


# Spirituality trapped in androcentric celebrity cults in South Africa post-1994

**Author:**Fundiswa A. Kobo<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Fundiswa A. Kobo,  
kobofa@unisa.ac.za

**Dates:**

Received: 30 May 2019

Accepted: 18 Oct. 2019

Published: 12 Dec. 2019

**How to cite this article:**

Kobo, F.A., 2019, 'Spirituality trapped in androcentric celebrity cults in South Africa post-1994', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(3), a5593. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5593>

**Copyright:**

© 2019. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

This article makes a distinction between cultic spiritualities that are prevalent in South Africa and a womanist spirituality of liberation. The current trends related to celebrity lifestyles in post-1994 South Africa deeply suggest an erasure of our subversive memory rooted in our quest for liberation, infused with a culture of protest, the struggle for the affirmation of a black woman's dignity and life. One of the biggest challenges we face in the rise of cultic worship in South Africa, this article will argue, is that spiritual malaise in a nation does not require argument and analyses albeit important, but a response that tames it with enhancing self-love and care and thus the development of the language and grammar of the soul – the rationality of the soul as propounded by Cone. The focus of this article will be on the ongoing Omotoso case as symbolic of these rapturous, pervasive life-killing forms of spirituality that a black womanist cannot be silent about. The article will show how celebrity culture traps our resources of spirituality we need to heal the nation that has been wounded but now continues with self-inflicted wounds two decades after its political liberation.

**Keywords:** Spirituality; Cults; Black women's bodies; Man of God; Patriarchy; Womanism.

## Introduction

This article was presented at the College of Human Sciences (CHS) Interdisciplinary Conference on Abuse of Religion and Gullibility of the Public in the Democratic South Africa, hosted by the University of South Africa (UNISA). This conference created space for theological discourse as a response to some signs that were seen in South Africa post-1994 – namely, the inflicting of Doom by pastors in the name of God, the claims of resurrection of the dead and pastors in trial on charges of rape, human trafficking, money laundering, amongst other things.

In reading these signs of the time post-1994 South Africa, the hope of a promised land becomes just that, hope. #FeesMustFall, protests on service delivery or lack of it, gender-based violence, unemployment, corruption in the government, racism, sexism, with the poor getting poorer in democratic South Africa: 'Dare we hope? We have been hopeful. We continue to be hopeful' (Kobo 2019a:177). According to Cone (2011:18),<sup>1</sup> black people find hope through and in religion which he defines as follows: '[r]eligion is the search for meaning if your life has no meaning in this world'. Cone (1985:99) also argues that 'the black church is the single most important institution in the black community', thus pointing to the centrality of black church arguably as a place of hope for the black community. But religion, church and the Bible have also been used to justify oppressions (Boesak 1987; Kobo 2019b; Maluleke & Nadar 2002; Moore 1973; Mosala 1988; Mtetwa 1998; Oduyoye 1995a; Williams 1993). It is in the name of religion through cultic practices today that hope among the black people seems to be fading. We could borrow words from the psalmist that capture the cry for life of many black, poor South Africans, and many women and children who died and those who are survivors of GBV post-1994 in South Africa: 'where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth'<sup>2</sup> which has today come to mean, 'my help comes from the man of God'.<sup>3</sup>

There are cultic spiritualities prevalent in post-1994 South Africa evident in the current trends related to celebrity lifestyles which deeply suggest an erasure of our subversive memory rooted

1.The late Prof James Cone (1969:117) is the father of Black Theology of Liberation (BTL), whose analysis of the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ was premised on the conditions of the oppressed black people in order for them to see the gospel as inseparable from their condition of humiliation, thus bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression. This article evokes his theological presuppositions and ideas and especially his conviction about the oppression of black women which was omitted in the developmental stages of the school (Cone 1979:363–365); it seeks to look at the conditions of the oppressed black women in the altars with the aim to bestow on them the necessary power in their quest for liberation from a womanist perspective.

2.Psalm 121:1–2.

3.Man of God, papa, daddy, have become popular names to refer to pastors, apostles, shepherds, etc. 'Church congregants once again sang and danced outside the court building in support of the man they affectionately refer to as "daddy" (*The Citizen* 2019).

**Note:** The Legacy of James Cone, sub-edited by Vuyani Vellem.

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

in our quest for liberation, infused with a culture of protest, struggle for the affirmation of a black woman's dignity and life. One of the biggest challenges we face in the rise of cultic worship in South Africa is that spiritual malaise in a nation does not require argument and analyses albeit important, but a response that tames it by enhancing self-love and care and thus the language of the soul – the rationality of the soul.

