

Women, witches and demons! Interrogating the feminization of demoniacs among Pentecostal - Christian communities in Zimbabwe

GILBERT TARUGARIRA¹ AND ANNAH MOYO²

ABSTRACT

Since the Christian church came to Zimbabwe, women have been its backbone. Today, even more than before, women are the ones who keep the church spiritually and numerically alive. Paradoxically, women are treated as objects of a male-created, monitored and imposed power structure and theology. Power seems to be located within a multidimensional system of oppression in which people can be oppressors and the oppressed simultaneously. Miracles involving exorcisms of demons continue to play an important role in defining sainthood, while possession itself has become increasingly the experience of women. With particular reference to selected Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, the study explores the nexus between the gendered African traditional beliefs on the status of women in society and the spiritual devaluation of women and their decimation as witches or as keepers of demons in Christian churches.

Keywords: Christian, demons, gender, miracles, exorcism, possession, witches

¹ Lecturer in History in the Department of Humanities, Business Development and Arts Education, Midlands State University in Zimbabwe.

² Lecturer at the Gender Institute, Midlands State University in Zimbabwe

Introduction

Historically, and in the minds of many African people in general and Zimbabweans in particular, the penetration of Christianity into Africa was intimately connected with the colonial era. Colonial governments often tried to identify themselves with Christianity, notwithstanding their conflicts with particular religious leaders (Zvobgo, 1996; Okon, 2014). Christian churches differ widely in style and form. There are mainstream missionary churches and African Independent Churches. Within the Christian churches are Pentecostal churches. Anderson (2004:110) defines Pentecostal Churches as “divergent African churches that emphasize the working of the spirit in the church, particularly with ecstatic phenomena like prophecy and speaking in tongues, healing and exorcism”. Leading Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe are Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), Family of God (FOG) and United Family International Ministries (UFIM). The followers tend to share common beliefs about witchcraft and demon possession and that possession could be cured only by lifting the spell or hex by religious exorcism performed by pastors or by the intercession of saints. The churches, ZAOGA in particular, neither allow a Christian to point to another as a witch nor believe that a Christian can be bewitched. However, if one thinks that someone has a demon of witchcraft, he or she is expected to cast out that demon of witchcraft in the name of Jesus Christ (Guti, 2011). Poverty and ill health have also been explained in terms of generational curses that can only be dealt with by men and women of God. Indeed, exorcism is closely associated with healing since there is a strong belief that misfortune; evil and sickness were caused by evil forces like witches and demons (Sundkler, 1961; Maxwell, 2006; Hastings, 1972; Gifford, 2004; Daneel 1974).

Methodological Issues

This study is qualitative in nature and employs the interpretive approach in accumulating data and discussing the findings of the

study (Ruddock, 2001; Bryman, 2004). Qualitative research studies people, cultural practices or beliefs, institutions or communities in their natural settings. The study largely focused on the AFM, ZAOGA and FOG followers. The database constructed for this study consisted of 92 women and men who between 2000 and 2020 identified themselves or were identified by others as possessed. Also within the sample were individuals suffering from ailments that they attributed to 'unclean spirits' or demons. Admittedly, the database was not exhaustive but it provided insights into the gender and age profiles of the victims of possession. Observations were conducted at particular church services in Gweru where people testified. Testimonies were solicited from individuals who had experienced miraculous cures themselves and who had relatives who had been healed miraculously as a result of the pastors' and saints' intercession with God. An analysis of testimonies obtained from some of the individuals involved helped to reveal why and in what ways faith healing had such a powerful attraction. Participant observation and eyewitness accounts afforded the researchers the latitude to make informed deductions from healing episodes.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Theories on the causes of African church independency point to social and political discrimination which encouraged Africans to seek churches where they were not second-class members. The Africans found themselves marginalized and deprived of leadership opportunities. Some of the African traditional beliefs like the practice of polygamy were attacked by missionaries (Hastings, 1982; Daneel, 1974; Sundkler, 1961). The quest for the independent church was for a belief through which immediate human needs, social, psychological and physical could be appropriately met. The African Independent Churches/African Indigenous Churches/African Initiated Churches (AICs) have been able to attract members from mission churches and lay

people who had no previous formal connection with Christianity. According to Hastings (1982:72), the most important attraction was “the establishment of accessible rites of healing with a Christian reference and within a caring community by gifted and spiritual individuals claiming an initiative effectively denied them in the older churches”. Prayer for healing, divining out witchcraft and the cleansing of witches are central to the religious activities of the AICs. Like what Aschwanden (1987) observed, most of the AICs distinguish three kinds of diseases namely diseases sent by God (*zviriwere zvaMwari*), those caused by evil spirits (*zviriwere zvemweya*) and diseases through witchcraft (*zviriwere zvavaroyi*).

