

# A womanist exposition of pseudo-spirituality and the cry of an oppressed African woman

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Women have for centuries suffered different forms of oppression and arguably continue to suffer in subtle forms in the 21st century. Marion Young points to five types of oppression, namely, violence, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness and cultural imperialism. For South African black women, all of these types of oppression have manifested three times more as they have suffered triple oppression of race, class and gender to employ the widely used notion of triple jeopardy in the womanist discourses and Black Theology of Liberation. The struggle of women to challenge the patriarchal culture of subordination is still pertinent for our context today. Patriarchy is a reality that has been inscribed in the minds, souls and bodies of these women. It arguably continues to be inscribed in subtle forms. Patriarchy and the oppression of women have been justified and perpetuated by a complex interplay of Christian teachings and practices fused with culture and the use of the Bible. Yet, for these women, church and the Bible continue to be central in their lives. This article looks at the cries of African women in juxtaposition to their prayers, faith and thus spirituality, and to argue that theirs is a pseudo-spirituality. This article is thus a womanist exposition of the pseudo-spirituality of an African woman in a quest for liberation of her spirituality.

## Introduction

This article was presented at the International Ecumenical Conference of the Center for the Academic Study of Christian Spirituality, hosted by the Theological Faculty from 26 to 29 June 2017. The original title of the article was 'A womanist exposition of pseudo-spirituality of an African woman'. It has since been reworked to its current form in order to bring out its focus on the cry of an African woman in juxtaposition to her spirituality which is arguably a pseudo-spirituality. Having looked at the theme of the conference 'Pray Without Ceasing: Perspectives in Spirituality Studies', my thoughts are shaped by what a certain minister suggested regarding being licenced to preach in the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA). He suggested that my mother would be added on a list of women who are called to pray without ceasing. This was said in relation to the difficulties of ordained ministry and how black women experience added burdens, what womanists refer to as double, triple or multiple jeopardy (Bennet 1986:170; EATWOT 1993:50–51; Masenya 1995:152; Nadar 2003:15–16; Ogunyemi 1985:64, 67, 68; Spivak 1992:84; Williams 1993:73, Tribble 1989:281–282). It must be stated though that within Black Theology of Liberation (BTL) and womanist discourses, the use of the notions of double, triple or multiple jeopardy is not an abstraction of the struggles of women from the comprehensive liberation struggles of black people but an unavoidable fact about the harshness of the lived experiences of black African women. One needs to remember that BTL generally critiques dualisms, so it might not be precise to cast the struggles of women in dualistic terms rather than in a comprehensive understanding of what liberation means to blackness. The theme 'Pray without Ceasing' inevitably brings to mind the harshness of the conditions that a black African woman lives in.

Secondly, in thinking of prayer and an African woman, 'weeping' or 'crying' comes to mind. It is very rare in my context to see or hear an African woman praying without shedding a tear. One thus has to think of the triple and multiple jeopardies of women in relation to prayer or the meaning of prayer in liturgical services in which they always end up in tears. The relationship between liturgy and spirituality is taken as obvious, with prayer in particular, as one of our spiritual resources in Christianity receiving some attention in this article.

The stories of women in the Marikana massacre exemplify some of the key arguments intended here. These are women who are mourning in agony as they witnessed the brutal killing of their sons, husbands, fathers and brothers by the police shooting on 16 August 2012 in Lonmin Mine, Marikana. About 112 black men were shot by police while protesting and 34 died, leaving mothers

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childless, wives widowed and children orphaned. These miners were standing up against injustice, crying to obviously deaf ears about wage increase to improve their lives and that of their families. What does prayer mean to a Marikana widow and, by implication, who listens to the prayers and cries of the black African women in their struggles for life? Whom are they directing their cries to? Furthermore, what role does Christianity play in their pain and cries? Does this faith contribute to the misdirection of their cries and pain? What makes an African woman cry and its implication on her spirituality is the crux of this article.

