

Ruwadzano/Manyano: A Transformational Women's Movement of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe 1920–2020

Martin Mujinga

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8098-2515>

University of South Africa

martinmujinga@gmail.com

Abstract

From its inception, the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) was characterised by male-dominating leadership positions, whereas its growth and development were mostly through women's ministry. Ruwadzano/Manyano, an indigenous women's movement which started in the 1920s, was an evangelistic initiative of the missionaries' wives to attract local women and families into the church. The movement grew from an organisation of the ordinary, less privileged women to define the majority of the church membership. Although the establishment of Ruwadzano/Manyano was meant to separate White from Black women's activities (as most Black women were maids), the zeal for the organisation by the native women led the movement to be a hub of transformation. Ruwadzano/Manyano was inspired by the women's Manyano movement in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa that had managed to give status to the housemaids as they came together in prayer, fellowship and Bible study. This paper argues that although the movement emerged from humble beginnings, it contributed significantly to the development of Methodism in Zimbabwe, the transformation of communities, the socioeconomic emancipation of women and the numerical growth of the church. Ruwadzano/Manyano constitutes more than half of the Methodist membership; yet, its history is not known by the majority of its members. This paper aims to inform readers about the history and impact of Ruwadzano/Manyano in the Zimbabwean religious and socioeconomic landscape. The study that directed this paper used qualitative research to conclude that the development of Methodism in Zimbabwe would not have been possible without Ruwadzano/Manyano ministering from the margins of a patriarchal society.

Keywords: Ruwadzano; Manyano; transformational; women's movement; Methodist Church; Zimbabwe



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Introduction

Methodism was established in Zimbabwe in 1891. Its history, theology and approach to ministry drew much from the Methodist Church of Southern Africa because the movement was jointly planted by the British missionaries and the South African Xhosa evangelists (Banana 1991; Gondongwe 2011; Mujinga 2017). The mission drivers of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ) are the organisations, departments and units. The organisations are divided into men, women, youth and children. These groups are further divided into uniformed and non-uniformed organisations. The uniformed organisations are identified by subscriptions and uniforms. On the one hand, men's organisations are divided into the Men's Christian Union (MCU) and the Men's Fellowship. The former is a uniformed organisation, and the latter has open membership. On the other hand, women's fellowship constitutes the Ruwadzano/Manyano and the Women's Association. Ruwadzano/Manyano is a uniformed organisation, whereas the Women's Association has open membership, just like the Men's Fellowship, as the two were formed for the affluent society. The uniformed organisations are also found among the boys, being called the Boys' Christian Union, while the girls' organisation is called the Girls' Christian Union. The corresponding non-uniformed youth organisations are the Methodist Young Disciples, the Young Adults and the Sunday school for children.

This paper focuses on the historical development of Ruwadzano/Manyano. The story of Ruwadzano/Manyano resembles a movement of women from the margins of the religious landscape to occupy the centre stage that brought transformation to both the church and the society. As women from the margins moved to the centre stage, society and ideologies were also transformed. Such transformations led to the establishment of an organisation like Ruwadzano/Manyano, formed by indigenous and purportedly classless society women, to grow beyond expectation, thereby constituting the majority in the MCZ membership.

Women have always been playing a pivotal role in the development of Methodism, though not much scholarly attention has been given to their influence in the Zimbabwean religious and social landscape. Zvobgo (in Banana 1991, 44) argues that "the expansion of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe was largely due to the Ruwadzano/Manyano movement." This paper argues that although Ruwadzano/Manyano emerged from a humble beginning, the movement contributed significantly to the development of Methodism in Zimbabwe, the transformation of Methodist communities, the socioeconomic emancipation of women and their families, and the numerical growth of MCZ. The paper concludes by forwarding that the growth and development of MCZ would not have been possible without Ruwadzano/Manyano as a movement ministering from the margins.

