



Defending Innovative Theologies

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Abstract

Colonialism never was intended to be a short-term project, and it laid a foundation that projected itself 200 years into the future – stifling the voices, ideas, dreams and ambitions of all it touched. The church, particularly in ‘post colonies’ in the Global South, wrestles with coloniality, where such impositions influence racial, gender and class divisions, where female church groups, lay and clergy women, still struggle in reclaiming their identity, and issues of patriarchy and endemic poverty. This struggle for transformation is unfortunately waged in silence, with ways to “break down walls that divide us”. It is in this context of struggle that innovative Christian theologies can be elevated by women with the intention of transforming all of society.

In order to develop a suitable theological interpretation of innovative theologies, that is capable of neutralising the insidious impacts of coloniality and its historical embedded impediments, requires that our journey of re-discovery explore very intensely our African indigenous heritage in order to find answers that free the soul from systemic oppression. New methods of using unexplored epistemologies should be investigated for their contributory value. Creating an ontology, new innovative theologies that can transform existing beliefs in order to advance, transform and contribute in a manner in which readers and hearers interpret the Bible, enhancing the embracement of their African identity requires a collective input.

Keywords: Anglican Church of Southern Africa, epistemologies, indigenous knowledge, motherhood, patriarchal,

Introduction

The focus of this study is to substantiate whether there exists a practise of indigenous theologies within the guild of the Mothers’ Union in the Anglican Diocese of Johannesburg. If there is a practice of indigenous theology that does exist in the Mothers’ Union, the question needs to be asked then, if this theology is presumed to be restorative amongst its members? The more probative question is, can the Mothers’ Union provide the necessary proficiencies within this enduring praxis to traverse means and the manner of using these ‘interesting’ or subsisting ‘innovative theologies’ in order to scale-up epistemologies to ensure that they can no longer be intentionally deprecated within the current neo-colonial realm? The purpose is to interrogate how the practice of these theologies can shape and be shaped by its members. Olojede (2014:3) follows the argument of Dei *et al* (2000:7) who argues that:

Deeply embedded in all writing about indigenous knowledge are implied lessons for teaching and learning. Indigenous knowledge systems are largely oral, passed on through the generations by women and men who have the trust of the elders of the community.

As the Mothers’ Union (MU) stands at the crossroads of social challenges, such as gender based violence and femicide cannot be addressed in isolation of addressing patriarchy, gender and racial contradictions, as well as the current economic inequalities/imbances so endemic within our society. What this means is that, the struggle for justice as women within the community, is a collective struggle, never easy, but always offering hope. Thus, according to Olojede, “One could

safely assume that indigenous knowledge possesses inherent qualities not only for they could be probed for their ethical significance” (Olojede, 2014:3).

It has, become fundamental to adduce whether there is such an emerging epistemology within the Mothers’ Union and whether their song, dance, stories, myths and legends can properly define the Christian position of African women within the Anglican Church in Southern Africa.

The Ontology

Currently, there is a distinct need to further research how or whether these living theologies of women, inform an emerging epistemology, gain acceptance, and get embraced by the church, and whether preaching, dancing, singing and worshipping will influence or enhance the spiritual needs of African women? In order to aptly define and articulate the Christian position of women within the Anglican Church of Southern Africa requires capturing, cataloging and documenting their ‘innovative theologies’ as they manifest in the form of stories, myths or legends, mode of dress and forms of worship. This constitutes a mammoth undertaking, and a part of the research was to delve into how the epistemology, the theoretical framework and knowledge inherent within the Mothers’ Union, sustains, justifies and keeps alive the beliefs embedded within their “religious and cultural inheritance”, and how all of this encapsulates and finds form as an ‘indigenous knowledge system’.

Moreover, the manner in which this ‘emergent epistemology’ can transform staid biblical narratives thus bringing them to life, further validating African Indigenous belief and spirituality, such that the whole Anglican Communion can benefit as an instrumental entity, driving the decolonisation discourse.

The integration of these women’s unique stories, myths and legends into this hermeneutic is the objective of the decolonisation/indigenisation discourse, in particular, the unlearning of internalised oppressive theologies which perpetuate racial self-hate, misogyny and other negative traits in order to relearn the embracing of values, practices and belief systems that dignify and celebrate culture, language and ethos. The paucity of meaningful research on the subject of self-actualisation does present a challenge in building a robust conceptual framework wherein one can argue that African women, in particular those who are an integral part of the ‘mainstream churches’, are capable of and in all probability have already built a ‘theology of worship’ and support that contributes meaningfully towards the indigenisation of a decolonised church. Researching and recording this unique aspect of African women and African mothers’ lives, will in all probability address and provide solutions to the post-coloniality.