Demons or evil spirits which are supernatural or natural are believed to torment people. In possessing a person, demons do not destroy but distort the psychology of an individual. They manipulate a person's nervous system to their desired ends during the time when one is possessed. Through the supernatural faculty of human perception (outside the scope of the five human senses of smell, taste, touch, hearing and seeing) the pastors or prophets receive an 'inner knowing' that demons are present (Guti, 1988). The natural way of identifying demons in people is by examining their actions and reactions. Symptoms of demonic possession include sexual immorality (prostitution, impure sexual thoughts, adultery), emotional imbalance, speech perversion, physical disorders, witchcraft, sorcery, miscarriages, barrenness, horrible dreams, and loss of hearing, among others (Daneel, 1974; Milingo, 1985; Guti, 1986, 1988; Bourdillon, 1990; Lagerwerf, 1992). It is important to note that the occurrence of one of these symptoms is not enough to conclude that demons are present. However, when a 'patient' manifests a few or several of these symptoms, probably, demons are involved. Beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery are still widespread in Zimbabwe and in many cases, death, illness and misfortune are considered the outcome of the

evil intent of mostly close relatives, rather than of natural causes. Adherents of Pentecostalism believe that miracles involving saints' exorcisms and the healing of other bodily afflictions brought on by demons constitute a sign of God's grace and love of humanity. This study investigated cases of the exorcism of demons from the demon-possessed. Focus was largely on healings of dumbness, deafness and various diseases which the medical doctors were allegedly found to be completely powerless. This study maintains that the preponderance of demonic attacks among women draws inspiration from the repression and oppression associated with patriarchy and the unjust traditional circumstances surrounding the place of women in society. In addition, the study also uses stress theories as another lens to understand the social position of women and their behaviour. Three stress theories advanced by Hobfoll et al (2018), Seyle (1977) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) were consulted. Seyle's pioneering stress theory treats people like automatons or machines that are just reactive during the stress process (Seyle, 1977). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provides that people have to meet the potentially stressful demands set upon them by their environments for them to cope with the demands. However, the Conservation of Resource (COR) theory by Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, and Westman (2018) was found most suitable. According to the COR theory, individuals seek to acquire and retain resources like *objects* such as homes, vehicles, *personal characteristics* such as self-esteem and respect, *conditions*, such as good health, motherhood, having a partner who provides social and financial support and *energies* such as time and knowledge. The environment is appraised as stressful when it fails or denies individuals to acquire such resources or causes loss or threat to resources they already have. Thus, women in this study are regarded as victims of an oppressive male-dominated environment that has denied them resources, taken the little resources they had and is threatening to dispose of the little that is left in favour of men.

Depending on what the denied resource means to the individual women, this leaves them with a damaged psychology and with various degrees of stress. Therefore, in this study, the role of the church is to *miraculously* give back resources to women, enable the women to acquire the resources they need and remove the threat of any loss of such resources.

Of spare ribs, Mothers of sin and Keepers of evil

According to Bourdillon (1990), the different roles men and women play in society are frequently expressed in religious myths and legends. God is depicted as male and the story of Adam and Eve in the Jewish and Christian Bibles is emphatic on the preponderance of leadership as masculine. Male primacy is expressed in the idea that Adam was God's first creation and Eve was made from one of Adam's ribs to be a helper. The woman was the first to disobey God by succumbing to the wiles of the serpent before leading Adam astray. Given that the story was written by men and from a man's point of view, men were liable to control ideology to the extent of having their position justified in a canonical religious narrative. While the spiritual devaluation is crucial, more male-dominated systems seem to be spread across the whole gamut of gender roles and relations as discussed below. Making reference to African women in the rural areas of Zimbabwe in the 1930s, Schmidt (1992) and Hungwe (2006) noted that both African and European men were obsessed with controlling women's mobility and sexuality. Colonial officials and missionaries blamed African women for most of the perceived ills of African society, including adultery, venereal diseases, divorce, the male labour shortage and the general contempt for law and order. Schmidt (1992:99) observed how colonial records were littered with “adjectives characterizing women as 'indolent', 'lazy', 'slothful', 'immoral', 'frivolous', 'savage' and 'uncivilized’”. Thus, male tacit supremacy over women has historical extractions in which the historical power

relations responsible for violence against women are the economic and social forces let loose by colonialism. These have exploited female labour and the female body. The colonial system therefore increasingly sought to legitimate 'customs' that would justify continued female subordination. Among missionaries, evil came to be identified not only with non-human malevolent spirits but as having living mediums in the form of women. Argyle and Preston-Whyte (1978:172) lamented how a woman without children “was an object of pity and often tempered with scorn so much that her husband's relatives would sometimes reproach her openly and treat her unkindly”. Women were so degraded that they were placed on a level hardly higher than that of a mere commercial commodity. The unmarried women who had children and had been to town earned the wrath of their elders in rural areas and were branded as prostitutes (Hungwe, 2006).

