

BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review of Chirongoma, Sophia, and Ven Scholar Wayua. *Mother Earth, Mother Africa: World Religions and Environmental Imagination*. Mother Earth, Mother Africa Ser. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 2022, 256 pp. ISBN: 1-998951-13-8.

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This publication contains contributions to gender-based and religious discourses in relation to ecological challenges in Africa. My objective in this review is to understand this publication on its own terms and place this work in a context.

This publication is the result of academic contributions made at the 5th All Africa Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians Conference held in Gaborone, Botswana in July 2019. The Circle of Concerned African Woman Theologians (<https://circle.org.za/about-us/history-of-the-circle/>) was founded in 1989 and is a Pan-African academic association of woman theologians. The Circle conducts research related to woman and religion/theology in the African continent and African diasporas with a special emphasis on research that has transformative impact on the lives of African woman. The initial research period of the Circle of Concerned African

Woman Theologians (1989-2009) focused on the construction and re-interpretation of religion for women. The second period (2009-2019) focused on the constructive response of African women and children in faith communities to the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. A new research focus was adopted at the 2019 conference, with a focus on the relationship between religion/theology, the Environment and Sustainable Development Goals. The publication reviewed here is one out of eight volumes being editing as a result of this conference.

The volume, *Mother Earth, Mother Africa: World Religions and Environmental Imagination*, contains 13 chapters organised into three sections. The foreword by Ezra Chitando and is followed by an introduction by the editors.

The first section, Religion, gender and environmental sustainability in Africa, contains 7 chapters. Chapter one, *Your House is Left to You Desolate: On Christian Grief and Faith for Africa and Earth in the Climate Crisis*, by Megan Bedford-Strohm, presents case studies that explore theological reflections on gender, justice and challenges related to climate change. Chapter two, *the Christic Okavango Delta of Botswana*, by Kenosi Molato and Musa Wenkosi Dube, explores the ecological context of the Okavango Delta as an environmental based Christology. Chapter three, *African Islam and Environmental Sustainability: A case study of the Varembe Muslim Woman in Zimbabwe*, by Silindiwe Zvingowanisei, considers the

positive role of rural Muslim woman in local ecological preservation practices. Chapter four, *Mother Earth, our life support system: Perspectives from a Catholic Nun*, by Mercy Shumbamhini, is based on a conversation between fellow nuns, emphasising ecological positioning, human interdependence, and eco-sensitiveness. Chapter five, by Nelly Mwale, *The Mother Earth Centre: a narrative of the Comboni sisters' contributions to environmental sustainability in Western Zambia* is an account of the Mother Earth Centre, a project focusing on rural woman self-sustainability, and ecological preservation. Chapter six by Cathrine Njagi, *African cosmological view: the role of African indigenous knowledge systems in the preservation of Mount Kenya Forest*, focuses on how rural woman in indigenous communities participate in forest conservation by incorporating religious and cultural resources. Chapter seven, by Sophia Chirongoma and Silindiwe Zvingowanisei, *Karanga woman's utilisation of Indigenous Systems on climate change adaptations and mitigation in Zimbabwe: towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG13)*, focuses on the integration between scientific and indigenous knowledge and how these systems are adapted by indigenous woman for climate initiatives.

The second section, *Gender, religion and access to landownership in Africa* contains 2 chapters that raise questions about the relationship between gender inequalities and landownership. Chapter eight, by Excellent Chirese, *Access to land ownership and gender in the light of African indigenous religion in Zimbabwe amongst the Shona*

in Chiredzi District, Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, is a case study about woman and landownership rights in a resettlement site. Chapter nine, by Wayua Kiilu, Gender, religion and access to land ownership in Kenya: Focus on Islam and Christianity, shows how Christian and Islamic teachings have negative effects for land inheritance for woman. The chapter argues that increased gender inclusivity in access to land may secure food security and woman's livelihood.

The third section, Mother Africa and religious imagination: Gender discourse explores Afrocentric approaches for understanding gender stereotypes in African contexts. Chapter ten, by Yoknyam Dabale, the Methodological approach of African Woman addressing gender biases in Christianity, provides an analysis of gender biases in African Christianity and explores solutions by discussing three central African feminist scholars, Nyambura J. Njoroge, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musa W. Dube. Chapter eleven, by Seyram Amenyedzi, the Afrocentric Womanist Paradigm, discusses hybrid approaches based on Afrocentrism and womanism in order to question gender inequalities experienced by woman in religio-cultural contexts. Chapter twelve, by Joseph Muyangata, Gender and holy Prayer Mountains in Zimbabwe: A case study of the Prayer Mountain Retreat Center in Borrowdale, Harare, focuses on how suburban Christian woman in Zimbabwe utilise mountains as gender specific sites for prayer and sanctuary. Chapter thirteen by Musa Wenkosi Dube, Speaking the unspeakable: the power of PLWH&A

biographies. The abbreviation in this title points to people living with HIV and AIDS, and the chapter argues how stories about these conditions have a therapeutic and social impact with a redemptive power to counter discrimination and stigma.

In sum, the strength of this publication lies in that the separate chapters engage with a variety of current discourses and empirical examples concerning the relationship between gender, religion and ecological challenges in Africa. One weakness with this publication lies perhaps in the lack of a summarising perspective. There are some short hints in the introduction (p. 3) about the actuality of this publication in light of ongoing discourses in African contexts, but the publication may well have restated and expanded these issues in a summary chapter developing theoretical perspectives. In the near future, many of the theological discourses raised by this publication will surely be an inherent part of the questions posed by the next generation of African theologians.