

The image features a decorative graphic on the right side consisting of three blue circles of varying sizes, each with a gradient from a darker blue center to a lighter blue outer ring. Two thin blue lines intersect to form a large 'V' shape that frames the circles. The text is positioned on the left side of the page.

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at issues of Gender Based Violence in Zambia and emanates from the World Council of Churches' (WCC) theme for the 2013 conference "God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace" and the current upraise of Gender Based Violence cases in Zambia. In this paper, I have argued that feminization of Gender Based Violence is mainly driven by economic hardships the nation is faced with and female dependence on males the communities and families are currently facing. Lack of formal education among women, counterproductive cultural practices and traditions as well as unhelpful legal systems contribute in fuelling violence against women. I therefore pose a challenge to the churches in Zambia (whilst acknowledging that GBV exists and does thrive within the churches), in line with the WCC theme to help actualize life, peace and justice among the Zambian populace through countering Gender Based Violence, with a preferential option for the women of Zambia.

INTRODUCTION

The term "God" carries many names and meanings in various parts of the world. In the Southern part of Africa, God is called by different names ranging from *Lesa* which means God among the Bemba people of Zambia, *Nyamalenga* meaning Creator among the Chewa people of Zambia and Malawi, *Baba* among the Shona people of Zimbabwe which means Father, *Nkosi* among the Zulu people of South Africa which means King. Embedded within all these names are notions of God who is powerful, beyond description, a parent, commands creation into existence and one who remains a mystery. It is this God who is an unfathomable God who is still a parent and Creator that the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Global Ecumenical Theological Institute

(GETI)summoned to lead humanity and the rest of the created order to justice and peace during the 2013 conference in Busan-South Korea.

In my work, I have chosen to link this theme to the current upswing in Gender Based Violence (hereafter GBV) cases in Zambia as witnessed in the media. The world has just been commemorating the international sixteen days of activism against Gender Based Violence (GBV) which ran from 25th November to 10th December, 2013 and yet media reports in Zambia are still bombarded with incidences of battering and killing of women by men (husbands, lovers and other men unknown to the female survivors and victims of GBV). Defilement cases and killings of girl children have also been reported in the media. Despite the Zambian government's and the civil society's efforts to combat GBV, the trend still continues in households, churches and communities. Although one might argue that the raise in the number of reported cases of GBV may be due to the comprehensive sensitization that has taken place in the Zambian society, hence, the willingness for GBV survivors to come forward and report crimes against them and also enthusiasm by the media to capture GBV stories, I still argue that this paper is vital because GBV should not present its ugly head in any society at whatever level, even as we seek to live revitalized lives through seeking a God who celebrates life and affirms the presence of justice and peace among God's own creation. This paper is born from my experiences at Global Ecumenical Theological Institute which ran under theme "God of life, lead us to Justice and Peace" which caused me to deeply reflect on the recent cases of GBV in Zambia. Thus, in my paper, I will seek to look at some drivers of GBV in Zambia and how the WCC theme can be a good starting point for the churches in Zambia to participate in stopping GBV in communities they serve.

WORKING DEFINITION OF GENDER

For purposes of this work, gender will be understood as a socio-cultural construct comprising a range of characteristics distinguishing male and female. “Gender divides humans into two categories: male and female...is the culturally voicable elaboration of sex as a hierarchical pair where male is coded superior and female inferior” (Grany-Francis, Waring *et al* 2003:1). Gender brings to fore classification of people into two groups: male and female. It entails “the way members of the two sexes are perceived, evaluated and expected to behave” (King 1995:5). It is born out of society’s understanding of roles to be played by male and female which in many cases renders the male superior to the female. Arguably, these gender roles have power dynamics embedded within them, thus, roles played by males are regarded as more praise worthy than those assigned to females by society.