This article will look at what a cult is, its affinities with mind control, which point to a relationship between faith and reason as one element of this research. We<sup>4</sup> will also look at the relationship between church, Christianity and cult, and lastly black women's bodies as sacrificial lambs at the altar of Omotoso.<sup>5</sup> The focus of this article will be on the ongoing Omotoso case as symbolic of these rapturous, pervasive life-killing forms of spirituality that a black womanist cannot be silent about. The article will show how celebrity culture traps our resources of spirituality we need in order to heal the nation that has been wounded but now continues with self-inflicted wounds two decades after our political liberation and how a womanist spirituality of liberation helps us to liberate these resources.

## What is a cult?

Cults are groups or movements<sup>6</sup> that exhibit an excessive devotion and commitment to some person, a charismatic leader (Marty 1960; Rudin 1990). Sociologically, they are defined as a beginning stage of a new religion (Roberts 1990); hence, some scholars employ 'new religious movement' to dispel the negative connotations that are always attached to cults (Boeri 2002:325). Ayella (1990:562) provides deeper insights on some difficulties in researching cults and posits that 'the labeling of a group as a cult makes this a sensitive topic to study'.

Several factors and conditions are associated with cults. Some scholars observe how socio-economic conditions break down in the family fabric; homelessness draws people to cults as a means of survival (Curtis & Curtis 1993:451). The state of vulnerability and emotional and psychological conditions have also been cited as stimuli for people to join cults and hence cults arguably provide the atmosphere of a surrogate family (Curtis & Curtis 1993:452; Marty 1960:129). So cults seemingly, are an escape, a form of therapy and 'a form of psychological anaesthesia' (Curtis & Curtis 1993: 453) for some who join under these circumstances.

Enroth (1977) posits that cults are primarily created for self-perpetuation through recruitment and conversion.<sup>7</sup> Clark (1979)

4. The use of 'we' in this work is an expression of a conversation that is never possible without others from a womanist perspective and wherever I make use of 'I', it must also be understood in that context, not as an affirmation of the Cartesian ego (Kobo 2018b:1).

5. Pastor Timothy Omotoso, a Nigerian pastor who is currently under police custody and is charged with rape and sexual assault of young girls and human trafficking. It must be stated that rape in South Africa is a problem of the 21st century that we continue to grapple with as church and society. See also Gqola (2015), le Roux in Hendricks, et al. 2012, Motsei (2007), to name a few.

6. Cults are understood as movements, 'new movements' (Robbins & Dick 1979:79), 'new religious movements' (Boerie 2002:325).

7. See also Wallis (1975).

thus asserts that this can be achieved by employing highly sophisticated and methodical techniques that will ensure successful inductions. Some of the techniques associated with cults are indoctrination, initiation rituals, brainwashing, coercion, intimidation, isolation, promises of utopia and salvation, disinformation, punishment and negative reinforcement. Brainwashing and indoctrination are highlighted as foundational mechanisms of recruitment (Curtis & Curtis 1993:452; Rudin 1990:46). Richardson, Harder and Simmonds (1972) are amongst several scholars who have pointed out the close affinities between brainwashing and religion.

Curtis John and Mimi's analysis of Hilgard (1961) and Orne (1966) is helpful in grasping the underpinnings of these mechanisms. According to Hilgard (1961, cited in Curtis & Curtis 1993):

To the extent that analytical and reasoning abilities influence individuals' judgment and to the extent that dissociative states have been correlated with a willing suspension of disbelief-the very process by which critical thinking is surrendered-individuals prone to dissociation may have considerable difficulty recognizing misleading and potentially dangerous propositions. (p. 453)

The point that is made here is that when people cease to think critically, they are prone to much abuse and exploitation as their rational judgement is suspended. Curtis John and Mimi further observe that (Curtis & Curtis 1993):

In this connection, misleading and deceptive promises regarding cults' presumptive benefits may not be recognized due to suspended rational judgment. Since the propensity toward dissociation has been observed with alpha states – the brain wave pattern associated with hypnotic trances – it might be expected that individuals in this state are subject to increased suggestibility and influence (Orne 1966). This, too, would tend to increase prospective cult members' chances of successful induction and recruitment. (p. 453)

The suspended rational judgement pointed in the above sentiments points to adverse impact on individuals' capacities for critical and analytical thinking which is necessary for recognising potentially ill-advised and dangerous propositions (Curtis & Curtis 1993:460). This domination over the minds is what makes black theologians and womanists to ponder on the question of the relationship between faith and reason which will be looked into later. More importantly, we have also identified some worrying features about cults in general, namely, the relationship between cults and survival, the recruitment strategies and the creation of an environment similar to that of a surrogate family and security for those struggling to survive. We need to keep these features in mind as we turn to a brief examination of the relationship between a cult and church.