Gaidzanwa (2000) observed that in rural Zimbabwe, for women and single men, marriage was the major basis for secondary access to land. Divorced women would not access affinal patrilineage land if their marriages broke down. These conditions made it very difficult for women to opt out of marriage altogether. Again, given the shortage of wage jobs in Zimbabwe, women were less able to compete with men in the labour market. Within the education system, gender discrimination pervades the school experiences of girls. A study by Dorsey (1975) pointed to the parent's attitude towards the education of girls and the self-image which girls have as a result of cultural conditioning which hinders women's advancement. Educating a girl has been considered a waste of money because, upon marriage, she is going to work and enrich another man. At the same time, a daughter is valued in traditional African society as a potential source of wealth due to the bride price paid for her during her marriage. Thus, girls seem to be conditioned from an early age to believe that a woman is inferior to a man, “that her place is in the home and field; that she

is there for the pleasure of the man and to bear children and that she is there to be seen and not heard” (Dorsey, 1975: 96).

The *mutanda*-marriage or *kuzvarira* usually practised during times of extreme distress, for instance, famine, implied compulsion for the girl child to marry a man in exchange for food for survival. While this was abandoned the only aspect which has survived is the actual pledging or pawning (Aschwanden, 1982). If a girl promised in the marriage died prematurely, the parents pledge their next daughter to guarantee the continuity and stability of a marriage. The practice of *kugara nhaka* (inheritance) also discriminates against women. Under this practice, a widow is expected to choose another husband among her husband's brothers or relatives. Sometimes she is expected to choose a brother-in-law who is already married, thereby putting herself in a polygamous relationship. Although the institution of *kugara nhaka* is being rejected as outmoded because the practice is no longer compatible with health risks like HIV/AIDS, there are traces of this practice to date. Evidence from testimonies to be discussed later shows that the girl child continues to suffer under the shadow of the law.

According to Gelfand (1967), the desire for a family in a patrilineal marriage is so strong that a woman's happiness and her position in society depend on her ability to bear children. In other words, her whole life is geared to her fecundity. Failure to conceive was one of the reasons why women sought the assistance of faith healers. A study by Daneel (1974) among the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) followers revealed that the diagnostic and therapeutic work of the Holy Spirit attracted many women who had been unable to bear children. “In the Mupamawonde area of Bikita, Mutendi came upon a certain woman, Kami, who for ten years had been unable to bear children. Laying-on of hands and prayer resulted in a speedy pregnancy”

(Daneel 1974:188). “Mutendi's 1964 register of patients showed that out of a total of 460 adults who visited the headquarters, 60% of them were women. Documents from Mutendi's clerk Mabharani Mushonga indicated that most of the cases were barren women asking for children or people asking that the sex of their unborn children be pre-determined” (Daneel 1974:202, 205). One of Mutendi's healing centres came to be known as the 'maternity' due to the expertise of the healer in dealing with barren women, pre-natal care, childbirth and treatment of young children. One of the healers had been ordained as a 'healer of women' and this ordination enabled her to deliver a child without the medicine of a *n'anga* or the surgical knife. Between 1963 and 1964 she claimed to have delivered a substantive number of children (Daneel, 1974: 210).

A perusal of some healing miracles recorded in the History of ZAOGA-FIF, shows that out of the recorded 68 people healed from multiple ailments in the mid-1980s, 63 were women. Out of the 63 women, 22 were healed from barrenness, 4 from witchcraft and 5 from the issue of blood (Guti, 1986: 62-83,138-153). The preponderance of women as victims of demon possession from Mutendi and Guti's healing activities suggests that women were more likely than men to identify themselves as being 'possessed'. From another dimension, women are also regularly portrayed as having higher moral and spiritual values than men and so are more susceptible to faith-healing than men. Lagerwerf (1992) argues that since the position of women is deeply affected by the process of modernization, it is not surprising that many women are possessed. Arthurs (2015) an African woman theologian saw Jesus as the overcomer of taboos.

