

Church in the Forefront:
Addressing Violence Against Women in the Anglican Diocese of Bondo, Kenya.

By

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Introduction.

Violence against women is a common problem in Kenya as it affects women irrespective of background, tribe, ethnicity, and age. Since time immemorial, women have suffered violence in a greater magnitude. This means that gender-based violence can be treated as a national disaster. The cultural context of Bondo embraces a patriarchal system that enhances the perpetuation of gender-based violence. The patriarchal system necessitates continued vulnerability of women who in effect contend with the situation. The traditional system and cultural context of the community upholds the position of men as head of families. In this case, ordinary men who are domineering abuse their women in the process of undertaking the responsibility of leadership. In this scenario, women find themselves to be on the receiving end.

Gender-based violence is recognized as a pressing social issue because of its psychological and physical consequences to the victimized.¹ This study will elaborate on how the presence of gender-based violence causes a ripple effect in the lives of the victimized, and also the dependents of these victimized women. Women who are susceptible to violence undertake the significant role of caring for the whole family which is a basic unit of the community. There should be cohesion within the social fabric of the community on issues of addressing violence against women. There should be systemic changes in unjust social structures in the community that perpetuates gender-based violence. The norms, ethics, the values, the morals and the culture of the society are constructed in such a way that they enhance exploitation of women which practically are the basis upon which societal practices are derived. The social institutions have been structured in such a way that they subordinate women. For instance, according to cultural practice, women's roles are enshrined within the sphere of domestic chores.

¹Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, Katie B. Edwards, *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 18.

They are rarely involved in economic activities that can empower them to meet their basic needs. This makes their situation susceptible to gender-based violence. Likewise, women's capacity becomes limited in their endeavor to implement their own fundamental rights. This results in women's minimal ability to participate in institutional and public leadership.

These social and economic inequalities propagate violence against women as well. Social institutions such as the family, religious groups, the political and legal sectors, economic and learning institutions, are designed in such a way that does not promote effective involvement and participation of women. The institution of social practices and enactment of laws tend to be biased against women. For instance, both by custom and by law, women are not allowed to acquire ancestral property such as land. This practice goes against basic human rights, and subjects women to injustices by placing them in a subservient economic class.

These patriarchal norms, cultural attitudes and gender stereotypes prevent women from making decisions about their sexuality and their reproductive rights. This makes them vulnerable to rape and the contraction of sexually-transmitted diseases such as AIDS that often results from forced sex. The cultural norm signifies the status of women based in childbearing, in which case, a barren woman is degraded in the community and encounters shame, humiliation and rejection.

The colonization mentality that gave rise to male dominance and supremacy creates a power imbalance whereby men perceive that they must be in control of women at all costs even to the extent of committing gender-based violence. The colonization mentality has enhanced a precedence that continues to perpetuate the act of violence against women since they are submissive to their husbands even in abusive relationships. The social construction of family

relations encourages lifelong unions irrespective of the challenges that are encountered in married life.

The state of violence against women in Kenya shows that it is a serious issue that needs to be addressed by the Church. According to Kenyan demographic and health survey 2014, 45% of women age 15-49 have experienced physical violence. The main perpetrators of physical violence against women are husbands; 14% of women report having experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.² I have family who make up part of these statistics. One of my Cousins who separated with her husband in 2019 and later divorced after a frantic effort to reconcile hit a snag because of her husband's unfaithfulness and brutality. The issue of gender-based violence matters to me because I strongly believed in these cultural traditions and embraced the patriarchal system, with a conviction in male supremacy. I remember an incident where I evaded a service for the blessing of a new home in my community simply because the service was conducted by a woman Priest. My mentality was focused on cultural belief in male dominance. But my cultural world view on male dominance changed because of convictions learned through biblical teachings on the theology of human personhood. Now, I know that this magnitude of gender-based violence clearly shows that women are hurting and that we in the church must listen to those victimized by this violence.

Amidst all this pain, the Church that is the beacon of hope has not been effectively responsive to this violence against women. In certain instances, women have been implored to endure in abusive relationship citing the possible shame and humiliation of their husbands. Some cases of violence have been left unattended to because of a systematic culture of male supremacy

²Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, "Kenyan 2014 Demographic and Health Survey Key Findings,"¹⁵, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/sr227/sr227.pdf>

and the compromise of justice issues related to gender-based violence. Rising cases of gender-based violence are a clear indication that the Church, which is a healing community, has to take an active role in addressing the needs of the victims of violence to give them hope and healing.

The structural fabric of our cultures, our politics, economic systems and traditions are key elements that are attributed to systematic violence against women. My primary claim in this thesis includes powerful, missional and holistic approaches based on the biblical theology of the Cross. This theology of the cross propagates the proclamation of the Gospel, and the prophetic and vibrant role which strives to eliminate injustices for women such as this kind of gender-based violence.³ This systemic violence against women calls for a concerted effort towards prayer which enables us to theologically reflect on the link of faith and mission that enhances the work of social justice. The weapon of undertaking change in the spiritual realm is prayer which enables what is impossible with men to be possible with God (Luke 18:27).

I will take into consideration different areas of argument that the church needs to concentrate on in its endeavor in addressing gender-based violence in the community of Bondo. In chapter one, I will discuss the causes of violence against women, In chapter 2, we will consider together theological and biblical perspective on gender-based violence, In chapter 3, we shall discuss principles and praxis for the Kenyan Church in response to gender-based violence, And in Chapter 4, I propose a possible training program for Church leaders on addressing gender-based violence.

³ Elizabeth Gerhard, *The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 25.

Chapter 1

Causes of Violence Against Women: Context and Causes in the Anglican Diocese of Bondo.

In this chapter, I shall present the factors that contribute to gender-based violence. These include economic, social, cultural and political factors. We will examine the experiences of women in Kenya. Finally, we will look at the patriarchal system in the community and the effects of colonialism on attitudes about violence against women. In an attempt to define the term violence against women, various theologians, organizations, activists and individuals have formulated diverse and applicable definitions for this terminology. A model definition has been formulated by the United Nation: “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”⁴

Violence against women is the most common form of violence and results in the oppression and victimization of women. Many women are marginalized because of the cultural context of the Patriarchal system that they find themselves in and therefore, they have to contend with the social norms of their specific context of living. As elucidated by Gakahu Nancy Wanjiru, “The patriarchal mindset states that violence directed towards women in Kenya is so because they are women.”⁵ This Patriarchal system causes women to endure hardship. The result of this violence is that they must grapple with not only the violence but the life challenges that it creates. This concurs with Wanjiru’s argument,

⁴UN WOMEN,” Virtual knowledge Centre to End violence against Women and Girls,” accessed June 18,2020, <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/295-defining-violence-against-women-and-girls.html>

⁵Gakahu Nancy Wanjiru, “Sexual Violence and Gender Inequality,” *African Ecclesial Review*, vol. 52, No. 4, 2010 & vol. 53, No. 1(2011): 220.

It is also heart rendering to realize that women have accepted the act of violence towards them while men have taken advantage of this “acceptance.” This is because as this crime continues to penetrate deeper into our social fabric, women continue to protect their husbands against the law.⁶

In this case, silence of women may not necessarily mean acceptance of the life challenges but it may amount to coping with the situation because of shunning the risk factors that are involved.

The Diocese of Bondo is among the regions that are affected by the issue of violence against women. It is situated within Bondo town in Siaya County of Kenya. Historically, the community of Bondo Town together with the available institutions and organizations makes it the largest populated town in Siaya County. The major economic activity in Bondo town is fishing. This is because Bondo is near Lake Victoria which traditionally is believed to be a freshwater lake that is suitable for fishing. The advantageous position of the town has resulted in its economic prosperity. The vast population in Bondo has led to the growth of various institutions of learning such as Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Kenya Medical Training College, Bondo Teachers Training Collage and Bondo Technical Training Institute. Bondo town developed gradually in the 1920s as a market center. The expansion in growth currently elevates Bondo to a sub- County status in Siaya County. The town is a business hub preferred by traders because of its wide economies of scale. The financial institutions which are available in the town include the Cooperative Bank, Kenya Commercial Bank, Equity Holdings, Kenya Women Finance Trust and Post Banks. Bondo has recreational facilities and the highest number of hotels in the entire County thereby becoming a favorite for

⁶Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 220.

visitors who seek decent and affordable accommodation facilities. Places of worship and entertainment and sports are also available.⁷ Despite this economic prosperity, gender-based violence is still present. There are several factors that contribute to this continuing problem in the Diocese of Bondo, including the fact that the region mostly embraces androcentric cultural aspects of living.