The paper starts by tracing the historical development of the Women's Manyano movement in South Africa as a precursor of Ruwadzano/Manyano in Zimbabwe. This will be followed by a discussion of the growth and development of the

Ruwadzano/Manyano movement in Zimbabwe, their leadership, programmes the organisation is undertaking in the society, their developmental projects, and an analysis of how their policy is shaping the vision and mission of the movement ministering from the margins.

Definition of Ruwadzano and Manyano

Faced with the constraints brought about by colonial rule, African women empowered themselves through religion (Moss 1992, iv). The word *manyano* is originally a Xhosa noun, which is a reciprocal form of the verb *ukunyana*, which means “join” (Brandel-Syrier 1962, 240). The equivalent of *manyano* is *kopano* in Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi, which refers to a gathering for the purpose of worship and prayer (Madise 1999, 22; Madise and Lebeloane 2008, 121). The word was first coined among the Xhosa people of the Ciskei region with the earliest missionary concentration. When Methodists entered Natal, they incorporated a number of Xhosa words into Christian Zulu vocabulary, *manyano* being one of the words (Brandel-Syrier 1962, 240–243). According to Haddad (2004, 4), the word was first used by the Methodist women to refer specifically to their weekly meetings, known as prayer unions. The indigenous African Christian women in South Africa were responding to the missionary endeavour through submissive action and formed their own movement (Haddad 2004, 4). Increasingly, the word *manyano* was adopted by women from other denominations when referring to their church organisations, be they male or female.

According to Preston (2009, 42), “the word *manyano* signifies purity of speech, holiness of life, conduct and temperament and service to the glory of God for the extension of his Kingdom.” The majority of Black churches in South Africa, both missionary oriented and initiated African churches, have their women organisations that are part of the *manyano* movement, and each Manyano has a distinctive uniform (Haddad 2004, 4). Whereas the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) women’s movement was called Women’s Manyano, their counterparts in Zimbabwe added the prefix *ruwadzano* to come up with Ruwadzano/Manyano. The word *ruwadzano* is derived from a Shona verb, *kuwadzana*, meaning fellowship, and in the MCZ context, *manyano* is the equivalent Ndebele word for *ruwadzano*. The prefix *ku* on the Shona term *kuwadzana* is replaced by *ru* in the MCZ to read *ruwadzano*, referring to fellowship. MCZ uses the two terms, *Manyano* and *Ruwadzano*, to read Ruwadzano/Manyano, which is the uniformed women’s fellowship (Mujinga 2017, 131). The use of the single double-barrel term Ruwadzano/Manyano is an attempt by MCZ to cater for both the Shona and Ndebele congregants’ cultural views.

Origins of Women’s Manyano in South Africa

There are differing theories as to when and how the Women’s Manyano was started in South Africa (Preston 2009, 41). The first theory states that the movement was started in 1905 by Rev. and Mrs Martha Mthembu (Madise 1999, 23). From 1905, the Women’s

Manyano was not recognised by the church, and the organisation functioned without the Methodist Church acknowledging its existence (Madise and Lebeloane 2008, 6).

The second theory argued that the Women's Manyano was formed on 7 December 1907 at a place called "Verdriet" nearby Dundee (Mkhwanazi 2002, 29). There were four circuits representing MCSA, namely Dundee, Driefontein, Newcastle and Nyanyadu. Ministers were also welcome to attend, and among the delegates were Revs J. G. H. Xaba, S. Msimang and E Msimang (Mkhwanazi 2002, 29). It was at this convention that the term *nyamezela*, which means perseverance, to be strong, consistent, to be faithful and optimistic about the future, was suggested as a term suitable to express the commitment of the women in prayer (Mkhwanazi 2002, 29).