The field of literary onomastics has shown a general trend in male writers of giving female characters names which disempower and dismember African women. Through the negative images, there

has been a promotion of the subordination of women in society. There has been a tendency by writers to rob the female characters of their potential to fight in life by portraying them as weaklings and defeatists. Gaidzanwa (1985) observed that male writers shaped their female characters in a negative way, largely as wives dependent on their husbands and as husbands' murderers.

Christianity and Science at the Crossroads

Horton (1967) advanced the thesis that there were irreconcilable differences between African traditional thought or spirituality and Western science. The difficulty resides in determining the extent to which the Western conception of medical science can be a paradigm for Africa where people believe that serious illness is also caused by demons or evil spirits. According to Guti (Undated) a pastor featured in the medico-religious scene as a 'diagnostician' and 'therapist' even though his diagnosis contrasted with the perception of a Western-trained medical doctor. Trained to diagnose and treat specific ailments, doctors rejected demon possession or bewitchment as a legitimate cause of sickness. Medical doctors prefer to use the popular term 'hysteria' to identify the spiritual attacks men and women experienced. Defending Christians' miraculous ability to exorcise demons, and to cure the possessed, Milingo (1985:45) rejected "the ideas of modern psychiatrists who preferred naturalism explanations to spiritual ones". He further argues that miracle cures, including the healing of demons possessed "occurred not because of medical science which is limited in scope, but through an individual's burning faith in God and his saints, the intercession of a saint on behalf of an individual and God's infinite mercy" (Milingo 1985:62). This explains why those possessed with the evil spirits scream in church during divine service. In church, the demons are met by blessed power which is hateful to them and stronger than them. This blessed power burns oppresses and strikes them with righteousness and drives them out of those in whom they dwell.

The Christian, therefore, is expected to recognize the forces of evil and must pray to overcome them. ZAOGA has adapted to certain notions of scientific rationalism without however giving up its prerogatives regarding the casting of demons and spiritual healing. Mbuya Dorcas Hospital owned by ZAOGA operates two wings, namely the Medical and the Deliverance section. The former section is subject to the authority of medical science in the diagnosis and treatment of the sick while the latter attends to those seeking spiritual and physical well-being through healing and deliverance sessions. While cognizant of the advances of science, the church does not accept the rationalist argument that miracles were impossible. Sundkler (1961:237) refers to a Zulu prophet who, during a gathering, spontaneously called out: “This is not a church but a hospital”. Pastor GM (2017) who operates in the deliverance section at Mbuya Dorcas hospital warned rationalists not to dismiss miracles. Her argument was that Jesus Christ commanded the sick to stand and walk and so when pastors deliver people from various ailments, they will not be violating the laws of nature. “Miracles are real and should not be relegated to whims of the human psyche controlled by the power of belief acting on the nervous system” (Pastor GM). She conceded that the majority of her patients in the deliverance centre have been women whose ailments had defied scientific medical cure. Some, who had been miraculously healed of possession or other illnesses, “turned to physicians at the same hospital for expert examination, an indication that science and spiritual healing do not compete but complement each other for people's spiritual and physical well-being” (Pastor GM, 2017).

Confronting the vulnerability of women to evil spirits.

As already mentioned, women make up the majority of churchgoers in all denominations and yet they continued to be treated as human beings without value and dignity. In a study in Gaborone, Botswana, Parrat (1996/1997) established that there was a high rate

of women's church membership, indicating that women were looking to the church for something which could be elusive. While all humans were vulnerable to demonic assault, women tended to be more susceptible to possession than men. This section grapples with the intimate relationship between difficulties that women encountered in their everyday lives and the perceived vulnerability to evil spirits. In reality, a lot of testimonies by women were recorded but in the interests of space, only a few were considered. Observations, testimonies and interviews narrated and analyzed below came from victims of possession, witnesses who became players in the drama of possession, the saints and pastors who were involved in exorcising demons and relatives of those possessed with demons. Pseudonyms were used in order to conceal the identities of informants and players.

