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, 903 (2020): 1, 15.

5 Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Ghana Health Service (GHS), and ICF International, *Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2014* (Maryland: GSS, 2015).

6 Dodzi Tsikata, *Affirmative Action and the Prospects for Gender Equality in Ghanaian Politics* (Accra: Abantu, Women in Broadcasting and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2009), http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ghana/10484.pdf.

7 Margaret Ivy Amoakohene, "Violence against Women in Ghana: A Look at Women's Perceptions and Review of Policy and Social Responses," *Social Science & Medicine* 59,

A plethora of research considers the interconnections between agency, gender, IPV, and religion. Evidence from the legal disciplines, for example, shows that factors such as the traditional norms of marital privacy, as well as rigid gender roles (including women's economic dependence on men), contribute to IPV and inhibit the enforcement of human rights.[8] Social policy studies have determined that, despite existing government initiatives, strong cultural and religious beliefs and practices support patriarchy, silence women, and perpetuate IPV.[9] However, few studies have considered the interconnection of IPV and religion in Ghana as found in other countries in the field of sociology.[10]

The few existing findings on religion's role in IPV in Ghana are contradictory. For example, one study based on three strands of the Ghana Demographic Health Survey documents religion's role in reducing cultural practices such as polygamy, thus, transforming the family structure and effectively reducing violence.[11] Another survey reports variations in IPV between women of various religious denominations.[12] As shown in the field of theology,[13] Christian churches in several parts of SSA are particularly adamant and inadequate in their responses to IPV due to patriarchy, cultural norms, and

no. 11 (2004): 2373–2385; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 109–30, 136–7.

8 Nancy Cantalupo et al., "Domestic Violence in Ghana: The Open Secret," *Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law* 7, no. 3 (2006): 531.

9 Dora A. Owusu, "Mute in Pain: The Power of Silence in Triggering Domestic Violence in Ghana," *Social Alternatives* 35, no. 1 (2016): 26–32, https://doi.org/10.3316/ielapa.243661809369078; Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 10, 151.

10 Nancy Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 46, 103.

11 Tim B. Heaton and Akosua Darkwah, "Religious Differences in Modernization of the Family," *Journal of Family Issues* 32, no. 12 (2011): 1576–96.

12 Baffour K. Takyi and Enoch Lamptey, "Faith and Marital Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Exploring the Links between Religious Affiliation and Intimate Partner Violence among Women in Ghana," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 35, no. 1–2 (2020): 36–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516676476.

13 For example, Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale, "Domestic Abuse in Marriage and Self-Silencing: Pastoral Care in a Context of Self-Silencing," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 74, no. 2 (2018): 6–7, https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-ec6377adb; Jillian E. H. Damron and Andy J. Johnson, "Violence against Women in Religious Communities: An Introduction," in *Religion and Men's Violence against Women,* ed. Andy J. Johnson (NY: Springer, 2015), 4–6.

untrained clergy that contribute to multiple kinds of abuse towards women,[14] including female ritual servitude (in which women are enslaved in indigenous shrines).[15] While faith leaders are well equipped to deal with violence,[16] churches' complicity perpetuates IPV through naïve scripture interpretations, practices, and theologies.[17]

The findings of the above-mentioned studies suggest that women are silenced and compelled to comply,[18] potentially implying that even more women than indicated in statistics experience various forms of partner abuse with health implications and limited possibilities to act.[19] While most studies focus on how religion tolerates gender violence, there is a lack of studies examining how religion can contribute to addressing and resisting IPV in Ghana. The few existing studies on women's agency in Ghana conceptualize agency as a negotiated act between survivors and their extended families[20] or as a lack of choice and participation in economic and social productivity.[21] However, there is a lack of knowledge on whether and

14 Angela Dwamena-Aboagye, *Ministering to the Hurting: Women's Mental Health and Pastoral Response in Ghana* (Accra: UG Press, 2021), 130–1.

15 David Stiles-Ocran, "Constructing a Heterotopic Christian Social Practice in Ghana." (PhD diss., University of Oslo, 2021).

16 Elisabet le Roux et al., "Getting Dirty: Working with Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14, no. 3 (2016): 22–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2016.1215837; Rose Mary Amega-Etego, "Violence against Women in Contemporary Ghanaian Society," *Theology & Sexuality* 13, no. 1 (2006): 23–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835806069783.

17 Elorm A. Stiles-Ocran, "No Way Out? The Dilemma of Survivors of Domestic Violence and the Church's Response in Ghana." (MA diss., VID Specialized University, 2020); Owusu, *Mute in Pain*, 30–31.

18 Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 72; Elorm Stiles-Ocran, "Women's Stolen Voices in Marriage in Ghana: The Role of Gender, Culture and Religion in Intimate Partner Violence," *Diaconia. Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 12, no. 2 (2021): 182-186.

19 Nata Duvvury, Stacey Scriver, Sarah Gammage & Neetu John, "The Impacts of Violence against Women on Choice and Agency: Evidence from Ghana and Pakistan," *Women's Studies International Forum* 89, no. 102536 (2021): 5, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2021.102536; UN Women, *Ending Violence against Women and Girls: Programming Essentials* (NY: UN Women, 2013).

20 Stephen Baffour Adjei, "Entrapment of Victims of Spousal Abuse in Ghana," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 32, no. 5 (2017): 742–6.

21 Duvvury et al., "The Impacts of Violence," 5–8.

how Christian theology contributes to women's agency in the face of IPV, a research gap that this article aims to narrow.

2. The Context of IPV and Agency: An Integrated Theoretical Lens

The concept of agency originally emerged from social theory in feminist literature and was defined on the premise of male experience, freedom, autonomy of choice, and preference.[22] Eventually, notions of agency as resistance to oppression came to dominate feminist scholarship in the 1990s, including the concept of creative self-construction.[23] This resistance was often conceptualized in the Western literature through the act of either reporting abuse or leaving abusive relationships,[24] the latter involving a gradual process for most abused women, with fear being a central motivation.[25]

However, non-Western anthropologists and gender/feminist/womanist theologians maintain that such essentialist ideological constructions of women's agency assume that everyone shares an identical experience of oppression. They criticize these constructions as limiting the agentic action and potential agency of non-Western women in constrained relationships.[26] Their studies contend that, in many ways, women are more agentive than is generally perceived in Western thought.[27] According to Saba Mahmood, the

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22 Orit Avishai, "Theorizing Gender from Religion Cases: Agency, Feminist Activism, and Masculinity," *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 3 (2016): 265.

23 Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (UK: Polity, 2000), 1–3.

24 Neil Andersson et al., "Barriers to Disclosing and Reporting Violence among Women in Pakistan: Findings from a National Household Survey and Focus Group Discussions," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 25, no. 11 (2010): 1966–8.

25 Maria Lindgren Scheffer and Barbro Renck, "Intimate Partner Violence and the Leaving Process: Interviews with Abused Women," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 3, no. 2 (2008): 116–20.

26 Kandiyoti Deniz, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender & Society* 2, no. 3 (1988): 274–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124388002003004; Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 83.

27 See, for example, Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Project*, revised ed. (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011); Lila Abu Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783–790, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.783; Sarojini Nadar and Cheryl Potgieter, "Liberated through Submission?: The Worthy Woman's Conference as a Case Study of

meanings and effects of various modalities of agency are ignored in dominant feminist discourse.[28] She argues that, although non-liberal Muslim women comply with religious norms, they privately and collectively interpret religious texts to allow for self-transformation.[29] Therefore, she contends that agency is a social construct that not only entails overt actions but also acts within oppression to cultivate possibilities for social transformation.[30] Following Mahmood, Elisabet le Roux claims that, in contexts where religious texts and laws compel women to comply, understanding varied forms of women's agency can prevent the misinterpretation of their actions as compliance to patriarchy.[31]

Meanwhile, feminist theologians, such as Alison Downie, stress that agency is not only individual but also relational, promoting the development, expression, and flourishing of life for vulnerable persons in limiting contexts.[32] The Concerned African Women Theologians[33] acknowledge that violence against women extends throughout society, including inside the church, where patriarchal theologies neglect women's lived experiences, deny women's full humanity, silence them, and exclude them from participating with men.[34] Consequently, they frame African women's agency

For*men*ism. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 26*, no. 2 (2010): 141–51, https://doi.org/10.2979/FSR.2010.26.2.141; Rachel Rinaldo, "Pious and Critical: Muslim Women Activists and the Question of Agency," *Gender & Society* 28, no. 6 (2014): 826–7, https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214549352.

28 Mahmood, *"*Politics of Piety*,"* 222.

29 Mahmood, "Politics of Piety," 80, 184–6.

30 Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 217–22, https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2001.16.2.202;
Rachel Jewkes and Robert Morrell, "Sexuality and the Limits of Agency among South African Teenage Women: Theorising Femininities and Their Connections to HIV Risk Practices," *Social Science & Medicine* 74, no. 11 (2012): 1729–37.

31 Elisabet le Roux, "Can Religious Women Choose? Holding the Tension between Complicity and Agency," *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 25, no. 1 (2019): 7–11.

32 Alison Downie, "Shame, Sin, Mental Illness, and a Feminist Theology of Agency," *Journal of Disability and Religion* 24, no. 1 (2020): 29–39), https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2019.1694461.

33 A Pan-African academic association of women who are committed to research and publication, also known as the Circle. They engage with communities to investigate and understand how religions affect women's lives in order to empower women and their communities.

34 Njoroge, "The Missing Voice," 81–2.

in terms of joint efforts with women in the pews to seek new ways of reading the Bible in pursuit of liberating, justice-oriented theologies that resist oppressive cultural norms.[35]

Denise M. Ackermann goes further, believing that such a theology demands praxis in which groups comprising only of marginalized women, without the presence of clergy or academics, critically study biblical texts and devise strategies of resistance in the face of constraining sexist practices.[36] Such readings introduce new perspectives that are needed, on the one hand, to challenge dominant and discriminatory texts and, on the other, creatively reconstruct meaningful and germane ones.[37]

These feminist discourses on religion, violence, and agency show that religion is a site of oppression that replicates gendered power dynamics, as well as being a site of constant resistance and recognition of the self, family, and community, thus, allowing for more nuanced and refined definitions of agency.[38] Their arguments align with Laura M. Ahearn's assertion that a broader definition of agency is needed. That is, one that may not always and necessarily equate agency to human action and resistance but, rather, embraces multiple actions and meanings, whether individually, collectively, or consciously enacted.[39] The present article's analysis of the empirical material engages with the nuanced conception of agency introduced by non-Western scholars to ask whether and how Christian theology contributes to women's agency in the face of IPV.

3. Methodological Considerations

This research employed a qualitative study to answer the research questions, yielding results that cannot be generalized.[40] The study was

35 Beverly Hadad, "Reframing Women's Agency in #Blessed Sex: Intersectional Dilemmas for African Women's Theologies," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2021): 2–6, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i2.6603; Njoroge, "The Missing Voice," 83.

36 Denise M. Ackermann, "Forward from the Margins: Feminist Theologies for Life," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 99 (1997): 66.

37 Ackermann, "Forward from the Margins," 67–69.

38 Avishai, "Theorizing Gender," 266–67.

39 Laura M. Ahearn, "Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30, no. 1 (2001): 109–37.

40 John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (London: Sage, 2018), 258.

conducted in two areas of Ghana's Volta Region (Anloga and Ho) and parts of the Greater Accra Region from March 2022 through January 2023. The sensitivity and silence associated with violence necessitated an initial reliance on a gatekeeper and snowball sampling methods to access the research context, resulting in contact with five participants. A contextual Bible study on Esther 1:1–22 was organized to recruit eight more participants. In total, 13 Christian female survivors (laity, church leaders, and pastors' spouses) took part in the study. Interviews were split between individual interviews with nine participants and a focus group discussion with four participants (see Table 1).[41]

A CGT approach was chosen based on its suitability for the study's aims. CGT focuses on producing theory and acknowledges multiple subjective experiences and realities as well as the co-construction of knowledge by researchers and participants through their interactions.[42] Transcribed interviews were simultaneously analyzed using memos and diagrams, reflexively comparing the data to identify relationships between the developing categories. During the initial inductive coding in NVivo, concepts emerged that captured the participants' understandings of the underlying causes and conditions of their IPV experiences. Examples of these concepts include *patriarchy*, *power and male domination*; *bride price*; and *culture that silences*. These concepts represent the properties and dimensions of *sociocultural and gender norms*, a higher-level category that emerged in the second stage of the analysis through focused coding.

CGT also emphasizes the processes and meanings of actions.[43] I coded this by looking at the causal conditions of violence and their outcomes, which provided context and explanations for the processes involved in the participants' responsive actions. For example, the participants attributed the intensity of the varied forms of abuse they experienced to a concept that was coded *church theologies*. Their understanding of those theologies and their effects provided explanations for their actions that were coded *questioning church theologies and constructing new theologies* (see section 5).

41 The survivors' names are anonymized.

42 Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2014), 49, 53–5.

43 Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2015).

Table 1. Participants' demographic data and type of interview

Participant	Age	Marital status	Occupation	Place	Individual in-person and phone interviews	Focus group discussion	Total
Aku	35	Separated	Trading	Greater Accra (GA)	✓		1
Abla	53	Deserted	Trading	✓	✓		1
Mansa	50	Widowed	Trading	✓	✓		1
Koenya	50	Separated	Teaching	Volta Region–Ho	✓		1
Esinam	40	Married	Teaching	✓	✓		1
Eli	34	Separated	Trading	Volta Region–Anloga	✓		1
Kafui	52	Separated	Trading	✓	✓		1
Emefa	68	Widowed	Trading	✓	✓		1
Mawusi	48	Married	Trading	✓	✓		1
Enam	-	Married	Trading	✓		✓	1
Selorm	-	Separated	Trading	✓		✓	1
Ewoenam	-	Married	Teaching	✓		✓	1
Akorfa	-	Married	Teaching	✓		✓	1
TOTAL		**-**	**-**	**-**	**9**	**4**	**13**

I initially identified four main categories and fourteen subcategories. However, during the process of writing and disseminating the research at academic seminars and conferences, I realized that some categories, such as *informal social support networks* (ISSNs), were poorly developed, a suspicion that was confirmed by reviewing memos and transcripts, recoding overlooked data, and conducting follow-up interviews with some participants to achieve saturation. In the final analysis stage, I did the theoretical coding for what I understood as the core emerging theme. At this point, my tentative interpretation was that survivors were self-advocating. By developing a diagram to explain my understanding of the data to a colleague, I gained a clearer understanding of the connection between survivors' self-advocacy efforts and their religion/theologies, enabling me to integrate the categories around the core category. I subsumed and renamed some categories to refine them. Finally, two main categories, nine subcategories, and a core category emerged (see Diagram 1).

Research involves interfering in the lives of participants. By being aware of the general biases of research, the specific ones I hold, and the possible implications of my actions, I foresaw the potentially traumatic effects on participants describing their experiences. Therefore, I engaged the services of a family life counsellor who would intervene during interviews where needed and followed up with some survivors for a time after the study. As a feminist theologian and academic, the interviews I conducted did not follow Ackermann's suggestion that such conversations be limited to marginalized women.[44] Indeed, my presence may have influenced the participants' thoughts and narratives. My identity as a native of the research context (which gave me a prior understanding of the lack of church response for vulnerable women) and the initial reliance on gatekeepers may also have influenced my interpretations. However, those interpretations were tested through theoretical saturation, constant questioning of categories, and asking the participants to provide comments in write-ups.

4. Personal Faith, Theology, and Agency in the Face of IPV: A Case of Christianity in Ghana

Diagram 1 presents the findings of my empirical study, illustrating the faith and theology-related processes that emerged in several survivors' narratives. The women's processes begin with the factors in the box at the bottom of the diagram that summarize the *systemic realities* perceived and identified by survivors, one of the two main categories developed during the analysis. These describe the conditions and causes of IPV: sociocultural and gender norms, economic factors, ISSNs, and church theologies. Additionally, these conditions lead to multiple forms of IPV, such as physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, with economic abuse being the most prevalent, however, these conditions are not the focus of this article. I present them in a condensed form in section 5.1 as background for the subsequently described self-enactments.