The article problematises this cry as a cry for life, a cry for liberation. The article assumes a womanist framework, which aims to expose the nexus of racism, classism and sexism in liberating the spirituality of an African woman, and therefore her whole existence. The argument is that this cry, in juxtaposition to prayer, faith and thus spirituality cannot be detached from patriarchy and the oppression of women, which has been justified and perpetuated by a complex interplay of Christian teachings, practices fused with culture and the use of the Bible. The article problematises how for these women, church and the Bible continue to be central in their lives yet they continue to interiorise forms of theology and thus spirituality that do not take into account their lived experience and ultimately their struggle for liberation.

Women's *limanyano*,<sup>1</sup> which is a site where women from the UPCSA, a structure that you find in other mainline churches like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (Theilen 2003) and other mainline churches is a case in point. Women have prayer meetings on Thursdays and Saturdays in these spaces. There are services like *Inkongo yemithwalo*,<sup>2</sup> a liturgical practice where women gather to talk and pray about their pain and suffering. One could discern some contradictions in this space. The article critiques this space by exposing irreconcilable contradictions presented and maintained by Women's *manyano*, a site that is arguably meant to liberate these women, yet keeps them in bondage, as a seedbed of patriarchy. It further exposes the kind of spirituality it then produces. By looking at the prayer services, the article argues that the content of these prayers points to a pseudo-spirituality as these women talk about their pain and suffering as something that will be dealt with in the next life when Jesus Christ comes back. Dualism is the heart of the problem associated with Western theology. It is pseudo-spirituality<sup>3</sup> if it propels them

1. *limanyano* is a Xhosa word literally translated as unity, and refers to a group of people who belong to the same group and share the same vision, mission, aims and objectives. The popular English name for it is association, but the article will make use of *iimanyano/manyano/umanyano* to emphasise its nuance. *limanyano* is a noun, with *ukumanyana* being a verb. *Ukumanyana* means to assembly, to gather, to cry together, to sing together and to pray together!

2. *Inkongo* – service, *Imithwalo* – burdens (service where people cast their burdens unto the Lord; it is usually marked by candle lighting which follows after prayer and symbolises the removal of darkness and dawn of light and hope).

3. It might be helpful to note that the use of pseudo follows Allan Boesak's thesis of pseudo-innocence in his work, *Farewell to Innocence* (1977). See also the use of pseudo by other black theologians; for example, Vuyani Vellem speaks about pseudo-religiosity in his works titled: *Black Theology of Liberation and radical democracy: a dialogue* (2015b) and *the Epilogue – Black spirituality of liberation* (2014). Boesak himself has often used it to contrast it with the effects of Black consciousness. The idea here is that the spirituality inculcated by Western theology among blacks is not 'innocent'.

to escape and not to respond to their material condition. It is pseudo-spirituality if it enhances the death of their consciousness, the article argues, and thus proposes a new paradigm of consciousness, as a response to a cry for life, a cry for liberation. We purpose to look at how bodies may die from patriarchy and other forces, while the Spirit lives. We look at spirituality borne of patriarchy as expressed in Women's *manyano*, a 'Women's space'. We conclude by looking at this site as a womanised space, that is, a new paradigm.

## Bodies may die but the Spirit never dies

To set the scene for this article, the following insights from the Statement, entitled 'The Cry For Life-Spirituality of the Third World', shape our thinking:

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

But carry heavy burdens on their backs

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. (EATWOT 1993:46)

The Statement, drafted by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in their Third General Assembly,<sup>4</sup> especially during the end of Apartheid in South Africa, remains one of the most fascinating insights by BTL. One of the most important things about this Statement is the manner in which it posits BTL as a response to an epoch in history that commences with the Trans-Atlantic slavery and thus the continuation of a cry of black African woman, women in the diaspora, women in Latin America, women in the United States and thus the groans of broken bodies in the global South up to the end of apartheid, continuing to this day.

The Statement exposes oppressive systems, where many are victims of a world power system that uses people for labour, yet those people struggle to make ends meet. Their cry for life is 'raised from the midst of misery and from within situations in which the forces of death are rampant' (EATWOT 1993:47). It is a cry for material conditions and speaks to structures that keep them at the same trenches of destitution.