During one of the church services, screams began towards the end of the service when the pastor began to pray for the sick. The pastor called women who dreamt of having 'spiritual husbands' to get to the front and be prayed for. Several women flocked for healing. Narrating her ordeal, Mrs Z a divorcee explained how a demon deceived her into thinking that he was her husband. He visited her in dreams and would 'sleep with her at night'. She got divorced because she no longer had any sexual appetite for her real husband. The 'spiritual husband' had become more libidinous, making sexual demands that she could not satisfy. She was convinced that she had been bewitched (Mrs. Z, 2015). A spirit with a 'legitimate' claim to restitution was functioning in conjunction with some jealous relatives who wanted to spoil her marriage. While sexual relations between demons and women occurred in some miracle tales, the sexually active devils though would not impregnate the women. Sexual relations between 'unclean spirits' and men were not part of the miracle narratives, in spite of the claim that demons sometimes appeared before men in the guise of women and awakened their lust. According to tales of married women who were seduced by demons, the demons were male with the same physical desires as

men. These appeared before the women in different forms, sometimes as handsome youths and sometimes as hairy, shaggy animals. What was more striking though was the femininity of the involuntary seduction and possession. More than a dozen women confessed that after the pastor had prayed for them, the 'spiritual husbands' stopped harassing them.

A witness to one demoniac's seizure in the church described a young woman Solly who looked very composed and sober. She seemed to be praying diligently but not 'paying attention to anything'. All of a sudden however, she began to convulse uncontrollably, wriggling on the floor, making hissing sounds and inaudible utterances. Not all believers remained calm when the young woman experienced the demonic seizure. The church leaders (elders and deacons) clustered around the afflicted woman. In some cases, she shouted obscenities and blasphemed. She tore her clothing and developed uncontrollable hiccupping. As the leaders continued to pray, casting out the demon, the woman ended in a state of temporary unconsciousness. After being prayed for in 2002, she never had another seizure, an indication that she got completely healed (Mbengo, 2014).

Pastor Elisha had examined a case which involved the healing of a girl of hysteria, an ailment that expressed itself in shouting and hiccups, symptoms associated with possession. Initially, Toko yelled involuntarily for 2 to 3 hours after which she began to hiccup without interruption for several days. She became so ill from the fits that she had to abandon all heavy labour. In February 2011, she reported having a vision of an elderly man who claimed that he was her husband. The pastor prayed for her. Subsequently, the hiccups did not return and Toko could resume heavy work. Quite a number of women who exhibited an experience similar to Toko's had not consulted doctors during illness but sought spiritual advice instead. The pastor went on to explain that although cases in which individuals were completely cured of their hysterical behaviour did

exist, there were also instances in which some of the illness's symptoms disappeared, only to resurface at some other time in different forms. From this expert testimony, the pastor concluded that hysterical convulsions did not yield to cure by way of scientific medical methods. People confirmed this opinion, stating even more categorically that medicine was powerless to defeat the disease completely. Having established that Toko was once ill but now completely cured, that she never turned to doctors for aid and that medicine was ineffectual with regard to hysteria, Pastor Elisha (2015) agreed with many that Toko had been cured by divine intervention.

At one ZAOGA deliverance sermon, 14 of those identified as possessed by demons were women. One lady testified that she had been initiated into witchcraft by her grandmother at a tender age. She confessed how she had undergone a system of incarnation, rites and magical codes taught to the young recruits by some older women in the village. Probed into explaining how this unfortunate development befell her, she narrated how the power of a female to be a witch begins at puberty when one is recruited into learning the rites upon the incision (*kutemerwa*) of the practices of the trade. This demon was blocking her marriage. Out of the 14 women, 5 had a problem of barrenness and 3 had a problem of miscarriages. Different causations were attributed to both barrenness and miscarriages. Traces were made to uterine or menstrual irregularities and abdominal pains as symptomatic of demonic attacks. One lady Jane (who was visibly pregnant) gave a more elaborate account of the presumed cause of her miscarriages. She alleged that the possibility of bewitchment at her wedding was the source of her problems. She had learnt that a disgruntled suitor had cast a spell on her during her wedding celebrations. Initially, she never took it seriously because she did not believe in witchcraft. After experiencing three miscarriages and having consulted medical doctors with no positive results, Jane became convinced that she had been bewitched and so medical science would not be

helpful to the nature of her problem. She went to church to be prayed for in 2011 and since then, miscarriages never occurred. She is a mother to two healthy children (Jane, 2017).

Lucy alleged that she had been bewitched by some village woman who had complained that she was going out with her husband. As a result, she was suffering from painful menstrual periods which were punctuated with bleeding. She was prayed for by Elder Joe in May 2014 and the period of pain and the flow of blood ceased (Lucy, 2016; Elder Joe, 2017). Rose, a widow was going through tough times. Upon the death of her husband in 2002, she lost all the property to her husband's relatives who accused her of having killed her husband through love potions (*mupfuhwira*). She was left with no personal resources and no means to sustain herself. She was in a very difficult position now that she had to undertake life without the financial and other supportive measures previously supplied by the husband. She was still hoping to get into another marriage. The demons haunting her were barrenness and bad luck. After being prayed for, she acquired a job 2015 (Rose, 2016).