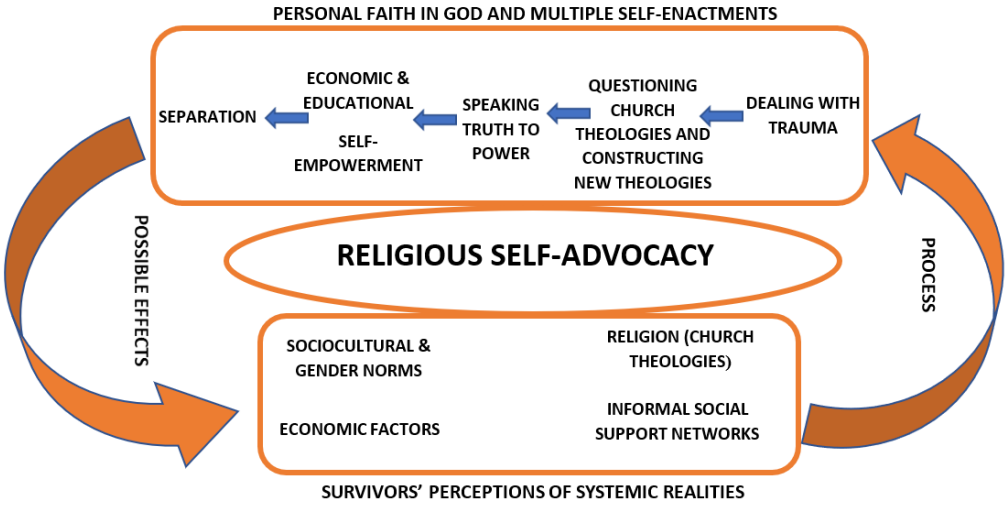
The curved arrow on the right indicates that survivors not only endure IPV but, also, counter it in multiple processes that involve their personal faith and theology. These processes constitute the second category, *personal faith in God and multiple self-enactments*, summarized in the box at the top of the diagram. The small sequential arrows show how, in their narratives,

[44] Ackermann, "Forward from the Margins," 66.

survivors describe actively dealing with the trauma of violence, reacting to church theologies, speaking truth to power, economically and educationally empowering themselves, and, eventually, separating from their abusive partners (as described in sections 4.2.1 through 4.2.5).

The curved arrow on the left indicates that these self-enactments produce possible effects of transforming the systemic structures that cause IPV. The ellipse between the top and bottom boxes highlights a connection between these two boxes and the core category of *religious self-advocacy*, defined as the agency inspired by the survivors' personal faith and theology.

Diagram 1. The concept of religious self-advocacy



4.1. Survivors' Perceptions of Systemic Realities

Most of the causes identified by survivors overlap with those summarized in section 2. Therefore, I describe them as the systemic realities that form the background of survivors' agency. It is important to underline that IPV may leave survivors with limited scope for action as well as health complications, threats to their lives, loss of children, dehumanization, and even suicide.

Sociocultural and gender norms, expressed in practices such as the bride price, perpetuate patriarchal attitudes of dominance, permitting men to shirk their responsibilities in the home while women are overwhelmed with house chores. Women are not permitted to speak freely in the home, and major decisions affecting women's sexuality are determined by their husbands. There is also a culture of silence around abuse, including a stigma associated with divorce.

Sociocultural and gender norms are strongly connected to economic factors in that they limit survivors' access to education and property. These norms marginalize women, labelling them as unqualified property owners. As a result, survivors often have a low economic status (as evidenced in Table 1) and depend economically on men. Economic abuse was the most prevalent form of abuse in the survivors' narratives and sometimes escalated into cycles of other forms of abuse. Survivors also spoke about men resisting their efforts to empower themselves economically and educationally, interpreting them as selfish and attempts at domination. It is worth noting, however, that men's economic abuse is connected to the general economic climate resulting from the negative impact of global economies on individual families. The survivors cited economic hardships and the high cost of living as reasons for men's abusive actions. In the church space, sociocultural and gender norms have made survivors feel limited in their ability to exercise their gifts and talents.

A third root cause is the ISSNs—including friends, family, and the church—on which survivors rely to cope with crises. ISSNs may offer pockets of advice, encouragement, arbitration, and financial support in the face of abuse. However, either partners may conceive of ISSNs as promoting unwanted interference in the marriage rather than providing support, consequently furthering the risk of abuse when survivors seek help. In other words, ISSNs can potentially constrain women's agency and silence them from seeking help, thus perpetuating violence.

The most interesting root cause determined through my analysis is religion and church theologies. Although women's collective membership in the church offers strong networks for belonging, joy, shared ideas, and occasionally, a space of safety, these networks are considered weak and short-lived due to concerns regarding trust. In many ways, the survivors lacked confidence in these networks and identified them as a source of women's predicaments. They reluctantly access existing church structures due to power dynamics. Ideologically, marriage vows and church theologies related to suffering, divorce, and male headship are used by power structures in the church to reinforce gendered cultural norms of marriage privacy and men's unequal dominance over women. Theological notions such as the cross and suffering, compel survivors to endure abuse in silence like Jesus Christ. The theology of divorce makes them believe it is a sin to divorce, instilling a fear of speaking out and garnering help.

This summary illustrates how systemic structures often intersect and contribute to IPV. Together, they reveal the complexities of survivors' lives and provide context for the agency that survivors develop despite resistance, as described in my analysis below.

4.2. Personal Faith in God and Multiple Self-Enactments

As sketched above, church theologies and practices often keep survivors trapped in complex circumstances. Nevertheless, my analysis also points to faith in God as empowering. When survivors find systemic structures oppressive, they turn to God, signaling a form of agency. Moreover, survivors' stories reveal that their faith imitated their ability to take control of their own affairs, speak for themselves, and take responsibility for their actions. Below, I describe the five most prominent areas of self-enactment in the data: dealing with trauma, questioning church theologies and constructing new theologies, speaking truth to power, economic and educational self-empowerment, and using separation as a tactical tool.

4.2.1. Dealing with Trauma

Violence raises existential questions that survivors find difficult to answer. For some, it is a life-or-death situation. Against this backdrop, many survivors described how their personal faith helped them cope with the violence they experienced. In a group discussion, Enam, Selorm, Akorfa, and Ewoenam agreed that "it is by the grace of God we are surviving and putting ourselves together". In personal interviews, Mawusi said, "I prayed

that I will not think of any of those things . . . I used to think of it a lot". Eli said,

> Through prayer, I came to realize that when I'm thinking too much, It would worry me. So, I stopped thinking. I lived as if nothing was happening to me. I don't sit and even remember that I have a husband.

Although this intentional memory work (prayer) may seem to be a form of denial, several survivors described it as a necessary survival mechanism that helped reduce feelings of frustration, depression, and other threats to their mental health. They said that praying built their faith and kept them focused on God.

Another recurring theme in the material is individual engagement in reading the Bible in search of answers, which produced a new understanding of their situation. In Aku's words,

> "The way my husband made me feel did not agree with the Bible . . . going to church and reading the Bible is very important for our faith. I would read encouraging words from the Bible . . . through reading the Bible . . . I had my understanding". These examples demonstrate how survivors used prayer and Bible reading to shift their minds from the violence to God. They interpreted these faith practices as actively working on their mental health and, thus, dealing with the trauma of IPV.

4.2.2. Questioning Church Theologies and Constructing New Theologies

A second persistent theme in the survivors' narratives is their criticism of the theologies they encountered in church and the development of their own theologies. Personal Bible readings produced in the survivors a consciousness of who they were and the nature of their situations that was instrumental to questioning and distancing church theologies. At least five changes resulting from these readings can be identified in the survivors' narratives. First, some survivors recognized and bemoaned that church theologies reiterate male dominance. They pointed to the interpretation of Ephesians 5:22, which is often cited by those who overemphasize women's submission to men, as contributing to their marginalization in the home and in society and preventing their marriage relationships from being ones of equal partnership, respect, and mutual decision-making. Esinam, for instance, said, "Just like how the Bible says we women should submit ourselves to men; in that respect, they say that men are the head". Second,

the survivors were strongly against theologies of the cross that were used to dismiss their experiences or portray IPV as the kind of suffering that Christians must endure. In the discussion group, Akorfa challenged the "words of comfort that we hear, like 'Be silent and carry your load, for your burden is light . . . Keep quiet and wait on the Lord.' For how long can we continue with that?". Esinam said, "I have been hearing messages on suffering . . . take up your cross . . . But that doesn't mean you should be suffering . . . Me, I hate suffering".

Third, the survivors deconstructed church theologies by observing how male church leaders and pastors took their own experiences for granted and did not consider survivors' realities. Eli commented that "Suffering is relative to how a person sees it . . . what is happening to me, maybe if that person were to experience what I am also experiencing, then they will know how and what to say". The survivors criticized their lack of representation in prevalent church theologies and, fourth, complained that church theologies are presented as universal. Akorfa noted that

> We are made to understand as if it's angels that wrote the Bible, and so everything that comes out of the Bible is what needs to be followed. That is what Christianity has become. You are born in it, and so you don't see anything wrong with it.

Fifth, the survivors' narratives indicate that they also constructed new theologies of their own. For example, they drew parallels between Christ and the church that suggested marriages ought to be loving relationships. Esinam contended that "Men should love their wives like Christ loved the church", and Aku said, "God's desire for marriage is that there will be joy. Because where there is joy, God is there . . . where there is no joy, then God is not there".

Furthermore, the survivors constructed new approaches to theologies of suffering. While conceding that suffering is part of the Christian journey, they argued that such general teachings must be contextualized whereby an endurance of suffering that discourages divorce cannot produce good things, and a preparedness to suffer as a Christian does not demand refraining from action if a situation can be improved. As Aku said, "God tells us to carry our own cross. If we follow him, we will suffer. …The same Bible also said that if one hand is disturbing you, you have to cut it off." Esinam, who felt assured of God's deliverance, said, "God is not happy when we

suffer" and referred to biblical stories of God delivering the nation of Israel from its enemies. The survivors believed that God would relieve their suffering, as Koenya suggested

> Jesus performed a miracle at that marriage ceremony. If he wanted them to suffer, he wouldn't have performed that miracle by turning water to wine. And the two shall be one . . . So, if I'm suffering in the marriage, then God is going to fight for me.

These quotes and examples illustrate how the survivors actively used their faith, prayers, and Bible study to cope with IPV and their suffering. The dual actions of criticizing church theologies that do not support IPV survivors and developing new theologies provided a basis for the various strategies of self-enactment, presented below in sections 4.2.3. through 4.2.5.

4.2.3. Speaking Truth to Power

New theologies altered the survivors' self-understanding and situation as they used their faith to cope with IPV. Esinam pointed out that "those who don't get revelation or understanding, they suffer the most . . . When I get it and I act on it, it works for me". The new theologies enabled survivors to feel capable of actively challenging power structures that oppress them. Akorfa explained that "Understanding God's word also helps motivate us to act and defend ourselves". Their theologies reflect a consciousness of who they are and the processes of change that allows for a self-conceptualization of an active, responsible agent.

The survivors' theologies also enable them to advocate for themselves by speaking truth to power. They subtly confront power structures in their homes, aware of the dangers involved. When they spoke, they forced their abusers to recall their humanity. Emefa recounted her reaction to her husband's repeated abuse:

> "As an educated person, you'll be using such language, shame onto you!" . . . Because it's the truth I said, he is hurt! I won't go far. He beats me but . . . I don't allow him. "I'm not your slave . . . you are not making me happy, and yet, when it's night, you want to mount me". Will a person accept that? She can't. I'm not a fool. "I am not your slave. Though I am a woman, I am also a human being".

Developing an understanding of the self based on new theologies empowers survivors to speak up on their own behalf in their homes and even speak truth to power there.

4.2.4. Economic and Educational Self-Empowerment

In situations that survivors are not able to change their situation at home or in their relationships some, instead, pursue economic and educational self-empowerment. Several of the participants believed that suffering calls for the application of wisdom, citing the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 who was known for her diligence and prudence. Esinam, who trusted in God and persevered, eventually gaining admission to pursue her master's degree, said:

> I told God that, if it was his will for me to take this course, then he should pave the way . . . It's not a sin to upgrade myself . . . The God who created man is the same God who created the woman. But their destiny is different from mine . . . If we sit down and fold our hands in between our thighs and always say, "God will do", where will God pass to do it when you haven't worked at it?

As many of the survivors were economically dependent on men and experienced the resulting abuse, they sought independence and testified about their satisfaction with their attainments. Koenya relates that, "I bought a [piece of] land . . . sell water . . . they name me as 'woman *kapo*', meaning a man. I do a whole lot". Emefa challenged her husband to prove that she was equally deserving of earning money and could do so. She said, "Though I am a woman, I faced everything on all sides . . . because I should also be earning a monthly income . . . I continued doing this and made more money than he made".

The participants submitted numerous examples of their educational and economic activities that can be understood as actions enabled by self-understanding and theologies that encouraged them to actively change their situation.

4.2.5. Separation as a Tactical Tool of Control and Punishment

Separation was another dimension of the survivors' agency, albeit a last resort. After immediate efforts to address the situation seemingly failed, some separated or planned to separate from their husbands. In these instances, new theologies helped them to justify the separation. They would

not tolerate oppression because God's love does not condemn them to suffer. As Akorfa expressed it,

> I read the Bible. God said he loves me and has not condemned me. I am precious for him. So, an individual cannot condemn me for me to take it in . . . So, we use those words to encourage ourselves and come out.

Esinam saw herself as an instrument of God to punish the offender and make him see her value. She said,

> I have taken a bold decision . . . I will leave . . . I know that at the right time, he will come to his senses . . . it is God who wants me to punish him, that's why [God] is pressing it on me that I have to leave.

Mawusi, who separated from her husband, said,

> When it all started, I myself I withdrew. I backed out. Because when I'm on my own and I tell myself I'm not going to cook *akple* today,[45] there is no problem with that.

Koenya similarly reported,

> "To be apart is also good . . . I made that decision. Out of sight, out of mind! Now it's working perfectly for me". These remarks indicate how closely decisions to separate relate to new theologies. Their conviction that God wanted to relieve them from their suffering and impressed it upon them provided survivors with the courage to consider separation and eventually realize it.

4.2.6. Personal Faith and Self-Advocacy

Moreover, the analysis shows that Christian theology played an important role for survivors of IPV in the case of a Protestant mainline church in Ghana. The examples and quotes above reveal that it was not traditional church theologies but, rather, the survivors' personal faith in God and their new theologies that acted as their lifeline for dealing with the trauma of IPV and resulted in multiple self-enactments. Motivated by their faith, the participants individually engaged with biblical texts, inspiring them to question and liberate themselves from oppressive church theologies. Not only did they believed in God's divine intervention as a necessary condition for their

[45] A local dish among the Anlo-Ewe.

liberation from oppression but also saw themselves as active partners in that mission. Their new theologies acted as a springboard to diverse kinds of agency, such as speaking truth to power, economic and educational empowerment, and, eventually, marital separation. Although these processes have been presented sequentially as analyzed from this empirical data, they may not necessarily follow that pattern in view of indeterminate human behavior and the systemic structures operating in specific times and contexts. In this context, the analysis confirms that Christian theology contributes to ensuring women's agency in the face of IPV. These processes, as described by survivors, begin with their personal faith and result in changes to their realities, and can, therefore, be characterized as a form of agency that I conceptualize as *religious self-advocacy*.

5. Configuring the Connections

I began this study with the aim of providing nuance to the concept of agency as introduced by Western feminist scholars, using a case study in Ghana to ask whether and how Christian theology contributes to women's agency in the face of IPV. In this section, I draw upon existing research in the field to discuss three central findings that contribute to a deeper understanding of agency in conditions of oppression: (1) personal faith and theology as complementary when ISSNs are ambiguous, (2) practices of personal faith as a starting point for the construction of new, liberative theologies, and (3) self-enactment and self-advocacy.

This study's findings support those of existing studies that maintain that sociocultural gender norms, church theologies, and economic factors interact to determine survivor's experiences.[46] This is further complicated when, as also found in my study, ISSNs interplay with these structures, confirming the complex, multidimensional nature of IPV.[47] Contrary to the Western conception of agency as resistance—where a Western woman is more likely turn to the justice system,[48]— survivors in Ghana, due to social stigma, do not access formal institutional structures to report abuse. Germane as ISSNs may be to survivors,[49] the dynamic complexities of

[46] Chisale, "Domestic Abuse in Marriage," 6–7; Owusu, "Mute in Pain," 26–32.
[47] Le Roux et al., "Getting Dirty."
[48] McNay, Gender and Agency, 1–3; Andersson et al., "Barriers to Disclosing," 1966–68; Scheffer and Renck, "Intimate Partner Violence," 116–20.
[49] Nason-Clark et al., *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence*, 46, 103.