Indigenisation and Decolonisation

The terminology ‘indigenisation’ and ‘decolonisation’ need to be thoroughly framed and articulated in order to unravel the modern colonial world. From an African womanhood and an African motherhood perspective the two concepts of ‘indigenisation’ and ‘decolonisation’, is a necessary and entwined ideas. In interrogating whether ‘decolonisation’ is enough to bring about an altered state, we cannot merely extemporise on our current diction, but must spell out in a way that is patently evident, certain and unquestionably, what we mean when we speak or write about the ‘decolonising of the mind’ or the ‘re-indigenisation of the soul’. One must certainly take a leaf out of the writings of Fanon (2008 [1952]), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986), Biko (2004 [1972]), and Grosfoguel (2011:12), who all argue that:

European Judeo-Christian patriarchy and European notions of sexuality, epistemology and spirituality were globalised and exported to the rest of the world through the colonial expansion as the hegemonic criteria to racialise, classify and pathologise the rest of the world’s population in a hierarchy of superior and inferior races.

While the common definition of the word indigenise, is to ‘alter (something) so as to make it fit in with the local culture’, this terminology however has been used by theologians since the 1950s and has been developed since then. Bouhairie (2014:2) makes the point that “...the indigenisation of Christian theology is the attempt to interpret the Christian faith through contextual religio-cultural and socio-political realities in order to increase local participation in Christianity amongst those who

suffer most from oppression of any kind”, while Olojede (2014:2) quotes Osei-Hwedie who defines indigenous knowledge as “...knowledge that is unique to a given culture and society and which is based on their common stock experience”.

Olojede (2014:2) puts forward the view that “indigenous knowledge systems could serve as bridges between academia and the wider community, between the old and new ways of doing things.” By its interpolation into the formal structures of the church, familiar indigenous spiritual practices that do exist through music, dance, and language of the Mothers’ Union, enable a more inclusive and relevant decolonised theology to emerge, which can be developed for the Anglican Communion as it looks to the future.

The Post-Coloniality Dilemma

To move beyond the ‘colonial power matrix’ of world systems, one of Grosfoguel (2011:13) arguments are that “anti-systemic decolonisation and liberation cannot be reduced to a single dimension of social life such as the economic system (capitalism)”. Grosfoguel says that,

a broader transformation of the sexual, gender, spiritual, epistemic, economic, political, linguistic, aesthetic, pedagogical and racial hierarchies of the modern/colonial western-centric Christian-centric capitalist patriarchal world systems.(Grosfoguel, 2011:3)

This argument is further advanced by Madise and Lebeloane (2008:9) who posit that being Christian came at a price for many indigenous people associated with being a convert and initiating new ways of being religious in the Christian environment. This was apparent in the ways they were expected to change and behave, and their initiatives were either questioned or rejected. Holness (1997:23) writes that failure of many missionaries to understand the cultural and emotional needs of African converts resulted in rural meetings held by Manyano to address these failures. Madise and Lebeloane (2008) write that many of the movements (indigenous) had to seek approval for the exercise of their religious commitments as “...they had to report on their actions and justify them to the church authorities”. These church movements “all met with resistance that in essence resulted from fear of the unknown and had to deal with the fact that they were under constant scrutiny in case something unexpected should emerge” (Madise & Lebeloane, 2008:9). Grosfoguel (2011:13) writes that “the ‘coloniality of power’ perspectives challenge us to think about social change and social transformation in a non-reductionist way”. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:17) thinks and writes “that epistemic justice is about liberation of reason itself from coloniality”. He says that epistemic freedom speaks to cognitive justice and is essentially about the right to think, theorise, and interpret the world, developing own methodologies, from where one is located. He further argues that:

Africa is one of those epistemic sites that experienced not only colonial genocides but also “theft of history’...epistemic ideas (killing of indigenous people’s knowledge’s) and linguicides (killing of indigenous people’s languages). Therefore, African people’s epistemic struggles are both old and new....old in the sense they emerged at the very time of colonial encounter. New in the sense that they are re-emerging within a context of deep present global systemic and epistemic crises. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:17)

The continued femasculation (Tucker, 2018) of women within the church and society at large, debilitates and inhibits intent on the part of women to properly address and resolve this post-coloniality dilemma that binds heavily in belief and practice. Tucker (2018:88) infers the probability that (“...the uniqueness of African women’s lives should of necessity be placed front and centre in order for them to make sense of where they are and where they intend going”.