The third theory suggests that the Women's Manyano was founded by Mrs Amos Burnett, the wife of a Methodist minister in the then Transvaal in 1910 (Preston 2009, 41). Holness (1997, 23) observes that before the formation of the Women's Manyano, a women's movement was established in the Transvaal and Natal. The women belonging to all these groups met for revival and prayer, and the activities of the groups were characterised by informality in singing, Bible study, prayer recitation, conversation, recitation and conversation as major components. Unfortunately, the women were refused permission to use the church for their activities and had to resort to holding meetings under trees where they worshipped and prayed. The Women's Manyano continued their devotional activities and insisted on being granted permission to use the church. They were later granted permission to use the church, and the organisation started to grow from one circuit to another, eventually spreading to the districts and finally becoming a Connexional movement (Madise 1999, 23).

The fourth theory mentions that the movement was established in 1926 at a Conference in Bloemfontein (Attwell 1997). This point is buttressed by Elphick, Davenport, and Davenport 1997, 253), who speak of African women from the Johannesburg Primitive Methodist Church holding a series of revivalist gatherings in 1919 and recruiting other women in the Orange Free State. This gathering constituted the beginnings of the Women's Manyano, which was initially led by Black male evangelists. Women took turns in leadership as well as to pray and convert their hearers to repentance.

From the four theories, scholars generally agree that the movement was started by women, and it gained official recognition at Conference in 1926 (Attwell 1997, 138). An analysis of the four theories presented in this section demonstrates the zeal of women to come together for fellowship. It cannot be concluded in this paper that the four hypotheses are the only ones that trace the beginning of *manyano* in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa; however, it can be argued that they are the ones that have received scholarly attention. What remains clear in reconstructing the historiography of Women's Manyano is what Holness (1997, 23) mentioned:

The missionaries welcomed these women's or mother's groups because of their perceived role in fostering "devout domesticity" among the women. In time, the Women's Manyano was to assume the somewhat modified characteristics of being a contextualised channel of mutual support, both for women who had moved to urban areas and rural women whose husbands had moved to the cities for work.

Impact of MCSA Women's Manyano on the Growth of Ruwadzano/Manyano in Zimbabwe

The MCSA Manyano held meetings in classrooms and private homes. In the difficulties of life during apartheid South Africa, the movement provided a significant place for African women. Women were fighting against the demise of their families as pass laws, migrant labour, and influx control laws took effect in the apartheid era. It was the support network of the Manyano groups, with their emphasis on family life, that increasingly played a central role in the indigenous expression of African women's Christianity (Haddad 2004, 7). The impact that the South African apartheid system had on this organisation and what it gave to its women who had so little position in society, made the organisation strong. A sense of identity, symbolised by their uniform, as well as a sense of pride and self-confidence, was something that membership of the Manyano gave to many women (Preston 2009, 23). Manyano was a place where women supported one another in a country where they were not recognised, as they were unfortunate for being Black and being female (Preston 2009, 42). In Manyano, women had their dignity restored. This was a place where they were not called domestic workers or by their English names, but rather, Mrs Dlamini (for example), something that resonated well with them as it brought some sense of dignity. This was a place where they could share scriptures, pray together and practise leadership. Manyano was a safe place, away from the dominating forces around women (Haddad 2004, 8).

Manyano was not just a coming together of aimless people, but a purposeful organisation where lives were redefined, redirected, dignity restored, and the dehumanised women from the kitchens of the White mistresses were rehumanised. This restoration process was done through preaching, praying and sharing experiences of being Black women in the Methodist Church. First, women experienced healing simply by being able to express their problems. Second, the needs articulated among the group invited advice in the form of the shared wisdom of the members. Third, such needs often themselves provided the cure for social action by the group (Preston 2009, 39). Material problems were solved materially by collections towards the needy women (Holness 1997, 28). Throughout the past and existing hardships and pain, women never lost hope because, on Thursdays, they would go to the Women's Manyano to seek strength through prayers—and things would change (Holness 1997).