Economic Factors

In relation to the problem of gender-based violence, economic factors refer to those elements that perpetuate the disempowerment of women and impede their self-reliance, meaning they must have financial support. There are factors such as un-employment among women that render them unable to protect their lives through their own work and efforts. Women who are not engaged in economic activities are dependent on their husbands for the provision of basic needs both for personal effects and for use in the house. A report by Federation International De Abogadas (FIDA) Kenya from a baseline survey among women in Nairobi, “women remain in abusive relations because they are economically dependent on their abusive partners. There is fear of losing financial support which makes them susceptible to manipulation. Denying women economic independence is a major cause of violence against them.”⁸ This situation makes such women liable to violence by ordinary men who take advantage of their vulnerable situation, such that women live at their mercy

Illiteracy on the part of a woman is a contributory factor to gender-based violence. A woman who is not academically empowered stands the risk of encountering violence, because of

⁷ Isaiah Gwengi, “Bondo Towers over other Siaya Towns,” STANDARD Digital, August 15, 2015, accessed April 21, 2020, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000172998/bondo-towers-over-other-siaya-towns>.

⁸Federation International De Abogadas (FIDA) Kenya, *Domestic Violence in Kenya-Report of a Baseline Survey among Women in Nairobi*, Nairobi: Apex Communication Ltd., 2002.

her inability to defend herself. An illiterate woman can face the consequences of poverty of the mind and resources and thus become vulnerable to violence. An uneducated woman cannot adjust to the changes that take place in the world because of technological advancement and modernization. Hence, she is unable to cope with the prevailing situation and that leads to fear of the unknown. This further, enhances the misunderstanding among married partners which is another factor that causes gender-violence.

Social Factors

In the context of gender-based violence, social factors refer to elements that jeopardize harmony and relationship amongst people of different genders who co-exist together. Social factors include behaviors and attitudes of ordinary men that results to the subordination of women counterparts. In the traditional culture, ordinary men tend to perceive their status or position to be superior to women which results in conflict of interest on communal affairs.

One of the social factors that contribute to gender-based violence can be the unfaithfulness of one of the pair. When one partner is unfaithful, this causes suspicion and a lack of trust in the relationship, and often leads to constant quarrels and disagreements between the pair. According to Maria Misrelma Moura Bessa the Countries of Africa that are in the category of developing countries like Kenya, showed the most risk factors for violence as the result of the infidelity of a partner. The studies that were conducted in African countries depicted severe physical violence to women during pregnancy. The risk factors that are attributed to gender-based violence include suspicion of infidelity, harassment, low educational level of men and alcoholism.⁹ Eventually, these risk factors result in physical violence that is common among

⁹Maria Misrelma Moura Bessa, Jefferson Drezett and Modesto Rolim ed., "Violence against Women during

couples who have mistrust. More often than not, women end up being hurt in such a situation more often than men. Mostly, they suffer from the repercussion of physical, psychological and sexual violence

Substance abuse contributes to violence against women especially if the partner is a drunkard. There are some drugs that if abused can trigger men, to inflict physical violence on their wives and others. The drugs that are commonly abused include alcohol, cocaine, heroin, marijuana, among others. The influence of these drugs triggers men to abuse their wives physically for instance, through battering, slapping and kicking, especially if such kind of men feel that they have been belittled. This kind of violent situation may persist if not immediately addressed. Extreme abuse of drugs results in severe consequences and vulnerability of married women.

Cultural Factors

In the context of gender-based violence, cultural factors as opposed to social factors refers to the norms, values and beliefs that are enshrined in the traditional culture upon which ordinary men formulate policies that results in marginalization of women. As Wanjiru cites A. Medea and K. Thompson in their book *Against Rape*, “Traditional culture even permits a man to discipline his wife through physical means...women are also expected to be passive and submissive and to accept violence as part of the woman’s estate.”¹⁰ In the context of Bondo, the nature of cultural system is patriarchal. This results to the perpetuation of violence against women by ordinary men. In this view, ordinary men consider themselves to be superior to women which results to domination of power by ordinary men in the aspect of leadership and

Pregnancy: Systematized revision,” *Reprodução&Climatério* 29(2014): 71-79, accessed June 22,2020, <https://core.ac.uk/reader/82649601>

¹⁰Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 223.

other related gender issues in the community. As Elizabeth Gerhard asserts “The belief that violence within a home is a private matter has roots in past legal sanctions of male dominance within the family”¹¹ As Wanjiru cites A. Medea in his book, “Masculinity gives man the power and authority to control women.”¹² The affirmation of Elizabeth Gerhard on the causes of violence against women emphasizes on culture as the fundamental contributor to global violence against women. The social, religious and cultural roots are believed to be the systemic causes of violence against women.¹³ This means that culture is the principal root cause of gender-based violence as culture enables people to have a sense of identity.

There are some natural conditions of human life that can be misconstrued by cultural beliefs hence perpetuate gender-based violence. One of the conditions includes barrenness of a woman that results into her humiliation both by the family and the community especially in the context of Bondo where culturally, children are highly valued. A woman, who finds herself in such a state of barrenness, could experience low self-esteem and lack of love as a result of degradation of her self-worth. As Mercy Amba Oduyoye states, “barrenness in a woman of matrilineal heritage is an obvious disaster.”¹⁴ The nature of a matrilineal system in this context, would expect a married woman to bear children even if such a person can be hindered from giving birth because of some natural factors.

¹¹ Elizabeth Gerhard, *The Cross and Gendecide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls*, (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2014),60.

¹²Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 223.

¹³Gerhard, *The Cross* , 15, 36.

¹⁴Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Woman and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 69.

Political Factors.

Economic and child-bearing issues such as these that we have discussed contribute to the non-involvement of women in political affairs. This non-participation renders them unable to bargain for power in the political arena. This state of affairs concurs with Wanjiru's sentiment, "Politicians refuse to enact bills that will reduce the rate of the crime of gender-violence."¹⁵ In Kenya, the two-thirds gender rule that gives women equal opportunity to utilize their talents in the political arena has not been fully implemented. This limits active participation of women in the political sphere that can enable them to agitate for their rights and well-being. The aspect of minimal participation of women in politics in Kenya has been elaborated by Beatrice Anyango, Beatrice Atim Alupo and Maxwell Peprah Opoku in their article "Women in Politics in Kenya: An Analysis of Participation and Barriers":

The promulgation of 2010 Constitution of Kenya was a major milestone in the fight towards gender equality as well as open up spaces for participation of women and their representation in decision-making processes. After years of adopting this new constitution, women continue to suffer setbacks whenever they seek not only elective but also appointment positions in Kenya. In the two parliamentary chambers, only few women have shown interest in contesting for parliamentary seats. For example, during the 2013 general elections, out of 1,908 aspirants who contested for the 349 National Assembly seats, only 197 were women of which 69 were elected. Concerning the Senate chamber, out of 67 representatives, only 16 women were elected to present their counties. At the local county level, out of 623 women who contested, only 85 were elected compared to 1,365 males who were elected out of 9,287 contestants (Association of Media Women in Kenya, 2014; Gender Forum, 2013).¹⁶

This implies that women's affirmative action has not yet been fully realized because of their minimal participation in the political arena. Therefore, women do not get equal employment opportunities in political positions for their empowerment.

¹⁵Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 220.

¹⁶Beatrice Anyango, Beatrice Atim Alupo and Maxwell Peprah Opoku, "Women in Politics in Kenya: An Analysis of Participation and Barriers," *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies* 7 (2018): 1505-1530, accessed February 13, 2021, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323496982>.

Experiences of Women in Kenya.