Living Theology - Uniformity and Piety

Tucker (2018:97) writes that “The Mothers’ Union within the Anglican Church is a highly visible group, particularly when its members wear the common uniform to meetings and to church services. Collectively, they appear to present a formidable front in dress, thinking and behaviour”. The question needs to be asked if this concordance and solidarity around common issues, e.g. gender violence, social justice, economic parity, etc. truly translate to ‘technologies of power’, for the MU, or is it all for the most part a conditioning towards ‘collective passivity’? Having had the opportunity to engage with the MU to determine whether their uniformity speaks to the genuine emergence of an ontology that proves to be a potential exemplar that others could emulate is a difficult call to make at this juncture. Suffice it to say that the decolonising/indigenisation discourse and programme requires that they as an entity/organisation amplify their voice and involvement in order to partner with and/or give direction to academia or become the mere object of study.

While much has been written about the uniform and the apparent homogeneity of the Mothers’ Union, by academics such as Gaitskell (2002), Haddad (2016) and Tucker (2018), amongst others, the unique dress of the Mothers’ Union cannot be blithely referenced without having some discussion in this regard. No matter how much disagreement there is amongst Mothers’ Union members, about whether they should wear the black and white uniform, or when and where to wear it, the very uniformity is as much part of their identity and theology of being. Tucker (2018:97) cites Ngewu (2004:241) whose view was “that women have been conditioned into wearing uniforms at school, work, and elsewhere and may find it strange that there should be uniforms worn in church.” Tucker further says that historically, people have been controlled and uniforms defined the institutional framework of such regulatory conduct. “The strangeness lies in the fact that women in the church would want to self-regulate and condition themselves by restricting their behaviour and movement.” (Tucker, 2018: 97). Tucker (2018:110) writes that,

During the anti-apartheid years, the Mothers’ Union implemented various strategies of power such that its “theology” and practices continued to remain somewhat hidden from public view. In public arenas, like church services, they used singing and prayer as a way to deflect any engagement with difficult theological issues, particularly where they might deviate from the reactionary clerical position of the day. In this way, they carved autonomy for themselves to follow their own hidden agendas while simultaneously obfuscating their theology from the clergy.

One could argue, that in some circumspect manner MU members are in principle ‘barefoot theologians’, a view supported by Ngewu (2004:232) who writes of the theology of the Mothers’ Union:

The members are not theologians in the strict sense of the word. Their Theology finds expression in how they feel, their feelings determine the kind of theology they practice, and this is expressed in the actions. In this way they could be described as ‘living theologians’ whose theology is not always articulated. This theology is not made up of a loose assemblage of articles of faith by well-coordinated actions that required members to be on the move all the time. Their theology is the theology of the laity, the whole people of God.

Where the Bible has been absolutised, instant solutions and responses are sought, bereft of rituals and symbols and nothing but “*sola scriptura*” is deemed final, requires that the MU initiate the development of a biblical hermeneutic that can reasonably assist members of the MU to read and view the Bible as “barefoot” theologians. Mbanjo-Moyo (2009:18) expands on her theology of “barefoot women’s theology” (*Bawotse*) of equality as a celebration of womanhood and its interconnectedness to mother earth with the erotic power of being. In women being affirmed as *imago Dei* “offers a forum for dialogical engagement between women’s experiences grounded in their socio-economic and religio-cultural realities of (dis)empowerment, and the theological sources that influence their daily experiences as Christian women” (Mbanjo-Moyo, 2009:207).

Where the Bible is read literally, Mban-Moyo found that in reading biblical texts like Leviticus 15 the reader's observation of certain menstrual taboos was fortified. Mban-Moyo (2009:210) cites Chingota and says that however, where Felix Chingota (1998: 34-40) uses "the same Bible studied contextually using liberation hermeneutics has transformed these women's lives". Mban-Moyo alludes to the fact that "in the liberation understanding that selected Biblical texts such as Genesis 2:18, 20-25 and Genesis 1:27 emerge as part of the biblical and theological grounding for the envisioned empowering sexual education programme based on principles of mutuality and companionship" (Mban-Moyo 2009:210). It is clear that the view of "barefoot or living theology" of the Mothers' Union can be further developed and can evolve to be accommodated within the canon of Anglican beliefs and practices. Maluleke (1997) is of the opinion that there has been a lack of vigorous debate on biblical hermeneutics, necessitating a need to alert African Christians to be cognisant "to the fact the Bible can and needs to be interpreted." (Maluleke,1997:16). Masenya (1996:216) declares "...give them the appropriate tools for reading it!" If women, mothers, members of the Mothers' Union already use Scripture to make their faith doctrine available to the needs of the marginalised and vulnerable to whom they minister, why should they not take the next logical step and outwardly develop their ontology of *Imvuselelo* (where liturgy and theology meet), into an epistemic branch of their Anglicanism.