ISSNs that range from minimal or no support, trust issues among female support groups, and patriarchal power structures seem simultaneously to constrain them. Le Roux contends that this finding must be considered cautiously as it does not necessarily imply women's compliance with patriarchy.[50] Instead, one may assert that gender is a relevant but limited analytical tool for assessing the multifarious oppressions women face. Researchers may benefit, therefore, from increased attention to other subtle social identifiers, such as ISSNs, that are heavily relied on in African settings. The analysis of the survivors' understanding and choices in relation to these networks reveals a quagmire of ISSNs, further illustrating the need for research on their ambiguous role in Africa. Indeed, an interesting finding arising from my research question is that survivors turned to their personal faith and theologies as a replacement for ISSNs.

Recounting how survivors enacted their personal faith, prayer practices and personal Bible readings demonstrated how they were instrumental to inspiring alternative understandings pivotal to disputing and deconstructing oppressive church theologies. Contrary to feminist/womanist theologies that call for partnership with marginalized groups for life-affirming theologies,[51] the theologies of the participants in this study may be seen as more individual or personal than relational. In other words, the survivors constructed theologies by and for themselves and showed no interest in transforming systemic structures at the macro level. At the same time, one cannot deny that their personal work and transformations have wider consequences, such as raising new questions and opening spaces of new possibilities. For instance, a potential positive outcome of their efforts at further education and work is the development of local and national economies that challenge gender norms and raise our consciousness of the prevailing systemic, intersectional drivers of IPV. Ackermann introduces the concept of a hermeneutic of life that devises strategies of resistance.[52] The new theologies of liberation that survivors personally construct can be interpreted as such a strategy.

50 Le Roux, "Can Religious Women Choose?," 7–11.
51 Hadad, "Reframing Women's Agency," 4.
52 Ackermann, "Forward from the Margins," 66.

Following Mahmood, I argue that these women's agency may be read along a continuum of perceptible and imperceptible actions and meanings. For example, the choices they make regarding their non-reliance on ISSNs to dealing with the trauma of IPV and constructing new theologies. Mahmood posits that the ability to effect change in oneself and in the world is not a universal trait but, rather, a culturally and historically defined one.[53] Survivors' ability to effect change in their lives is also personally defined. My analysis of the various concepts that emerged from the survivors' narratives reveals that their perceptions and understandings of change enable them to enact ways of being and garner responsibility that was not given but dynamically evolved. Their self-enactments indicate their personae as agentive beings who find and rely on the God of the oppressed who fights for his people.

This dynamism agrees with Ahearn's argument for more flexible approaches to the concept of agency[54] and adds nuance to how we may conceptualize agency. Survivors' ability to read and interpret multiple, intersecting, and constraining structures is crucial to their processes of strategizing. They not only construct new theologies but act on them to carry out self-change. As active beings, they stand up for themselves. They speak truth to power while being conscious of the risks involved. They empower themselves economically and educationally in both formal and informal sectors and go beyond to separate from their abusive partners. These steps allow them to challenge gender norms and the stigma of singleness and divorce.

Their agency may be seen as generative in that they are motivated to engage in multiple acts of self-advocacy that allow them to reconstruct their damaged identities. Their agency reminds us that they are persons with dignity and unique capabilities who are equally created in God's image. They describe themselves not as slaves and fools but as rational, responsible beings capable of identifying and pursuing their own needs. Based on their choices and responsibilities, such agency may be understood as self-advocacy. In view of how they rely on their theologies to advocate for their own dignity, personhood, and needs, I argue there is a strong connection between religion/theology and survivors' agency, describing this agency as *religious self-advocacy*. Based on the survivors' narratives, I understand

53 Mahmood, "Feminist Theory," 212.
54 Ahearn, "Language and Agency," 109–37.

religious self-advocacy as the human capacity to intentionally draw upon personal faith as a resource that generates a critical awareness of oneself and the systemic structures that inhibit human progress. Moreover, it is a resource that motivates multiple acts to improve one's situation. The concept of religious self-advocacy can, thus, be considered an answer to the question of whether and how Christian theology can contribute to ensuring women's agency in the face of IPV.

Conclusion

I referred, in my introduction, to the growing phenomenon of IPV against Christian women under the justification of church theologies in religious communities. This inductive empirical study emerged from my interest in the forms of agency that evolve from the meanings survivors make of their experiences with IPV with the help of church theologies. It is a truism that multiple intersecting systems, including church theologies, will at times constrain women's agency. However, my study indicates that theologies are equally a potential source of liberation as well as of oppression. The personal theologies of survivors motivate their will to rise. The theologies that survivors individually constructed based on their experiences subvert dominant norms and inspire generative forms of agency that I describe as religious self-advocacy. I use religious self-advocacy heuristically to illustrate the dynamic interplay between religion/ individualized theology and survivors' independent navigations of intersecting systemic structures in the context of IPV. The concept of agency as religious self-advocacy that I have developed in this article provides nuance to Western and non-Western feminist conceptions of agency. It highlights that personal faith and theology should be taken into consideration due to its ability to enable change in the context of IPV, not as church theology but as liberative theology that is constructed individually.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by VID Specialized University, Oslo, under project code 134252. My appreciation goes to my supervisors, Profs. Annette Rose Leis-Peters and Esther Mombo, and to the church and all the female survivors with whom this study was done.

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Losing the Lost Coin: Gender Doublets in the Synoptic Tradition

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SHORT BIO

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SUBMISSION DATE
11 April 2023

ACCEPTANCE DATE
27 June 2023

ABSTRACT

The Bible continues to be a contested book with texts that are both detrimental to women's full participation and inclusive and liberating with the latter often being hidden and sometimes deliberately obscured, however, they can be uncovered. The question of which of these traditions go back to the historical Jesus is contested. Historical Jesus traditions would have higher authority in the eyes of critical readers, and denying this status to traditions diminishes their importance. This article examines the tradition of "gender doublets" where double parables cite two examples for the same idea that illustrate male and female reality. The author argues that the frequency of these doublets, as well as the spread of evidence and the variability of construction, make it very probable that these doublets go back to the historical Jesus. In an environment hostile to women, it is more likely that parables like "the lost coin" or "the woman baking with leaven" got "lost" or were deliberately omitted from parallel traditions rather than the possibility of a later redactor compiling or composing such doublets.

KEYWORDS
Gender doublets, Gender pairs, lost coin, parable of the leaven, Q parables, synoptic parables

Introduction

In the journey towards women's full and equal participation in society, the Bible continues to be a contested book, used as a resource by both sides of the divide. While the oppressive texts are obvious and easily quoted, the inclusive and liberating traditions are often hidden in the Bible, sometimes deliberately obscured or lost in the process of redaction and canonization. Nevertheless, there are more such traditions in the Bible than meets the eye and they can be uncovered. In the consciousness of more critical Christians, a difference is made between the traditions going back to the historical Jesus, and those coming from an early church that opposed women's participation. However, what goes back to the historical Jesus is heavily contested in scholarship and scholars are often reluctant to make such a claim of a textual tradition. Denying that a tradition can be traced to the historical Jesus has the effect of diminishing its importance, especially in the eyes of critical readers. This article discusses the tradition of parable doublets that seem to be inclusive of women and men in the discourse of Jesus as told in the synoptic gospels. Were these examples originally told

ISSN 2707-2991

by Jesus to include both his male and female listeners? Do they show that his message was inclusive of women? Or were they constructed by later authors and redactors? This article argues that while there cannot be absolute certainty, the most probable explanation is that they go back to the historical Jesus, but were subsequently not transmitted as doublets by all communities and redactors. Some Christian redactors "lost" the lost coin, or "lost" the woman baking with leaven. The article raises the question of what interests are served by scholars who deny that these doublets go back to the historical Jesus.

Defining "Gender Doublets"

Throughout the synoptic gospels, there are parable doublets, that is examples where there are two illustrations for the same idea. Some of these are gender doublets, where one example focuses on male experience, the other on female experience. Some of these are obvious, others less so. There are disagreements between scholars as to what exactly constitutes a gender doublet, and which parables should be labelled a parable doublet. Arnal sometimes speaks of "doublets", sometimes of "couplets" or "gender pairs", or of "twinning", and defines them as "repetitious examples, statements or arguments, paired by gender: one male, one female (usually in that order)".[1] Kloppenborg and Batten speak of "Gender pairs".[2] Seim speaks of "gender pairs" in her discussion on "Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts" but in addition to parables also includes other paired stories in Luke, such as the pairing of Zechariah and Mary in the infancy narrative, and pairs of healing miracles.[3] She emphasizes that the double parables are more structurally similar than the double narratives, as there is "parallelisation through the identical introduction, form and/or the concluding observation".[4] Jacobsen speaks of "twinning" in both Q and Luke and also includes more than just parables.[5]

1 William E Arnal, "Gendered Couplets in Q and Legal Formulations: From the Rhetoric to Social Source," *JBL* 116, no. 1 (2019): 77.

2 John S Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 97; Alicia Batten, "More Queries For Q : Women and Christian Origins," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 (1994): 47.

3 Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message - Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 15.

4 Seim, *The Double Message*, 16.

5 Arland. D. Jacobsen, *The First Gospel – An Introduction to Q* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1992), 227.

This article employs a wide definition, looking at parables only, from the three synoptic gospels and the gospel of Thomas. Paired parables will be examined where one part can be seen as coming from the male reality and the other the female. What constitutes these differences is, of course, a matter of debate. In some doublets, male or female actors are named, in others, one needs to determine what reality lies behind them. Were there fixed gender roles in first-century Palestine and can one accurately speak of "men's work" versus "women's work"? While these categories are never absolute, gender roles in first-century Palestine peasant society were likely clearly defined. However, whether an example can be seen as speaking to men and women is something that needs to be discussed case by case. When one speaks of "women's experience" it needs to be noted, as Beavis formulates it, that

> while the recovery and interpretation of material about women by women is an important part of feminist inquiry, it by no means exhausts the scope of feminist interpretation . . . nor can it be assumed that all women, regardless of differences such as race, class or ethnicity, share some essential nature – that all women are expressions of the category of "Woman" or "the Feminine".[6]

Not all women share the same experience, not even all women of first-century Galilee. But did Jesus try to reach the different groups in his audience in his teaching? Did he formulate examples to appeal to women particularly? Can such examples be identified?

An example of a gender doublet that all scholars agree on is the longer story parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin in Luke 15:1-10 where male and female actors are specifically named. But there are also less obvious examples where there is disagreement, such as the example of the birds, who do not sow (was this an activity for men?) and the lilies, who do not spin or weave (were these women's activities?) in Matt 6:26, 28b-30 and Luke 12:24, 27-28. Here, no male or female actor is named. Not all scholars agree that these should be counted as gender doublet.[7] There are also many short parables where two short illustrations, seldom longer than a verse or two,

6 Mary Ann Beavis, *The Lost Coin – Parables of Women, Work and Wisdom* (London-New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 23.

7 Dieter T. Roth, *The Parables in Q* (London: T & T Clarke International, 2018), 201.

are juxtaposed. In this article a very broad definition is used, and all examples mentioned by various scholars will be looked at as part of the spread of evidence for that particular doublet, its construction, and whether it can be seen as a "gender doublet". Subsequently, the question of whether these doublets were deliberately "constructed" by early Christian redactors or even composed, as is implied in some articles (see later discussion), will be discussed. The other possibility is that they go back to the historical Jesus but that they were increasingly obscured in later tradition. That is to say that later redactors were "losing the lost coin".

Given that all four gospels portray Jesus as having women followers, tracing the gender doublets to the historical Jesus would seem the obvious choice. Schüssler Fiorenza states that canonical literature of the New Testament "does not transmit a single sexist story of Jesus, although he lived and preached in a patriarchal culture and society".[8] While not everyone agrees, citing the difficult text of the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:24-31, [9] all make it clear that this story contradicts the portrait of Jesus in other texts in Mark and the synoptics, which is usually open and supportive of women.

However, there are many scholars who have argued that these doublets are a later construction by early Christian authors who had a special interest in women. They usually first cite Luke, though it is disputed whether Luke advances or impedes women's full participation,[10] and second, the compiler(s) of the document of the double tradition shared by Matthew and Luke, commonly known as Q.[11] It is difficult to prove what goes back to the historical Jesus and even if these doublets were later compilations, they should be of interest to gender scholars. However their importance would be

8 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons - Explorations in Feminist Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 32.

9 David D. M. King, "The Problem of Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman: A Reader-Response Analysis of Mark 7:24-31," *Journal of Religion, Identity, and Politics* 3, no. 1 (2014): 17–18.

10 Seim, *The Double Message*, 1–3.

11 This article uses "Q" as shorthand for the tradition shared by Matthew and Luke. This does not necessarily refer to a particular reconstructed version of Q as for example proposed by the editors of the *Critical Edition of Q* (Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenborg 2000).

enhanced if demonstrated that it is highly likely this was the way the historical Jesus communicated with his audience.

This article will show how common gender doublets are in the synoptic tradition and that they are found in all three synoptic gospels, as well as the Gospel of Thomas. It argues that this makes the "compilation theory" less likely. It will also show that there are gender doublets that do not follow the expected order of the male example first, or differ from the norm in other ways, which also counts against deliberate construction. It argues that the most likely explanation for the texts we have is that they flowed naturally from a gifted preacher who was aware that both men and women were a part of his audience.

Possible gender doublets are listed below as well as the debates around whether or not they are real "gender pairs". A redaction-critical approach will follow, comparing versions and determining what is likely to have been the original version and what is a possible redaction, though of course one is dealing with probabilities and not certainties here. In following a traditional "historical-critical" approach, I am aware of the feminist critique of this method that claims to allow for an objective interpretation while obscuring a biased agenda. Nevertheless, the "master's tools" [12]can still be very useful to unmask tensions in the text. Making oneself dependent "on the same foundations that we criticize"[13] can nevertheless open up a route to dialogue and open space into mainstream and dominant discourse.

The gender pairs will not be individually discussed in depth as to what they reveal about the lives of women and their message. Nevertheless, each gender pair is worth studying in depth in further research.[14]

12 Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, *Her Master's Tools? Feministand Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), Title

13 Stichele and Penner, *Her Master's Tools?*, 12.

14 See the detailed analysis of the gender doublet on the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in J Gertrud Tönsing, "Growth or Contamination ? The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven and the Hidden Transcript," *Neotestamentica* 56, no. 1 (2022): 165–87.

Debates Around "Historical Jesus" Material

Suggesting that some material in the New Testament goes back to the historical Jesus inevitably results in fraught and difficult discussions as to what criteria can be used to determine this. Indeed, we can only reach the historical Jesus when mediated by the faith memory of the church and not by any objective outside proofs. As Dunn points out, "We cannot find a Jesus who did not make an impression or arouse faith in listeners". [15] There is no absolute criteria that could "prove beyond reasonable doubt" that something goes back to the historical Jesus. Nevertheless, there are ways to determine which of these claims has greater plausibility. Theissen and Winter argue that a decisive criterion for "authenticity" is "contextual plausibility in tandem with the plausibility of later effects".[16] A convincing argument must be made that it is likely this material dates back to Jesus rather than to the background of first-century Palestine or the early church.

The "criterion of dissimilarity", which was widely used in the debates around the historical Jesus, argues that it is most likely to date to the historical Jesus if it is different to what would have been said in a Jewish context or by followers of the risen Christ. This criterion has been critiqued as it attempts to separate Jesus from his context and also his followers.[17] Jesus was a Jew who took up the traditions of his context in his preaching. But he did bring something new and different. This can be determined without a denigration of his Jewish roots (see the critique of Schottroff et al. of Feminist Anti-Judaism).[18]

Similarly, one should not denigrate Jesus' followers, particularly those who understood themselves in continuity with the teachings of the historical Jesus and were closer to the source than we today can ever be. However, it is equally true that the early church had to adapt to the world and understood the teaching of the historical Jesus in light of the resurrection. There was an

15 James D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective of Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 29.

16 Gerd Theissen and Dagmar Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus* (Louisville, London: John Knox Press, 2002), xv.

17 Christopher F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London, Philadelphia: SCM Press, Trinity International, 1993), 38.

18 Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer, and Marie-Theres Wacker, *Feminist Interpretation - The Bible in Women's Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 55 – 61.

inevitable shift in the message and theology, which is discernible in gospel material.[19] Is the material easier to understand in light of the post-Easter message or is it understandable within the context of Jesus' preaching among the simple people of Galilee or Judea? We need to acknowledge how little we know of these backgrounds when we make such findings.[20]

Another common criterion for increasing the plausibility of originality is "multiple independent attestation".[21] This is based on assumptions on authorship, dating, and relationships between the documents. Is the Gospel of Thomas independent of the gospels and is Mark independent of the "Q" double tradition? These questions are disputed. If they are independent, then attestation in different tradition streams would be strong evidence for authenticity rather than later redaction.[22] Despite potential dependencies between the sources, a spread of evidence, nevertheless, makes it more likely that a tradition is closer to the earliest Christian tradition.[23] Multiple attestation cannot prove authenticity, but it does heighten the probability that the tradition originated earlier rather than later and, therefore, could conceivably go back to the historical Jesus.[24] This criterion is crucial to this article.