Young (1990:39ff.) points to five types of oppression, namely, violence, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness and cultural imperialism. Each of these types is true about women. The date 1492 in the Statement brings to mind the unforgettable violence against black women in the dungeons

4. A statement from the Third General Assembly of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1992.

of Elmina Castle. The exploitation of women even in the church today is undeniable! While they are marginalised from leadership positions and remain powerless in decision-making processes, their contribution in church and in society continues to be exploited. The grasp of the intensity of the oppression of women is further articulated by Spivak (1988):

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization. (p. 102)

For South African black women, all of those have arguably manifested three times more as they have suffered triple oppression of race, class and gender, and their struggle to challenge the patriarchal culture of subordination is still pertinent for our context today. It is a cry for life as they have to navigate their way in a patriarchal society whose structures are designed to silence them and make them believe that they are not worthy. This point is well articulated in this statement: 'The subtle forms of violence women experience cannot easily be articulated but have for centuries been eating into the psyche of women, eroding their self-esteem' (EATWOT 1993:50–51). If this is the harsh context of a black African woman, how does it come out in her prayer?

Accordingly, this cry for life is however not a cry of despair, sorrow, hopelessness or grief, but a strident witness to the persistence of life (EATWOT 1993:47). It is a cry that denies victory to torture, 'Bodies may die, but spirit never dies' (EATWOT 1993:46). Something seems to keep the fire lit despite the circumstances. A song, and thus spirituality, which presents a quandary as will be explored in the following sections.

## Spirituality borne of patriarchy

The oppression of women has not only been a socio-historical matter but it has also been justified theologically and sanctioned by the church (Kobo & Mangoedi 2017). Williams (1993:83) states that the construct of patriarchy has been sustained by Christian rationalisations. This is indeed not new in the South African context, if we look at how the ideology of apartheid was derived from the Bible (Moore 1973:viii; Mosala 1988:4). Mtetwa (1998:69) writes '... the domination and subjugation of the indigenous peoples, the suppression of their religions and their cultures, were legitimated and sanctioned by Biblical injunctions'. Oduyoye (1995)'s insights on how church responds to constructs of race, class and gender by aligning itself with forces that question the true humanity of the other, and finding ways of justifying their oppressing nature are helpful for us. She further exposes how indeed the Bible can be used to further justify the oppression; she writes, '... unfortunately, biblical interpretation and Christian theology in Africa have had the effect of sacralising the marginalisation of women's experience' (Oduyoye 1995:480–481).

In the following story, taken from Maluleke and Nadar (2002:8–9), evident in some experiences of gender-based

violence (GBV) by victims of this scourge, this justification could be analysed. To repeat, I make use of a womanist framework, the types of oppression Young suggests, to reflect on the story below and one of the Marikana women referred to earlier and other untold stories of experiences of many African women whose voices have been silenced – the subaltern women according to Spivak (1988:78). By subaltern she refers to the majority of people in India who were arguably not represented during the struggle for national independence from British colonial rule. People like 'the rural peasantry' (Morton 2003:6) and especially subaltern women, which for her, are in the worst situation (Spivak 1992:83). Spivak contends that 'If in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow' (1988:82–83). The story of Kerina follows:

Kerina's eyes were downcast when her younger sister asked her what she would like to do. She responded, 'I can't do anything. The pastor says that I cannot leave him'. Whenever Kerina had made an attempt to leave this marriage, the pastor always came up with all the religious reasons why she should not leave. He cited several biblical mandates to justify the abuse i.e. the headship of the male over the female and the lack of submission on the part of Kerina toward her husband. He did not just stop at the point of justifying the abuse. He went further to dissuade her from initiating separation proceedings, citing from the Bible that divorce was not permissible. Finally he suggested that anyone (like Kerina's sister) who was involved in trying to separate this couple, would face the 'wrath of God' because 'which two God have joined together, let no "man" put asunder'. (Maluleke & Nadar 2002:8–9)

Kerina's eyes that are downcast express an emotion perhaps of powerlessness, her inability to deal with what is obviously a painful experience in her relationship. She is entangled in this web of violence apparently justified theologically by the pastor. The use of the Bible in this case points to the dangers of biblical interpretation and indeed the dangers of the biblical text and its use to justify violence.