SETTING THE CONTEXT



Map of Zambia

GBV takes many forms, among them physical, economical, emotional, spiritual and sexual dimensions. Zambia like many other countries in the world has its own GBV crisis which brings into question issues of gender justice and peace. Hence, it is vital to establish the GBV scenario in Zambia if gender issues are to

be in-cooperated in the quest by the churches in Zambia to champion the God of life and promotion of gender justice and peace. According to a survey conducted by the Zambian Demographic and Health “47 per cent of Zambian women have experienced some form of sexual or physical violence since the age of 15” (2007). These alarming statistics point to the reported cases of GBV in Zambia thus, one shudders to think of the actual statistics of both unreported and reported cases of GBV. There has been feminization GBV in Zambia as the most prone to abuse and dehumanization are females due to many factors, among them cultural, economic, religious and biological which compound their vulnerability. As already mentioned, issues of GBV are not unique to Zambia as women all over the world undergo many forms of abuse at the hands of men.¹ Nonetheless, in Zambia many factors can be cited as promoters of GBV as is discussed below.

SOME DRIVERS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

There are many avenues that can be cited as drivers of GBV in Zambia but the following are what I consider as cardinal contributors of GBV which mainly affects women. Acknowledging that these GBV drivers are not exhaustive, I will nevertheless offer economic hardships and dependence, lack of formal education, counterproductive cultural practices and traditions and unhelpful legal systems as contributors to feminized GBV in Zambia.

First, the current global economic meltdown that has continued to affect the entire globe has not spared Zambia, which is deemed as an economically developing country. Many mining companies, which have for a long time been

¹Whilst acknowledging that Gender Based Violence affects both genders, in this paper, I analyze it from the vantage point of women because they are the most affected by violence at the hands of their male counterparts and Zambia’s statistics prove this as factual.

a source of revenue for the nation and a source of employment for many
Zambian men have been shut down, resulting in many job losses. These job
losses have in turn caused drastic paradigm shifts in how men understand their
own masculinity in an economic context that they fail to provide for their
families as the sole breadwinners. These economic hardships have also seen
some Zambian women step out of the confines of their homes to go and look for
manual work to help support their families. This scenario has emasculated many
Zambian men who feel robbed of their jobs and also place of respect as the
“men of their homes”, leaving them disoriented about their roles in society.
Therefore, to assert their masculinity and try to regain dominion in such
economically challenging situations that erode them of any real power, some
men resort to violence against their wives and children. For them, violence not
only serves to exert their power but is also used a channel to conceal their
inability to be “real men” who can provide for their households. Such levels of
inadequacy are fuelled by cultural and religious teachings that call for women’s
total dependence on men, thus, when tables are turned, some men feel
worthless; hence resort to violence against women.

Second, as pointed out above, wives in Zambia are generally taught to be
economically, socially, spiritually dependent on their husbands. Seeley, Grellier
et al argue that women lack “access to information, skills, assets, credit,
technology and health care...these constraints remains the most critical facing
women in many countries, particularly in the face of HIV/AIDS”(2004:88).
This renders many females impoverished and economically dependent on males
for daily survival, thus jeopardizing their ability to make informed decisions
that pertain to their lives, especially in the face of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore,
women in Zambia face “gender-intensified disadvantages stemming from the
uneven and often inequitable distribution of resources between men and

women, as well as boys and girls. Gender-imposed constraints resulting from the biases to partialities of those individuals who have the authority and power to allocate resources” (:89). In many cases, women and girls do not have easy access to services that can enhance their wellbeing while men and boys stand at an advantage. In her analysis of masculinities, Remyann Connell discusses complicity masculinity as she argues that “the number of men rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony since they benefit from patriarchal dividends, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women” (2005:79). This group of men and boys does not necessarily actively participate in the subordination and violation of women and gains but gains from privileges that come with patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. For, example, a family short of finances would opt to educate a boy child at the expense of a girl child who is expected to get married and therefore be her husband’s dependent for life.