The Development of Ruwadzano/Manyano Movement in Zimbabwe

The development of the Ruwadzano/Manyano movement was a result of the success of the African Women's Prayer Union in South Africa, launched in the Transvaal by Mrs

Amos Burnet. It was through this movement that it expanded to Zimbabwe in 1920 (Zvobgo in Banana 1991, 44). Chirisa (1991, 27) mentions that the movement was brought to Zimbabwe by Mrs Emma White, the wife of Rev. John White, who had a brother in Natal, and she (Mrs White) had also lived in South Africa herself. The first formal Women's Prayer Union meeting was held at Nengubo (now Waddilove) under the leadership of Rev. White and his wife, Emma. Among the founding members of the first Ruwadzano branch were Miriam Furamera, Christina Gutu, Nurse Murerekwa, Eva Musona, Grace Mutanangwa and Sara Mukanganise (Chirisa 1991, 23). The meeting agreed that Ruwadzano meetings should be chaired by the minister's wife and the evangelist's wife would be the secretary (Chirisa 1991, 23). The Women's Prayer Union was formally recognised by the Methodist Church at its Synod in January 1920. Mrs White was elected the president while Mrs Sally Carter was the secretary and treasurer. Mrs Maria Lewanika was appointed to represent the Mashonaland region, while Mrs Matambo represented the Matabeleland region. The meeting further agreed to use the Zulu policy book translated into vernacular languages.

The word "Ruwadzano" was first recognised in 1921 but was officially used in 1922 at a convention in Epworth, which had some representatives from South Africa like Mrs Elizabeth Tshuku Ramushu, and Mrs Anne Mfazi. The Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) District was represented by Mrs White, Mrs Musa, Mrs Tutani, Mrs Matambo and Mrs Hogan (Carter 1974, 4; Chirisa 1991, 23). The aim of forming Ruwadzano was to promote spiritual awareness among women of the Rhodesian Synod, to promote spiritual growth and encourage the manipulative skills needed in the running of a home (Carter 1974). The term Ruwadzano became common at this convention and was used in Mashonaland, while Manyano was used in Matabeleland. The 1937 Synod report states that the "Ruwadzano/Manyano movement among our African women is full of power and blessing" (Chirisa 1991, 25).

Although the term Ruwadzano was first used in 1922, the organisation remains seemingly ignorant of this historical fact. For example, in 2018, there was a proposal to the Annual Conference from Ruwadzano/Manyano through the Mission Committee requesting permission to celebrate 125 years of existence that year. The organisation had printed logo material and went further to create fundraising and other committees (MCZ 2018, 19). The Mission Committee justified the request by mentioning that "when the church celebrated a century of Methodism in 1991, Mrs Gladys Chirisa chronicled the history of Ruwadzano/Manyano and Girls' Christian Union. The book assumed that by 1893, Ruwadzano/Manyano was going to be 100 years, hence the justification of celebrating 125 years in 2018" (MCZ 2018, 19). The report from Ruwadzano/Manyano created a scene of embarrassment in the Conference when the Mission Committee report reprimanded them, saying:

... calculations for the event from historians showed that Ruwadzano started in Zimbabwe in 1826, and therefore, the organisation cannot claim 125 years of existence. This discovery was brought to light when there was a lot of progress in terms of

preparation and the huge production of logo material. Moral judgments were called for and we applied situational ethics. In future, such events will not be allowed to take place without the concept or theological justification of the event. (MCZ 2018, 16)

Conference noted the miscalculation of the dates and stopped Ruwadzano/Manyano from continuing with the event but allowed them to go ahead with selling their material (MCZ 2018, 16).

From this confusing historical narrative, it is clear that even the Mission Committee also further confused the Conference because there was no proper research that they had done on the origins of the organisation. Both 1893 and 1826 are the wrong dates for the inception of Ruwadzano/Manyano. This point was supported by Carter (1974, 4) and Chirisa (1991, 23), who confirm 1922 as the proper year when the term Ruwadzano was first used, having started in 1920 (Zvobgo in Banana 1991, 44).