In February 2016, Molly got seriously ill while at school. Molly went to the hospital and doctors diagnosed nothing but she continued to experience excruciating pain on her side. Her parents had sold all their cattle to pay witch doctors for their services but without success. She became very thin. She was smelling badly and very anaemic. By discharging her from the hospital, the doctors had actually sent her home to die. Her mother took her to a miracle crusade where Evangelist Paul was preaching. The evangelist cried out unto God and began to bind the demon of death. After being prayed for in January 2017, she started regaining strength. Molly is alive and happily married. She is a mother of a healthy boy (Molly, 2018).

Mrs Q of Mkoba village, Gweru, narrated how she was saved from witchcraft. At the age of 14 years, she started recruiting Christians to devil worship. She got married but could not have a child. After

realising her problem, she was converted to Christianity and was also prayed for to have a child. She became pregnant. During her pregnancy, she was attacked by cerebral malaria and the doctors wanted her to abort. She refused and asked to be prayed for instead. She was completely healed and now has two children, a boy and a girl (Mrs Q, 2015). On a night of miracles in the Mkoba village, the Pastor called for people who were having problems in their marriages to come before him for prayers. A multitude of women flocked to have hands laid upon them. The ushers' records indicated that more than twenty-two women and four couples had been prayed for. Mrs K testified that she had rejoined her husband after 15 years of separation (Mrs K, 2018).

Discussion of Findings

An overview of the place of men in the gendered spiritual maze or jigsaw puzzle showed that attacks of possession rarely occurred among men. Field findings revealed that very scattered testimonies were recorded where men were healed of various ailments. In services observed, no single man fell into a trance akin to demonic possession. In the majority of cases, it was the male leadership who prayed for saints and exorcised demons while women ushered and counselled the healed. Men largely presented themselves before pastors to be prayed for so that their businesses would prosper, be promoted at work and have sound health. A consideration of the testimonies above shows that the phenomena of women being possessed, and denounced as witches or keepers of evil spirits are large scale.

Under the pressure of circumstances, women often turned to the prophets in an act of desperation after being branded as witches in their villages. The marauding groups of witch-hunters (*Tsikamutanda*) rarely had females, as if to confirm the claim that only men are experts in the art of witch-hunting. Thus the categorization of women and men into witches and witch-hunters respectively becomes an essential part of the process of

establishing the authority of men. Even in medieval Europe, witch-hunting was linked to the attempt by men to professionalize and monopolize healing, taking it out of the hands of non-professional women (Barstow 1994). Witch-hunting is not just a denunciation of women's religious observances, but a way of blocking particular practices such as healing by women.

While environmental, social and economic issues were critical in creating the preconditions for demonic attacks, the study revealed that the poor, ravaged, hungry and victims of abuse were women. Taking the environmental argument a step further and adding a cultural spin to it, Pastor GM (2017) blamed economic and social conditions and cultural beliefs for creating traits which nurture demonic attacks. She noted that the migration of men from their rural homes in pursuit of paid labour elsewhere had stressful consequences for individuals, particularly women whose responsibilities were substantially broadened. The sexual frustration that women experienced because of their husbands' lengthy absences had a destructive influence on the psyche and morals of society. As a result, women became prone to suffering from moral discontent, loose sexual morals and poverty of ideas as they try to eke out a living.

Some names given to girl children largely capture or signify the sorrows and problems of families. The troubles and stresses affecting the family invite spiritual forces of a demonic nature and this explains why in some cases, upon becoming Christians, people would change their names. This change in names is different from that initiated by missionaries to which Oduyoye (1986:33) proffers that “the missionaries gave people names that only the Europeans could pronounce 'correctly' because they found African names too difficult to say...” Chitando (1998) has added that traditional names were viewed as backward and unholy and so change would signify the transformation from the old

person before conversion into Christianity. According to Guti (Undated: 15-16), “In biblical times, names did have meaning and they stood for something. Hoshea was changed to be Joshua, Simon was changed to Peter and Saul was changed to be Paul”. Among ZAOGA followers many men and women who originally held names with pejorative interpretations adopted new names. Popular names which had been dropped include Ndakaitei (What did I do?), Musodzi (Tears), Muchaneta (You shall get tired), and Makanetsa (You troubled us), among others. Somehow, the changing of names is believed to shield someone from demonic attacks of bad luck.

As already indicated, upon marriage women leave the father's clan but never become full members of the husband's clan. Since they do not participate in the husband's family rituals, they occupy an inferior position which makes them victims of men's domineering attitudes. Lewis (1971) argues that the social function of exorcism is to control women.