In articulating what Anglicans believe, the worldwide Anglican Communion representing 165 countries webpage explains, that its authority, beliefs and practices are derived from what is commonly referred to as a 'three-legged stool', which is an integration of the Bible (Scripture), Reason (intellect) and Spiritual experience. "This 'three-legged stool' as it is commonly referred to, is believed to be, a balance in the approach to the faith, significantly contrasting with the Roman Catholic and Protestant doctrines". One of the instruments used to advance and maintain the colonial, and oppressors' narrative has been the use of Scripture. I am of the opinion that this was used in order to construct a particular one-dimensional historical memory intent on eradicating and/or diminishing the 'virtues' and 'values' of their colonised subjects, a deliberately calculated stratagem for exploitative objectives.

The Mothers' Union has in a sense been 'holding the fort against the invading marauders' of our minds, by retaining in character their Africaness, through the retention of the imagery and ideals of motherhood and womanhood 'differently'. LenkaBula (2007) writes on one of the central hermeneutical methods used by the Circle, which they refer to as "doing theology". This method was developed and derived from the view that culture must not be romanticised. LenkaBula cites Kanyoro (2002) who avers that "In identifying in culture those things that were beautiful and wholesome and life affirming, one must also denounce those things which deny life and wholeness" (LenkaBula, 2007:7). One must of necessity explain how the theologies of Mariology and motherhood can be used to validate the majority of women in the church. Punt (2003:77), in evaluating Dube's decolonising feminist approach, describes how post-colonial biblical criticism rediscovered the neglected voices or elements within the biblical text. Punt cites Sugirtharajah (1997) who argues that "vernacular interpretations seek to... overcome the remoteness and strangeness of the biblical text by trying to make links across cultural divides by employing the readers' own cultural resources and social experiences to illuminate the biblical narrative", believing that it makes sense of what was imported and foreign. Thinking along these lines becomes hugely assistive in clarifying our understanding of how, African biblical hermeneutics, which is also referred to as cultural hermeneutics, essentially constitutes the very hermeneutics that is both liberatory and transformational. In understanding the colonial past, we are thus able to grapple with the diverse theologies that can be embraced as we seek to understand our collective spiritual needs. This can be in, and of itself, liberating. Adamo's (2015:33) study shows that biblical interpretation using African biblical hermeneutics makes "African social-cultural context a subject of interpretation, it is the rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Africentric perspective – analysis of biblical text is done from the perspective of African world-view and culture."

Adamo (2015:34) further argues that African hermeneutics has been colonised in various ways and that to "break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that European biblical scholars have long enjoyed". Cultural hermeneutics understands the Bible according to scripture and African culture and African tradition attempting to 'blacken' the Bible. Adamo (2015:47) is of

the opinion that African biblical hermeneutics is not in isolation but “the task and the distinctiveness attempt to decolonise the interpretation of the Bible in the light of African culture and tradition.” African biblical hermeneutics also “reappraises the ancient biblical tradition and African world-view, culture and life experience with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected to the business of biblical interpretation” (Adamo, 2015:35). The amplification of this line of argument, by Alcoff (2011:4) where she states that “the very project of “shifting the geography of reason” requires such reconstructive work, for it requires us to uncover and reassess disavowed knowledge to clarify the grounds of our own claims of adequacy or epistemic progress. African women’s cultural traditions are multi-layered, and their cultural hermeneutics has to be multidimensional as well. Pui-lan in Siwila and Kobo (2021:12) writes that “cultural hermeneutics is an important tool that African women theologians have developed to analyse their culture, religion and Christian heritage”. Pui-lan explores Kanyoro’s (2010) argument that,

points out that cultural hermeneutics in the African context involves the critique of colonial and white myths about African women; an analysis of the rituals and ceremonies that define women’s life journeys and the social institutions that support those rituals; the examination of the cultural ideologies regarding gender roles and power in society; and the recovery of sources and data that provide information about women’s diverse experiences and the gender struggles as defined by history, culture, race, and class structures. (Pui-lan in Siwila & Kobo, 2021:12)

Pui-lan comments, that one of the important aspects of Oduyoye’s argument, is the hermeneutics of liberation. Important in its criterion is that it promotes full humanity and participation in society allowing women in identifying and promoting life affirming aspects of their culture. In line with Oduyoye, African women need to engage in the hermeneutics of suspicion that challenges inhuman and domesticating customs and traditions while recovering our historical memory. As African women, we must take up the responsibility to change and transform those oppressive customs in order to bring about the fullness of life, a hermeneutics of suspicion must go hand in hand with a hermeneutics of commitment. Pui-lan in Siwila and Kobo (2021:14) reiterates Oduyoye’s opinion that “folk-talk which included myths, folk tales and proverbs shared among people is an integral part of the ‘religio-cultural corpus’ of Africa because it is dynamic and malleable, and interplays with the changing conditions of life to direct individual self-perception and to shape the entire community” (Oduyoye, 1995:20). Kanyoro’s (2001) example of a reading of the story of Ruth which western feminists focus on the friendship or the courage of Naomi and Ruth who make decisions on how to survive, Kanyoro focuses instead on Orpah on how we can support women who do not follow cultural expectations. “Reading the text through both a cultural lens and a gendered lens may enable us to see the multiple layers of the text” (Pui-lan in Siwila & Kobo, 2021:17).