The experiences of women in the context of gender-based violence render them liable to deprivation of their rights, liberty and freedom. The situation of gender-based violence at times gets little attention from the society because of the traditional beliefs and customs that are silent on gender-based violence issues. Women in Kenya encounter challenges that are precipitated by physical, psychological and sexual acts of violence. Women who are mostly within the confines of the patriarchal system are affected by the societal norms and beliefs that give preference to male gender in terms of decision making on social, cultural and traditional norms. As affirmed by Wanjiru, “Being a patriarchal society, women in Kenya have little influence in decisions affecting their lives. This extends to sexual relations.”¹⁷ In this instance, women’s role is passive and this renders them susceptible to male dominance.

The unjust social structures in our society have caused more harm than good to women who are prone to gender-based violence. Women avoid reporting cases of violence because they guard their male counterparts against the law. As stated by Wanjiru,

Kenya is a patriarchal state and male dominance cuts across social organizations including the Church. In such a context, male power dominates all interpersonal, male and female relationships...the reality and threat of violence is a form of social control enabled by an existing social structure characterized by patriarchal systems.¹⁸

Some women have had to suffer silently from unprecedented physical and psychological violence such as battering, deprivation of their rights and abuse. These forms of violence are perpetuated by ordinary men who take advantage of unjust social structures in a society that does

¹⁷Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 224.

¹⁸Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 220.

not address violence against women with the seriousness that it deserves. Therefore, this crime affects women of all cadres in the society young, old, educated and uneducated.

In the Kenyan context, the terms and conditions of service, such as the payment of wages to women laborers, may be too little to support their financial needs. This applies mostly to women who fend for their families in the aspect of the provision of basic needs such as food, clothing and the education of their children. This puts them in a vulnerable economic situation that they have to contend with against their wish. In most cases, the frame-work of the family is set up as an institution where economic violence against women happens. In families where men are irresponsible in providing for basic needs, women must stand in the gap and ensure that all the family needs are met, if they are economically empowered at all. The role of parenthood compels such women to care for the economic needs of their families by any means.

Likewise, the economic violence that women continue to experience includes the exclusion of women from financial decision making. This hinders women from using their talents to enhance development within the business sector. According to report by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Kenya, "women remain underrepresented in decision making processes at all levels...they have less access to and control over the benefits from land tenure, education, and employment opportunities."¹⁹ The inability of women to access funds can be a major drawback for the growth of the economy. Some women are endowed with entrepreneurial skills that could be tapped to boost the economy as well as to improve their well-being.

¹⁹UnitedStatesAgencyforInternationalDevelopment(USAID),"GenderEqualityandWomen'sEmpowerment,"accessed February13,2021,<https://www.usaid.gov/kenya/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-kenya>

Some women are hindered from engaging in income-generating activities or employment. This is because many men strongly believe that women are meant to be housewives only and because the culture supports that belief. This bars women from using their skills to empower themselves together with their families.

There are also traditional laws on inheritance that discriminate against women, regarding property rights and use of communal land. Such laws are biased against women's welfare and deny them equal opportunity to acquire property, even if they contributed to the purchase or towards its ownership. For instance, in Kenya, "Susan" a widow from Nyapiedho village in West Sakwa, Bondo, had her land confiscated by the kin of her late husband simply because she did not give birth to a boy child. In the process, she experienced continued verbal and physical attacks from the person she thought would be her defender in the absence of her husband.²⁰ This clearly shows the risky situation that married women find themselves especially after the demise of their husbands who offers them with security.

The repercussions of economic violence against women include abject poverty. Women who are not economically empowered stand the risk of leading an impoverished life. This is because such women lack the ability to afford basic needs such as clothing, food and shelter. This aspect of economic gender-based violence in turn results in the likelihood of contracting diseases as result of poor health. In summary, the ultimate repercussions of economic violence against women can be abject poverty, because of it leaves her unable to participate in society for her empowerment.

²⁰Kevines Omollo, "Siaya villages where widows have no right to own land," The Standard Newspaper, September 17th, 2020, accessed October 27th, 2020, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/nyanza/article/2001386643/siaya-where-mans-death-is-loss-to-his-wife-gain-to-relatives>

The Patriarchal system in Community and effects of Colonialism on Violence against Women.

The patriarchal system in relation to gender-based violence depicts a scenario in which male dominance permeates the overall functioning of a societal system. As pointed out by Kinuka, “Patriarchy is a complex system maintained by religion, politics and socio-cultural norms in Kenya. It allows for male supremacy that supports male dominance in every unit and engenders a hierarchical power structure and rule of overkill males.”²¹ This implies that patriarchal system in a cultural set up bestows absolute power to men which is liable to misuse by ordinary men to commit the crime of gender-based violence.

The impact of colonialism on attitudes about violence against women is substantial as Oduyoye states, “In Africa, colonization did not create patriarchy; it only strengthened it.”²² The emergence of colonialism perpetuated patriarchy, most prominently to win the heart of those who were colonized, and also to enable colonizers to find a soft landing for the propagation of their mission. In essence, women had to abide by the rules of the game as colonialism became a force to reckon with. This is a precise illustration of the deep-rooted historical perspective on the eventual effect of violence against women.

The Patriarchal system in the community defines women’s role as subordinate to men. This system hinders the active participation of women in areas of interest both in public and in institutional framework. The colonialist mentality creates a scenario in which men’s position may be understood as superior to women. This is contrary to the theological position that advocates for women as helpers of male counterparts. The implication of the patriarchal system

²¹H. Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 62.

²²Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Violence, Institutionalized,” in *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, ed. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (London: Mowbray, 1996), 106.

and the effects of colonialism on gender-based violence are well elaborated by Oduyoye when she points to the fact the patriarchal system in the community hinders women from undertaking a position of equal decision making in the family. For instance, among the patriarchal-patrilineal Yoruba of Western Nigeria, a wife is a member of the work-force in the house that is presumed to belong to the husband. She is not entitled to take part in decision-making in the house.²³ Conventionally, married couples have a right to equal decision making in the house as both are partners who virtually should help one another, the model of relationship that is depicted by the Yoruba of Western Nigeria tends to illustrate a divergent view.

Ordinary men figure a woman to be their possession under the patriarchal system. This is a trend that results in the manipulation and control of women to some extent against their own rights. The underlying fact is that women are considered to be inferior to men and this subjects woman to be under the authority of men. This perspective silences the voice of women even in circumstances of equal decision making.

²³Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (MaryKnoll,NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 71.

Chapter 2

Violence against Women: Theological and Biblical perspectives: Theology of human Personhood

Theological and biblical perspective on gender-based violence provides a valid and a firm foundation for addressing gender-based violence that continues to impact the society. Sound interpretation of the word of God has a significant effect on transforming human attitudes that leads to oppression of the vulnerable people. Likewise, theology and biblical teachings provides guidance on appropriate human relations, dignity and individual's worth. In essence, theology of human personhood recognizes that every human person has a self-worth that requires respect for human dignity. This resonates with M. Shawn Copeland's argument that God's intended purpose for creation of humanity is for mutual relationship and love. Jesus Christ is our role model on equal treatment that all partners deserve. He does not forget despised bodies.²⁴ The perpetuation of gender-based violence diminishes dignity of women and their person hood. The implication is that men need to treat their women counterparts with respect and love since both virtues are earned. This is in recognition of the spirit of equal treatment of human personhood.

Recognition of humanity of the female gender enables them to have a sense of belonging and identity within the social spectrum. In this way, women are enhanced to realize self-esteem which is a motivating factor for the normal functioning of women at optimum level. Every human being is able to function better in an environment that appreciates their humanity and value as an individual irrespective of gender.

²⁴M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 53.

Notable qualities that are attributed to female gender that enable them to have a sense of personhood, is an indicator that women are also fearfully and wonderfully created in the image of God. This signifies that women have an equal opportunity to undertake a meaningful and worthwhile contribution using their God given talents. This implies that God also purpose women to be co-creators with him as they develop the world to be a better place to live in. Every human person is designed by God for the soul purpose of serving God without gender disparity. In this sense, Jesus Christ did not discriminate against women during his public ministry but instead, Christ supported women who had various Spiritual and physical needs. For instance, biblical text illustrates an incidence concerning an encounter of Christ with a Canaanite woman from the district of Tyre and Sidon whose daughter was possessed by demons. This woman pleaded with Christ to heal her daughter. Christ's response shows that the barrier between them could not hinder Christ from healing the sick daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mathew 15:21-28).