The study established that women still believed in the powers of sorcerers and needed male guidance to seek out spiritual aid at churches. Men in similar situations might on occasion have sought the help of medical doctors, but not traditional healers before seeking spiritual aid. By implication, the interviewees were suggesting that women were more prone to retaining traditional superstitious ideas about magic than men and that they were more likely than men to be ensnared by the devil. The belief in witchcraft was found to be clearly prevalent and normal among the women congregants. Thus, the movement from mainline churches was for both physical and spiritual healing.

The traditional thought that women are lowly and men are noble was found to be conducive to the social process of controlling women. While it was difficult to get detailed statistics, Pastor Elisha argued that the number of women who committed suicide

for love was much more than that of men. Suicide is an expression of anger, despair and protest. According to Durkheim (1952), it is sometimes a way of expressing feelings and opinions, especially in situations where the protestor feels so disempowered that they are forced to make a final and dramatic statement to draw attention to their grievances. Gaidzanwa (2001:23) stated that "... in 1998 alone, over 150 women committed suicide in Gokwe; an area where cotton growing which yields large cash values for farmers is the major activity". The suicides were a result of dissatisfaction with the disposal of proceeds from farming ventures undertaken by individual households.

The spiritual devaluation of women and their denunciation as keepers of evil spirits also hinges on differential access to and use of social knowledge. Men's promiscuous behaviour, loss of the love of their wives and the pain of arranged marriages at times forced women to use husband-taming herbs. In a study in the Sengezi Resettlement in east-central Zimbabwe, Goebel (2005) highlighted the obsessive use of husband-taming herbs. She stated that "the work that women put into their marriages through the use of husband-taming herbs reveals both their desperation in the face of high rates of marital instability in the context of few economic and social alternatives and key ways that women take up gender struggle..." (Goebel, 2005:142). Culturally, a piece from women's clothes cannot be used to patch or mend men's clothes while the reverse is possible. Turning women's sexual attraction into a dangerous quality is a step in controlling women. According to Daneel (1974:298), if a female member has had "a complicated childbirth or experiences trouble in suckling her child, whether she was regarded as a witch in the past or not, the prophets are likely to subject her to pressure to elicit a confession of witchcraft".

Women's helplessness also stemmed from the natural sexual impulses of demons that were invariably male. There is a cultural

perception that women's bodies were open and men's are sealed. Chief Sogwala (2017) opined that “because women did not wear underwear (which of course is not generally a truism), their genitals were exposed to demons released by the spell when they crossed over the porch”. Prophet Jokonia (2017) also believed that women were in greater danger of possession than men. He subscribed to notions that specific times in the religious calendar heightened the possibility of the demon invasion, arguing that there were times when women were more defenseless against the devil's wiles, especially during menstrual periods.

ZAOGA–FIF followers hold that the Christian answer to demonic attacks lies in the life and death of Jesus Christ who conquered death through his resurrection. Thus people in need, the poor, the marginalized, have to identify with Jesus Christ in their pain and humiliation. For Christian women, religion provided emotional support in times of distress. From the evidence presented, it can be seen that women have greater social and psychological disabilities than men to resist demonic attacks.

Conclusion

Given all the social, economic, moral, and cultural problems besetting households and individuals, there was little wonder that demonic attacks were rampant among women. The massive dominance of the patriarchal system remains a huge barrier to the emancipation of women within Christian communities. There is a need to correct, re-build or re-construct female images and demythologize this celebrated view of women as sufferers, trouble causers, uncustomary, and witches, among other negative descriptors. Although Christian churches officially allow the use of medicine, the healing prayer, laying-on of hands and exorcism are regarded as important religious activities complementing the Western medical treatment already received. What has kept women down within the church is the male chauvinistic attitude that some church leaders still have. The challenge, however,

remains that of breaking these gender roles and power relations with their negative conditioning and socialization. From the study, men never became possessed and given the cultural reconfiguration of possession, men were less likely to identify themselves and to be identified as demoniacs. Demonic possession among Christians exhibits an exclusive female base making it an overwhelmingly female enterprise.

NOTE

Interviews were part of the primary source of summaries of testimonies around which discussions on spirit possession and healing unfolded. The author had interviews with quite a number of people some of whom have been cited in the write up. Interviews were held with Mrs.K on 6 May 2018; Mrs Q, 10 February 2015; Molly, on 11 August 2018; Rose, on 14 July 2016; Lucy, on 29 October 2016; Elder Joe, on 29 October 2016; Jane, on 12 May 2017; Pastor Elisha, 17 April 2015; Mbengo, 22 December 2014; Mrs Z, 11 July 2015; PastorGM, 15 September 2017; Chief Sogwala, 3 January 2017 and Prophet Jokonia, 27 June 2017.