In furtherance of this line of reasoning, Pui-lan in Siwila & Kobo (2021:17) asserts that cultural hermeneutics encourages African women to pay attention to the use of African cultural resources as critical tools for interpreting the Bible.

Given that African women themselves are reading the Bible, which has been translated into their vernacular languages, some researchers have documented and exposed colonial and patriarchal translations to develop a gender-neutral and decolonizing reading. One of the methods of storytelling, and story tellers have told and retold Bible stories to address the needs of community, adding new characters or including the responses of the listeners or comparing the bible stories with African stories” (Pui-lan in Siwila & Kobo 2021:17).

She further discusses how Musa Dube’s outlines different approaches that African women theologians are pursuing, where Dube (2001) looks at divination, a practice in which the biblical text is used as a tool, whereby people ask diviner healers to interpret certain biblical passages in order to diagnose troubled relationships and offer solutions for healing, Pui-lan (2021:18) is of the opinion that women theologians have to read the Bible “with ordinary readers, non-academic

women interpreters, and document their feminist methods of resistance” in understanding how African women use the Bible.

In support of West’s hermeneutic of re-indigenisation Brown (2004:9) puts forward the view that “...re-indigenisation is rooted in the dialogic relationship that occurs when scholars and ordinary people read together, one allows each party to be influenced and partially constituted by the other”. While there have been valiant efforts on the part of feminists to challenge this locus of enunciation, the emphasis has been more on decoloniality and not enough on re-indigenisation. Essentially, the idea that needs to take root within the Mothers’ Union is that ‘decolonisation’ and ‘indigenisation’ must of necessity be part and parcel of the African mindset. This view is supported by Grosfoguel (2011) Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2017) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 2018) who all aver that decoloniality and decolonisation failed in removing coloniality. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:11) warns “...that Africans must be vigilant against the trap of ending up normalising and universalising coloniality as a natural state of the world”. Seroto (2018:11) is of the opinion that “scholars of anti-colonialism and decolonisation are not only faced with confronting racialism, sexism and related hierarchies, but are also faced with the challenge of confronting coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being”. Coloniality “must be unmasked, resisted and destroyed because it produces a world order that can only be sustained by a combination of violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:12).

In 1961 South Africa exited the Commonwealth becoming an independent Republic. Despite the independence from the Commonwealth, the change from the National Party’s control and its apartheid policy to an ANC led government with their so-called “Convention for a Democratic South Africa” in 1994, violence, exploitation and violation of human rights are still prevalent, especially black women and children being the dominant group, representing the most exploited. Grosfoguel (2011:15) says that “Coloniality allows for the understanding of the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/ colonial capitalist world systems”. In a manner or to a degree that could not be doubted, the Mothers’ Union has not sorted or aspired to “something different” other than wanting to be dignified as African women and as African mothers, as they practiced their spirituality. Shattering the mantle of so-called “missionary zeal” as enforced by Sumner House has incipiently evolved into an unconscious endeavour, an endeavour which should not be derogated in the absence of a robust or expedient plan of their epistemology.

Epistemological Paradigms in Knowledge Systems

The arrogant supremacy of coloniality of knowledge has deliberately consigned the knowledge systems that do not promote Western or Eurocentric knowledge to the extraneous edges of society. Seroto (2018:4) cites Mbembe who cautions institutions on the continued use of only ‘Westernised’ knowledge. Grosfoguel (2013) writes that “coloniality of knowledge compels colonial scholars to understand how and why other knowledge systems, such as indigenous knowledge, have been pushed to the territorial side of society”. Seroto (2018:4) thinks that “the coloniality of knowledge has something to do with the impact of colonisation on the different areas of knowledge production”. He further says that “the purpose of promoting Western and Eurocentric thought, imagination and ‘knowledge’ in Africa was to erase the colonised from mainstream existence and place them as “things” in the realm of otherness” (Seroto, 2018:4).