Ruwadzano/Manyano rose out of the need by the White missionaries to spread the gospel to Africans by means of Africans (Zvobgo in Banana 1991, 44). This model became effective because, first, White women were far too few to propagate the gospel that could convince Black women to love Christ. Second, they were convinced that the minds of the natives could be understood only by fellow natives; as such African natives were deemed the most appropriate witnesses to follow (Zvobgo in Banana 1991, 44). Third, it was also a way of separating White from Black women's activities as most Black women were housemaids. In the minds of women missionaries, "the kraal" of the heathen African woman needed to be transformed into a home in which Christianity could flourish (Haddad 2016, 2). One of the major concerns of female missionaries at this time was the necessity of inculcating the ideal of a male breadwinner, along with a dependent housekeeping wife and mother and dependent school-going children, among the African women and girls they worked with in the cities (Haddad 2016, 2). The most potent evangelistic agency of the Methodists among Africans between 1920 and 1974 was the Ruwadzano/Manyano movement, which had no parallel elsewhere on the African continent outside Zimbabwe and South Africa (Zvobgo in Banana 1991, 44).

Fourth, Ruwadzano in Zimbabwe was similar to Manyano in South Africa, not only in the movement but in the history of suffering within South Africa (Moss 1992). These continuities were a result of the fact that individuals who are socially subordinate actively join associations to compensate for discrimination in the society, thereby fulfilling needs (not readily available in the larger society) such as self-expression, status, recognition, prestige, and leadership opportunities (Preston 2009, 37). Fifth, it is a natural human trait to look for people who have similar struggles, and the Methodist women in both Zimbabwe and South Africa found that within their Manyano groups, they experienced affirmation, a voice and continual reminders of the reality of God in their lives and their situations.

Sixth, the organisation was formed with the aim of women to encourage one another in spiritual growth in their homes and in the movement. Chirisa (1991) expresses the impact of coming together on Thursday:

For Thursday afternoon, it is time when across the length and breadth of Zimbabwe, in the city, from town ... dirt roads and country paths women are seen with a Bible, a hymnbook, a membership card going to the Ruwadzano. The married women and the housemaids, widows, doctors, lawyers, teachers, peasant farmers, women from every walk of life, both young and old come together in classrooms, makeshifts and church buildings ... for spiritual uplifting. (See also Mujinga 2017, 131)

Seventh, Ruwadzano/Manyano represents a powerful female spiritual response to Christianity in the face of both male dominance and traditional patriarchal culture. It was formed as a support group that provides sanctuary and a medium through which individuals can filter information from the outside world and provide validation of one's worth (Moss 1992, 5).

The first Ruwadzano/Manyano meeting was held in 1926 at the Waddilove Institute with 10 circuits and about 1 500 delegates in attendance. By 1942, there were 4 798 fully bloused members. In 1944 the number rose to 5 819. By 1974 the membership had grown to 19 372 (Gondongwe 2011, 72). Ruwadzano/Manyano became the most popular organisation in the MCZ. The growth towards the egalitarian nature of the movement made it a good centre of hope for the socially, economically and politically oppressed women. The uniform itself conferred a substantial amount of dignity to women, and as a result, it attracted quite a number of them (Gondongwe 2011). By 2021, the organisation had grown to constitute almost half of the MCZ community. Of the 123 262 congregants in the MCZ (who include youth and children), 58 505 are women, while 16 940 are men (MCZ 2021, R37). Within the women's fellowship, which comprises all women in the Methodist Church, the Women's Association constitutes a very insignificant membership of 231 members (MCZ 2021, R38). These statistics demonstrate the impact of Ruwadzano/Manyano in the ministry and mission of the MCZ. The organisation has continued to grow, becoming a haven for the less privileged women, girls and orphans.

The Ruwadzano/Manyano Uniform

The uniform is the pride of the Ruwadzano/Manyano women; however, the red, black and white colours that make the Ruwadzano/Manyano uniform originated from a secular world. Chirisa (1991, 21) claims that:

In 1907, the women in Natal were greatly impressed by the uniform worn by the Queen's battalion when they paraded at an official occasion. The battalion wore white helmets, red coats, white polo-neck collars and black trousers. The Transvaal women decided that as soldiers of the cross, they too should wear a uniform. They transposed the soldiers' uniform to symbolise the Manyano uniform.