Ideally, theology of human person hood empowers women to bargain for their rights, protection, privileges and responsibility. In view of this, women are enlightened to advocate for their liberty in a community that embraces the androcentric system more particularly within the context of Bondo Diocese. The ministry of Jesus Christ focused on the welfare of humanity who was deprived of their liberty. Christ identified with the underprivileged people in the society whose voice could not be heard. In essence, women are in the category of people who are disadvantaged because of social status and power dominance. As illustrated by Copeland, "Jesus of Nazareth... is the clearest example of what it means to identify with women who are poor, excluded, and despised; to take their side in the struggle for life- no matter the cost. Jesus signifies and teaches a new way of being human, of embodied spirituality. His incarnation,

which makes the infinite God present, disrupts gender oppression, and abuse of sexual others.”²⁵ The precedence that Christ set is an eye opener on the need for humanity to take the interest of others at heart more especially in reference to gender- based violence.

Biblical Perspective on Violence.

This chapter illustrates how biblical text can be used in different ways some of which people have used strangely in disempowering women. I argue that reading Scripture as a whole provides basis for addressing the crime of gender-based violence, because of its sincere and holistic approach to the plight of the marginalized women. As noted by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “Throughout Africa, the Bible has been and continues to be absolutized: it is one of our oracles that we consult for instant solutions and responses.”²⁶ In light of a biblical view on gender-based violence, humanity should coexist harmoniously as God advocates for mutuality of partners right from the creation of man in the Garden of Eden. In this case, God created our forebears that is to say the first human beings in God’s own image. This affirms out-rightly the aspect of mutuality from the beginning of creation of the first human beings. On the contrary, gender-based violence is an act that contravenes the conventional way of human existence as it creates disharmony, disorder and intolerance among different genders. Biblical perspective underscores that violence against women is an act that contravenes the biblical mandate for human life and relations irrespective of gender. As affirmed by Juliana Claassens,

Scripture depicts some of the effects of gender- based violence against women in varied ways. In the Book of Lamentations, symbolism is used to demonstrate the violence against women after the devastating events of 597- 587 B.C.E. The invasion of the City of Jerusalem by the mighty Babylonian army personified Jerusalem as a violated woman. She is invaded, raped and humiliated. She suffers

²⁵Copeland, *Enfleshing*, 65

²⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, (MaryKnoll: Orbis Books, 1995), 174.

anguish and desolation and nobody can respond to her plea. She is in a situation of hopelessness with no recourse.²⁷

The metaphorical use of language in this context portrays women as victims of gender-based violence. It is an illustration that affirms their defenselessness and shows how the society can be intolerant to the plight of women.

The illustration of extreme gender inequality is seen in Jer. 6:1-8 whereby the City that is equated to woman is unable to make a decision to consent to sexual intercourse, or has got no ability to withhold this consent because of the patriarchal ideology.²⁸ The perception of women as male possession's in patriarchal system deprives women freedom of making choices on matters sexuality. This is in cognizance of the fact that their decision on matters sexuality is mostly influenced by their male counterparts.

Institutions that offer support to women who are affected by gender-based violence have noted that some of the experiences that women face as a result of gender-based violence. In this case, gender-based violence is attributable to the literal interpretation of the biblical text. As suggested by Adams, women tend to justify their situation according to the text. She states that;

People who work with battered women note the frequency with which abused women interpret their abuse as divinely ordained, and cite scriptural support for their interpretation. One woman said God punished women more and cited Gen. 3: 16. Another, who complained to her husband that she had sustained injuries after one of his attacks, was told by him: "your bones are my bones- just like it says in the Bible."²⁹

²⁷Juliana Claassens, *Fragile Dignity: Intercontextual Conversations on Scriptures, Family and Violence* (Atlanta: Sprank Publisher, 2013), 71-75.

²⁸Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, Katie B. Edwards, *Rape Culture, Gender Violence and Religion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2018), 176.

²⁹Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, *Violence Against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Source Book* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 431.

I would suggest that Scripture is often misinterpreted by those who want to justify their position or suit their own needs. The misinterpretation of Scripture by the proponents of gender-based violence as a result of power dominance should be challenged at all cost for the well-being of women. Basically, Scripture should be used appropriately to defend the plight of the oppressed and vulnerable people in the society such as women. Such application of Scripture would justify God's intended purpose for humanity.

The biblical text underscores instances in which women were treated in a manner that rendered them liable to violence within the social spectrum. Bible depicts an illustration where women could not be counted amongst the crowd as seen in the parable of Jesus feeding five thousand people. The vulnerability of women in Scripture is further illustrated by J. F. D. Creach, in his book *Violence in Scripture*. He asserts how women suffer abuse in the hands of men as depicted in Judges 19:15b-28. The men of Gibeah rape and murder a Levite's concubine.³⁰ This shows that violence against women is as old as the period of the Israelites who were God's chosen people, and were intended to transform humanity through faith formation. In this light, gender-based violence is a struggle that began from the period of our forefathers and continues into the modern world. Women have undergone traumatic experiences since time immemorial. Therefore, the plight of women, concerning the violence that they encounter creates a born of contention as depicted in the transition from the old generation to the current dispensation.

The old man's action in Judges 19 demonstrates how women face violence in diverse ways without recourse. In this scenario, the old man spared the life of the Levite at the expense of the concubine. Further, the Levite did not empathize with his concubine on the sorry state of

³⁰Jerome. F.D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 129, 130.

the affair. He proceeded to murder his concubine, an act which was least expected of him. As Creach points out “The Levite treats the concubine in Judges 19 as someone whose interests and well-being are subordinate to his own”³¹ This shows the seriousness and magnitude of violence encountered by the concubine and most women of the period.

Although God’s call to married couples is for peaceful relationship, and that death alone breaks the marriage bond, biblical perspective on abusive relationship provides an option for separation if reconciliation is unattainable (1 Corinthians 7:15).³² The context within which women find themselves in abusive relationship would not give room for separation. Many a times, they are encouraged to bear with the situation which in effect results to more harm than good. Many women have suffered silently in abusive relationship without any recourse. This is because of the fear of intimidation or condemnation from the partner.

More often than not, women face destructive violence in various magnitudes such as physical, psychological and sexual violence, much of which goes unreported due to cultural and traditional factors. They tend to endure such kinds of violence which result in long term ramifications for the victimized. The underlying question is what can be done to effectively address the violence against women which is prevalent in our society?

In conclusion, the current trend of violence against women in our society both physically, psychologically and sexually resonates with the violence against this woman in the narrative of Judges. Women suffer as a result of their vulnerable situation that is necessitated by the patriarchal system and tradition. Men who are insensitive to the wellbeing of their female counterparts abuse them by corrupting power to dominate and manipulate women for their own

³¹Creach, *Violence*, 146.

³²Blyth, *Rape*, 93, 94.

self-interest. This is a moral issue of injustice that must be addressed more especially, by the faith community.

Listening to African Women Theologians: on Scripture

The profound contribution of African women theologians on the contentious issue of gender-based violence cannot be wished away. African women theologians voice on the interpretation of Scripture in view of the feminist's perspective plays a critical role in addressing the violence perpetuated against women. Some African women theologians have undertaken profound scholarly hermeneutics on Scripture, which is authoritative when applied appropriately to transform and liberate the marginalized masses in the society.