## Relationship between church, Christianity and cult (ecclesiological perspective)

If we look at some of the definitions of cults discussed so far, the fact that Jesus Christ's movement was a cult cannot be

denied.<sup>8</sup> The notion of cults or new [religious] movements could be traced back to the very first movement that erupted as an antithesis of the state religion, Jesus Christ's movement, the newly found communities that followed the teachings of Jesus Christ (Richardson 1979). This movement of Jesus ultimately developed into the institutional church, unfortunately becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire during Constantine.<sup>9</sup> The vision of the Jesus movement became official only when Constantine claimed to have had a vision of conversion and domesticated this movement. What one is trying to elaborate here is to propose a broad thesis that links the origin of the church perhaps as a cult, perhaps a disturbing cult built around Jesus; however, it later became domesticated when it became an official religion of the state.

The point we are making is that insofar as the official religion of the Roman empire was something else before the movement of Jesus Christ was domesticated, Jesus' movement should be viewed as a cult too in its origins. If one looks at the justification of the exclusion of Jesus, or rather the killing of Jesus, this matter becomes clear. Jesus was killed because of the collaboration of the official religion of the Jews, Judaism and the power of the Roman Empire.

The cult of Jesus arguably re-interprets and appropriates a positive view of what a cult could be in the context of an empire because even the very custodians of this religious tradition, the Jews, seem to have accepted to serve the empire, according to the story of Jesus in the Gospels. If you look at the narrative showing Jesus' way to the cross, he is accused by the Sadducees, Pharisees, taken to the Sanhedrin, arguably a seat of Judaism, to condemn him to death. Herod, representing the Jews and Pilate the Roman Empire became friends.<sup>10</sup> The point so far is to argue that the movement that Jesus started was a cult, but if it was a cult, it was different as it disturbed the relationship between the state religion and the empire.

Therefore, we cannot simply talk about cults in a negative sense, I argue, because Christianity started as a cult led by Jesus with a few men, his 12 disciples and one amongst them also betrayed him. The cult of Jesus however is something that springs out of a steady focused insemination and planting of the seed against a formidable power structure that also manufactures its own religiosity, in other words, its own spirituality (Vellem 2014). In his work, Vellem exposes the links between Western religiosity and spirituality and the subjugation of black Africans. He posits that in the context of an empire African religiosity is an alternative. What he means is that, in our contemporary history, we must not forget that

8. If cults are movements as argued earlier, the Jesus movement, a new religious movement, is arguably a cult. For more on the Jesus movement, see Richardson et al. (1972), Richardson (1974), Richardson and Stewart (1977) and O'Callaghan (1965).

9. 'When under Constantine Christianity became a state religion, however, the Church changed. From then on, [the] Church and State would be allies. The confession of the Church became the confessions of the State, and the politics of the State became politics of the Church. The politics of the Kingdom of God would henceforth be subjected to the approval of Caesar. G.J. Heering spoke of "the Fall of the Christian Church" (55) and rightly so. In simple terms, we might say, the Church became a white Church, and subsequent history would prove it. ... Once the Christian Church had discovered what could be done with its new-found economic and political power, there was no stopping it in joining fully in all the benefits' (Boesak 1977:29).

10. Luke 23:12.

our problem has always been what official religion does to those other forms of religion or religiosity, unofficial and sometimes subjugated. Cone (1969:117) has long argued throughout his career and life about an inseparability of the gospel from the humiliating conditions of the oppressed black people as an anti-thesis to the official religion that subjugates.

To return to our point, what makes this cult distinct, that is, the Jesus movement, is firstly its metaphysics. In all cultic movements there is a purposeful deification of the leader and a commitment of all members to pay homage to the leader. Cults tend to be positively oriented and organised around a charismatic leader (Marty 1960:25). But Jesus' cult becomes different; the leader is killed. The other cults however refuse to die; the cultic leaders would rather sacrifice others to sustain the cult. They are based on the sacrifice of the other human beings. Jesus' cult is arguably based on the sacrifice of the leader for other human beings to live.<sup>11</sup> Jesus' movement is a cult. It was not recognised, it is on the margins and it was started by people who could not even pronounce their names, the Galileans, the riff raff of society, the marginalised, people who ultimately became victims of the political and economic systems of the day. In *EcclesioGenesis*, Boff (1986) states that the genesis of the church lies in the movements of the marginalised.

The insights above on the Jesus movement further expose a constant tension between what we have then understood as an institutionalised church and the Jesus movement, a debate exists as to whether Jesus willed an institutionalised church or a movement of liberation. So, the pertinent question for the researcher is whether the church as an institution is what Jesus willed or not? There are close affinities between the Constantinian model church and religion becoming a problem for the public life. We see a church that became an official religion of the state, contrary to the Jesus' movement which was never an official religion of the state and in fact Jesus was killed by the state. Because Jesus's movement was never an official religion of the state, we must always remember that he was killed.