When the uniform was introduced, there was no agreed-upon quality of the material. Every red colour silk, velvet or cotton was worn as a blouse, but the feeling of pride was growing (Carter 1974, 2). Women could also wear round or square collars.

Both full members and trial members may wear the Ruwadzano/Manyano uniform. However, only full members of the church are allowed to wear the red blouse. Those in polygamous marriages are not allowed to wear the red blouse, since it contravenes the Methodist theology of monogamy. The red-bloused uniform confers a sense of identity to women who have experienced the triple oppression of being female, Black and poor (Gondongwe 2011, 72). Moreover, while in uniform, everyone looks the same. The uniform is a leveller to the extent that women can, without shame, hide their poverty by wearing their official dress—no one can detect who is rich and who is poor (Gondongwe 2011, 72).

The wearing of a red blouse, black skirt, white hat and collar, red belt and a pin is one of the most prestigious statuses that most women would want to be associated with. In the passage of time, the uniform has been regulated. The Administration and Policy Book of Ruwadzano/Manyano gives the specifications of the Ruwadzano/Manyano uniform. The blouse should be long sleeved with four white buttons and the fifth one on the belt. The collar should be white and round. The skirt should have six panels with a zip at the back. The hat also has six panels. Women are expected to wear black shoes¹ with laces. The panel for the material should be top tax, baby butcher or mandy material [eia] (MCZ 2015, 11–12).

The red, black and white colours of the uniform have a theological meaning:

The black skirt is an acknowledgement of the past sins. The red blouse symbolises the blood of Jesus that washes away sins. The white collar and hat stand for the new life which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The five buttons with one on the belt represent the five wounds of Jesus on the cross. The hat has six panels that symbolise the fruit of the spirit, which is expected to characterise women in this movement, namely forgiveness, perseverance, justice, humanity, peace and love. The brim that brings the panels of the hat together symbolises Ruwadzano/Manyano women as the people of prayer for unity in the movement and in the world. The collar symbolises the burden of the cross women have to bear in all times. (Mujinga 2017, 131–132)

Women with trial membership wear white blouses because blousing is a rite of passage into the organisation administered by the minister's wife, who is a full member of the organisation. A minister's wife who is not a full member of the organisation is not

1 Ruwadzano/Manyano women believe that in the Bible, shoes represented the will to serve God. They were often used as symbols, and the only way to describe how far someone was willing to go for faith is by describing the shoes on his feet and how torn they were. Shoes in the Bible were also symbols of faith in God and victory over your enemies (Isaiah 52:7; Eph. 6:15). Ruwadzano/Manyano uses the Ephesians narrative to justify the wearing of shoes as part of the uniform.

allowed to wear the red blouse and does not blouse women until she is a full member of the organisation.

Apart from the uniform of the full members, ministers' wives who are full members also wear a cape on their shoulders, which demonstrates the multiple roles played by the minister's wife in the work of the church and the social lives of the women. The cape is a sign that ministers' wives in the Ruwadzano/Manyano are the anchor of hope, trust, reconciliation, humility, passion and a source of confidence. Ministers' wives are the centre where the laity and the clergy meet. This cape gives them a unique role in the ministry of the church in general and the ministry of Ruwadzano/Manyano in particular. Sande and Maforo interviewed one Apostolic Faith Mission minister's wife, who revealed the importance of the pastor's wife. The interviewee mentioned that:

... as a pastor's wife, I am viewed as the mother of the local church. My motherly role extends to the community. When the community looks at me, they see *amai vemusha* (mother of the home). As *amai vemusha*, together with other women in the church, we must address certain charitable needs of the community. (Sande and Maforo 2021, 6)

Ruwadzano/Manyano members also put a pin on the left side of their chest, locked on the blouse. The pin is a reminder for women to lock everything, including people's secrets on their chests, to keep secrets and only share the pains of the members and of the people in the world (Mujinga 2017, 132).