The participation of African women theologians in the interpretation of the Bible on issues of gender-based violence provides a comprehensive framework, and basis for challenging complacency on the use of Scripture by ordinary men for justification of gender-based violence. As affirmed by Isabel Apawo Phiri, the patriarchal Bible expresses the voice of women by proxy, that is to say, through a male voice. The perspective of patriarchal interpretation of the Bible does not vividly show concern to the plight of women on issues of victimization and gender disparity. This necessitates a transformation in ways of reading the Bible both within the academy and within communities of faith. The attainment of transformative readings of the Bible requires the sharing of liberative academic interpretive resources with faith communities for the realization of gender social transformation.³³ Women who are prone to the consequences of physical, psychological and sexual violence are in a better position to interpret the Scripture from an informed point of view. This enhances a significant comprehension of the text for the

³³Sarojini Nadar, "Texts of Terror" *The Conspiracy of Rape in the Bible, Church, and Society: The Case of Esther 2:1-18*, in *The African Women, Religion, and Health*, eds. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Sarojini Nadar (New York: Orbis Press, 2006), 78, 79.

effective realization of change through the entrenchment of feminist voice on gender-based violence.

Scripture expresses an understanding of a God who is concerned for the liberation of the oppressed and marginalized people. The message of God delivered through the prophets includes the denunciation of societal injustices that hinder human freedom. In light of this image of God, Nadar asserts, “Women within faith communities also struggle with the biblical text to find a God who liberates rather than oppresses.”³⁴ This implies that African women theologians aim at interpretation of Scripture in such a way that it addresses teachings that suppresses the voice of women on issues of violence against them.

The fact that women experience all forms of gender-based violence provides them with an opportunity to analyze Scripture in grey areas that are unmasked concerning gender-based violence given their susceptible situation. African women theologians are able to proactively affirm their position on issues violence through biblical hermeneutics. This point to Nadar’s notion,

unless one reads the text from a feminist perspective it is difficult to uncover the masked references to sexual violence, which are covered up ingeniously by the literary devices of time and plot structure in the scripture. For instance, the book of Esther 2:1-18 that depicts the virgins with whom the King forcibly had sexual intercourse metaphorically represents a form of rape and sexual violence that appears to be natural before being “erased” from further discussion. This text could easily be understood from a feminist perspective that unearths the occurrence of sexual violence, which are obscured creatively by the literary devices of time and plot structure in the scene.³⁵

The sentiment of women theologians on the critical crime of violence against women provides a fundamental basis for addressing the crime of gender-based violence from informed view. The

³⁴Nadar, “*Texts*,” 82.

³⁵Nadar, “*Texts*,” 89.

vulnerable women can be assured of absolute commitment in addressing the menace of violence against them, if they are given a listening ear.

Listening to African Women Theologians on Patriarchal Structures.

Patriarchal structures in this context refer to systems in the society that enable the male gender to have power dominance over women on critical issues that directly impact human life. As Mercy Amba Oduyoye states, “Patriarchy exists wherever one finds systemic and normative inequalities and subordination.”³⁶ The patriarchal structures within the framework of the community have resulted in the subordination of women by ordinary men. These ordinary men take advantage of male domination over women as a norm that is permissible within the traditional set up. The traditional norms that elevate the position of men over their women counterparts perpetuate the stereotyping notion that perceives women to be of lower rank.

African women within the patriarchal cultural system encounter difficulty in the use of their gifts towards advancement of personal growth and economic development. As we have previously seen, the patriarchal system to an extent delimits equal participation of women in social, cultural, economic and political activities. For instance, in Kenya the affirmative act that requires the observance of two thirds gender rule giving women equal opportunity to work in various sectors of the economy has not been fully implemented. This implies that majority of women who are suitable to undertake various jobs as per their skills have not yet been absorbed into the job market. This was affirmed when the Chief Justice of Kenya clamored for the dissolution of the Kenyan Parliament if the Affirmative act is not implemented to the letter. On the September 21st, 2020, over Citizen News, Chief Justice of Kenya David Maraga invoked article 461 to ask the President to dissolve Parliament, faulting Members of Parliament for

³⁶Oduyoye, *Daughters*, 131.

failing to pass the two thirds gender laws. Despite court orders compelling Parliament to enact the legislation required to implement the two-thirds gender rule... parliament blatantly failed, refused and or neglected to do so. This move was highly welcome by women leaders.³⁷ More often than not, women's role is perceived to be domestic in nature. This hinders the capacity of women in the advancement of their ambition in other areas of vested interest. This is in view of the fact that the androcentric cultural system is silent on the struggle for women's liberation. In chapter 3 and chapter 4, I will show how the struggle of women in Scripture is geared towards restoration of women hood.

³⁷Watch Citizen News, "Chief Justice Maraga asks President to dissolve parliament," September 21st, 2020, accessed October 27th, 2020, <https://youtu.be/gdTWHalHVNU>

Chapter 3

Application: Principles and Praxis for the Kenyan Church: The Response of the Church

Principles in this context mean the general rules that the Church applies in enhancing order and sanity concerning violence of her marginalized members. The spirit of the law has to ensure that the defenseless are well guarded. Likewise, as stated by Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, “Praxis is the term we use to describe the ongoing life of a Church that moves between “study/reflection” and “engagement/action. “This concept of praxis can help Church leaders frame ways for Churches to understand their ministry context and bring about changes in their congregations and in their social contexts.”³⁸ Church leaders must preach, educate and enlighten the congregation on various topical issues of gender-based violence and also denounce oppressive strands in the society, for the Church to become a transformative institution in reference to the concept of praxis.

What has it been in Kenya?

The crime of gender-based violence continues to cause devastating effects to marginalized women, since Kenya embraces traditional cultural system and patriarchy to date. For instance, previously, we encountered “Susan Achieng” who had her land grabbed by the kin of her late husband simply because she did not give birth to a boy. She has experienced continued verbal and physical attacks, from the person she thought would be her defender in the absence of her husband. Like the concubine, she has been betrayed by her protector and, left for

³⁸ Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2011) 26, 41.

dead.³⁹ The occurrence of violence of this nature still continues to affect the social fabrics of the society in as much as efforts are put in place to mitigate the vice.

The church in Kenya more especially the Anglican Diocese of Bondo have been in the forefront in addressing violence against women in effort towards realization of its mission work. The Anglican Diocese of Bondo has played a key role in addressing gender-based violence by advocating for non-violence in family and community set up. The vibrant Mothers Union wing in the Diocese of Bondo that advocates for justice and the rights of women has a culture of marking International day for elimination of gender- based violence. During this day, they undertake community sensitization towards elimination of violence against women through road show in various Arch- Deaconries such as Bondo, Ramba, Usigu and Chianda through road show, conducting of workshops towards empowerment of women and supporting the victimized women. This yearly event continues to impact, influence and shape the cultural norm on complacency towards violence against women.

The Institute for Faith and Gender Empowerment (IFOGE) Organization within the Diocese of Bondo is instrumental in addressing issues concerning gender-based violence. The Organization has conducted various workshops and conferences for Church leaders. The empowerment of Church leaders has influenced them to address the issue of gender-based violence in the community with open mind from theological and biblical point of view. This fosters trust and confidence in leadership of the Church on pastoral issues that affects their congregation more especially the issues that affects the ministry of women.

³⁹ Kevine Omollo, “Siaya villages where widows have no right to own Land,” September 17th 2020, accessed September 20th, 2020, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/nyanza/article/2001386643/siaya-where-mans-death-is-loss-to-his-wife-gain-to-relatives>.

The tradition of the Church addresses gender inequality and emancipation of women from patriarchal subjugation through her mission of preaching the good news of equality, freedom, liberation, and tranquility to the marginalized and oppressed like women. This is an aspect of the principal mission of the Church⁴⁰ The Anglican Church in the Diocese of Bondo still has a mission to minister the Gospel of liberation geared towards addressing the needs of the vulnerable in the community such as women in her approach to mission. The Church is an institution where women should find healing, encouragement and hope. This provides restoration to women who are hurting because of gender- based violence. The Church as a beacon of hope has an obligation to address the needs of her vulnerable and victimized members such as women.

What has it been Globally?