Demonstrating the plausibility of later effects is a process of trying to determine how the different versions of a text came about, and what effect the passage had later. The most likely original version is the one that can explain how the others originated. The other layers are not inauthentic: "Jesus left behind him thinkers not memorizers, disciples not reciters, people

19 Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons*, 251–53.

20 Stanley E. Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research* (New York: T & T Clarke International, 2000), 74.

21 Andries Van Aarde, "Methods and Models in the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Historical Criticism and/or Social Scientific Criticism," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 58, no. 2 (2002): 429. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v58i2.562.

22 Kloppenborg argues that Q is independent of Mark but is also made up of various redactional layers of different ages. To discuss the implications of this goes beyond the scope of this article. John S Kloppenborg, Conflict and Invention – Literary, Rhetorical and Social Studies on the Sayings Gospel Q (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), 7–10.

23 Theissen and Winter, *The Quest for the Plausible Jesus*, 14–15.

24 John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus - The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke International, 1991), xxxi.

not parrots".[25] If it can show how the later effects might have come about, it heightens the plausibility that a passage was original.

Arguments for Compilation by Luke

The evangelist Luke has a particularly high proportion of narratives including women, seemingly demonstrating a special interest in women, even though there is a debate whether his writing advances or pushes back the women's cause.[26] Luke tells the double parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin just before the third parable of the lost son (Luke 15:1-10). Matthew brings a parallel to the story of the lost sheep, but not the lost coin. (Matt 18:12-14) The Gospel of Thomas notes the lost sheep only (G Thom107). Did Luke compose the story of the woman looking for the coin himself as Schmithals implies?[27] Or did he adapt something from his special Luke sources to construct a doublet as Grundmann and Balch argue?[28]

If one looks at this parable in isolation in the context of Luke it would be easy to argue that Luke follows his special interest, especially if one sees Luke as woman-friendly. However if one examines it in the context of all the gender doublets that are included in both Luke and Matthew, (see discussion below), it is more likely that there were many gender doublets in circulation, and that Luke found the doublet either in Q as argued by Klein[29] or in his Special Luke material. Evans argues that, in this case, Matthew does not share a tradition with Luke but does not make a finding on the originality of Luke.[30]

Matthew brings only the story of the lost sheep. Did he not know the second part that was only found in the Special Luke material? Or did Matthew deliberately "lose" the lost coin parable, perhaps to side-line the offensive

25 Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, xxxi.
26 Seim, *The Double Message*, 1–2.
27 While Schmithals does not deny that the second parable could come from special Luke material, he emphasizes the particularly Lukan elements of the construction. Walter Schmithals, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1980), 164.
28 Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1978), 306; David.L Balch, "Luke," in *Eerdman's Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: William B. Eerdman's, 2003), 1137.
29 Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 521.
30 Evans, *Saint Luke,* 585.

comparison between a searching woman and God searching for the lost? Another possible reason for Matthew leaving the second part of the doublet argued by some scholars is that Matthew emphasizes the sheep "going astray" rather than the shepherd "losing" it. This would be a reason for leaving out the coin, which is passive and has no agency.[31] Kloppenburg goes even further:

> Matthew put the parable of the lost sheep at the service of a pastoral exhortation which invites one to follow the example of the shepherd's conduct; it would have been tactless to add the example of a woman searching for a drachma.[32]

The choice of words is notable, and seems to indicate that, even today, some people have no problem equating God with the shepherd but shirk from equating God with a searching woman. In many congregations, leaders are called "shepherds" (pastors) and are motivated to follow the example of Christ but are seldom motivated by the example of a searching woman. Brawley points out that while people are encouraged to identify with the shepherd, the word "or" leaves it open to listeners whether or not they want to identify with the woman. In popular consciousness, the coin parable, though still present in the scriptures, is normally still "lost".

The Gospel of Thomas 107 only includes the example of the shepherd. It also speaks of the lamb going astray and ends with the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep: "I love you more than the ninety-nine". Again, this would be a good reason to "lose" the inanimate coin, which cannot be in a loving relationship with the finder.

The balance of probability is against the doublet being authored or compiled by Luke. There are enough plausible reasons for Matthew to omit it to make it possible that it was part of the "Q" tradition.

31 Klein, Das Lukasevangelium, 521.
32 Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q,* 98.

Arguments for the Compilation by the Redactor of Q

Frequency of Gender doublets in Q

There are various gender doublets shared by both Matthew and Luke, leading some scholars to argue that this was a special interest of the compiler(s) of the Q document.[33]

Kloppenburg identifies four gender pairs in the double tradition:[34]

1) Jonah / Queen of Sheba: Q (Luke) 11:31-32 // Matt 12:41-42
2) Sowing and spinning: Q (Luke) 12:24,27-28 // Matt 6:26,28b-30
3) Mustard seed and the leaven: Q (Luke) 13:18-21 // Matt 13:31-33
4) Grinding corn, working in the field/ in bed: Q (Luke)17:34-35 //Matt 24:40–41

1)The men of Nineveh listened to Jonah, the Queen of Sheba came to listen to Solomon. They will stand in judgement on "this generation". Here, there are clear male and female actors.

2) The birds do not sow (possible work of men) and the flowers do not spin (possible work of women), yet they live and thrive under God's care. Hearon and Wire include spinning in a list of "essential tasks carried out by women" in their discussion of parables, and as such this can be seen as a "gender doublet" even though no actors are named in this example. [35]

3) A man sows (or throws) a mustard seed in his garden, a woman mixes leaven into dough. Both grow from small beginnings with a great effect. Here again, male and female actors are named. This parable is also found in Mark, but due to the ways that Matthew and Luke agree against the Markan version, many scholars would argue it was also in Q.[36]

4) People are close together, sharing a space or activities and then one is taken and the other is left on the "day the Son of Man is revealed" (Luke 17:30). Matthew has two men in a field and two women grinding grain, Luke

33 Roth, *The Parables in Q*, 201.
34 Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 97.
35 Beavis, *The Lost Coin*, 139.
36 Roth, *The Parables in Q*, 299; Evans, *Saint Luke*, 552.

has two people on a bed and two women grinding grain. This is a clear gender doublet in Matthew and an ambiguous one in Luke. This could refer to a married couple.

Other doublets can be added to this list of four:

5) Lost sheep / lost coin: Q (Luke) 15:1-10// Matt 18:12-14.
Here, male and female actors are again named. It is possible that this was in Q, and that Matthew deliberately "lost" the female part of the doublet (as argued above). The common denominator is the value the seeker places on what is lost.

6) Fish and egg/bread: Q (Luke) 11:9-13 // Matt 7:9-11
This is not an obvious gender doublet, as in both cases the son asks the father for food. In reality, it is likely that it would be the father providing the fish and the mother providing the bread (Matthew)[37] or egg (Luke). In this case, the fatherly caring role is being emphasized, despite common knowledge that women normally provide food to children. Brawley calls the family model presupposed here one that "undermines the hierarchical patriarchal model".[38]

The following doublets are included by some scholars but are not parables, so go beyond what is discussed in this article. However, they do follow the pattern, so shall just be mentioned here:

a) Division in the family: Q (Luke) 12:51-53 // Matt 10:34-36
The divisions are son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Matthew's final general statement uses the generic *anthropos* (human), though it is often translated as "man": "a man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (10:36).

b) Van Eck[39] points out a brief doublet within a longer (non-gendered) doublet: In the days of Noah and the days of Lot:

37 Hearon & Wire in Beavis, The Lost Coin, 140.
38 Robert L. Brawley, *Luke* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 123.
39 Ernest van Eck, "A Realistic Reading of the Parable of the Lost Coin in q: Gaining or Losing Even More?," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75, no. 3 (2019): 6, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5656.

Marrying and being given in marriage: Q (Luke) 17:27 // Matt 24:38
However here, while Luke uses the passive “being given in marriage” (that is the bride), Matthew’s version states “giving in marriage” (the action of the father), making it a male doublet. Again this might be a case of Matthew “losing” the gendered doublet.

Even if one does not include all the examples above as gender doublets, it demonstrates that the tradition shared by Luke and Matthew (Q) has a high concentration of illustrations from the lives of women. This raises the question of whether compiling such doublets was a particular interest for the redactor of Q, which would consequently mean that the interest in twinning examples in terms of gender would predate Luke.

Parables are separate or single in other sources
One of the main reasons for arguing that they were compiled by the redactor of Q comes from the fact that some of the doublets are separate or single in other sources. One example is the parable doublet of the Mustard seed and the leaven Q (Luke) 13:18-21 // Matt 13:31-33. Both Matthew and Luke compare the kingdom of God to a mustard seed being sown by a man and to the leaven women used to bake bread. The gospel of Mark includes only the mustard seed parable in his gospel and not the leaven (4:30-32). The Gospel of Thomas brings the two parables separately in different places (G Thom 20 and 96). This, many scholars argue, shows that these parables circulated independently and that it was the redactor of Q who brought them together.

The Gospel of Thomas 36 parallels the second example above (Sowing and spinning) but has differences in its Coptic and Greek versions. The Coptic version only has the words: Jesus said, "Do not be concerned from morning until evening and from evening until morning about what you will wear". The Greek fragment P Oxy 655 brings the example of the lilies that “do not card or spin”,[40] articulating, in this case, only the “female” example. The Coptic version could have “lost” the feminine illustration. In this case, the Gospel of Thomas would be evidence of the female example circulating separately and could be another example to be cited in support of a compilation by Q.

40 Robinson, Hoffmann, & Kloppenborg, eds *The Critical Edition of Q*, 344.

Similarly, the Gospel of Thomas has a parallel to the fourth example above but only includes one part: "two will rest on a bed. The one will die, the other will live" (G Thom 61). In example (a) above, speaking about divisions in the family, the Gospel of Thomas only uses the example of the "father against son and son against father" (G Thom 16.3b). Did this redactor "lose" the other part of the example, or was only one part known and the second part originates with redactor of Q?

Several scholars argue that the Gender Doublets go back to the compiler of Q,[41] such as Bovon[42] who states that the early Christians liked to bring together traditions that were similar. Kloppenborg even writes that "It might even be argued that Luke got the idea to use paired illustrations from Q".[43]

Was the parable doublet "compiled" or even "composed" or were parts of the doublets "lost"? Except for the case of the Greek fragment with the lilies parable (P Oxy 655), the missing part of the doublet is almost always the feminine example. Is it more likely that early Christian redactors added in a feminine part of a doublet, or that in an environment hostile to women, the feminine part was deliberately omitted because it was seen as inappropriate or even embarrassing?

Problems With the "Q as compiler" Theory

Plausible reasons for leaving out parts or splitting gender doublets

Mark only includes the mustard seed parable and does not include the second half of the doublet, the parable of the leaven (4:30-32). However, Mark includes this parable in a whole chapter of parables on seed and sowing. As such, just as there is in the "lost coin" example above, there is a very plausible explanation why Mark would not have included the leaven parable if he had known it as a doublet.

The Gospel of Thomas generally consists of only short sayings, and is understandable that they sometimes only bring one half of the doublet. The

41 Klein, Das Lukasevangelium, 483; Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 97.

42 F Bovon, *Das Evangelium Nach Lukas*, EKK 2. Auf (Neukirchen-Vlyn: Neukirchener/Patmos Verlag, 2008), 418.

43 Kloppenborg, Excavating Q, 97.

leaven parable has also undergone some transformation, so can no longer be considered a genuine "twin" of the G Thom mustard seed parable.[44]

Lack of "Gender Friendly" Material in Q
If one takes the reconstruction of "Q" contained in the *Critical edition of Q* by Robinson, Hoffmann and Kloppenburg as a departure point, there is little material beyond the gender doublets themselves indicating that the inclusion of women was of particular interest to the compilers of such a document.

Outside of the parable doublets, women are mentioned in the following places in the reconstruction of Q in Robinson et al.:

1) Q (Luke) 7:28: "There has not arisen among women's offspring anyone who surpasses John".[45]
The interest here is in John and not in the inclusion of women.

2) Q (Luke) 13:34: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her nestlings under her wings, but you were not willing".[46]
While this is a feminine image, it would be difficult to argue that it originated with the redactors of Q, which is usually seen as a rural, Galilean document.[47] Rather, this likely originated with the historical Jesus, or in Judean communities.

3) Q (Luke) 14:26: "The one who does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple; and the one who does not hate son and daughter cannot be my disciple".[48]
This verse is similar in structure to the parable doublets and shows the same pattern of inclusion. It can be understood as a sayings doublet, which is not a parable. It adds to the list of doublets, but is not independent evidence of the interests of the Q redactor.

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44 See more thorough discussion of versions of this doublet in Tönsing, "Growth or Contamination?," 182 – 183.
45 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenborg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*, 136.
46 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenborg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*, 420.
47 Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q*, 214.
48 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenborg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q,* 452.

4) Q (Luke) 16:18: "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and the one who marries a divorcée commits adultery".[49] This cannot be cited as evidence of a special interest in including women.

In the gospel of Luke, a special interest to include women is evident in many places. However, this is not the case in the Luke/Matthew doublet tradition, as least as reconstructed in the *Critical Edition of Q.* It is difficult to imagine that an editor would go to some trouble to collect and put together parable doublets in order to be inclusive of women, but not leave traces of this interest in any other material, narrative or otherwise. It is more probable that this material goes back to the historical Jesus.

Disagreements About Categories

There is disagreement about what qualifies as "gender doublets". For example, Roth does not consider doublet (2) above, about the birds and the flowers, as a genuine gender doublet. While he does not provide specific reasonings, he notes that the reference to male and female work is negative, that is, it speaks of what the birds and lilies do not do.[50]

The doublet in Luke 17:34-45 (doublet (4) above) is also interesting to consider, as both Matthew and Luke mention two women grinding corn together. However, Matthew notes two men in the field while Luke has "two people in one bed", probably intended as a reference to a married couple, meaning that it cannot be considered a genuine gender doublet in the Lukan version. As both pronouns are male, many commentators assume two men.[51] Consequently, some Bible translations read "two men on a couch" (ISV and YLT),[52] however, it is more likely that the example does not want to specify whether it is the husband or the wife is that is left behind.[53] Most contemporary Bible Translations render it as "two people on a bed".[54] A married couple corresponds better to the close proximity of two women operating the handmill. If Q had compiled a clear gender doublet, as in Matthew, it raises the question of why Luke would make it ambiguous.

49 Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenborg, eds. *The Critical Edition of Q*, 470
50 Roth, *The Parables in Q*, 201.
51 See the discussion in Klein, Das Lukasevangelium, 575.
52 *The Message* freely paraphrases: "two men will be in the same boat fishing"
53 L. Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale Ne (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 286.
54 Luke 17:34 *Good News Bible* , NIV, ESV, NLT

Instead it seems that Matthew "loses" the married couple and changes it into two men.

The example of the fish and the egg/bread (doublet (6) above) could have easily been changed into a genuine gender doublet if this had been the interest of the compiler, but it remains an ambiguous doublet.

The last example (non-parable doublet b), contained within a non-gendered doublet, again differs in Luke and Matthew. Here, one could argue Luke changed the "giving in marriage" to the gendered "being given in marriage". However, this then raises the question why he did not change the whole passage into a gendered doublet. Once again, the more plausible scenario is that Matthew "lost" the feminine element.

The ambiguity of the examples queries whether there could have been a deliberate attempt to construct "gender doublets". If the compiler of Q had deliberately done this in an environment that was generally hostile to women's participation, and this had not been included in the sources, would it not seem more obvious and deliberate? The ambiguity of the parables are more easily understood as simply illustrations that would make sense to different people in an audience, rather than as a deliberate attempt to construct a gender balanced double parable.

Arguments for Originality of Gender Doublets

This section shall argue that the spread and variety of doublets in the synoptic tradition and beyond is such that it is most easily explained as a common narrative practice of the historical Jesus. The criterion of "multiple independent attestation" is relevant here, though scholars debate whether the Gospel of Thomas is really an independent source or somehow dependent on the gospels (see discussion on dating in Valantasis).[55] However, a spread across the Q texts, Mark, as well as the Gospel of Thomas does increase the plausibility of originality if these three are taken as independent sources. Even if there is literary dependence, multiple attestation shows common knowledge of important traditions that are more likely to have originated earlier rather than later. There is also material found

55 R. Valantasis, *The Gospel of Thomas* (London - New York: Routledge, 1997), 12–20.

only in Matthew or Luke (Special Matthew or Special Luke) that would likely be independent of Q.