Pato (1998:57) argues “...that feminists, womanists and liberation theologians have exposed the restrictions of working within the confines of a fixed canon that fails to include their struggles and pain.” Pato’s reasoning is that African Christians should “rediscover the integral connections which can marry African and European traditions together with the Christian faith. Rather than dismissing African folktales and myths as pagan and evil, African Christians must use them alongside biblical stories”. Pato’s is of the opinion that to ground African theology in an African experience, the use of one’s own experiences will complement biblical narratives, indicating, pride and respect as African Christians place alongside African stories, myths and legends, thereby enabling the biblical narratives to come to life. Maluleke (1997:8) argues that even after the terminology of “‘African theology’ and ‘African Christianity’ has found acceptance the debate on the sources and criteria

for truly African and truly Cristian theology has continued.” Maluleke cites Henry Okullu who clarifies Africa theology as,

When we are looking for African theology we should go first to the fields, to the village church, to Christian’s homes to listen to those spontaneously uttered prayers before going to bed. We should go to the schools, to the frontiers where traditional religions meet with Christianity. We must listen to the throbbing drumbeats and the clapping of hands accompanying the impromptu singing in the independent churches... Everywhere in Africa things are happening. Christians are talking, singing, preaching, writing, gauging, praying, discussing. Can it be that all this is an empty show? This then is African theology (1997: 9.)

The essence of the supposition regarding the evolving ontology of the Mothers Union, emphasises the need for academia to engage meaningfully with such epistemologies. Maluleke (1997:7) writes of John Mbiti’s concern that “African theology” is a banner where “all sorts of articles and references... the substance of which often turns out to be advice on how African theology should be done...” Mbiti declares that “I will use the term ‘African theology’...without apology or embarrassment to mean theological reflection and expression by African Christians.” The MU as part of a world-wide organisation and very much part of the indigenous Manyano type movements, has been able to navigate between the two, the traditional Anglican and the traditional indigenous spirituality, thus can help the church find its prophetic voice.

Haddad says that the members of the Mothers’ Union are very much part of the indigenous Christian women’s movement in South Africa (Haddad, 2016:171). She deems that it provides “a sacred, sequestered, safe site which has been forged by African women themselves”. Haddad further says that “the elements of extempore prayer, preaching, fundraising, and the wearing of the church uniform (albeit with some ambiguity) and enable women to continue to express their spirituality in ways that are authentically African and Anglican” (Haddad, 2016:171). The research indicates how this ‘living theology’ of MU women, could imbue such emergent epistemologies, in order to gain acknowledgement and acceptance within the Church. There exists the real likelihood that such preaching, dancing, and singing influences and enhances the spiritual needs of African women who are as Anglican as one could be. It is more important than ever for the Church to develop and embrace what the indigenous members of its congregation can contribute to the broader development of Anglicanism.

Maluleke (1997:8) writes “that African Christian theology ought to be at the service of the church in Africa is seldom in doubt”. He further cites Johnson who says that the church’s “chief task is that of enabling the church to develop her own theologies so that it may cease depending on pre-fabricated theology, liturgies and traditions, not an exotic but a plant become indigenous to the soil”. Maluleke (1997: 8) states that there are voices that “have called for theologies that are more critical of both received traditions within the church and of the church itself, enabling the church to be both prophetic and self-critical”. It is the very skills and resources embedded within the Mothers Union, and not just the social-cultural context in which they dwell that will determine the epistemological ideals and the knowledge systems that will allow them to emerge from their chrysalis. Such a formulation can remedy the imbalances inherent in the dominant Eurocentric frameworks which pervade our current body of knowledge.

Defining Self – An African Perspective

To unmask coloniality which has sustained the imbalances in society and subjected South Africa women to a history of poverty, violence and victims of patriarchy, women need to redefine and challenge that which dis-empowers them. The term “bosadi” used by Masenya (1996; 1997; 2004) meaning (the spirit of womanhood) is used to “...redefine and challenge dis-empowering notions of womanhood that are embedded within the current African cultures. Womanhood in Africa should not necessarily be linked to motherhood or limited to wife-hood” (Masenya, 2004:221). Her definition of women as “bosadi” is:

A mosadi (‘woman’) is a female African-South African women who though, conscious of the corporeal mentality of Africans and also respecting it, can stand on her own, to affirming her full humanity as a

being created in God's image. As an independent person, she may choose to be involved with a male partner in a marriage relationship though that does not entail that she loses her humanness and independence to her male partner. If she does not choose to be in a marriage relationship, she must be at liberty to remain single. (Masenya 1997:442)

Masenya (2007:10) argues that "...the bosadi (womanhood) approach to problematic culture and sacred text can be helpful to African women in their struggle to regain their dignity and sense of worth." In using this approach, Masenya (2007:10) says it can help "to counter stereotypes and beliefs found there that a woman is less human than a man, that her inferiority is divinely ordained, and that she cannot be a leader..." Masenya (1997; 2004; 2005) writes that bosadi "Elevates the positive elements of African cultures for both women and men, including the institution of the family and its significance in and for Africa, the spirit of *botho* (*ubuntu*) commitment to hard work and a healthy code of sexual morality" (Masenya, 2007:10).