The global context illustrates how the universal Church strives to address violence against women which is a universal phenomenon. The unity in diversity that prevails in the universal Church in the common interest of advocating for the rights of the marginalized women is of great significance. The Church has shown great concern to be in solidarity with women by actively participating in events that are organized to address the issue of gender-based violence. For instance, the universal Church often participates in marking International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women on 25th November every Year.⁴¹

The Church as a healing community has the advantage to address the aspect of violence against women which is still a pressing social issue. The membership of the Church comprises individuals with diverse talents and skills that can be harnessed to enhance the building of the

⁴⁰ John Chitakure, *Shona Women in Zimbabwe- a Purchased People?: Marriage, Bride wealth, Domestic violence and Christian Traditions on Women* (San Antonio, TX: Pick wick Publications, 2016), 36.

⁴¹UnitedNationsInternationalDayfortheEliminationofViolenceagainstWomen, <https://www.un.org/en/observances-violence-against-women-day>

body of Christ on issues that affects its members in regard to gender-based violence. The Systemic changes in regard to practices of patriarchal dominance, the repugnant societal norms and cultures that perpetuate gender-based violence and gender stereotyping would result in the liberation of women for the full realization of their rights and freedoms in gender related issues. It will lead to the observance of equality and equity in social, religious, political, legal, economic and learning institutions irrespective of gender. There would be just social structures in the community that enhance favorable values and norms in regard to gender.

The Church must be the voice of the voiceless both close and beyond on issues of gender-based violence. In the spirit of love for neighbor, the Church is required to advocate for women who are oppressed and abused locally and in the global community. This is a strategic way of addressing the plight of women who suffer violence in diverse forms.⁴² The Church that is established on the foundation of Christian values and principles is driven by the mission of Jesus Christ that includes reaching out to the oppressed people in society. Christ had a concern for the welfare and needs of all vulnerable people.

The mission of the Church is to mentor its members by providing education on family life which emphasizes the spirit of peaceful co-existence amongst married couples. This teaching program aims at empowering married couples on the need of treating one another with respect and love. This creates a non-violent environment in the frame work of the family. As pointed out by Caroline Blyth, the preaching of a true Church would strongly condemn abuse of the wife by the husband that is tantamount to hatred. The husband is called to love the wife, a virtue that prohibits abuse.⁴³ Many women today continue to suffer psychologically because of verbal abuse

⁴²Chitakure, *Shona*, 36.

⁴³Blyth, *Rape*, 103.

by men especially when they are under the influence of drugs and substance abuse such as alcohol. This is necessitated by the fact that they refrain from physical assault that could result to bodily harm or injury. Instead, they resort to other forms of abuse such as verbal insult that similarly inhibits hatred and rejection by the victims. The effects of harsh words are psychological in nature and this also amounts to demoralization of the victimized women.

The Church has a challenge to undertake ministry with ordinary men who perpetuate violence against women for their survival, well-being and satisfaction. This kind of ministry should focus on changing the attitude of ordinary men who are prone to gender-based violence. The Church should aim at a holistic transformation of the lives of such ordinary men. According to Pamela Cooper White, a ministry with ordinary men can be undertaken in a multifaceted approach that includes a peer group format with multiple formation stages. In this phase, men are taught to unlearn violence by identification of the signs of likelihood of abuse together with minimization and refusal. It is critical at this stage for men to know skills for behavioral change. The second stage involves learning to replace aggression with effective communication and clear expression of needs. The last stage includes active participation in community service, prevention and empowerment. At this point, men become engaged in an advocacy role aimed at addressing gender-based violence. They become agents of social change and advocates for victims of gender-based violence.⁴⁴ The approach of ministration of the word of God through this ministry to ordinary men is an effective way of achieving holistic transformation of men's lives geared towards behavioral change.

⁴⁴Pamela Cooper White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against Women and the Church's response* (Minneapolis: Fortress press, 2012), 214, 216.

The physical, psychological and sexual violence that women encounter results in psychosocial problems and physical harm to their body, which may in turn lead to long term effects if not addressed promptly. Therefore, the Church has a responsibility to respond to the needs of the victimized women through the provision of psychosocial support. This ensures that the Church accords victims of violence counselling that can result in a holistic restoration of health.

The Church which has a role as a Spiritual Community in Healing is called to teach and preach about violence against women to a point that the congregation commences to trust and comprehend the reality of gender-based violence in their lives. It means victimized women seeking help in the Church when a need arises. This is tantamount to the effects of quality teaching and enlightenment of the congregation so that they may appropriately address issues of gender-based violence. Likewise, violence must be addressed without fear or favor so that the person who is responsible is held accountable. Such a person is believed to have violated the right of the offender. The suggestion by White highlights, “As the Church, we are called to join in this movement to break silence and to restore justice. Second, we must name the violence as violence...we must hold the focus on the one who is responsible.”⁴⁵ In reality, justice ought to be done for the victimized or survivors of violence whose rights have been offended. This is an appropriate step of action towards addressing the menace of gender-based violence. Concerning the care for abused women and the justice that they deserve, Gerhard confirms that the Church has to be in the forefront in offering support to victimized women who live in both local and global communities. The Church has the significant role of empathizing with the victims of

⁴⁵ White, *The Cry*, 246, 247.

violence.⁴⁶ Essentially, Caroline Blyth explains that sermons help to transform people's beliefs, ideologies and values more especially those that concerns gender violence. They rekindle an individual's memory on attitudinal behavior towards gender violence and its perpetration.⁴⁷ This empowers people to make informed decisions and worthwhile choices regarding issues of violence against women.

The responsibility of the Church in addressing violence against women is clearly stipulated in the Nazarene manifesto that underscores the mission of Jesus Christ on earth as written in Luke 4:18-19; "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because... He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Christ's purpose for humanity in the stated mission is a challenge for the Church to emulate that which is perceived to be the heartbeat of God in addressing human frailty. As affirmed by Gerhard, "A theological approach to ending violence against women reminds the Church that the worship of our God must involve care for the poor, peacemaking and creating justice because theology is the proclamation of the God who cares for the oppressed and marginalized."⁴⁸ . Christ came to liberate the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized. This is a concern that the Church continues to grapple with in response to Christ's mandate.

In as much as the church has shown great interest in addressing the plight of vulnerable women, there are instances in which the church is also responsible for the marginalization of women to some extent. There are cases in which the church has offered support to the offenders of gender-based violence especially when they are apprehended. The offenders get attention

⁴⁶Gerhard, *The Cross*, 30.

⁴⁷Blyth, *Rape*, 87.

⁴⁸Gerhard, *The Cross*, 33.

from the church at the expense of victimized women. The church responds more to the needs of the abuser especially in cases where justice is done against the offender. As White suggests, “It is all too often the case that the church’s sympathy and resources are mobilized for the abuser, while the pain, fear, and serious safety needs of the victim (s) are downplayed or largely ignored.”⁴⁹ This is a scenario that is prevalent in modern society where corruption hinders proper execution of justice against the offenders of gender-based violence. In certain instances, the church has failed to undertake her prophetic role of denouncing such kind of ills in our midst thereby becoming complacent. The ministry of Jesus Christ focused on advocacy for the oppressed and vulnerable people in the society such as women.

Response of the Church to Scripture.

Scripture is the ultimate authority of God’s word that is significant for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). This implies that Scripture is the valid reference point to Christians on issues that leads to the dehumanization of humanity. Therefore, the Bible provides focal point for guidance on gender-based violence.

The modern Church in Africa has made a tremendous effort to empower women who are called in ministry so that their valuable talents can be tapped to enrich the work of God both far and beyond the borders of Africa. Ursula King attests to this, “In Africa, there is some evidence of openness to new ways of reading the Bible. The fact that there are now some women biblically trained gives us hope that the Bible will be read and interpreted from the perspective of women, especially since the situation of African women has elements similar to that of women in the Old Testament.”⁵⁰ The Bible was written in a Jewish culture that embraced patriarchy. This

⁴⁹ White, *The Cry*, 209.

⁵⁰ Ursula King, *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1994), 39.

implies that male language dominated the interpretation of the Bible since this androcentric system did not consider feminine voices in biblical interpretation. This is an aspect that silenced the voice of women in biblical hermeneutics.