The Spread of Non-Gendered Doublets: Drawing in Different Audiences
There are many non-gendered doublets in the synoptic tradition, some of them seem aimed at drawing in different segments of an audience. Sometimes there are also three different examples. The list below is not exhaustive, providing only unambiguous doublets. In many cases there are some sources that mention only one part of the doublet. This is what one would expect from the oral tradition where one part of the illustration could have been recalled more clearly than the other.

The Double Tradition (Q)
Sparrows and Hair: Q (Luke) 12:6-7 // Matt 10:29-31
Figs from thornbushes, grapes from briers: Q (Luke) 6: 43-44 // Matt 7:16-18 // G Thom 45

Parables only in Luke (Special Luke)
Galileans killed by Pilate, people killed by collapsed tower: Luke 13:1-5
Counting cost of building a tower, going to war: Luke 14:28-33
Days of Noah, days of Lot: Luke 17:26-29 (Matthew has Noah only 24:37-39)

Parables only in Matthew (Special Matthew)
Treasure in the field, precious Pearl: Matt 13:44-46 // G Thom 76
Salt and Light: Mt 5:13-16 (Luke has Salt only14:34-35)
Giving what is holy to the dogs, pearls to swine: Matt 7:6 // G Thom 93

Gospel of Thomas
Mounting two horses, stretching two bows: G Thom 47

The general prevalence of doublets in the synoptic and Thomasine tradition (multiple attestation) counts against deliberate compilation by an early Christian writer. It is understandable that a doublet would sometimes remain together in oral traditions, whereas other times only one part would circulate in one community and the entire doublet in another community.

The Spread of Gender Doublets

The presence of gender doublets goes beyond just Matthew and Luke They are also present in Mark and the Gospel of Thomas. This makes it less likely that they came about as a result of the deliberate composition of the redactor of Q, unless one argues that neither Mark nor Thomas are independent of Q.

The gender doublet about mending clothes and making wine can be seen as a genuine gender doublet as mending clothes would generally have been the work of women whereas making wine was the work of men. Perkins discusses whether mending was woman's work or whether this speaks about "male village tailors" as Kee argues. However, the more relevant question is whether people who can afford tailors would really mend old clothes. This is more likely to reflect the situation of the poor and not the rich, in which case mending would be woman's work. [56]

This is contained as a doublet in four documents, Mark, Matthew and Luke and also the Gospel of Thomas:

Mending clothes and making wine: Mark 2:21-22 // Luke 5:33 - 39 // Matt 9:14-17 // G Thom 47

There is one more gender doublet in Special Luke, which is also independent of Q:
Widow in Zarephath, Naaman: Luke 4:24-27.

It goes beyond the scope of this article to fully argue this, but a case could be made that the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13) was originally a short parable that was part of a gender doublet together with the parable of the wise and wicked servants (Matt 24:45-51). Several scholars have argued that Matthew wrote an expanded allegory of Christ's second coming in this parable.[57] This would mean that the Special Matthew material also contained a gender doublet, independent of Q:

56 Beavis, *The Lost Coin*, 129–30.
57 Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium Nach Matthäus*, 515–516.

The wise and wicked servants, wise and foolish virgins Matt 24:45-51, 25:1-13.
(Luke only has wise and wicked servants Luke 12:42-46).

There is, thus, an impressive spread of evidence of gender doublets in Christian texts that likely do not depend on the Q document. “Multiple attestation” counts as one of the factors in favour of attributing a saying or a tradition to the historical Jesus. The spread of evidence counts against the theory that these doublets were compiled by the redactor of just one of the early Christian documents.

The Format of Gender Doublets
Another argument raises doubt as to the theory that doublets were later compilations is their structure. If doublets were deliberately constructed, one would expect a certain regular structure, in this case, usually the male example first and then the female examples.

Most of the examples that have been listed above follow the expected order of the male example appearing first. However, there are some notable exceptions:

1. Jonah / Queen of Sheba: Q (Luke) 11:31-32 // Matt 12:41-42
Matthew has Jonah first then the Queen of Sheba, the expected male-female order whereas Luke has the order in reverse, which is illogical in the context. He begins speaking about the “sign of Jonah” (11:29-30), then speaks of the “Queen of the South”, (31) and then goes back to speaking of the men of Nineveh and Jonah (32). It is more likely that Matthew smooths out the sequence than that Luke deliberately jumbled it, which would mean that the sequence with the female example first is probably original.

2. One taken, the other left: Q (Luke)17:34-35 //Matt 24:40 – 41
This doublet on the end times where two people are side by side and only one is taken up, is a clear gender doublet in Matthew with the male example coming first: There are two men in a field and two women together at a hand mill. As argued above, the example in Luke is not a clearly structured gender doublet as the first example probably refers to a married couple.

3. Widow in Zarephath, Naaman: Luke 4:24-27.
Here the female example comes first, likely because they are in chronological order, the first linked to Elijah, the second to Elisha.

4. Mending clothes, making wine: Mark 2:21-22 // Luke 5:33 - 39 // Matt 9:14-17 // G Thom 47
In three of the four witnesses to this doublet, the example linked to women's reality, patching clothes comes first. However, in the Gospel of Thomas, the two are reversed and the example of making wine appears first.

There is, thus, irregularity in the structure of the doublets. While this does not completely rule out deliberate construction, it is more likely that what was deliberately constructed to make a point would also make the point in some kind of regular way.

Lack of Reasons for Deliberate Construction
While many "gendered" doublets can be found, most of them are not obvious. Compilation would imply sifting among the many short parables Jesus told to find two with the same message and similar structure, one from the male and the other from the female reality. This theory implies that Jesus did tell both these parables, but not together. This theory, though not impossible, is more complicated than assuming he told them together. The alternative would be to consider that the redactors or evangelists composed the other half of the gender parable.[58] While one might expect this from Luke, it can be argued that Luke is not so unambiguously woman-friendly that he would be a more likely author than Jesus himself.[59] If there was a woman-friendly redactor of Q, it is likely the compiler rather than a composer as it is likely that a composer would have written less ambiguous examples if they were trying to make a point.

Conclusions

While gender doublets are not easy to define and there are differences of opinion about which examples to include, there is a great spread of such parables where one example could be seen to be taken from the male and

58 David L. Tiede, *Luke - Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 273.
59 Seim, *The Double Message*, 1–2.

the other from the female experience. These examples are found in different sources, such as Q, Mark, Special Luke and possibly Special Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas. The construction of the parables varies, sometimes the male example comes first, sometimes the female, and some of them are ambiguous in at least one of the versions. In some cases, only one part of the doublet is found in some versions. Most often it is the feminine part that is “lost”.

As shown above, scholars have argued that the parable doublets were an innovation of the redactor of Q and other sources, including Mark and the Gospel of Thomas, were derived and inspired from this. However, there is little evidence that the Q document had a particular interest in women and not all scholars agree on this theory of dependence. A simpler explanation is that doublets in general, and gender doublets in particular, were a way that the historical Jesus spoke to his audience and that some communities remembered the whole doublet and others just a portion. Some redactors could also have deliberately omitted a part of the tradition available to them for reasons enumerated above. In the early church there was a growing tendency to marginalize women. In such situations, female examples were likely deliberately left out rather than being compiled from disparate traditions or even deliberately composed.

It is impossible to prove beyond doubt that a tradition goes back to the historical Jesus, and whether or not it does, does not change the canonicity of a tradition. However, it does make a difference as to its authority, at least among critical readers. The best explanation for the texts we have with all their ambiguities and variations is that the historical Jesus was aware of having both men and women in his audience and found examples that would appeal to different groups without consciously and deliberately constructing the doublets. These examples flowed naturally from a gifted speaker. It is easy to imagine the situation in which they arose, reconstruct a possible original version and explain how the other variations of the doublets arose. This would mean that the parable doublets in the synoptic gospels would meet the criterion of Theissen and Winter for historical Jesus traditions of “contextual plausibility in tandem with the plausibility of later effects”.

The rich, even if partly obscured tradition of gender doublets sheds light on the situation Jesus may have been speaking into and raises a wealth of

questions and insights into their complex tradition history that warrant more research and analysis so that what was “lost” may be found.

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Deprivation of Land Tenure to Daughters of Mother Earth: The Case of Eswatini

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SHORT BIO

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SUBMISSION DATE
28 September 2022

ACCEPTANCE DATE
7 March 2023

ABSTRACT

The judicial system in Eswatini operates on the basis of Roman-Dutch common law and Swazi customary law and administers land occupancy through the dual landholding system of freehold title and Swazi nation land. Tenure over Swazi nation land is governed by Swazi customary law and not defined by legislation. Instead, land is controlled and held in trust by the King and is allocated by chiefs according to traditional non-codified provisions. Whilst Section 211 of the Swazi Constitution (2005) provides that "a citizen of Swaziland, without regard to gender, shall have equal access to land for normal domestic purposes", traditional leaders, who routinely run the administration of the Swazi nation land and customary land tenure, often ignore it. Ordinarily, only male household heads are eligible to secure land through the customary process known as "*kukhonta*" that initiates males into the chiefdom and marks their commitment and allegiance to the chief. Under Swazi law and custom, a women can only be granted land rights by the chief through her husband, male relatives, or male children. This paper argues that women are alienated from the land rights that Mother Earth has bequeathed to all humanity despite the similarities of women's lived experiences and that of the environment. Three (3) scenarios found through library research are cited as examples of Swati women's lived experiences with regard to land accessibility. The paper concludes by noting that the implementation of Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, and particularly Sustainable Development Goal number 5 (SDG 5), which is geared towards establishing gender equality and empowering all women and girls, can amongst other initiatives be achieved through equal land rights granted to all the children of Mother Earth. However, unless and until societal constructs on land acquisition and ownership are reinterpreted, Emaswati women will continue to receive only the breadcrumbs that fall from the master's table.

KEYWORDS
Daughters; judicial system land rights; land tenure; mother earth; patriarchy; Swazi law; custom

Introduction

Mother Earth, also referred to as Mother Nature or the Earth Mother, is the personification of nature that emphasizes its life-sustaining and nurturing qualities by adopting the profile of motherhood. Theological literature is replete with discussions that argue for the sacredness and deserved

ISSN 2707-2991

reverence of Mother Earth.[1] Yet, despite these theological pleas, Mother Earth continues to experience great stress. Her critical resources are being only plundered, squandered, and depleted, causing irreversible damage and risk to her survival.[2] Global trends such as the commodification and financialization of land, climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and urbanization continue to exacerbate the pressure on the land and its natural resources, housing, and livestock.[3] Consequently, Mother Earth has responded to such adverse conditions by an increase in temperature, adverse weather, and population, becoming more violent and unfriendly by the day.[4] Human beings are the chief culprits in the exploitation of her invaluable resources, forgetting "that as much as we occupy a unique niche in the biosphere, we still have that responsibility to take good care of the environment".[5] The unique presence of humans on Earth should not be misconstrued as a divine right to exploit nature. As confirmed by Swanson, "we have exploited earth for our own interests and today the planet we call our mother, faces the threat of extinction of life on its soil just because of our ill practices".[6]

By exploring Eswatini familial contexts, this paper presents another type of exploitation whereby one gender is deprived of the rights that Mother Earth has plentifully granted to all her progeny. As she helplessly watches the discrimination against women through land deprivation, her spirit groans in pain for the women that are her replica and human embodiment. I use the term "daughters" to refer to Swati women as people that relate closely with the environment because of shared experiences. Yet, paradoxically, they are victims of socially constructed norms and practices that deprive them of what Mother Earth offers. Given the patriarchal Eswatini laws, the men see themselves as the rightful beneficiaries to land rights. Since land is regarded as the most fundamental resource for women's living conditions, being

1 Lori J. Swanson, "A Feminist Ethic That Binds Us to Mother Earth," *Ethics and the Environment* 20, no. 2 (2015): 83 –103.

2 Swanson, "A Feminist Ethic That Binds Us to Mother Earth," 89.

3 Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources (New York & Geneva: UN Women, 2013).

4 Sonene Nyawo, "Are Prayers a Panacea for Climate Uncertainties?:An African Traditional Perspective from Swaziland," *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 3 (2017): 362 – 374. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12299.

5 Nyawo, "Are Prayers a Panacea for Climate Uncertainties?," 268.

6 Swanson, "A Feminist Ethic That Binds Us to Mother Earth," 87.

deprived of land rights renders them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.[7]

Writing on land reforms in Zimbabwe, Enna Gudhlanga and Chipo Chirimuuta[8] confirm that land-based livelihoods are vital to improving both rural and urban people's economic and social status. Their gendered perspective of the land reform program in Zimbabwe posits that when Zimbabwe attained independence she inherited the racially skewed land distribution pattern that had favored the white colonialist society living in Zimbabwe. The post-independence land reform program largely focused on rectifying racial imbalances yet neglected to address gender inequalities in land ownership.[9] Women, therefore, doubly suffered the imbalances, being disadvantaged in both land distributions and through inheriting the patriarchal, customary laws and colonial institutions and policies that continue to exclude women. These are cited by Enna Gudhlanga and Chipo Chirimuuta as the main contributing factors to women's suffering.[10] Yet, as emphasized by Enna Sukutai Gudhlanga, Josephine Muganiwa, and Musa Dube[11] in an edited collection, *Mother Earth and Religion*, women have an intimate connection with the environment. that despite their presence and contribution throughout history they, like Mother Earth, are exploited, oppressed and marginalized. Essays in *Mother Earth and Religion* argue that environmental degradation correlates closely to women's suffering, thus suggesting that women have a special bond with the natural resource systems of the Earth.[12] According to the authors in the volume, the profound identification of Mother Earth with women is well captured in African myths,

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7 Gladys Mutangadura, "Women and Land Tenure Rights in Southern Africa: A human rights-based approach," Paper presented at *Land in Africa: Market Asset, or Secure Livelihood?*, Westminster, London, 8-9 November 2004. https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/G00173.pdf.

8 Enna Gudhlanga and Chipo Chirimuuta, "Are we not beneficiaries also? Portrayal of gender and land reform in Davie Mutasa's *Sekai minda tave nayo*." *Gender Behaviour Journal* 10, no.2 (2012): 4734.

9 Gudhlanga and Chirimuuta, "Are we not beneficiaries also?," 4736.

10 Gudhlanga and Chirimuuta, "Are we not beneficiaries also?," 4736.

11 Enna Gudhlanga, Josephine Muganiwa, and Musa Dube, eds., *African Literature, Mother Earth and Religion* (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2022), xxiii.

12 Anne Jerneck, "What about gender in climate change? Twelve feminist lessons from development," *Sustainability* 10, no. 3 (2018): 1 – 20. https://doi.org/10.3390/sui10030627.

folklores, legends, rituals, sacred songs, and incantations. They argue that women are better placed to comprehend the challenges imposed by the global environmental crisis, familiar with having to walk long distances to fetch water, firewood, and food to sustain their families.[13] Nevertheless, the volume offers hope as it posits that women, despite being victims of the environmental crisis, have the potential to be used as agents of change and spearhead the preservation of the environment through religion and the creative arts.[14]

By focusing on women's deprivation of land rights, I argue that women's economic and physical securities are at risk when they are denied land rights, demonstrating how women's access to land and resources supports their independence and autonomy. Indeed, it provides for their daily necessities and the needs of their families. It is also a crucial component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's gender-responsive implementation.[15] Therefore, this paper argues that gender inequalities undermine women's ability to exercise their rights to land in Eswatini, in contradiction to the Sustainable Development Goal 10 that aims to reduce inequalities by granting equal land rights to both women and men. The paper shares the understanding of the term 'land' with the publication of UN Women 2020 that defines land as that which "encompasses farmland, wetland, pasture, rangeland and forests, as well as harvesting, hunting and fishing territories".[16] As such, "women's rights to land" refers to both women's rights to secure land tenure *and* their ability to own, use, access, control, transfer, and make decisions about the land and related resources.[17]

Theoretical Considerations: African Feminist Framework

At the heart of this article is the consideration that land control and ownership is stratified and based on hierarchical and segregating systems in Eswatini. The disadvantaged are always women who languish helplessly at the bottom of the pyramid without security that they would have gained from land

13 Gudhlanga, Muganiwa, and Dube, *African Literature, Mother Earth and Religion,* xxiv.
14 Gudhlanga, Muganiwa, and Dube, *African Literature, Mother Earth and Religion,* xxvii.
15 UN Women, Towards a gender-responsive implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (New York: UN Women, 2018), 4–16.
16 UN Women, Towards a gender-responsive.
17 UN Women, Realizing Women's Rights.

ownership. To further theorize the deprivation of the women's rights and ability to enjoy the gifts given to humanity by Mother Earth, this article premises its argument on the African feminist framework. African feminist theory concerns itself with the realities of the challenges that women encounter in their daily lives that can be traced to cultural injustices, thus positing culture as an important factor in navigating women's deprivation of land tenure.[18] Inequalities in accessing productive resources, including land, continues to be a concern for African feminists involved in the gender debate.[19] Despite the diverse cultural values across Africa, African feminist theorists argue that certain belief systems run through most communities, such as the denial of women's land rights and the patriarchal nature of African societies.[20] Indeed, Isabel Phiri asserts, "Unfortunately African cultures have viewed women as less important than men, thereby making it difficult for women to have valid relationships with self, others, creation and God".[21] Furthermore, Mercy Oduyoye,[22] Isabel Phiri, and Sarojini Nadar[23] theorize that the African feminist perspective gives women the power to reject life-denying aspects of culture, whilst also empowering them to identify life-affirming ones. The emphasis African feminist theory places on gender dynamics and its examination of how patriarchal laws and practices shape women's identities and sense of belonging makes it the appropriate lens through which to examine this subject on women's land deprivation. In this article, I argue that there are modified legal frameworks in Eswatini that address women's land rights on paper but fails to actualize the policies in real life. Employing aspects of African feminist theory to empower Swati women on land control and ownership will make these legal frameworks relevant to contemporary realities.