The argument for institutionalisation is that human beings set up structures that sometimes are indeed intended to give expression to a goal that is egalitarian, that is wonderful in the historical sense and so on. That is why we must have some kind of an institution and organisational power in support of the vision of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> But what often happens is that institutions ultimately begin to exist for themselves. They become self-centric and exist for their survival; the original command and vision are downplayed. When institutions begin to do so, they no longer adhere to the vision and the church no longer thinks of the mission and vision of the Jesus movement. The questions we have raised in defining what a cult is, the recruitment methods, the survival of the struggling people and the false façade created by cults

11. 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (Jn 10:10).

12. 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor' (Is 61:1-2; Lk 14:18-19).



also become more pressing for us if we examine the institutionalised churches and the vision of Jesus.

The mainstream Protestant churches in South Africa in addition to what Nadar and Maluleke (2019) say about the church suggesting that there is no church in South Africa must actually be understood as a cult from a womanist perspective. The apostasy of the institutional church in South Africa, the loss of the prophetic voice by the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the absence of that prophetic voice in our denominations including my own, the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA), all suggest that there is a bigger picture we must confront that exacerbates the rise of cultic practices in South Africa. How would we not have them if the churches have become redundant or have become irrelevant? (Vellem 2019a:281). Obviously, the spread of anything that calls the name of Jesus becomes possible.

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL) is itself an institution of a particular democratic system which is deified. In other words, one can argue that democracy is cultic too. Democracy must never be regarded by churches as equal to the liberation of human beings; it is a system. Why did the ANC itself relegate a liberation perspective of theology by domesticating it? They appointed the likes of Mehana (the chaplain of the ANC) who claimed that they are representatives of a liberation perspective of theology the same Mehanas who are no different from the Omotosos if their remarks about women are brought to mind.<sup>13</sup>

We have churches in South Africa even today who are modelled after the Constantinian framework and that is a cause of worry as they are deviating from the crux of the Jesus movement. It can therefore be argued that same mainline churches and their apostasy could also be interpreted as a cult if a cult must be seen as something negative. Vellem's analysis and critique of David Bosch<sup>14</sup> is helpful for us. He uses the notions of a redundant and irrelevant church to expose the constant tensions and contradictions related to a church which are both life affirming and life killing (Vellem 2019a). The church is considered as otherworldly and disconnected from life.<sup>15</sup> The contrast is how such contradictions show mainstream churches in a negative light while showing cults in a positive light. 'The cults indicate a deep-felt need, they bring to light a cruel neglect, they shatter our hackneyed religious cant, they repudiate our smug churchianity'

13. Only to distance themselves later from his utterances about women (Qodashe 2019).

14. In this work that attempts to 'carry on with Cone's spirit', Vellem (2019:268) exposes the ghettoizing of Cone's theological propositions, by non-racialist intellectuals, like David Bosch amongst others.

15. Cry, cry, cry for life  
For the peasants who produce our food  
But go to bed with empty stomach  
For workers who keep the wheel turning  
Cry, cry, cry for life  
For the courage, for the hope  
For the forest, for the stream  
Bodies may die, spirit never dies  
In our struggle, we burst in songs  
As a new day dawns, we will shout in joy (Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians [EATWOT] 1993:46).

(Kuizenga 1944:35). The problem is that while institutional or mainstream churches escape to the other world in responding to the cries and material needs of the people, cults, according to Kuizenga (1944):

Many of the cults are not ashamed to help a man earn a living. They have been quick to see, that, while man does not live by bread alone, nevertheless enough to eat, decent clothes, and moderately sanitary housing are not implacable enemies of religion. Not a few of our churches, and they among the most boastfully fundamental have been so falsely and peculiarly spiritual that they are insistent. (39) on saving the soul even while they help to let the body die. (pp. 39–40)

Kuizenga (1944) further asserts that '[o]ne does not endorse all the extravaganzas of the cults, if he suggests that the churches are challenged to be awake, wide awake' (p. 43). A church that lives for its own survival and is indifferent to the cries of the people is dangerous. Cultic practices destroy the ability of self-care which could be built through Black Consciousness (BC), which is inspired by 'irrevocably changing of minds, bodies and soul' (Mkhabela 2017:xvi). In his research on the emergence of movements of socially marginal beliefs and cults in America, Jorgensen 1982 makes the same observation on the "dissatisfaction with the solutions to everyday life problems offered by orthodox religion or science" (Jorgensen 1982:389).