This story suggests a lot about how theology can be used to justify life-killing situations but, more importantly, the inherent dangers of headship theology which grant enormous power and normativity to a male. Most patriarchal cultures, including my own isiXhosa, would sustain this violence with expressions such as *indoda yintloko ye khaya*.<sup>5</sup> Powerlessness, entanglement in vicious cycles of violence between home and the church, absolutised normativity of a male in the headship theology and the use of scriptures to justify this miserable state are among the elements observed in the story above. Also, the emotions in the story suggest that women's bodies can also speak. Spivak (1988) influences my thoughts on the matter as I contend that the psyche and spirituality of women is contained in androcentric vessels of religiosity and spirituality.

The Statement of EATWOT (1992) gives nuances to this justification, aptly put as follows:

The subtle forms of violence women experience cannot easily be articulated but have for centuries been eating into the psyche

5.A man is the head of the household or home.

of women, eroding their self-esteem. This takes various forms – denying to women their right to self-expression out of their own wisdom, which expresses a perspective different from a dominant mode, or rendering women invisible. The oppression of women by patriarchal religion, including Christianity, and the androcentric language and interpretation of scriptures are other expressions of this. The marginalisation women experience in the church is indeed another form of violence against them. (pp. 50–51)

There is ample evidence on theological justification of gender oppression as posited by Williams (1993), Oduyoye (1995), Maluleke and Nadar (2002) and EATWOT (1993). Yet, for African women, church and the Bible continue to be central in their lives. Theirs is a spirituality borne of patriarchy. Their prayerful life is explained in the section that follows on *limanyano*.

## ***limanyano***

*limanyano* in the UPCSAs are structured in such a way that men affiliate with the Men's Christian Guild (MCG), married and unmarried women with the Uniting Presbyterian Women's Fellowship (UPWF), unmarried young women with the Imanyano Yezintombi ZamaRhabe Amanyanayo (IYZA) and there is the Youth Fellowship (YF).

*limanyano* are best defined by Vellem (2007:54) as 'uncoerced cultural sites which give expression to the marginalised values of the black masses'. He argues that 'the name signifies a yearning of unity among black Africans who were fragmented by the missionary enterprise and colonial repression'. Furthermore, 'the spirit of African consciousness permeates across *iimanyano*', Vellem argues (2007:51).

He further argues that *iimanyano* started with men who had no choices politically, economically and culturally. These men were oppressed and the only space they could be themselves was in the religious sphere. This matter is understandable when one brings the history of the wars that led to the defeat of *AmaXhosa* and ultimately all black people in South Africa. The movement of the colonial power from Cape Town into the interior of South Africa continued to throttle the space of the black people. After all, most of what became a Christian order, brought about by the Scottish missionaries, especially in relation to the Presbyterian tradition of missions, coincided with the violence of the colonial structures or power. This point is well articulated by Njoh (2006:4), who asserts that Christian missionaries considered African belief systems, traditional practices and customs relating to the institution of marriage, the place and role of women in society and production and reproduction, as antithetical to Christian religious doctrine. By space then, one has to keep this history in mind. *limanyano* created space for black people in the history of land dispossession, cultural killing and erosion of traditional practices.

Later women's, girls' and youth associations were formed. *limanyano*, one could argue, was the only safe space for the liberation of black men and women, where they could

embrace whatever was left for them after their defeat as a people. Their land was gone, traditional practices were eroded, families were dismantled of their Africanness or African roots, which was more evident in worship as conveyed by Khabela (in Vellem 2007):

The Manyano displayed a sense of vigorous enthusiasm and conscientious organizational capability. The atmosphere in the Manyano was that of a cathartic frenzy of unpremeditated talking during the heat of the typical African spontaneity and eloquent spiritual experience. (p. 50)

The 'organisational capability' (Vellem 2007:50) displayed by *limanyano* was important for organising and creating structures in church as organisation-space. Through *iimanyano* which were 'African initiated' (Vellem 2007:51), an African way of worship was introduced with a black expression: drumming, dancing, singing and celebration of faith in contrast to the Scottish liturgy that was imposed on Africans. '... The words "cathartic frenzy" capture the spirit of these associations poignantly' (Vellem 2007:51). *limanyano* thus created uncoerced spaces for African spiritual consciousness.