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18 Wangari Maathai, *The Challenge for Africa* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009).

19 Adeoye O. Akinola, "Women, Culture and Africa's Land Reform Agenda," *Front. Psychol* 9 (2018): 1 – 8. doi:10.3389/fpsh9.2018.02234.

20 Akinola, "Women, Culture".

21 Isabel Phiri, "African Women's Theologies in the New Millennium", *Agenda* 61, Religion & Spirituality (2004): 16 – 24.

22 Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001): 19.

23 Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, "What's in a Name? Forging a Theological Framework for African Women's Theologies," *Journal of Constructive Theology* 12, no.2 (2006): 5 – 24.

Methodology

The African feminist theory that premises my argument draws on the lived experiences of African women, interpreting their reality, defining their unique standpoint, and facilitating their emancipation from hegemonic forces like sexism.[24] This paper is based on an examination of literature located from library catalogues that discuss Swati women's life experiences, literature reviews, local newspaper publications, and other similar sources. From the many scenarios that depict the denial women land rights, I have selected three (3) women from the three (3) most rural regions of Eswatini as examples. Excerpts on their experiences of the deprivation of their land rights are provided in a later section.

Locating context

Eswatini has ratified and is bound by international and regional treaties to eliminate laws that harm and discriminate against women on property rights. These include the African [Banjul] Charter on People's and Human Rights (African Charter), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).[25] To comply with these legal frameworks, in 1999 Eswatini drafted, among other initiatives, a land policy. The development of an effective, efficient, and complete system of land administration, rangeland management issues, and gender parity of land allocation and the preservation of property rights were among the challenges it was intended to address. Unfortunately, despite its formal endorsement, the most divisive concerns with the national policy are about land tenure and land reform. Nevertheless, the government has taken steps (albeit small ones) towards achieving a gender-inclusive future facilitated through national reviews that

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24 Ingrid Yngstrom, "Women, Wives and Land Rights in Africa: Situating Gender Beyond the Household in the Debate Over Land Policy and Changing Tenure Systems," *Oxford Development Studies* 30, no.1 (2002): 21 – 40. https://doi.org/10.1080/136008101200114886

25 See The International Women's Human Rights Clinic Georgetown University Law Center, "Women's Equal Property and Land Rights Hold Key To Reversing Toll of Poverty and Hiv/AidsiIn Swaziland: A Human Rights Report and Proposed Legislation," accessed 27 September 2022.https://www.law.georgetown.edu/international-law-journal/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/08/1-Womens-Equal-Property-508.pdf.

examine the conformity between the country's 2005 Constitution and customary laws on land rights. The Third Cycle National Report of the Kingdom of Eswatini, compiled by the working group of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and validated in May 2021, shows some development in the legislative and policy frameworks.[26] The report implements 133 recommendations gathered through the interactive dialogue during the Second Cycle Review that took place in May 2016. For the purposes of this discussion, I will, in broad strokes, refer to sections of the report that relate to discrimination against women and their denial of land rights.

Regarding Eswatini's jurisprudence on eliminating discrimination and inequality, the report states that the country has made positive strides thereby protecting and promoting the rights of women. It argues that sections 20 and 28 of the constitution have now been interpreted to effect the provisions of the CEDAW and other similar instruments. It cites cases where the court ruled in favor of women who were discriminated against by their marital families and declared the common law doctrine of marital power to be discriminatory towards women, arguing that it transgresses the constitutional right to equality before the law and the right to dignity, rendering it invalid. The court further declared that spouses married under the terms of the Marriage Act of 1964 and in Community of Property have equal capacity and authority to administer marital property. However, under common law marital authority, a married woman cannot administer property, including land, or enter contracts without her husband's consent nor can she represent herself in court. This limits her ability to enter contracts of financial credit, mortgages, and bank loans. Consequently, married women are reduced to the legal status of juveniles under the guardianship of their husbands due to common law marital power. What follows is a discussion on the dualism of the legal system in the country that contributes to women's deprivation of land rights in Eswatini.

26 D.T Vollmer and S.C Vollmer, "Global perspectives of Africa: Harnessing the universal periodic review to process sexual and gender-based violence in SADC member states," *Stellenbosch Law Review* 33, no. 1 (2022): 100 – 122.

Dualism in the Legal Framework

Eswatini has two legal systems that operate simultaneously: the Roman-Dutch Common Law system used by the Constitutional courts and the Swazi Customary Law administered by the Swazi courts.[27] However, neither has authority over concerns pertaining to customary land. Rather, these are under the control of His Majesty King Mswati III, whose subordinate chiefs and their local councils govern (in trust) the management, distribution, and conflict resolution of Swazi customary land. Though system is governed by the Native Administration Act (No. 79 of 1950), it is ambiguous and flexible. As such, the Act is subject to the chief's interpretation as it is refracted through Swazi Customary Law, a set of unwritten provisions passed from generation to generation.[28]

While Section 211 of the Swazi Constitution provides that "a citizen of Swaziland, without regard to gender, shall have equal access to land for normal domestic purposes", traditional leaders who are responsible for the administration of Swazi nation land and customary land tenure often ignore this provision.[29] Under the patriarchal Swazi law and custom, women only have the right to land-use through their husbands, male relatives, and the exclusive specifications of male political and legal authorities (that is, chiefs). Indeed, the right to land ownership is reserved for males who exercise it through a customary process known as *kukhonta*, a practice that initiates men into chiefdom and marks their allegiance to the chief.[30] Moreover, women are restricted from presenting themselves directly to the chief, and instead must be represented by their husbands or sons in cases of land disputes. This lack of agency and protection on communal land makes women vulnerable as they depend on the goodwill of their husbands, in-

27 Ronald T. Nhlapho, *Marriage and divorce in Swazi law and custom* (Swaziland: Mbabane Websters pty ltd,1992): 37.

28 Alfred Mndzebele, "A presentation on land issues and land reform in Swaziland." In *Southern African Regional Poverty and Development Network Conference on Land Reform and Poverty Alleviation in Southern Africa*, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, June 2001: 4-5.

29 Hloniphile Simelane, "Urban Land Management and its Discontents: A Case Study of the Swaziland Urban Development Project (SUDP)," *Journal of Development Studies* 52, no. 6 (2016): 797 – 812. doi: 10.1080/00220388.1098632.

30 Simelane, "Urban Land Management and its Discontents," 797 – 812.

laws, and chief who could expel them for any reason, including adultery, witchcraft, and the failure to bare male children.[31]

The dualism in the legal framework mentioned above extends to land occupancy where it is divided in two, Swazi National Land (SNL) and Title Deed Land (TDL), that account for 54% and 46% of land in Zimbabwe respectively[32]. The dual landholding system was a result of a series of laws passed by colonial administrators between the early 1900's and 1968. As observed by Hugh MacMillan,[33] pre-independence legislation established a large part of the groundwork that allowed for the dual system of land law. Land leased through concessions could be converted to individual freehold titles, attributable to the Concessions Partition Act of 1907, despite the fact that Swazi Nation land was managed in accordance with customary law by the monarch through the chieftaincy system.[34] There is no written law defining who has ownership of SNL. Rather, it is officially under the King controls, who holds it in trust and distributes it to tribal chiefs in accordance with tradition. Therefore, for men to access SNL, structures connected to the local chieftaincy must give their consent. A household that receives land is required to practice *kuhlehla* or provide services to the chief's home and his fields in return for these rights. Moreover, according to Swazi customary law, a man's male descendants may inherit this land.[35] The traditional "landholding" rights and tenure of families is strong and secure, especially for male household heads, even though chiefs maintain the authority to evict and/or re-allocate a household in the community if suspected of a crime or witchcraft.[36]

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31 Simelane, "Urban Land Management and its Discontents," 797 – 812.

32 Absalom Manyatsi and Saico Singwane, "Land governance in Eswatini." In *NUST-NELGA Land Symposium: Land Governance Challenges and Opportunities in Southern Africa, Windhoek, Namibia, September* 3-4, 2019.

33 Hugh MacMillan, "Swaziland: Decolonisation and the Triumph of 'Tradition'," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 23, no. 4 (1985): 643 – 666.

34 Simelane, "Urban Land Management and its Discontents," 797–812.

35 Sean Johnson, "Sustainable Land Administration and Management: Eswatini," *EU* 19, 2019.

36 Daisy Dlamini and Micah Masuku, "Land tenure and land productivity: A case of maize production in Swaziland." *Asian Journal of Agricultural Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2011): 301 – 307.

Routine practice generally restricts women's access to land and personal property and discriminates against them based on their gender, and marital status and regime.[37] As mentioned above, a chief may only grant a woman communal SNL through her husband, male relatives, or male children, in accordance with Swazi law and custom, as only men can own land. As such, women have no security at all on communal land. Moreover, women struggle to gain possession of private property as they lack sufficient economic resources to purchase land. Those few who afford to buy land cannot register the land in their name if they have been married under civil law, but instead require their spouses' permission to manage the land. Additionally, a husband married under civil or customary law may use his marital authority to manage his wife's personal property as well as her income without first getting her permission, treating her like a juvenile. Without her husband's consent, a married woman cannot sell her own animals or crops, get rid of her household belongings, or apply for a bank loan. Penelope Andrews[38] best describes this scenario as "women always being under the perpetual tutelage of a male". At the nullification of marriage, a woman is deprived of the property to which she has contributed because ordinarily she owns nothing of value; her husband can unilaterally dispose of property to deprive her of her share and the traditional authorities and civil courts most often unfairly divide the marital estate.[39]Women's deprivation of land rights is not unique to Emaswati. Indeed, women in other African countries have similar experiences. The following summarizes the findings of a study that brings to the fore the motif that equality between women and men on land ownership only exists on the pages of legal documentation, but not in practice. These findings resonate with the experiences of Swati women represented in three (3) excerpts cited below.

Gender Dynamics of Land Ownership in Southern Africa

Many states in Africa have modified their legal structures to accommodate women's land rights, but cultural impediments remain an obstacle to this development. As noted by Adeoye Akinola, land reforms do not benefit

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37 Nhlapho, *Marriage and divorce in Swazi law and custom,* 40.

38 Penelope Andrews, "The Stepchild of National Liberation: Women and Rights in the New South Africa," in *Post-Apartheid Constitutions: Perspectives on South Africa's Basic Law,* ed. Penelope Andrews and Stephen Ellmann (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand Press, 2001), 327.

39 Johnson, "Sustainable Land Administration and Management," 12.

women due to customary law practices that deny women's access to land. These laws are guided by historical practices and unwritten procedures based on traditional norms and cultural affiliation.[40] Gladys Mutangadura, in a research study entitled "Women and Land Tenure Rights in Southern Africa: A human rights-based approach", explores the deprivation of land to women in six countries in southern Africa. A summary of her findings on each country follows.[41]

Almost all agricultural land in Lesotho is held through traditional tenure, where women are considered minors and are not permitted to inherit land or decide how to manage or utilize it. If there are no male relatives to inherit, the land reverts to the chieftainship for reallocation upon the holder's death. Daughters are not permitted to inherit their father's fields. In Botswana, every male head of a household was traditionally entitled to three pieces of land. When a man died, his male children inherited his land. No matter their marital status, age, or other circumstances, women could never independently purchase land or other landed property. They were required to reside with their sons, spouses, or parents. While some laws permit wives to purchase property, marital power, nevertheless, dictates that wives cannot obtain a loan to successfully use the land without their husband's written agreement. Mozambique's constitution, which states that all citizens are equal before the law, enjoy the same rights, and are subject to the same obligations, regardless of color, race, sex, ethnicity, place of birth, religion, level of education, social status, marital status of parents, and profession, has upheld the principle of gender equality since 1975. However, despite the constitution of Mozambique being non-discriminatory, some legislations continue to largely discriminate against women on land ownership and control due to the application of customary law in the patrilineal societies.

In South Africa, women are discriminated against in both statutory and customary tenure systems, despite constitution prohibiting it. Even though community tenure systems greatly vary, women are often ineligible to hold land separately from men. Inheritance and access laws typically favor men over women and women with children over women without children. In Malawi, the type of marriage affects the women's rights to land under

40 Akinola, "Women, Culture," 2.
41 Mutangadura, "Women and Land Tenure Rights in Southern Africa," 5.

customary tenure. In a patrilineal marriage, only the male line can inherit land, and women can only gain access to it through their husbands and sons. The woman must move back to her native village after divorcing her husband, losing the privilege to work her farm. After her husband passes away, the widow can continue to utilize the land he owned as long as she remains single. As her sons get older, she must share the land with them, but remains at risk of eviction subject to the will of her sons.

The type of marriage similarly affects the women's rights to land under customary tenure in Zambia. Land rights belong entirely to the wife in an uxorilocal marriage (where the husband settles in the wife's village), and the man must return them in cases of the dissolution of the union. In contrast, the rights are entirely held by the husband in a virilocal marriage (where the wife settles in the husband's village). In the case of divorce or the husband's death, the woman must leave the field and return to her own village. The most common type of marriage in rural areas is a virilocal union, suggesting that, overall, more women than men are victims of unstable land tenure as a result of marital custom.

Like the women's experiences highlighted in these summaries, Swati women, are deprived of land ownership rights. Yet, for them, land ownership is a crucial form of security and income increasing empowerment that decreases poverty. Below are three (3) excerpts extracted from narratives available in the public domain on Emaswati women that, like their sisters in the six (6) countries in Mutangadura's report, are secondary claimants and beneficiaries of land rights. These women represent the experiences of hundreds of Swati women that are denied land rights in their communities.

Scenario 1

A widow in the Lubombo region faced the threat of being evicted by her brother-in-law from land that he claimed he had control over as "the head of the family" following the death of her husband. The violations persisted and increased during lockdown because the women's rights and legal aid organizations that would normally come to her rescue were not accessible to her nor did she have access to the courts. As a result, her brother-in-law

took advantage of the lockdown to accelerate and assert his claim over the land.[42]

Scenario 2

Abigail Fakudze, a teacher, explained that despite a woman working the fields for her family, it legally remains the property of her husband who controls the land and anything that comes from the land: "[O]ur history says that a woman doesn't have land…she doesn't own, she tills the land until sunset, but she doesn't own [it]. When it's time for harvest, it's the man who goes [and sells] at the market with the van that's full of cotton or maize. But she's been tilling the land and making sure that the crop sees the light of day".[43]

Scenario 3

An elderly, widowed, Swazi woman's land, where she had installed a fence and build a pit latrine toilet, was taken away from her by a chief,. No one could help her repossess her field despite it being located at her residence as that had also been stolen by the leader of the community. [44]

Discussion of the Scenarios in Context

The scenarios illustrate the marginalization women's rights in Eswatini, as well as the significant gender gaps in land management and rights to use land as collateral.[45] The three (3) women cited above have no control over any land and, consequently, are in insecure positions within their family structures. Instead, land ownership and access to them are largely vested in lineages, clans, and families. Women then are secondary claimants of land property, accessible only through their male relatives. Such limited access is quickly lost when their husbands die, as captured in scenario three (3),

42 Betty Claire Mubangizi, and John Cantius Mubangizi, "COVID-19, Rural Livelihoods and Human Rights: A South African Perspective," *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University* 56, no. 3 (2021): 216 – 228.