From this broad theological prism and framework, why then would we not have an Omotoso? And who is then suffering? A black woman is the one who is suffering. Her suffering dungeoning is concealed by religion and the church today. This was confirmed by Ms Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva, the Chairperson of the CRL Commission, in a seminar at UNISA, where she reported the exploitation of women and children as one of their findings. She exposed the affinities between the abuse of religion and leadership that is male-dominated. She cited a pastor saying that women are in iimanyano and have no business in the running of the church (27 August 2018). Nadar (2018) exposes South African churches' inability to make links between church teachings on headship theology and what happened to Cheryl Zondi. This is exactly what Cone's theology debunked as observed earlier and also in his critique of Niebuhr's inability to connect a lynching tree and the cross (Kobo 2018b:2). This kind of church would certainly have Mehanas, the Omotosos and black women as sacrificial lambs in their altars.

## Black women's bodies as sacrificial lambs at Omotoso's altar

We have already established that these institutions alluded to above produce pseudo-spiritualities and are patriarchal and thus androcentric vessels of spirituality. A deep analysis of patriarchal violence from a womanist perspective exposes how such a totality of oppression finds its uniqueness in the use of faith, theological justification and rationalisation of women's exploitation (Kobo 2018a; Williams 1993). How patriarchal violence has become so difficult to deal with could be traced by womanists from the narrative that is shaped by

male-dominated language and symbols. In their analysis of the predominating concepts of God that were introduced to black South Africans by missionaries and western theologians, Moore and Ntwasa (1973:19–21) argue that God as person has been one of the major and fundamental images, which later came to mean that God is male and also white, and today it means male and black if *papa* and ‘daddy’ come to mind. In a racist society, the place of males, even African and black males, is that of power in relation to his fellow African and black women (Maluleke & Nadar 2002:6). Moore and Ntwasa (1973) further expose the affinities of this racialising and gendering of God with exclusion of blacks and women from positions of authority. This occurs to the extent that human beings have been made to imagine God as a man. The attributes of God such as love, forgiveness, and so on, collapse in the lived experiences of women but the imaginary is so thick that it bounces back because the word *papa* by the way is God. Therefore, the mistakes that are committed by males, which include patriarchal violence and sexism, must be forgiven because God is forgiving. The lived experience of a woman constantly gets contradicted in her subconscious mind because the code *papa* is not only used for a male human being but also used to designate a transcendental power all women must believe in. The dwelling of this power becomes a subconscious phenomenon, it is intuitive. So when we have to consciously deal with the rapacious behaviour attributable to this man, our mind becomes blocked by a faith that shows God to be a man. That is the danger of faith.

Cherly Zondi<sup>16</sup> in her testimony narrated how after being raped by Omotoso, he would pray for both. ‘She said that when Omotoso woke up he prayed asking God for forgiveness for both of them’ (Sun Reporter 2018). She states that she fears prayer. Which victim wouldn’t fear prayer especially a woman whose body has been crushed and defiled and dungeoned? What does prayer mean for women in Elmina,<sup>17</sup> women in Marikana<sup>18</sup> and Cherly Zondi? The same prayer that was used and left black Africans landless?<sup>19</sup> What is prayer? Who hears these prayers? God the man or the man of God is a dilemma for womanists.

Cherly Zondi’s dilemma is demonstrated in her attempt to break away from the cult; yet years later, she returns with the hope of an apology and that the man of God has changed, she says. When she realises that things are the same, her belief system collapses again. From a womanist perspective, her struggle is that of disharmony between her faith and reason. She is aware that the man of God is a monster, yet her struggle is that God cannot be a monster. But God is a man, and the man of God should not be a monster.

16. Cheryl Zondi is one of the alleged victims of Pastor Timothy Omotoso who testified against him in court on 15th October 2018 (Sun Reporter 2018).

17. Elmina signifies the genesis of the fragmentation of black humanity and ‘dungeoning’ of black African women. See Kobo (2018b).

18. Marikana signifies the dungeoning of black African women in the democratic South Africa (Kobo 2018a:1–2).

19. ‘When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us “let us pray”. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the bible’ (Mofokeng 1988:34). But as a womanist I say not only the land but a woman as well, a black woman was gone.

When you talk about Black Theology of Liberation (BTL) and BC from a spiritual perspective, you must constantly look at how cognitive rationality is helpful in making us grasp a reality that is beyond the rationality of cognition. Anything that we say theologically is not equal to what we say about it, there is always a surplus...that is what faith is about. No matter how much language you can use to try to explain the mystery of faith, eloquence, philosophy, no matter how much you can deploy all those tools, the highest possibilities of the deployment of cognition, there will still be something you will never be able to grasp about who God is. Worship or rather prayer therefore becomes a means by which you transcend that rationality (Vellem 2019b:83). There is no way in which you can explain it without accepting that prayer bridges the limitations of language. Language is the system, language is something that human beings have created for communication, language is rational and has reason, but prayer goes beyond such features and assumes a different rationality. It is only then that it becomes authentic.