Following Vellem's thesis, we could say that central to *iimanyano* is arguably the spirit embedded in the 'Cry for Life', the resilience, rebellion and refusal to succumb to powers that continue to oppress Africans. This thesis is validated by a number of works that have examined the Ethiopian Movement, the rise of African Independent Churches and the development of the politics of resistance among the blacks in this era. It is logical then to argue that African spiritual consciousness is a spirit of resistance. One could also look at women like Nontetha, a South African who was a religious leader, a seer, a prophetess, who promoted unity among black Africans (Vellem 2014:2), and others in this era to argue that in principle, *limanyano* originate as a spirit of refusal or resistance. Following this, the article assumes this position that *iimanyano* is for women, and their refusal to be killed by patriarchy. African spiritual consciousness in an uncoerced space of *limanyano* suggests a spirituality that does not succumb to the teachings and doctrines that promise other-worldly life. This space cannot be an androcentric vessel of spirituality.

While this article is framed within this view and interpretation of *iimanyano*, the very spaces that were available for the black person to express himself or herself, it should not be assumed that in these very spaces, there were no violent patriarchal relations between men and women. Surely these contradictions become clearer in what follows next, the *iimanyano* of women in the UPCSAs.

## **Women's *limanyano* – Uniting Presbyterian Women's Fellowship**

On Thursdays and Saturdays, elderly and young, married and unmarried women of our church gather in church halls, occupying their supposedly feminine spaces, *iimanyano*. These are supposedly women's spaces because it is only women who gather together with the agenda supposedly formulated

by 'them'. Some practices, nonetheless, contradict this. Their year plans, for example, are endorsed by a minister and session of the congregation, which in most instances is predominantly male. The organisational capacity of a woman is thus subjugated to males and unfortunately even in cases where women occupy these decision-making spaces, theirs is often pseudo-agency because they seldom speak for and with their own sisters. When women occupy leadership positions in church, tensions arise. Leadership predominantly assumes headship theology, and women simply express and legitimise their domination by men. The point is that there is a disjuncture between being a leader and being a woman. One becomes a leader by becoming a vessel of androcentric assumptions and values and 'abandon' her being as a woman. Between leadership and being a woman, one has to collapse and in most instances, the latter collapses. There are numerous examples in South Africa that point to this contradiction. The failure of the Women's League of the African National Congress in the recent conference of this political organisation is one of them. They have failed to deliver not only the president of this organisation but also even its deputy president. That women would easily participate in structures that take decisions that oppress them is rampant and easily finds expression in almost all spheres. The argument is that, largely speaking, the UPWF simply reproduces the power of a patriarch and this becomes apparent even in the decision-making spaces of the denomination like the session as alluded to above. When women are elected into leadership positions, they simply and significantly become androcentric vessels of patriarchal leadership.

The UPWF membership is open to:

uniformed (badged) women in full communion of the UPCSA who accept and abide by the aims and objectives of the UPWF as set out in their Constitution and have paid the affiliation fees. (Constitution of the Uniting Presbyterian Women's Fellowship 2017; Clause 4.1.1:2)

Some of their aims and objectives are:

- 2.1. To strengthen and deepen Christian/fellowship through reading and study of the Bible, through rendering prayer and conducting regular worship.
- 2.4. To empower women by promoting self-worth, confidence and self-assertiveness in order for them to play a constructive role in Church and society.
- 2.7. To give support to other church projects as identified by members of the fellowship geared at improving both faith and the lives of people. (Constitution of the UPWF Clause 4.1.1:2)

Often, in this *umanyano*, there is a combination of literate and illiterate women, domestic workers who come from squalid conditions, with their broken bodies; their spirituality is what keeps them sane. While these gatherings are a means in which they express themselves, they are however not without flaws, when we look at power dynamics that exist in this site. A site where other women's voices are throttled by their fellow sisters, who are positioned better than them, for example, domestic

workers, sex workers, unemployed, pensioners, etc. Spivak asserts that '... the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves ...' (1992:82). This raises fundamental questions on how women deal with class and power among themselves and whether women can be oppressors to other women. Joy Ann James made this point some years ago when she argued that 'Women from oppressed peoples routinely find themselves in liberation limbos', (1997:216). She uses the notion of 'limbo' to express how women issues are often evaded to marginal sites and ghettoised both by insiders and outsiders of the oppressed peoples. The UPWF is a space, as we have argued, of women, yet the project of African consciousness in this association is ghettoised. There is very little in this space that engages colonial relations with Christianity and thus the struggle of black African women as related to colonisation. Issues of blackness are evaded in this space, with more pronounced internal class struggles among the women themselves, on the contrary.