Third, GBV in Zambia is promoted by counterproductive culture and traditional beliefs and teachings. Culture carries many definition but can also be defined as “the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [woman] as a member of society” (Taylor as cited by Gausset 2001:510). In Zambia, culture denotes how local people live their daily lives adorned with codes of conduct which maintain existing socio-cultural structures and strata. Based on some of these unwritten cultural codes, women generally and wives in particular are taught to be submissive to men in general and husbands in particular. Such teachings and beliefs are born from understandings that females ought to take the role of second fiddle in comparison with their male counterparts. This promotes wife battering as some men and husbands feel that they own women and wives

specifically. Issues of gender and culture cannot be separated as they are an inter-twined depiction of how people interact in the midst of their cultural inclinations. An example of such cultural practices which promote GBV is the practice of *lobola*.² It must be mentioned that whether *lobola* as a cultural practice can out rightly be cited as a driver of GBV remains debatable. One school of thought contends that *lobola* depicts the value placed on women in many *Zambian* contexts; hence, the bride's family has to be thanked by her groom through gifts. The other school of thought argues that *lobola* commodifies women, making them further vulnerable to men and husbands in particular.

The act of the bridal wealth exchange is the vital element that legalizes the marriage, effectively transferring certain vital rights over the woman from her father or guardian to her husband and his family. The rights over the woman as a wife (rights *in uxorem*). These include rights of sexual access, now the exclusive preserve of her husband, his family, and whoever they may designate or permit...the second set of rights relate to a woman's procreative powers. These rights in *genetricem* give to the husband and his family legal control over all children born to the woman for as long as she is legally married to the man (Afolayan 2004:183).

As a new entrant into her husband's family, there is a systematic transfer of the woman's rights from her father to her new husband and her newly acquired family. Once the husband has paid *lobola* for her, the woman has to ever be available for the husband's gratification in all avenues of life, leaving no room for her to negotiate for her own safety and wellbeing. The *lobola* practice in this capitalistic dispensation does not in many cases allow for the exchange of cattle but money is paid instead, thereby, adding to the commodification of women.

²This is the bride price that the groom presents to the bride's family as part of marriage negotiations. The practice of *lobola* has undergone a lot of changes with time.

“Cash is often offered and accepted in the place of cattle, further reinforcing the recurrent criticism of *lobola* as the commodification of women” (:201). This practice usually objectifies women rendering them voiceless in marriages, thereby, allowing husbands to abuse them. Since husbands would have paid *lobola*, wives are believed to be “owned” by their husbands who therefore determine every aspect of the woman’s life, especially issues around her sexuality.

As earlier asserted, a lot of arguments have emerged on how *lobola* practice contributes to GBV in Zambia. *Lobola* when understood in its African ethos is a celebratory compensation between the families of the bride and groom.

The departure of a daughter from the family to become a wife in another creates a gap in the departing daughter’s family. Filling this gap requires compensation from the groom’s family for the loss of the daughter’s presence, service, and productive labor (Afolayan 2004:183).

The practice of *lobola* cannot therefore be directly cited as a driver of GBV when understood within its African ethos, it is only meant to compensate the bride’s family and not object her.

As Musimbi Kanyoro³ argues that “culture is a double-edged sword. In some instances, culture is like the creed for the community identity. In other instances, culture is the main justification for difference, oppression and injustices-especially to those whom culture defines as ‘the other’, ‘the outsider’ (2002:130). Depending on which lens one uses, culture can both give identity to a people but can also rob vulnerable groups such as women of their identity

³ Musimbi Kanyoro is one of the leading African women theologians.

when used to promote injustice and dehumanization stemming from gender disparities.

Lastly, unhelpful legal systems which promote stigmatization of women who undergo GBV have compounded cases violence against women. In some cases, when women report rape cases to the police service, they are either blamed for being raped or are meant by unfriendly and unsympathetic officers. Although the situation is slowly changing as some officers under the Victim Support unit of the police service are being trained in handling survivors of GBV, some women still report being blamed by the police officers for being raped. For example, some women are blamed for their bad dressing once they report a rape case which therefore makes some police stations very unfriendly towards GBV survivors, with many women opting not to report the violence they undergo in homes and society.

JOHN 10:10b: PRAGMATIC WAYS IN WHICH THE CHURCHES IN ZAMBIA CAN PROMOTE GENDER JUSTICE AND PEACE.