To enhance a theology of de-colonised and re-indigenised notions of motherhood, the beliefs and practices of women in the Mothers' Union should be thoroughly researched and documented. In order for scriptures to become a 'theology of liberation', we must expunge the colonial scriptural narrative that was and possibly in some instances still is a cudgel used to assuage entire native populations on the need to bow down to "white superiority", that essential foundation for amoral exploitation and expropriation of souls, land, resources and dignity.

The integration of this hermeneutic is the subject of re-indigenisation, especially where the particularity of unlearning the internalised oppressive theologies which perpetuate racial self-hate, misogyny and other negative traits and relearn the embracing of values, practices and belief systems that dignify and celebrate culture, language, and ethos. Kgatla (2018:161) writes that the colonisation and decolonisation discourse is important. "The former colonisers usually defend themselves using the self-fulfilling prophesy discourse of blaming the victims for what they are. Moreover, the victims may suffer from incurable paralysis that leads to self-hate and toxic anger and often time's victims may turn on themselves becoming embroiled in the crab-mentality syndrome believes that the mission of the church means moving from the periphery of self-destruction to self-development" (Kgatla, 2018:161). Here Kgatla cites Bosch (1991:9) who asserts that the decolonisation of the black mind is a process that needs to be embraced unequivocally by the black church and be taken to its logical consequences of the mission of that church. At the centre of the African search for self-knowing six core concerns and demands are articulated by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:26), which are, "...complete African self-rule, self-regeneration, self-understanding, self-definition, self-knowing and self-articulation after centuries of domination and silencing".

Masenya (2007:2) asks the question as to how "many women negate progressive liberationist theologies, theologies geared to enabling them to affirm their full humanity as equal human beings". The scantiness of meaningful research on the subject of re-indigenisation in conjunction with decoloniality does present a challenge in building a robust conceptual framework wherein one can argue that African women, in particular those who are an integral part of the 'Mainstream Church', are capable of and in all probability have built a theology of worship and support that contributes in purposeful ways towards the re-indigenisation of a decolonised Church.

Paul's address to the Athenians in Acts 17:24-28 (NIV) captures, what it means to celebrate our connectedness to creation, with our whole bodies, mind and soul, "God did this so that men would seek for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us, For in Him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17:27-28 - NIV). To the Tswana, the sacredness of singing was nothing new. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:241) write that to sing and dance is "go-bina" in Setswana which means to "venerate". However, to the evangelists, this performance was described as "monotonous thumping to barbarous airs". They say further that:

the choreography of rustic Christian life in Africa would set a different tune, the very sound of which it hoped would signify conformity with church orthodoxy. Mission music was widely domesticated in Southern

Africa..., its cadences would be made to take on the pulse of indigenous self-assertion to harmonise the aspirations of an independent, black salvation (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991:241).

Ngewu (2004:240) further says that it is in singing that women can and do, make their ascent to God known. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991:113) in their research of the colonial evangelism, to the Tswana people, about different Southern Tswana culture, writes that the act of worship was 'moving':

The human frame became this sonorous instrument of the divine, whether in forceful preaching and responsive listening when making a 'joyful noise'. The production of rhythm and harmony compelled a body of people who 'in time' and it epitomised the pragmatic power of rites to affect a coherence of action, a communion, that instantiated transcendence as it drew down the spirit.

Vellem (2016:3) uses Kalilombe's definition of describing spirituality as 'those attitudes and beliefs and practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out toward super-sensible realities'. Vellem says (2016:3):

Animate has deeper connotation of enlivening to make alive. The ideas of making alive and inspiration in relation to attitudes, beliefs and practices are meant to facilitate reaching out to the super-sensible realms of life or to connect with the super-sensible, constitute the subliminal theme that guides our attempts to conceptualise spirituality and its pertinence for publicity.

Biko (2004:31-32 [1972]), agrees with the sentiments of Sekou Toure quote, who said that "To take part in the African revolution, it is not enough to write a revolutionary song, you must fashion the revolution with people, and if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves". In stark contrast with Eurocentric perceptions (it being demonic) in regard to African rhythmic song and dance, the African epistemic appears rather different when one takes into account that the process of indigenisation or rebirth of African spirituality is not inspired or driven by the 'identity politics' as practiced in the West.

Spiritual Awakening

One way that women can claim back their lost identity is in memory, is through the indigenisation of a spirituality that is in the very DNA of their bodies. It is in the memory of songs familiar, dances passed on from time immemorial, it is in sharing of their stories and lamenting their everyday pains. In living out their theology, there is an awakening and an activism in addressing their oppression, it is in reclaiming their voices. Vellem (2016:6) aptly puts it that:

Imvuselelo is rebellion in worship. It is resurrection in the context of death in the coloniality of the oppressed and rejected. Imvuselelo is a rich, dangerous memory of restlessness and insanity in the midst of oppression. Imvuselelo is a rich, impatient, militant, insurgent and dangerous memory of the spirit that refuses to be relegated to the grave and the hillside. Imvuselelo is the revival of home for the indwelling of the spirit of liberation.