43 Brook Kelly, Marika Maris, Nicolas Mitchell, and Karen Morao, "Women's Equal Property and Land Rights Hold Key to Reversing Toll of Poverty And HIV/Aids in Swaziland: A Human Rights Report and Proposed Legislation," *The International Women's Human Rights Clinic at Georgetown University Law Centre* 40, (2012): 291 – 440.

44 One Billion Rising, "Women must have access and control over land," *Eswatini Observer,* October 9, 2021.

45 Akinola, "Women, Culture," 5.

where land ownership and management is transferred to the customary leader. In cases of resistance, the chief is legally able to repossess the land from the occupant if there is resistance as, officially, it rightfully belongs to him. Moreover, as shown in the second scenario, despite tilling the land and nurturing the crops, it a the man rather than the woman who manages the farm sales. Mary Kimani cites expert reports that claim women in Africa contribute 70 per cent of food production, nearly half of all farm labor, and 80-90 per cent of food processing, storage, and hoeing and weeding.[46] Nevertheless, women are routinely obliged to hand over financial responsibility of the harvests to men with little say on how the proceeds are used.[47] Mercy Oduyoye echoes this assertion in the preface of *Mother Earth, Mother Africa & African Indigenous Religions*:

Women do not own land, but only work on it at the pleasure of the husband. Even in the matrilineal communities where married couples do not have community of property, and where there is no fear of it being alienated because of marriage, it is the men of her matriclan who are direct custodians of the family land. So, by and large, the culture treats both women and Mother Earth as belong to the men of Africa.[48]

As previously mentioned, Eswatini has two types of land tenure (Eswatini Nation Land and Title Deeds Land), and Section 211 of the 2005 Constitution provides for equal access to land for women and men. It is important to note that there are four types of marital regimes possible in Eswatini, with varying property consequences for women. Thandabantu Nhlapo[49] lists them as follows: in community of property with marital power, where all property is jointly owned but registered solely in the man's name; out of community of property with marital power, where property is separately owned according to an antenuptial agreement but controlled by the husband; out of community of property without marital power, where property is separately owned according to an antenuptial agreement and controlled solely by the owner of

46 Mary Kimani, "Women Struggle to Secure land rights," *Africa Renewal* 22, no. 1 (2021): 10-21.

47 Akinola, "Women, Culture," 8.

48 Matholeni Nobuntu Penxa, Molly Manyonganise, and Boateng Georgina Kwamina, eds., *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions* (Cape town: African Sun Media, 2020), xv.

49 Thandabantu Nhlapo, *Marriage and Divorce in Swazi Law and Custom*. (Mbabane, Swaziland: Websters, 1992).

that property; and Swazi law and custom, where the husband has complete marital power over the wife's person and property. The above illustrate how, despite government efforts to enact laws that seek to relax certain restrictions on women, women are still deprived of their right over land.

The women in the highlighted scenarios above fit into three of the marital regimes, where land occupancy is a man's domain. The woman in the first is widowed, and marital power is transferred to her late husband's brother. He treats her as property to be kept of or disposed. The same applies to the woman in the second scenario whereby her husband exercises marital power over their property. Even after she has tilled the land and produced the harvest, it remains under her husband's purview to control and manage the sales. Even in scenario three, the widow loses possession of "her" land to the chief who has land rights transferred to him from the woman's deceased husband. For the daughters of Mother Earth, this deprivation of land rights is paradoxical to the a strong attachment they share with the land; they play with it, they talk with it, and mourn with it. It is, therefore, the experience of women's marginalization in land control and ownership that connects them with Mother Earth who is also travailing in pain as a result of stressful global trends.

Furthermore, the scenarios illustrate a compulsory compliance with the dictates of patriarchy, that favor men over women in the acquisition of land rights. The discrimination against widows and the married women are evidence that men are given a higher status, pre-established and ready-made for them to step into. In contrast, women are expected to adopt a docile status that deprives them of enjoying the benefits of the land as children of Mother Earth. As mentioned earlier, in the Eswatini patriarchal space, a woman must ask her male relatives to represent her in traditional courts when it comes to land matters, regardless of whether she is married according to civil law or Swazi law and custom, or single. The expectation is that the male relatives will act on behalf of a woman, thus chaining her to the will of a man for her whole life: she is first under the guardianship of her father, and when she marries, she comes under the guardianship of her husband; if she divorces or is widowed, she either returns to the

guardianship of her father or other male relatives, most often her sons.[50] In other words, a woman's identity is always defined by the men around her where society ensures that she is not autonomous or independent. She lives in a male-controlled world even into adulthood.[51]

This patriarchal dependency syndrome indoctrinates women with characteristics that are thought to be feminine from an early age, asking warmth, expressiveness, care, and concern for others before themselves. In contrast, males are presumed (and allowed) to be independent, aggressive, direct, unemotional, dominant, and competent. Notably, society does not attach the same value to female traits where patriarchal orientation dictates that the masculine traits are deemed to be more valuable, and form the reference point for personhood in society.[52] Therefore, societal constructions force women to consciously and unconsciously accept anything to maintain their attachment to a man and live under their authority. The women's compulsory attachment to a man is also noted in scenarios where a single or divorced woman wants to acquire land through Swazi law and customs. Chiefs that have relaxed restrictions on land ownership by women, in compliance with the 2005 Constitution, compel women to entitle their homes after their father's names, and not their own. This is evidence that the male bias in the law persists. Even though women are allowed to occupy their designated land, they are more like refugees.

Conclusion

Women's access to, use of, and control over land and other productive resources is essential to ensuring gender equality and an adequate standard of living, as intended by the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) of Agenda 2030. Depriving women of land occupancy is not only a direct violation of their birthright from Mother Earth, but contravenes the international protocols. Equality in land ownership is crucial for women as it ensures that women can provide for their day-to-day needs and those of

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50 Joshua Mpofu. *Some Observable Causes of Women's Subordination* (Harare: Cass 1983):12.

51 Sonene Nyawo, "*Sowungumuntfukenyalo'* - 'You are Now a Real Person': A Feminist Analysis of How Women's Identities and Personhood are Constructed by Societal Perceptions on Fertility in the Swazi Patriarchal Family" (PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2014), 56.

52 Nyawo, "'*Sowungumuntfukenyalo'*," 71.

their families and communities. That is to say that ownership of land and property empowers women by providing income and security not only for herself but her entire family. Tim Hanstad[53] underscores this observation by arguing that granting sufficient land rights to women has substantial advantages: women will be less likely to be victims of domestic violence; their children will be more likely to be educated, and stay in school longer; women will be less likely to contract and spread HIV and AIDS as they do not have to resort to prostitution to earn a living; and women will be better positioned to access microcredit. Moreover, land deprivation reduces their to perpetual dependence on male figures in their lives that, should there be an illness, instances of domestic violence, or death in the family, would otherwise leave them landless.[54]

Without resources, such as land, women have limited agency in household decision-making and no recourse to the assets during crises.[55] Thus, a gender approach to land rights is crucial to enable shifts in gender power relations and assure that all people, regardless of sex, benefit from and are empowered by development policies and practices that would improve people's rights to land.[56] This parity between genders, according to Noddings, requires more than what political or legal rhetoric currently offers, but rather calls for a commitment to reorientation or transformation of attitudes on societal norms.[57] It calls for a conscious effort from society to break the cycle of women's perpetual dependency on men that will also remove the male bias. Subsequently, each gender will treat the other as equal beneficiaries to what Mother Earth offers all humanity.

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53 Tim Hanstad, Tasnuma Haque, and Robin Nielsen, "Improving land access for India's rural poor," *Economic and Political Weekly* 43, no. 10 (2008): 49 – 56. doi:10.2307/40277230.

54 Carmen Diana Deere and Cheryl R. Doss, "Gender and the Distribution of Wealth in Developing Countries," *World Institute for Development Economics Research* 115 (2006): 1–27.

55 Tchérina Jerolon, "Dismantling election-related sexual and gender-based violence in Kenyan politics," *LSE Women, Peace and Security,* April 26, 2021, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2021/04/26/dismantling-election-related-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-kenyan-politics/.

56 Briony McDonagh, "Women, Land and Property, Then and Now: An Afterword. *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44, no. 4 (2021): 487 – 491.

57 Nel Noddings. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 41.

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The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa: Family, Religion, and the State by Ludovic Lado

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SUBMISSION DATE
17 June 2023

ACCEPTANCE DATE
10 July 2023

Introduction

The allocation of household headship roles to men is a dominant practice that serves the heteropatriarchal values enshrined in religious scripture, customary laws, and colonial-era civil laws. At the international level, feminist efforts to ensure gender equality in all spheres of life led to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopting the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. Ratifying CEDAW and adopting relevant reforms reflects a commitment to gender justice.

According to Article 87 of Côte d'Ivoire's constitution, any international treaty or convention the state ratifies has authority over domestic legislation.[1] Côte

1 Marie Agathe Bahi, "The justice system and women's rights in Côte d'Ivoire," in *In Search of equality: Women, law and society in Africa*, ed. Stefanie Röhrs, Dee Smythe, Annie Hsieh, and Monica de Souza (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2014), 159.

ISSN 2707-2991

d'Ivoire ratified CEDAW in 1995 but waited until 2013 to adjust its national legislation in accordance to Article 16 of CEDAW (on Marriage and Family Life) that requires the government to ensure women have equal rights to men in marriage, particularly in regard to parental responsibilities, choice of profession, and the acquisition, ownership, and management of property.[2] Some Ivorians suspect that the government rushed the adoption of the 2013 reforms to attract Millennium Challenge Corporation funds,[3] while other analysts suggest that the law was passed to meet the demands of global development goals and the World Bank requirements for external financing.[4]

Globalized ideals of marriage are most applicable to heteronormative, monogamous, nuclear family setups from Western contexts where, to a large extent, men and women have equal economic opportunities. Family dynamics in Côte d'Ivoire are regulated by the practice of both monogamy and polygamy. Both models require men to take up the role of matrimonial headship thereby promoting women's subordination in line with cultural expectations and religious prescripts that have been in place for decades. Thus, the development of family codes requires introspection regarding the significance of religious and customary values.[5]

The secular state and Côte d'Ivoire's 2013 family code

Notably, prior to the colonization of Côte d'Ivoire by the French in 1893, marital practices were based on uncodified customs adopted by a wide range of ethnic groups. From 1893 until the early 1960s, French statutory law co-existed with diverse customary practices. However, when Côte d'Ivoire became a modern state in 1964, the state abandoned customary laws.[6] The 1964 amendment of the civil code prohibited the practice of bride

2 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)," accessed, 10 May, 2023, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm#article16

3 Ludovic Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa: Family, Religion, and the State* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 123.

4 Jeanne Maddox Toungara, "Women in Côte d'Ivoire," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, accessed 20 May, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.650.

5 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 1.

6 Bahi, "The justice system and women's rights in Côte d'Ivoire," 151.

wealth despite its social significance in facilitating customary matrimonial union. The amendment required marriages celebrated before religious officials to be first approved by the court registrar.[7] It also outlawed polygamy, thereby privileging the Western ideal of a state presiding over monogamous citizens and nuclear family units.

Participants identified three types of marriage and their different purposes: Customary marriages unite families, religious marriages represent holy matrimony, and civil marriages provide the legal recognition of the state.[8] While the notion of civil rights implies legality, sociocultural and religious legitimacy shapes individuals' and couples' relations with their families and communities. As such, most Ivorians continue to ignore the outlawing of bride price[9] and the amended Family code.[10] Reforms require consultative deliberation with communities. Considering the widespread perception that civil laws imply the importance of Western ideals, sustained multistakeholder engagement with conservative constituents is vital.

The book notes two specific provisions of the family code that were adopted in 2013 without prior consultation of multiple stakeholders. Significant changes that sparked outrage related to Articles 58 and 59. Article 58 "specified that the husband, as family head, fulfils this role in the joint interest of the household and the children", while Article 59 stated that "marriage expenses were mainly borne by the husband".[11] The revised version of the family code stipulated that both spouses are to ensure "the moral and material direction of the family, provide for the children's education, and prepare for their future".[12] Article 60 of the original version gave the husband the sole right to choose where his family would reside, however, the revised version urged common agreement, "with disagreements to be decided by a judge, taking into consideration the interest of the family".[13]

7 Bahi, "The justice system and women's rights in Côte d'Ivoire," 156.
8 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 82.
9 Risa Ellovich, "The law and Ivoirian women," *Anthropos* 80 (1985): 188.
10 Ellovich, "The law," 192.
11 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 25.
12 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 25.
13 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 26.

Christians and Muslims interviewed by the author posited that the amendments to Articles 58 and 59 were incompatible with religious and customary values. They collectively expressed the worry that such principles would lead to conflicts and undermine men's designated role to lead and provide. A participant representing the legal fraternity echoed the same sentiments, although they recognized that the law was attempting to place husbands and wives on the same footing.[14] Male participants unanimously agreed that it was a man's divine prerogative to be the head of the family.[15] While most men contended that the proposed shift was too sudden and did not consider social realities, Catholic men seemed more open to sharing household financial responsibilities, especially when both spouses have incomes.[16]

Article 67, which permitted women to work in professions different from their husbands unless the exercise of that profession was contrary to the interest of the family, was amended to give women and men the right to exercise any profession of their choice unless a judge "legally established that the exercise of such was contrary to the interest of the family".[17] Participants noted that marital relations required collaborative decision-making regarding issues such as professional commitments and where to live. However, they maintained that men should retain their principal status as "the authority of the family".[18]

The 2017 annual statistics from the Ministry of Interior and Security of Côte d'Ivoire indicated an increase in the demand for marriage under civil law despite the costly application fee of around US$100.[19] Understandably, demand arose mostly in the capital city of Abidjan, which accounted for 60% of civil law marriages registered from 2015 to 2017.[20] Similar to customary and religious marriages, which are initiated by men, the uptake of civil

14 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 80.
15 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 82.
16 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 87.
17 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 26.
18 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 79.
19 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 43.
20 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 43.

marriages depends on a man proposing to his female partner. Key benefits of a civil marriage include the legal recognition of spouses and children for estate management purposes. It is worth noting that inheritance practices in Côte d'Ivoire, especially in rural areas, continue to be dictated by family, community, and religious leaders. Some observers noted that the extension of the family code to customary and religious unions could potentially ensure equal access to property.[21] Since civil marriages award women the right to legal recourse, extending such provisions seems favorable. However, many women cannot not afford the costs of judicial procedures. Furthermore, as most women participants noted, they try to avoid marital conflict, thus taking matters to the courts is not considered ideal.

State officials did not consult the Ivorian population during the reform process. When a bill requesting the revision of the code was first tabled in November 2012, most lawmakers supported the principle of a single head of the family. Then head of state, Alassane Ouattara, dissolved the government coalition citing breach of loyalty.[22] Amadou Soumahoro, the chairman of the *Rassemblement des républicains* (RDR), swiftly urged members of the alliance to vote for the new law to ensure political survival.[23] Therefore, in addition to the state's exclusionary approach towards citizens, some law makers were coerced into endorsing what is now known as the 2013 amended family code. In this case, the state did not act in the interest of the people.

As it stands, citizens whose marriages are not legally recognized are deprived of access to resources and rights available to those in civil marriages.[24] The state missed the opportunity to engage with civil society representatives on the benefits associated with inheritance rights, especially for widows and children. They could have deliberated on how best to mitigate challenges perpetuated by dominant marital practices. For instance, several

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21 Juliana Nnoko-Mewanu, "Côte d'Ivoire Marriage Reform a Step for Women: Law Could Spur Change Throughout Africa," accessed 30 May, 2023. https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/24/cote-divoire-marriage-reform-step-women

22 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 28.

23 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 28.

24 Fareda Banda, "The United Nations Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination against Women in Law and Practice," 1, accessed 1 June, 2023. https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/21258/1/united_nations_working_group_on_the_issue_of_discrimination_against_women_in_law_and_practice.pdf

participants noted that there were little to no consequences for spouses who neglected the responsibilities associated with their defined roles in marriage.

The civil code does not extend to customary and religious marriages. Therefore, the state's hyperfocus on the promotion of gender equality in civil unions reinforces the exclusion of those who are not in legally recognized unions. It becomes clear that adopting reforms in line with CEDAW with no regard for the population serves as a mere tick-box practice. That is to say, "CEDAW was ratified, and laws were amended accordingly". Amending the law as a public relations act for the international community does more local harm than good. Since the 1960s, citizens have taken a *fait accompli* approach[25] but continuously refer to customary and religious institutions for recourse, to the detriment of women.