As a critique to women's *Manyano*, we also look at how the church leadership remains male dominated, when women are the ones who are in majority, and thus electing men into power. We look at the contradictions, when one of their aims and objectives is to empower women to 'play constructive role in Church and society', yet in practice they elect men into power. Also, connected to this point is the resistance of women to accept and to support women that are in leadership positions. This speaks to women's complicity to patriarchy<sup>6</sup> and the article thus argues that it is in this regard a patriarchal site. However, if we proceed with the assumption that the denomination itself is fraught with patriarchal violence, then we should accept without any deeper elaboration that the theology that inspires women in their space is androcentric. Thus, the toxic mixture of the potentially liberating space with patriarchy becomes the complex examination of this article through the lenses of spirituality. Let us now look at the spirituality produced by an arguably patriarchal site in the section that follows.

## A pseudo-spirituality

Spirituality, according to Dreyer (2011:1), is 'a comprehensive life orientation that determines one's identity'. She further posits that it includes every dimension of human life. 'It is about one's entire human existence as an authentic person in God's presence' (Dreyer 2011:1). Sobrino (1988:2-3) further elucidates this interconnectedness by firstly posing the question 'in order to have a "spiritual life" must you not have life?' And to this, he responds that there is no spirituality without life. Kalilombe posits that 'spirituality has been described generally as those attitudes and beliefs and practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out toward the supersensible realities' (1994:115)

If Dreyer, Sobrino and Kalilombe's insights which indeed are enrooted in an African world view, are our thesis, then we proceed to look at how then, women's *Manyano* nuances spirituality.

6. For more insights on women's complicity to patriarchy, see Landman (1995; 2000) and Kobo (2016).

The selected days that African women gather for these meetings are mainly used to pray for the church, community and themselves (as pointed to in one of their aims and objectives). They pray for different things; *inkonzo yemithwalo*, in particular, is a liturgical practice where they gather to pray for their pain and suffering. The article argues that the content of these prayers points to a pseudo-spirituality as these women talk about their pain and suffering as something that will be dealt with in the next life when Jesus Christ comes back. It is pseudo-spirituality if it propels them to escape and not to respond to their material condition, the violence and violation. Pseudo-spirituality is the use of spiritual resources such as prayer to evade one's comprehensive life situation, lived experience by unconsciously expressing commitment to attitudes, beliefs and practices that further the interest of the oppressor.

A brief reflection on a recent Bible study<sup>7</sup> facilitated in their conference under the theme 'Why are you weeping?' elucidates this point. In response to the question why they weep or cry when they pray, they cited, among others, the following:

brokenness, being deeply troubled, family burdens, children (barrenness), how they are tormented by even fellow women, favouring of sons, problems with husbands, GBV, pain, fear, financial constraints, unemployment, inability to provide for their families, living and material conditions. (cf. A Cry for life)

One said, 'we cry because we are looking at the storms that are surrounding us, and ask ourselves if there is something that we are not doing right. If our prayers are not right' (07 October 2017). Another one said, we cry because even Jesus said, in the Bible, he wants 'crying women' (07 October 2017).

So they are aware of their conditions, but their prayer does not suggest to them that they should resist and be conscious of the source or cause, structural causes of their challenges. Prayer to them simply provides what one could call an escape route, rather than power to protest and resist against systems of their oppression.

The UPWF displays irreconcilable contradictions and a dualistic power structure. It is an association not the 'church'. What is the 'church' is what the missionaries brought to South Africa. This tension exists even before one examines the theology of the church or the association itself. The approach to this objective: 'To give support to other church projects as identified by members of the fellowship geared at improving both faith and the lives of people', suggests this tension first. There are 'other church projects', that must be supported by members, and these projects should 'improve faith' and the lives of the people surely according to what the 'church' deems as faith and teaches as faith. The 'church' is indisputably one that teaches faith that is other-worldly. Through their prayers, one is able to see that faith to them is still other-worldly and dualistic putting this space,

7.1 facilitated a Bible study in the Tshwane Presbytery – Uniting Presbyterian Women's Fellowship (UPWF), Conference at Prestige College in Hammanskraal on 07 October 2017.