More often than not, Scripture has been misinterpreted to advance gender-based violence in a manner that relegates the position of women and subordinate women which should not be the case. For instance, in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus, wives are implored to be subject to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). Likewise, (Ephesians 5:21) gives emphasis to the need of both partners to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. This particular verse has often been overlooked resulting in a partial understanding of the whole passage. Ordinary men have often misinterpreted "subject" in the text to mean that women should be subordinate to their husbands. This perspective renders women prone to violence by ordinary men. Here, the Church has to see to it that proper hermeneutics of the Bible is done especially on texts that are inappropriately misinterpreted to marginalize women. This is only imaginable if the Church becomes a transformative leader and accepts the challenge to be an agent of change.

There are some significant women in the biblical narrative that had to bargain for power in patriarchal systems, so that they are used by God to accomplish God's purpose. These women were relentless in their commitment to faith and religious affiliation. As affirmed by Judith R. Baskin,

The women who figure as "voices" are the female oracles who arose at critical junctures of Israel's history to remind the people that their destiny was shaped and foretold by God. Women that include Deborah, Rahab, Hannah, Abigail stood outside regular power structures and possessed the intuitive and semiotic skills required to cross a variety of social and gender boundaries.⁵¹

⁵¹Judith R. Baskin, "Reading the Women of the Bible," *A New Interpretation of Their Stories*, by Tikva Frymer-Kensky" *Shofar Winter Vol 23, no.2* (2005):160.

In the modern context, there are women who strongly agitate for civil rights and advocate for the liberation of their oppressed counterparts. These women who figure as “voices” have shown solidarity with their marginalized counterparts, thereby undertaking significant role in breaking the silence on gender-based violence.

How Can the Church be a Model for Society?

The Church as a model for society on gender-based violence implies that the Church has to set precedence on the best appropriate manner of intervening in the lives of women who are prone to violence in the society. As affirmed by Wanjiru, “The Church can no longer deal with women’s issues...as one without relevance to the Church; it needs to analyze... why women are unable to get out of the cycle of violence, and how the church, as an instrument of God could stop its perpetuation.”⁵² The Church as a healing community is bestowed with the responsibility of addressing social upheavals that perpetuates gender-based violence. The Church has to be in the forefront in addressing gender-based violence by being the voice of the voiceless. The Church as an institution has to address the needs of victims of gender-based violence who are prone to physical, psychological and sexual abuse. The Church is bestowed with the authority to challenge the perpetrators of violence in the community as it continues to be the mouthpiece of the disadvantaged lot by being the agent of change.

The Church as a beacon of hope has to offer counselling services to victims of gender-based violence. Many of the victims of gender-based violence suffer in silence. The Church has to reach out to such people majority of who are women. These vulnerable people are able to find hope from trauma and restoration of health through counselling that can be managed effectively

⁵²Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 227.

by the leaders of the Church. Therefore, the Church is instituted to offer hope to the hopeless in the society.

The Church is mandated to preach a theology of liberation of the oppressed. In most cases, women fall in the category of those who are marginalized because of the patriarchal system that tends to be advantageous to men in numerous ways. As affirmed by Wanjiru, “The Church is a healing community. As a community called to liberate the oppressed, it is required to liberate women from a culture of violence, to serenity of life and communion.”⁵³ One of the primary missions of the Church is to liberate the oppressed people from the traditional, cultural practices and norms that contravene the theological and biblical mandate on human virtues.

The Church can be a model for society on gender-based violence by addressing unjust social structures that perpetuates the crime of violence. These unjust structures in the society silence the voice of women on pertinent issues that directly affects their lives. Women have to contend with the patriarchal system that rarely creates a safe space for their involvement in religious, cultural and political affairs.

Chapter 4

Violence Against Women: Training Church Leaders-The Needs and Opportunities for Clergy.

In order to respond to the serious issue of gender-based violence in Bondo, I will coordinate a training workshop for Clergy in consultation with the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Bondo, the Mothers Union worker, leaders of Faith Based Organizations such as Bondo Pastors Fellowship, Non-Governmental Organizations including, The Institute for Faith

⁵³Wanjiru, *Sexual*, 227.

and Gender Empowerment (IFOGE), Plan International Kenya and Compassion International. We will examine the ways that training can be used in the church to change the narrative around gender-based violence in our community. Training as a method of dissemination of information provides valuable resources for use by the clergy. It also enhances the building up of the capacities of the clergy so that they are better equipped with knowledge of ways to address the problem of gender-based violence in the community of Bondo.

Training church leaders to speak out against gender-based violence would enable them to be in the forefront of the movement to do this work, which has robbed our society of its moral integrity and damaged the social fabric. Through training, leaders can be empowered to be agents of change on this critical issue, so that the role of leaders in the Church as agents of advocacy, change and transformation can be realized.

Training church leaders to recognize cases of violence against women and equipping them with strategies to help those women and to educate the men involved that violence against women is wrong, can help alleviate the rate of gender-based violence in the community of Bondo. The latest statistics show that gender-based violence is still rampant in Kenya where Bondo is situated. I have previously stated this fact, but it is worth repeating. In the Kenyan demographic and health survey 2014, 45% of women age 15-49 have experienced physical violence. The main perpetrators of physical violence against women are husbands; 14% of women report having experienced sexual violence at least once in their life time.⁵⁴ If church leaders are better equipped with sound knowledge and skills to address gender-based violence, they will sensitize the community to attitudinal and behavioral changes around this issue.

⁵⁴Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, "Kenyan 2014 Demographic and Health Survey Key Findings,"¹⁵, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/sr227/sr227.pdf>

Training helps to empower leaders to advocate for justice issues concerning gender-based violence. The systemic crime of gender-based violence in the Bondo community requires a holistic approach in training that is aimed at the liberation of vulnerable women. Training of leaders for the advocacy of women rights and the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule equips such leaders to be in the forefront in creating safe space for the involvement of women in leadership both in the church and community at large.

As discussed in chapter 3, the church must step forward because of the unjust structures in the society that silence the voice of women on pertinent issues that directly affects their lives. When leaders are professionally trained in methods of behavioral change relating to gender-based violence, they become agents of social change and role models by challenging the unjust social structures in the community that perpetuate gender-based violence. Leaders who are transformed through training have the authority to challenge ordinary men who perpetuate the crime of gender-based violence.

Training of church leaders with the motive of addressing systemic gender-based violence enhances the capacity of leaders to respond to the need of liberating marginalized women in the community. As affirmed by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the church being the beacon of faith, hope and love, must be considerate to the affairs of marginalized women. This would ensure that the prospect of redemption becomes the ultimate goal for the church.⁵⁵ The church has an obligation to be a role model in undertaking effective leadership that caters for the welfare of its oppressed members.

⁵⁵Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll:Orbis Books, 2004),99.

As discussed earlier, many of the victims of gender-based violence suffer from trauma and ill-health. Equipping church leaders with knowledge about psycho-social support for counselling skills with victimized and vulnerable women will empower leaders to reach out to the most needy cases of gender-based violence in the community. In which case, Church leaders will offer hope to the hopeless in the Society.

The Mothers Union: An Example of Training that Empowers Women.

The church should empower women leaders as part of its missional approach to reach its most marginalized members. This would ensure that the church is holistic in her approach to mission both far and beyond. The core of Christ's Gospel revolves around meeting the needs of the vulnerable people in the society. I concur with Oduyoye's explanation, "The African church needs to empower women...to speak for themselves, manage their 'women's affairs' and be fully present in decisions and operations that affect the whole church, including the forming of its theology."⁵⁶ This would enable the Church to be inclusive in her approach to mission. Through this model, many people will be inspired by a Church that is able to preach Christ and live by the Word.

The Church is already blessed with women leaders among the laity and that is in the form of the Mothers Union. As illustrated by The Most Reverend Justin Welby,

Mothers' Union is a Christian organization that has been supporting families worldwide for over 140 years. Started by our founder Mary Sumner in 1876 in her local parish, we have grown into an International charity with over 4 million members in 84 Countries. As Christian membership charity, we demonstrate our faith in action. This happens as we work towards stopping poverty, stopping inequality and stopping injustice. We have campaigned at local, national and

⁵⁶Oduyoye, *Beads*, 97.