Comparative perspectives: Senegal, Mali, and Niger

Civil marriages in post-colonial African states are more common in urban settings, as reflected by the book's reference to the cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Mali, and Niger. Consequently, family law reforms in these countries manifest as urban processes, with little impact on rural citizens. While CEDAW recognizes plural family forms, countries like Côte d'Ivoire have adopted the civil marital unit as the ideal state-sanctioned model.[26] Since independence in 1960, Mali and Senegal have replaced the colonial family laws with their own national marriage codes. State parties that have ratified CEDAW are obliged to discourage and prohibit polygamy as it constitutes a direct violation of women's rights to equality.[27] Accordingly, Côte d'Ivoire have outlawed polygamous marriages although they are still being practiced in the country. Unlike Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal's family codes integrated customary law and colonial law in which polygamous and monogamous marriages have civil legal status.[28] It is worth noting that

25 Jeanne Maddox Toungara, "Inventing the African family: Gender and family law reform in Cote D'Ivoire," *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 1 (1994): 38.

26 Banda, "Gender Equality and Family laws in Africa," 4.

27 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "The Human Rights Council Working Group on the issue of Discrimination against Women in law and in practice," accessed 20 May, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2015/04/human-rights-council-working-group-issue-discrimination-against-women-law-and

28 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 96.

the African Union's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (better known as Maputo Protocol) recognizes monogamy as the preferred model, but in the event of polygyny, the rights of women should be promoted and protected.[29] The protocol acknowledges social realities and the need to address their impact. For example, in the event of the death of a polygynous husband, all wives and their children will receive inheritance, despite falling outside the ideal civil family code.

Due to religious contestation, Niger has yet to adopt a codified family code. Marriages within the country have either civil or customary status. To pave way for future reforms, Nigerien politicians have adopted a comprehensive approach aimed at implementing gender reforms in areas that are likely to gain support, such as health care and education. The increased participation of women in politics is expected to inspire further changes to family law. Concepts such as equity are subject to interpretation. While equity may imply equal sharing before the law, religious and customary authorities may prescribe that equity requires women to receive less because they do not have the same status and obligations as men.[30] This ties in with the book's reference to complementarity, a popular notion where participants are defined as representative of equal dignity and partnership in marriage.[31] Collaborating with multiple stakeholders to develop contextual meanings and solutions for gender justice is important. For instance, the state of South Africa had to remedy its failure to recognize Muslim marriages by awarding maintenance and allowing for inheritance in situations involving polygyny.[32]

Mali represents a case of consensual reforms informed by various religious, political, and social stakeholders. As a result, important innovations regarding marital regimes, filiation, kinship, inheritance, and divorce were introduced. Despite popular acceptance, some Islamic groups, including the National Muslim Women Association of Mali opposed reforms such as the description of marriage as a secular act, the establishment of a minimum marriage age at eighteen years for women, and the legitimation of children

29 Banda, "Gender Equality and Family laws in Africa," 8.
30 Banda, "Gender Equality and Family laws in Africa," 1.
31 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 92.
32 Banda, "Gender Equality and Family laws in Africa," 8.

born out of wedlock.[33] The code was referred to the National Assembly and a joint commission made up of members of the *Haut Conseil Islamique* and parliamentary legal experts engaged further to develop the code, which was adopted in December 2011. It prevailed due to low levels of public contestation likely because the *Haut Conseil Islamique* got most of the changes they wanted.[34]

The book notes that, while Senegal, Mali, and Niger seem to be more consultative, they have yet to legally address the discrimination of women with regards to "choice of profession, processes of divorce, custody of children in the event of a divorce, inheritance, choice of residence, and polygamy".[35] Thus, from a CEDAW perspective, Côte d'Ivoire's family code is more progressive. What remains is for it to be adapted.

Conclusion

Although the book notes that reforms such as the family code are widely perceived as measures to weaken traditional forms of family life, and favor the emergence of new ones, such as homosexual marriages,[36] this theme was underexplored. Since Islamic faith and Catholicism (and Christianity more broadly) are dominant in Côte d'Ivoire, the focus on participants from these sects provided relevant insights on attitudes towards modernity. The author referred to participants' suspicions that the liberal legal amendments represented a step towards the legalization of homosexuality and homosexual marriage.[37] A sentiment that is echoed in parliamentary discussions and media reports.[38] Considering that homosexuality is not illegal in the country, it is understandable that heteropatriarchal conservatives, threatened by the legal disregard for male headship, anticipate that, in the long run, marriage will cease to preserve the heteropatriarchy. Further studies should investigate activism and state efforts towards queer inclusion.

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33 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 109.

34 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 111.

35 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 112.

36 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 19.

37 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 81.

38 Hannane Ferdjani, "Ivory Coast's controversial polygamy bill: All you need to know," accessed 30 May, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/7/19/ivory-coasts-controversial-polygamy-bill-all-you-need-to-know

While the book places emphasis on the resilience of customary marriage and dominance of Islamic principles, it does not provide in-depth insights on polygynous sects of society and how they have adapted, if at all. The researcher relied on urban informants who reside in contexts where civil marriage rates are higher. The book did not shed light on insights from rural participants with insider information on polygyny. Nevertheless, the emphasis on urban citizens' exercise of customary rituals such as bride wealth[39] demonstrates a lacklustre adoption of civil law principles across the country. As such, rural-based studies could provide more context-specific knowledge that is currently under researched.

Marginalized groups, such as rural women, lack the power and means to organize and articulate their positions on human rights issues.[40] This remains a major challenge for reform-seeking feminist agents across the African continent. The urban-rural divide in the uptake of civil law poses a barrier to engagement. Inaccessible legal jargon and challenges in interpretation present an additional challenge. Thus, in countries where most of the population reside in rural areas, such as Mali (70%), legal reforms have minimal impact.[41] While Islam is not a state religion, it plays a central role in the regulation of Malians' marital practices. Although contexts with lower rural populations have experienced an increase in civil marriages, married couples still customize their unions according to male headship principles. Customary practices remain the domain of families and communities. According to Côte d'Ivoire's 2014 general census results, 71.9% of married respondents were married customarily, 28.4% religiously, and only 8.4% civilly.[42]

Given that culture is never static, provisions for equality within marriage are practicable. Political actors, local feminist groups, and religious leaders, among others, should engage in sustained efforts to ensure the legal recognition of customary and religious marriages and establish relevant

39 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 112.
40 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 124.
41 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 107.
42 Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa*, 25.

reforms to ensure gender justice. Otherwise, women's legal status will continue to be characterized by "equality in law and inequality in practice".[43]

[43] Bahi, "The justice system and women's rights in Côte d'Ivoire," 148.

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The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye: Ecumenism, Feminism, and Communal Practice by Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein

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SUBMISSION DATE
11 July 2023

ACCEPTANCE DATE
24 July 2023

Introduction

This book provides a thorough examination of the life and work of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, one of the first African women theologians to publish substantive theological reflections on African women.[1] Oredein's work significantly addresses a gap in understanding the history and value of African Women's Theologies (AWTs) to the continental and global theological enterprise by tracing the story and deliberations of one of its founding mothers. The author conveys how a lack of recognition of African scholarship and the exclusion of African women skews religious and theological discourse due to the absence of marginalized voices. As such, the author's aim to trace Oduyoye's cultural and theological odyssey is so valuable, spanning decades of the development of AWTs through one of its most influential proponents.

[1] Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, "'Treading Softly but Firmly': African Women, Religion, and Health," in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 2.

ISSN 2707-2991

Oredein's Methodology

The first half of the book, chapters one through three, weave together strands of Oduyoye's family story and cultural heritage that shaped the contours of a unique theological path, creating a road for many to follow. Oredein paints a detailed picture of the key influencers of a woman who forged a trail through patriarchal culture and church spaces that did not recognize the validity of her call to serve theologically or educationally. The author documents the unique circumstances of the history and culture that formed and shaped Oduyoye's assertion of equality for women, resisting patriarchal interpretations of what women could do and be.

The section traces a fascinating portrait of Oduyoye's theological origins from her early years and pivotal moments that led to strong realizations about her Ghanaian Akan heritage. Her roots in the church as the daughter of a highly respected Methodist pastor and a mother who was marginalized in church leadership led her to question the ways church failed to recognize the value of women's efforts. Equally influential was her awareness of a determined matriarchal line that embodied endurance and suspicion of a church that sidelined their participation and contributions. Her inclusive vision defied patriarchal logic, advocating for the experiences and voices of women, aligning with faltering steps taken in Ghana towards national independence that included female leadership.

Oredein's biographical exploration of Oduyoye's journey presents the origins of her feminist formations through her questioning of religious and cultural practices that diminished the value and restricted the participation of African women in ecclesial spaces. Oduyoye encountered African women's creative expressions of agency in their religious and cultural communities despite those who sought to preserve colonial and cultural beliefs and attitudes adverse to African women. Such encounters drove Oduyoye to explore a broader vision of African women's traditions in pursuing the wellbeing of all, finding empowering language and practices in unhospitable spaces, and fostering an African feminist worldview. Subsequently, Oredein traces how Oduyoye was able to carry her noteworthy learning from her academic career into important ecumenical spaces, significantly broadening the conversation and inclusion of African women's concerns in theological discourse. The author traces Oduyoye's sizable influence through her participation and commitment to organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

(EATWOT), and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (often referred to as the Circle).

The establishment of the Circle is arguably one of Oduyoye's greatest spheres of influence, carving a trail for African women theologians to connect, learn, and publish in the community. The Circle remains an enduring conduit for producing academic theological works grounded in the plight of African women and their communities, simultaneously encouraging the development of African women theologians across the continent. Oredein highlights how this compelling history sparked Oduyoye to analyze and reformat Christian faith, doctrines, and practices through challenges faced by African women.

In the second half of the book, chapters four through eight, Oredein provides an erudite exposé of Oduyoye's systematic understanding of key doctrines that helped shape the development of African women's theology (AWT). Oredein's comprehensive focus on Oduyoye's scholarly re-examination of key Christian dogmas in light of the wisdom and experience of African women round out this scholarly tome. This in-depth overview of Oduyoye's theological constructions of the doctrine of God, Christology, Theological Anthropology, and Ecclesiology present life-giving interpretations for women to resist systemic exclusion in theological discourse dominated by African male and Western Christian theologians.

Oredein portrays how Oduyoye challenges the traditional delivery of theological frameworks, disputing Christian theology that tends to overlook or even denigrate the African person, and women in particular, in relation to God.[2] Thus, Oduyoye's first theological task was to employ a hermeneutic of suspicion in reading Christian doctrines and views on culture. Oredein demonstrates how Oduyoye challenges ethnocentric European norms that bleed into the packaging and delivery of theology in the African context, favoring European over African and male over female, largely reinforcing hierarchical ideals.

[2] Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye: Ecumenism, Feminism, and Communal Practice* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 67.

Oredein highlights how Oduyoye's simultaneous examinations of the doctrine of God and Christology, as well as African cultural practices, challenge oppressive structures that promote colonialism, ethnocentrism, classism, racism, patriarchy, and sexism. Oredein expounds how Oduyoye presents the affinity of African women with Jesus, who experienced cultural estrangement and social marginalization, overcoming oppression. More so than critiquing, Oduyoye promulgates alternative humanizing modes of theological reflection inclusive of African women and all groups experiencing marginalization. Thus, Oredein's expositions of Oduyoye's theological anthropology, including the "fullness of African personhood" and "narratives rooted in women's experiences" promoting Africa's wellness.[3] This includes explorations on conceptions of the Creator and Akan cosmological thought and Akan feminist claims in favor of holistic communal life "towards communal equity".[4] Oredein unpacks how Oduyoye reclaims the view of the divine within Akan and broader African worldviews, while holding cultural practices and interpretations accountable for troubling gender biases that skew African Christianity.

Finally, Oredein's discussion of Oduyoye's ecclesiology rounds out her doctrinal reformulations to include African women's full participation in the church. Oduyoye elaborated on the incomplete nature of a church that sidelines parts of itself, asking "who are the bodies the 'church' must step on in order to procure its greatness"?[5] Oredein examines how Oduyoye, along with other African women theologians, advocate for a household of God that is attentive to all its members, bearing witness to God's primary concern for the world and the collective diversity of all who are made in God's image.

Oredein ends with two noteworthy chapters. The first considers subjects for further exploration raised by Oduyoye's work, where others must further challenging conversations about sexuality, African men's accountability, other voices in the diaspora, African feminist theology, and Christian ethics. The second concludes on the way Oduyoye's work and practice call for adjusted lenses and correctives from which to examine Western

3 Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 120.
4 Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 120.
5 Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 151.

interpretations furnished by African feminism, liberating those who have been intentionally or unintentionally silenced in cultural and ecclesial spaces.

The Enduring Value of this Text

While this short summary of some of the key point of Oredein's volume is insufficient to cover the depth of her investigation, it serves to highlight some key ideas propounded by this helpful exposition of Oduyoye's life, theological scholarship, and ecclesial work. The enduring value of this text is exhibited by several key features.

First, this text provides essential documentation on the extraordinary life of Oduyoye and her substantial scholarly and ecclesial contributions as an African woman and theological innovator who centered God's spacious directive to care for all creation with deep concern for the marginalized. It demonstrates the wide embrace of God for all image-bearers to embody love for all cultures and genders who reflect God's image to one another and the world. Through Oduyoye's life and witness, it calls for embodiment as an essential part of theological reflection, embracing the lived experiences of woman as worthy image-bearers whose stories bear witness to eternal truths of justice and compassion.

Second, this can be used as a textbook to systematically comprehend the contours of AWT and appreciate the breadth and depth of AWTs practical application for post-colonial understanding. It does so by inviting readers to consider critical questions that are essential to exploring post-colonial realities in Africa, in conversation with sacred texts. This includes noting contextual encounters in the Bible at moments in time "with the divine, with the self, and with others", which are filtered through the socioeconomic and cultural lens of its readers.[6] Continual cognizance of contextual reading has tremendous bearing on the theological enterprise and the future of Christianity to avoid the pitfalls of racism, imperialism, and tribalism.[7]

6 Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye,* 108.

7 Esther Mombo, "Considerations for an Inclusive Global Theological Education," *The Ecumenical Review* 71, no. 4 (2019): 450. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12442.

Third, Oredein carefully examines key conceptions of Oduyoye's work formed in communities of mutual influence that have become pillars of African Women's theological scholarship spanning four decades.[8] Oredein shows the strength of Oduyoye's methods of theological reflection that are never conducted in isolation but, rather, in communities of practice for the wellbeing of African peoples and the church. Oduyoye's life and her scholarship demonstrate how African women's lived experiences and wisdom—grounded in shared challenges such as racism, sexism, violence, or marginalization—are at the heart of God's concern for the world. Oredein's work demonstrates Oduyoye's resilience and creativity, validating the collective wisdom of African woman's theologies to forge paths towards liberation and inclusion.

Fourth, Oredein amplifies the way's Oduyoye's body of work impresses self-examination upon her readers, compelling consideration of one's context and formation. This includes drawing attention to social and cultural location and proximity to marginalized voices, such as those of African women. Oredein's writing style draws the reader in to ever expanding questions about the development of a valid and necessary theological expression that allows for the world to be seen through the lens of neglected voices. This significant aspect establishes Oduyoye's work as a valuable resource for the African continent in a world still haunted by colonial and patriarchal legacies.

Finally, by framing God within the everyday context of African women's lives, this book calls for embodied scholarship and practice in theological and ecclesial spaces that includes women's voices and reflections on their experiences.[9] Oredein's careful description of Oduyoye's reconstruction of key Christian principles may well be a decolonial roadmap to navigate the deeply entrenched legacies of Western hegemony and patriarchy tethered to the missionary expansion of Christianity in Africa. Oredein shows how Oduyoye subverts dominant narratives that serve to keep African women invisible and subservient in systems that enforce oppression, sexism, and the devaluing of insightful contributions made by African women in church and society.

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8 Selena D. Headley, "Black Theology in Theological Education: Expanding the Boundaries through African Women's Theologies," *The Ecumenical Review* 74, no. 4 (2022): 636. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12728.

9 Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 107.

Oredein's systematically illustrates the foundation and substance of the key doctrinal positions that Oduyoye formed over the course of her life in collaboration with a growing group of African women scholars. Oredein's approach creates a razor-sharp critique of the detrimental imprints of a Western colonial mission enterprise that degraded the worth of African culture and cosmology. Simultaneously, Oredein explains Oduyoye's history and frameworks that gives shape and form to liberating foundations upon which to build a decolonial ecumenical theology for African culture and the church at large. Oredein comprehensively covers the life's work of a woman who is a forerunner of a branch of theology that not only serves African woman but is a gift to the church and religious scholarship around the world. This book provides enduring value to the academy and the church and is highly recommended as a prized reference for theological educators, religious scholars, and students who want to incorporate a fuller understanding of theology in a post-colonial world.

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