Rationality dwells in us in ways we may not have control over. This means that how we articulate God in relation to who God is without us being able to tell is triggered by patriarchal violence (Ntwasa & Moore 1973). The compatibility between these two rationalities is wrong. The experiences related to violence faced by women themselves necessitate a rational response. But the dissonance between how we articulate God in relation to who God is blocks that rational response. This makes us constantly ask: how possible is it that women who are the only people to really imagine the pain of Omotoso’s defilement of a human being suddenly become the ones to have their minds blocked by what they express as their faith in God, to an extent that they become conspirators?<sup>20</sup> As observed by Maluleke and Nadar in their analyses of the covenant between human societies and violence especially against women, there are many layers of this violence and a host of conspirators who enter into a covenant of violence with the abuser. In the case of Omotoso, their analysis is confirmed by Omotoso’s statement that what happened between him and Cheryl Zondi was a covenant between them and God and should thus be kept sacred (Sun Reporter 2018). There was also an involvement of the two women who have also been kept in custody on the charges of recruiting, grooming and monitoring the movements of girls for the controversial pastor (Eyewitness News 2019; Sun Reporter 2018).

One sees the contradiction between two rationalities not because there are inherent contradictions but because there is a dissonance between the two. That is why the balance between faith and reason is always important. It is a wrong rationality of who God is, but it has become a grammar of faith. But faith cannot be controlled. If you push this system to its limit, it triggers something we cannot control but it again blocks the rationality in order for these people to again pay homage to a God who is also a *papa*.

We are certainly devastated by the wide fire set by these cults: Omotoso, Bushiri, Lekau, in Engcobo and Mdantsane in the

20. See also James (1997) and Mosala (1986).

Eastern Cape, to name a few. The person who is ultimately and viciously denigrated is a woman in these organisations that we loosely define as cults. But it is the same even in those places that we regard as mainstream churches, if you look at Mehana and the silent Mehanas in our denominations. So, the CRL must not think that the solution is between these cults as they name them and the mainstream churches. The CRL must remember the following: firstly, the Jesus movement is the movement of liberation that must never be tamed or sanitised by powerful institutionalised forms of that movement. Secondly, bastardising cults is inadequate while the mainstream churches are left untouched; whereas both converge on the top of the body of a woman in denigrating human lives. What is the spirituality of liberation in this context?

## A womanist spirituality of liberation

Once the Jesus movement of Galilee, the city that was on the outskirts of Jerusalem, the movement of the marginalised, the outcasts is sanitised, co-opted and ghettoised, the liberation theology starts there. The liberation theology starts at the zone of non-being (Fanon 1952) where the non-persons, poor, oppressed (Boesak 1977; Cone 1969, 1975; Vellem 2007) and marginalised (Boff 1986) are located. A theology of liberation revolts against the spiritual enslavement of black people at the hands of white supremacy and also from enslavement from within as demonstrated in the cultic practices that challenge black humanity today. Black theology of liberation as a theology of the oppressed, by the oppressed, for the liberation of the oppressed must include the oppression of black women. Black women are oppressed, and their bodies are sacrificial lambs in the altars of both old and new movements. Oduyoye (2004:69) argues that 'Liberation for women must also happen in the church'. Cone traced this relegation of the plight of black women to the background at school. Mofokeng (1987) and Mosala (1987) have also seen that. Hence, Mosala's (1987:39) proposition about the importance of a womanist theological discourse is a necessity of the objective and subjective conditions of black women's struggle.

From a womanist perspective, consciousness which is foundational in the paradigm of womanism and BTL (Cone 1975; Kobo 2018a; Vellem 2015) is core if we are to understand the extent of black women's struggle in these cultic practices of the old and new movements. This awareness or consciousness is BC, meaning that BTL and womanism is a BC and systematic reflection on the black situation. The argument of this article is that a deficient relationship between philosophy, ideology and faith produces a deficient and pseudo spirituality (Kobo 2018a), which is what we are seeing in both cultic and mainline churches today. Looking at the problem of theology and ideology in the old and new movements, we have averred that there are contradictions. The CRL cannot only focus on the so-called cults because what we see in South Africa today are symptoms of a deeper problem created by the most powerful. If one looks at how these mainstream denominations are sleeping in the same

bed with the ANC government after 25 years into democracy, what we see in these cults is arguable: a fetishised spirituality emanating from the rigidity of structural religion, the Constantine model of church, imperialistic, rigid order and a form of power that is anti-life. And the most horrifying expression of empire and this rigid order will always be women, that is, the reason we are talking about triple and multiple jeopardies (Bennet 1986:170; EATWOT 1993:50–51; Kobo 2018a:1; Williams 1993:73) as black women's bodies lie at the altar of racists, sexists and cults and spiritualities trapped in the dungeons that must be excavated for the liberation of black humanity as a whole.