During the research, the women who were interviewed were asked if there is a particular term or word or practice that describes a return or a revival of their indigenous spirituality. The word '*Imvuselelo*' was used time and time again. In many African languages, the term is used as a revival, an awakening, a growth. In Zulu, isiXhosa, Tswana and even as far afield as Zimbabwe – the use of the word '*Imvuselelo*' is used for that form of worship when guilds, communities or groups gather to praise, worship and lament. When asking Mothers' Union members what it meant for them, the explanations given were a revival, awakening, and rebirth. Vellem (2016:2) cites Frans Fanon who says that:

Another way in which the native copes with the oppression of colonialism is in dance that, in its intensity, resembles possession by otherworldly spirits. Any anthropological study of a native population held in the grip

of colonialism should pay careful attention to these dances, Fanon says, because they are an indicator, a thermometer, that measures the level of frustration and how close to the boiling point it has reached (2008:20).

Imvuselelo is a place where the Mothers' Union members' living theology can be seen in action, where liturgy and theology meet. One of the participants in the research, very poignantly spoke into the essence of *Imvuselelo*:

"In the community, not only Anglican women. They used to invite women, then they got something like 'Imvuselelo'. So on Sundays, they would know that they not leaving church, or the place where they worshipped, until five, six or seven-o'clock. We stay in the church inviting women again that on a certain Sunday we be at church for the day, we'll be praising, we will be worshipping, we'll be praying, we'll be doing everything, we will be talking, everything, giving women chances to voice and break what's in here (pointing to her heart) but with us here".

It is in such robust and ecstatic expression and the spending of an entire day or night in *Imvuselelo* worship that speaks to the mechanism nurtured to cope with oppression. Vellem (2016) believes that *Imvuselelo* is a liturgical "thermometer to measure the sanity of an oppressed people". He says that "*Imvuselelo* is indeed a liturgical thermometer to measure the intensity of the clash of two worlds resulting in the dispossession of our land as blacks and our cultural oppression – cultural oppression, which a *la* Gutierrez, is worse than death itself"(Vellem 2016:2).

The women of the Mothers' Union are passionate about the times that they come together when they are free to use these forms of expression as an enunciation of their spiritual doctrine. While these forms of worship are considered unorthodox in the eyes of the mainstream or Europeanised churches, it is filled with song, using drums and other musical instruments, many of them home-made, as a means to amplify and acoustically enhance their dancing and preaching. Vellem (2016:2) explains how "*Imvuselelo* is a form of liturgy that is distinct from traditional, conventional one. Although a minister, may open the *Imvuselelo* service this, form of liturgy distinguishes itself in many ways as ordinary members take part in preaching and share equally in the proceedings of the service". It is a dialogical celebration of worship". Members of the Mothers' Union are sources/channels of rebirth, a revival, a renewal of indigenous spirituality, in their small groups and Bible studies. This makes eminent sense, as members of the Mothers Union stories unfold, and as they spoke to their understanding of how they made sense of the Bible.

Conclusion

Kaunda et al (2019:18) write that the "Colonial missionaries introduced a 'hierarchy of marginalization,' which remains a framework for interpreting human socio-relational reality." The fading British Empire already had firmly in place the Church of England (C of E), a significant influencer in the life of its former colonies, shaping and steering its social, economic political and racial character. The Anglican Church still has a journey to travel as it wrestles with coloniality. The burgeoning religiosity of the African masses over the course of several centuries was in truth fertile grounds for the missionary workers of the Church of England in South Africa as an intentional instrument, partnered with Mother England in the continuity of their imperialist endeavors and enterprises across Africa. The Mothers' Union perhaps has a head-start on the ecclesiastic leadership of the church, who have not been entirely enthusiastic about the open promoting of indigenous theologies or practices. Indigenisation and decolonisation are necessary to overcome the historical divide of race, class and gender within the church and secular society and the MU's social activism is an integral part of that social milieu.

Women in the church should begin to develop these requisite instruments and methodologies, and such new theologies need to be crystallised into new epistemologies. This in all probability, will encourage and create an open-minded discourse intent on flattening the existing hierarchies within the church. These innovative theologies must empower their respective communities and society at large, and influence a cathartic healing long overdue, which so desperately are needed to infuse the culture and ethos of our African heritage into this modern yet 'regressive' world of today. This particular arena of discourse, that is, "the dynamics of epistemological decolonisation and re-



indigenisation of women in the church”, has only touched the tip of a very large ‘iceberg’ and in all honesty is a study that requires many minds and souls to become instrumental in elucidating a history and a culture that was deliberately broken in the name of ‘empire and profit’.

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