*imanyano* into a limbo. The credibility of this powerful site is questionable in its current disintegrated state. An African rooted spirituality, as presented by Dreyer, Sobrino and Kalilombe, debunks any idea of a soul separated from the body, spirit separated from material as suggested by the West (Vellem 2014:5), differently put by Collins, 'oppression is not simply understood in the mind, it is felt in the body' (Collins 2000:274). These prayers express pseudo-spirituality if it enhances death of consciousness, and lack of action therefore, the paper argues, and proposes a new paradigm of consciousness, a womanised Manyano, as a response to her cry for life, spirituality and thus liberation. The death of consciousness here is used within the framework of Black Consciousness.

## ***imanyano* as a womanised space?**

By exposing pseudo-spirituality of an African woman, produced and maintained by *manyano*, the article proposes a 'womanised' *manyano*, as a response to her cry for life, spirituality and thus liberation. Mosala (1987:39) made a point about the importance of a womanist theological discourse as necessity of the objective and subjective conditions of black women's struggle (in Kobo 2016:2). Walker (1984:xi–xii) and Ogunyemi (1985:72)'s insights are helpful in understanding womanism. Walker defines womanists with reference to being outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour... She further points to one that appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility ... and women's strength. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, not just women (in Kobo 2016:3). According to Ogunyemi (1985:72), a womanist paradigm is thus aimed at 'dynamism of wholeness and self-healing'. Womanists are aware that gender questions are part of the context that includes other issues relevant to African women (Ogunyemi in Arndt 2000:711; Oduyoye 2001:21). With that in mind, we now turn to a womanised *imanyano* as an attempt to liberate the spirituality of an African woman.

## **A womanised *imanyano***

The site is marked by a 'paradigmatic shift' from being a women's Manyano defined by women that share and cry about pain and suffering as something that will be dealt with when Jesus comes back. It is a site of consciousness; one needs to note that consciousness is core to the paradigm of womanism as it is in that of BTL (Cone 1975; Vellem 2015b). So in a site marked by consciousness, even when they cry, and share their pain and suffering, they together map out ways of flourishing here and now... heaven is too far! Employing a womanist framework, we critique their structures, agenda, year plans and programmes to establish how these counter their own oppression, patriarchy, etc. Liberation calls for unlearning of systems, norms, practices and culture. We critique class differences and power dynamics, and promote agency for women.

By proposing a critical reading and understanding of scripture, we attempt to subvert a truncated reading of scripture. Mosala (1988:7–9) is very helpful for us. He looks

at the implications of the text of Esther for African women's struggle for liberation in South Africa.

A womanised site concerns itself not only with the liberation of these women but also of men. Once again, a womanised space debunks the idea of looking at patriarchy with dualistic tensions between men and women. Women in this space aim to 'knit the world's black family together to achieve black, not just female transcendence' (Ogunyemi 1985:69). It is a site where everything comes together, that is, life, economics, politics and spirituality. A place of restoration and deep spirituality.

But a womanised site of Iimanyano is also a challenge to the patriarchal theology of the church. 'Patriarchy is a reality and needs debunking but cannot be debunked in a heated battle' (Lorke & Werner 2013:395, emphasis added). It simply requires critical examination. The question is whether there are radical theories in our Church that help women and men to understand their liberation in Christ. By exposing the pseudo-agency and spirituality of African women as produced and maintained in this space, the article proposes this 'paradigmatic shift', to expose how the systems of oppression interconnect in different spaces in the entire denomination, and calls for a critique of these spaces for the liberation of all.

## Conclusion

The article problematises the cries of African women when they pray as a cry for life and a cry for liberation. The insights on the Statement of EATWOT set our scene as we then began to ponder on women's oppressions and cries. We looked at this cry in juxtaposition to her faith, prayer and spirituality and how, despite theological justification of her oppression, church and the Bible continue to be central in her life. We critique Iimanyano, a space for women in the UPCSA, and have argued that it is a patriarchal site that produces pseudo-agency and spirituality. We have proposed a new paradigm of consciousness as a response to her cry for life, spirituality and thus liberation, a womanised site.

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