## Conclusion

The prevalent cultic spiritualities in post 1994 South Africa point to a deep-seated problem of empire, a rigid order and institutions that produce power that is anti-life for black women today. The so-called cults and mainstream churches have converged on the bodies of black African women who are laying at the altar and dungeons, and whose bodies and spiritualities must be excavated from a womanist perspective.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that she has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced her in writing this article.

### Author's contributions

E.A.K. is the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

### Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

## References

- Ayella, M., 1990. "They must be crazy": Some of the difficulties in researching "cults". *American Behavioral Scientist* 33(5), 562–577. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764290033005005>



- Bennet, B., 1986, 'A critique on the role of women in the church', in I. Mosala & B. Thlagale (eds.), *The unquestionable right to be free*, pp. 169–174, Skotaville, Johannesburg.
- Boeri, M.W., 2002, 'Women after the Utopia: The gendered lives of former cult members', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 31(3), 323–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241602031003003>
- Boesak, A., 1987, *If this is treason, I am guilty*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Boesak, A., 1977, *Farewell to innocence. A social-ethical study of black theology and black power*, Ravan, Johannesburg.
- Boff, L., 1986, *Ecclesiology: The base communities reinvent the church*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
- Clark, J.G., 1979, 'Cults', *Journal of the American Medical Association* 242(3), 279–281. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.242.3.279>
- Cone, J.H., 1969, *Black theology and black power*, Seabury Press, New York.
- Cone, J.H., 1975, *God of the oppressed*, Seabury, New York.
- Cone, J.H., 1979, 'Black theology and black women: Introduction', in J.H. Cone & G.S. Wilmore (eds.), *Black theology: A documentary history*, pp. 1966–1979, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
- Cone, J.H., 1985, *'For my people': Black theology and the black church*, Kotaville, Johannesburg.
- Cone, J.H., 2011, *The cross and the lynching tree*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
- Curtis, J.M. & Curtis, M.J., 1993, 'Factors related to susceptibility and recruitment by cults', *Psychological Reports* 73(2), 451–460. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1993.73.2.451>
- Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) Third General Assembly Statement, 1993, 'The cry for life- spirituality of the third world', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 7(1), 45–71.
- Enroth, R.M., 1977, 'Cult/countercult', *Eternity* 27, 19–22.
- Eyewitness News, 2019, *Timothy Omotoso's lawyers file papers with SCA in bid to remove trial judge*, viewed 04 February 2019, from <https://ewn.co.za/Topic/Timothy-Omotoso>.
- Fanon, F., 1952, *Black skin, white masks*, Grove Press, New York.
- Gqola, P.D., 2015, *Rape. A South African nightmare*, MFBooks, Johannesburg, Auckland Park.
- Hendriks, H.J., Moutin, E., Hansen, L. & Le Roux, E. (eds.), 2012, *Men in the pulpit, women in the pew?*, SUN Press, Stellenbosch.
- Hildard, E.R., 1961 *Hypnotic susceptibility*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, NY.
- Kobo, F.A., 2018a, 'A womanist exposition of pseudo-spirituality and the cry of an oppressed African woman', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(1), 4896. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4896>
- Kobo, F.A., 2018b, 'Black women's bodies as reformers from the dungeons: The reformation and womanism', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(3), 5015. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5015>
- Kobo, F.A., 2019a, 'Hope in a pseudo spirituality of democracy in South Africa. Religion and human security in troubling contexts', in E. Chitando & J. Tarusarira (eds.), *Religion and human security in Africa*, pp. 177–196, Routledge, London.
- Kobo, F.A., 2019b, 'Womanism and Black Anthropology: In memory of James Cone', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 162–163, 82–100.
- Kuizenga, J.E., 1944, 'The cults: Phenomenon and challenge', *Theology Today* 1(1), 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004057364400100104>
- Maluleke, T.S. & Nadar, S., 2002, 'Breaking the covenant of violence against women', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 114, 5–17.
- Marty, M.E., 1960, 'Sects and cults', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 332(1), 125–134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626033200113>
- Mkhabela, I., 2017, 'Foreword', in B. Ndaba, T. Owen, M. Panyane, R. Serumula & J. Smith (eds.), *The black consciousness reader*, pp. xiii–xvii, Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd, Auckland Park.
- Mofokeng, T., 1988, 'Black Christians, the Bible and liberation', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 2(1), 34–42.