International levels to bring about real change for family life, women's and girl's rights.⁵⁷

However, much effort still need to be put in place by the church leadership to work hand in hand with the Mothers Union wing in addressing gender-based violence which is trending. The Church can begin by harnessing the power and skill of this organization. In this case, I will develop a manual for addressing gender-based violence in liaison with the Bishop of Anglican Church of Kenya, Diocese of Bondo, who is the ecclesiastical authority and the Mother's Union President and Coordinator. The topical areas in the manual includes, causes of gender-based violence, biblical and theological perspective/response to gender-based violence, the role of African women theologian in addressing gender-based violence, the role of the Church in response to gender-based violence, the role of leaders in response to gender-based violence. The manual/ workshop material would equip these mother's union leaders with useful materials for addressing gender-based violence that are significant for sensitization and teaching programs for women both in the Church and the wider community. The workshop materials need to be formulated on a theological and biblical basis that provides fundamental teachings for implementation by church leaders.

The church can be in the forefront in its endeavor to address gender-based violence by undertaking ministry with both men and women in the church through Bible study. This joint initiative would ensure that there is proper theological and biblical understanding of womanhood by both men and women. This will support harmonious co-existence especially in cultures where patriarchy takes center stage and predominates. As underscored by Oduyoye, "The very least the church can do is to make a conscious effort to promote and support women's study meetings, as

⁵⁷Justin Welby, "Mothers' Union, What we do: Mothers' Union are the heart and love of the Church," accessed March 6, 2021, <https://www.mothersunion.org/what-we-do>

well as refresher courses for clergy and lay preachers on women's issues, in order to enable the church to understand and to take effective steps against sexism."⁵⁸ The continued sustainability of women's ministry in the church requires that church leaders see to it that the spiritual needs of women are taken into consideration and their well-being supported.

Women find attention, solace, encouragement and motivation within the social fabrics of the society that fosters freedom and social justice for women. The Church is an ideal institution that provides counselling services for issues related to gender-based violence and advocate for justice and rights for women. Women, empowered by this support can undertake significant contribution both in the Church and the community. As stressed by Oduyoye, "The strong social empowering networks that women in Africa have built on traditional culture have enabled them to be sustainable. This is a model for organization of Church women."⁵⁹ Many networks in Africa by Mothers Union have embraced this formidable indigenous women network and modified it to embrace values of the Church. In this aspect, the network is used as a channel for enriching the physical, psychosocial and spiritual needs of women in Africa.

The Church must make use of the riches that it has by creating programs that are geared toward training women about economic empowerment for financial sustainability. For instance, in the Anglican Diocese of Bondo, the Anglican Diocesan Services that concentrates on development programs within the regional Dioceses in Nyanza should embark on a critical role in training the Mothers Union leaders as Training of Trainers on Income Generating Activities, and Small Scale Enterprising Programs such as banking and loans. This kind of training while offered to Mothers Union leaders in the form of Training of Trainers aid in uplifting the

⁵⁸Oduyoye, *Beads*, 99.

⁵⁹ Oduyoye, *Beads*, 104.

economic standards of women who receive the training, as women leaders replicate their acquired knowledge on entrepreneurship and share it with marginalized women. Then these marginalized women are better equipped with needed skills to engage in productive and viable economic activities. This is a way of addressing economic violence against women, a violence that subjects them to the control of the oppressive strands in society that continue to deprive them of the right to a dignified source for the essentials of living.

Conclusion.

The elementary approach to addressing violence against women is based on the transformation of humanity through the Word of God. The unjust human practices that promote violence against women can be addressed effectively through the ministry of the Word of God that is divinely instituted to convert the soul, mind and spirit of humanity to embrace a Christ-like attitude, “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit...it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). According to Elizabeth Gerhard, the Church has a basis for addressing the menace of violence against women through the theology of the Cross that works to ensure systemic changes on gender inequality. This is an effective response that provides a theologically based spirituality of faith that is hopeful, imaginative and holistic in relation to the adverse global effect of violence against women. The power of the language of the Cross offers a tangible basis for the formation of a practical social ethic for addressing gender-based violence by denouncing oppression, abuse and violence as sin. This provides a focused and informed direction for the Church.⁶⁰ The Word of God needs to be shared in love for it to have a ripple effect so that it can

⁶⁰ Elizabeth Gerhard, *The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 18, 93.

transform the lives of those who perpetuate gender-based violence. Christ preached the gospel of love of a neighbor as oneself. This includes the spirit of the golden rule that requires doing to others what you anticipate them to do for you.

The ability to overcome gender-based violence is vested in the manifestation of the unfailing love of God. God is able to meet the victimized and suffering women to the point of their needs through the support of the Church which can be institution of transformation in the society. As explained by Gerhard, “It is a great challenge to the church to be Christ for the suffering and oppressed. The work to end suffering and at the same time be present with the suffering is the tension the church must live within.”⁶¹ Therefore, the Church has to condemn this violence and ensure that the victimized are assisted, as gender-based violence is a theological issue that jeopardizes the well-being not only of the marginalized women but us all.

Church as an institution is obligated to stand in solidarity with the marginalized women who are powerless and weak to defend for their cause against the aggressors. This concurs with Gerhard’s argument, “The church as a whole must denounce the violence, take steps to aid the victims, and have a clear plan to hold accountable secular and church institutions that collude with culpable governmental and criminal justice systems.”⁶² Many times, the marginalized women succumb to the violence because of unjust structural systems in the society.

The leadership of the church must be in solidarity with women in their quest for freedom on issues that limit their development and active participation in leadership. This can be attained effectively through nurturing the talents that women have for the growth of the church. This would encourage the spirit of inclusivism for the continued viability of the Church as women

⁶¹Gerhard, *The Cross*, 99.

⁶²Gerhard, *The Cross*, 107.

enable relationships and promote life. In Africa, women are capable of undertaking the noble task of ministerial calling on a high scale given the opportunity to exploit their gifts in this arena. For instance, in Kenya, the Anglican Church of Kenya, Diocese of Bondo, on a special full Synod held on January 12th, 2021 appointed Canon Emily Awino Onyango, the second woman to be ordained a priest in the Anglican Church of Kenya, to serve as assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Bondo: “In her new role Bishop Emily will take on responsibility for...women’s ministry within the church, and gender issues, including...tackling gender-based violence.”⁶³ This paradigm shift of involvement of women in ecclesiastical leadership by the church vividly shows that the Church is a role model and is in the fore-front in addressing gender-based violence. The involvement of women in ecclesiastical leadership is because their authority is respected following the trend of their leadership ability in the Church. The engagement of women in leadership has enabled them to show case their talents as they are inspired by God as instruments of divine calling in servant leadership. This is reminiscent of the model of public ministry of Jesus Christ which included women who were devoted in their task and service both to God and humankind. The suggestion by Mathew Engelke as he cites Hoehler- Fatton’s on “Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya,” also alludes,

Most African Christian Churches have predominantly female memberships, and the work of women in fostering religious faith is an important one. Hoehler-Fatton’s accounts of how women have helped shape and run the Roho churches are insightful and original. Her discussion of women’s singing during services is equally important. In Roho Churches, it is clear, ‘religion’ is a female domain, and it is time we began to look at religion in Africa from such a perspective.⁶⁴

⁶³Anglican Communion News Service, <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2021/01/canon-emily-awino-onyango-becomes-first-female-anglican-bishop-in-east-and-central-africa.aspx>, assessed on January 18th, 2021.

⁶⁴Matthew Engelke, “Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 27 no 3 (1997): 337-338, accessed January 26, 2021, <https://0-web-a-ebsohost->

The church needs to advocate for justice and equality for women. This creates opportunities for women to take active roles in leadership and challenges the system that has resulted in the oppression of women. The advocacy for justice for women enables them to have a sense of identity and gain social status in the society that tends to lean towards a patriarchal system.

The church should empower women within a patriarchal Society to have the means of negotiating with their power and challenging violence against them through indigenous practices. These provide possibilities for partnership and Christian witness for church leaders in the Anglican Diocese of Bondo. Church leaders can effectively transform traditional practices that perpetuate gender-based violence through collaboration and cooperation with the traditionalist, in order to create an opportunity for sound Christian witness.

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