“I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest” John 10:10b

Bearing in mind that this paper is not a Biblical Studies comprehensive paper, the Scriptural text above is cited to show that Jesus Christ and God in God’s entirety is concerned with the welfare of all creation as God’s aim is for creation to experience fullness of life. Thus, where GBV is the order of the day, it negates fullness of life, and in this case, the lives of women in Zambia are not lived in their fullness. Therefore, for the churches in Zambia to be relevant to the Zambian community, they need to address issues of GBV in ways that help eradicate this vice.

The churches in Zambia first need to acknowledge that GBV exists within their walls. A case in point is the small number of churches in Zambia that ordain women as clergy, how the ordained female clergy are treated as entities of tokenism by some of their male counterparts in the churches. In churches that ordain women, women clergy are still not taken seriously in cases of decision making. Furthermore, women in many churches are used by church structures as tools for cheap or free labour and also as sources of finance. This “baptized” GBV within the churches needs to be addressed by the churches as it has continued to exist without being addressed and yet it dehumanizes women within the body of Christ. “To pursue peace we must prevent and eliminate personal, structural and media violence, including violence against people because of race, caste, gender, sexual orientation, culture or religion”.⁴ GBV is one of the prominent forms of violation in the churches which needs urgent attention from all quarters.

Second, the churches in Zambia need to prioritize issues of GBV as part of their lectionary and lessons for their members. This is because GBV is practiced by both Christians and non-Christians in their communities. Additionally, since GBV is a matter of life and death, churches that are pro-life need to take up the challenge of addressing GBV among communities they serve. The sermons preached need to address this life threatening vice in Zambian communities. “The Bible makes justice the inseparable companion of peace”.⁵ A more tangible way in which the churches in Zambia can counter GBV is by addressing some of its life-denying teachings which promote the subjugation of women by men, especially within marital setups. The churches have for long

⁴An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace Central Committee in Preparation for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, Kingston, 2011:242.

⁵ An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace, 2011:242.

taught Biblical tenets to married couples which hinder divorce at all costs. But taking cognisance of the current trend where women die at the hands of their male counterparts, such teachings need to re-visited. The churches have been relaxed in the face of violence and are therefore challenged by WCC to step up to the challenges faced by communities by stressing that:

we recognize that we must face up to truth along the way. We come to realize how often we deceive ourselves and are complicit with violence. We learn to give up looking for justifications of what we have done, and train ourselves in the practice of justice. This means confessing our wrong-doings, giving and receiving forgiveness and learning to reconcile with each other.⁶

The churches must seek for forgiveness especially from women they have taught and trained to submit to their spouses to a point of death. The churches also need to seek forgiveness from the men they have taught to feel and act superior to their female counterparts, thereby, rendering women more vulnerable to GBV cases. As champions of justice, the churches need to act in ways that promote peaceful co-existence within communities, regardless of gender.

Lastly, the churches in Zambia need to partner with other institutions and organisations that deal with combating GBV in Zambia. This is because the churches may not have all the expertise needed in fighting GBV but through working in collaboration with other organisations, the churches will then offer sound and relevant solutions to GBV faced by Zambian women. Since GBV erodes the life of women and also the males who perpetuate it, the struggle against this vice cannot be won by the churches alone. It is a struggle

⁶An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace, 2011:242

that demands all interested parties to work together in promoting life and healthy living in communities.

CONCLUSION

This paper looked at issues of Gender Based Violence in Zambia and emanated from the World Council of Churches' (WCC) theme for the 2013 conference "God of Life, lead us to Justice and Peace" and the current upraise of Gender Based Violence cases in Zambia. In this paper, I have argued that feminization of Gender Based Violence is mainly driven by economic hardships the nation is faced with and female dependence on males the communities and families are currently facing. Lack of formal education among women, counterproductive cultural practices and traditions as well as unhelpful legal systems contribute in fuelling violence against women. I further posed a challenge to the churches in Zambia (whilst acknowledging that GBV exists and does thrive within the churches), in line with the WCC theme to help actualize life, peace and justice among the Zambian populace through countering Gender Based Violence, with a preferential option for the women of Zambia.

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