References

- Argyle, J. and Preston-Whyte, E. (1978). *Social System and Tradition in Southern Africa: Essays in Honour of Eileen Krige*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Arthurs, F. (2015). *Foolish Things Wives Do To Mess Up Their Marriages*. Harare: AEGEA Publications.
- Aschwanden, H. (1982). *Symbols of Life: Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Barstow, A.L. (1994). *Witchraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*. San Francisco: Pandora.
- Bourdillon, M.F.C.(1991). *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chitando, E.(1996/1997). "Whats in a name? Naming Practices among the African Christians in Zimbabwe' in P.Gundani and K.Fielder (eds.) *Theology Cooked in an African Pot: ATISCA BULLETIN No.5/6*, Special Volume 106-119.
- Daneel, M. L. (1974). *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, Vol.2. The Hague: Mouton.
- Dorsey, B.J. (1975). "The African Secondary School Leaver: Aspirations, Academic Achievement and Post-School Employment" in M.W.Murphree,(ed.) *Education, Race and Employment in Rhodesia*. The Association of Round Tables in Central Africa in conjunction with The Centre for Inter-Racial Studies University of Rhodesia, Salisbury 15-167.
- Durkheim, E. (1952). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Gaidzanwa, R.B. (1988). 'Women and Land Rights in Zimbabwe: An Overview.' Rural and Urban Planning Department. University of Zimbabwe Occasional Paper No.13.1988.
- Gaidzanwa, R.B. (2001). "Family and Household Concepts in Creative Policy-Making" in R.B.Gaidzanwa (ed.), *Policy Making Issues in Southern Africa*. Harare: SAPES Books 13-36.

- Gaidzanwa, R. B. (1985). *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*. Harare: UZ Publications.
- Gelfand, M. (1967). *The African Witch: With Particular Reference to Witchcraft Beliefs and Practice among the Shona of Rhodesia*. Edinburgh: E and S. Livingstone Ltd.
- Goebel, A. (2005). *Gender and Land Reform: The Zimbabwe Experience*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Guti, E. (1986). *History of ZAOGA Forward In Faith: How It Began and Where it is Going*. Harare: EGEEA Publications.
- Guti, E. (Undated). *Believers' Guide for Blessings: Biblical Ways To Properly Relate To Your Pastor*. Harare: AGEA Publications.
- Hastings, A. (1982). *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hobfoll, S. E., Halbesleben, J., Neveu, J., & Westman, M. (2018). Conservation of resources in the organizational context: the reality of resources and their consequences. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 5: 103–28 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032117-104640>. [Accessed on: 5 January 2022].
- Horton, W. R. G. (1967). "African Traditional Thought and Western Science, 1" in *Africa* 37, 1 50-71.
- Hungwe, C. (2006). "Putting them in their place: 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' women in Zimbabwean gender struggles" in *Feminist Africa 6: Subaltern Sexualities*. Issue 6: September 33-42.
- Lagerwerf, L. (1992). *Witchcraft, Sorcery and Spirit Possession. Pastoral Responses in Africa*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Lazarus, R. S. & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lewis, I. M. (1971). *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. London: Penguin.

- Maxwell, D. (2006). *African Gifts of the Spirit. Pentecostalism and the rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Milingo, E. (1984). *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival*. London: C.Hurst and Company, London.
- Okon,E.E.(2014). *Christian Missions and Colonial Rule in Africa: Objective and Contemporary Analysis*. University of Calabar; Calabar.
- Ruddock, A.(2001). *Understanding Audiences: Theory and Methods*. London: SAGE.
- Saroj, N.P. (1996/1997). "Christianity in a New Context: Special Cases of Interaction" in K. Fiedler, P. Gundani and H.Mijoga.(eds.). *Theology Cooked in an African Pot*.ATISCA BULLETIN NO.5/6, 1996/1997, Special Volume 142-164.
- Schmidt, E. (1992). *Peasants, Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939*. Portsmouth: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Selye, H. (1977). 'The Evolution of Stress Concept' in Janis, I. L. (ed). *Current Trends in Psychology*. (Pp. 25-32). Los Altos: William Kaufman Inc.
- Sundkler, B.G.M. (1961). *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.
- Zvobgo, C.J.M. (1996). *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe 1890-1939*.Gweru: Mambo Press.