- Mofokeng, T.A., 1987, 'Following the trail of suffering: Black theological perspectives, past and present', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 1(2), 21–34.
- Moore, B. (ed.), 1973, *Black theology. The South African voice*, C. Hurts & Co, London.
- Moore, B. & Ntwasa, S., 1973, 'The concept of God in Black Theology', in B. Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, pp. 18–28, C. Hurts & Co., London.
- Mosala, B.I., 1986, 'Black theology and the struggle of the black woman in Southern Africa', in I. Mosala & B. Thlagale (eds.), *The unquestionable right to be free. Essays in black theology*, pp. 129–133, Skotaville, Johannesburg.
- Mosala, I.J., 1987, 'Black theology in South Africa and North America: Prospects for the future; building of alliances', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 1(2), 35–41.
- Mosala, I.J., 1988, 'The implications of the text of Esther for African women's struggle for liberation in South Africa', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 2(2), 3–9.
- Motsei, M., 2007, *The Kangaroo court: Reflections on the rape trial of Jacob Zuma*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne.
- Mtsetwa, S.J., 1998, 'African traditional religion and culture in a post-apartheid South Africa: A critical appraisal', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 12(1), 59–76.
- Nadar, S., 2018, 'Moral responsibility for Omotoso lies within the churches', *News24*, viewed 09 May 2019, from <https://www.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/moral-responsibility-for-omotoso-lies-with-the-churches-20181026>.
- Nadar S. & Maluleke T.S., 2019, *No holy cows in hate cases*, viewed 09 May 2019, from <https://mg.co.za/article/2019-01-11-00-no-holy-cows-in-hate-cases#.XETGe9uxHNA.gmail>.
- O'Callaghan, D., 1965, 'Christianity and the mystery cults', *Irish Theological Quarterly* 32(3), 241–245. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002114006503200304>
- Oduyoye, M.A., 1995a, *Daughters of Anowa. African women and patriarchy*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.
- Oduyoye, M.A., 1995b, 'Calling the church to account', *Ecumenical Review* 47(4), 479–489. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.1995.tb03742.x>
- Oduyoye, M.A., 2004, *Beads and strands: Reflections of an African woman on Christianity in Africa*, Orbis, Maryknoll, NY.
- Qodashe, Z., 2019, *ANC disappointed with Reverend Vukile Mehana*, viewed 08 May 2019, from <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/anc-disappointed-with-reverend-vukile-mehana/>.
- Richardson, J.T., 1974, 'The Jesus movement: An assessment', *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 9(3), 20–42.
- Richardson, J.T., 1979, 'From cult to sect: Creative eclecticism in new religious movements', *Pacific Sociological Review* 22(2), 139–166. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1388875>
- Richardson, J.T. & Stewart, M., 1977, 'Conversion process models and the Jesus movement', *American Behavioral Scientist* 20(6), 819–838. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427702000603>
- Richardson, T.J., Harder, M. & Simmonds, R.B., 1972, 'Thought reform and the Jesus movement', *Youth & Society* 4, 185–202.
- Robbins, T. & Anthony, D., 1979, 'Cults, brainwashing, and counter-subversion', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 446(1), 78–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271627944600108>
- Roberts, K.A., 1990, *Religion in sociological perspective*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA.
- Rudin, M.R., 1990, 'Cults and Satanism: Threats to teens', *NASSP Bulletin* 74(526), 46–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019263659007452610>
- Sun Reporter, 15 October 2018, *Omotoso trial: Mzansi supports Cheryl Zondi*, viewed 04 February 2019, from <https://www.dailysun.co.za/News/National/omotoso-trial-mzansi-supports-cheryl-zondi-20181015>.
- The Citizen, 04 February 2019, *Omotoso rape trial postponed pending constitutional court decision*, viewed 04 February 2019, from <https://citizen.co.za/category/news/south-africa/courts/>.
- Vellem, V.S., 2007, 'The symbol of liberation in South African public life: A black theological perspective', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria.
- Vellem, V.S., 2014, 'Spirituality of liberation: A conversation with African religiosity', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1), 7.
- Vellem V.S., 2015, 'Unshackling the Church', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71(3), Art. #3119, 5 pages. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.3119>
- Vellem, V.S., 2019a, 'Cracking the Eurocentric code. A battle on the banks of the "new blood rivers"', *Missionalia* 46(2), 267–287. <https://doi.org/10.7832/46-2-313>
- Vellem, V.S., 2019b, 'limanyano singing Siyakudumisa: Ambivalent worship and the reformed tradition in South Africa', *St Augustine Papers* 19(1/2), 75–95.
- Williams, J.L., 1993, 'Racism and sexism: Redrawing the conceptual and strategic maps', *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 7(2), 73–99.