Ruwadzano/Manyano Leadership from 1920–2021

Although Ruwadzano/Manyano was a movement targeted for Black women, it was led by the White missionaries' wives from its inception. There are a number of factors that could have necessitated missionaries' wives to lead the organisation. Three assumptions can be forwarded to argue why the organisation of the less privileged was led by the privileged few. To start with, most Black women were believed to lack the proper administrative skill to lead the organisation. Moreover, Black women suffered triple disadvantages, that of being female, Black, and most of them were housemaids in the missionaries' kitchens. The above scenarios created an autocratic structure of a superiority and inferiority group, respectively. Moreover, the church was led by the missionaries and the wife of the male leader, who will be the superintendent at circuit/parish level, bishop at district/diocese level and presiding bishop at Connexional/national level—which would be the one who automatically leads the organisation (see MCZ 2015). In the event that the presiding bishop or bishop is a female, the committee will choose another minister's wife who is already a president to lead the organisation. In the circuit, when there is a married male minister working with the female superintendent, his wife automatically becomes the Ruwadzano/Manyano president.

The first Ruwadzano/Manyano president was Mrs Emma White, the wife of Rev. John White, who was the chairman of the Rhodesia District from 1901–1926 (Kadenge in

Banana 1991, 112). Rev. White is credited in the MCZ history because he was the first to translate the Bible into the Shona vernacular language (Mujinga 2017, 123). Because of his zeal for the Africanisation of the gospel, White was referred to as Baba² White (Kadenge in Banana 1991, 112). Given the support of her husband, it cannot be denied that Mrs White had a passion for the establishment and the development of the Ruwadzano/Manyano movement in Zimbabwe.

In 1927, Mrs Mildred Noble took over the presidency since her husband, Rev. Frank Noble, was now the District Chairman. She led the organisation from 1927 to 1938. Mrs Noble was replaced by Mrs Sally Carter, the wife of Rev. Herbert Carter, who led from 1938 to 1954. From 1954 to 1962, Rev. Jesse Lawrence was appointed as the District Chairman and his wife, Dora Lawrence, became the president of Ruwadzano/Manyano.

During the time of Mrs Lawrence, the Ruwadzano/Manyano leadership policy changed in 1962. First, the organisation was led by an interim leader when the substantive leader had resigned. Second, the first Black woman to lead the Ruwadzano/Manyano, Mrs Ellen Musa, was not the wife of the leader of the church. Third, the leadership of Mrs Musa was a giant step towards the Africanisation of the organisation as she was the first Black woman to occupy that position. It can be argued that the stepping aside of Mrs Lawrence was the inauguration of the autonomous organisation because, from 1962, Ruwadzano/Manyano was led by Black women. Mrs Musa held the position until 1965, when Mrs Sarah Ndhlela took over after her husband, Andrew Manjoni Ndhlela, was elected the first Black District Chairperson of the Rhodesian District until 1980.

Mrs Ndhlela saw the transition of the missionary leadership in 1977 when the church was granted autonomy by the British Methodist Church. She was succeeded by Mrs Alice Ramushu in 1981. Mrs Ramushu was also not the wife of the head of the church. She became the president when Rev. Mazobere was the leader. Mazobere served for less than a year and was replaced by Rev. Caspen Makuzva. His wife Jessica led the organisation up to 1985 and was succeeded by Mrs Gladys Chirisa, who led the organisation from 1986 to 1991. Mrs Chirisa was succeeded by Mrs Mazobere, who led the organisation from 1992 to 1994. When Rev. Farai Chirisa was reappointed bishop (now presiding bishop) from 1995–1999, Mrs Chirisa bounced back as the Ruwadzano/Manyano president. It was during her tenure that the organisation changed its approach to mission. A number of turn-around activities were witnessed. For the first time, the organisation embarked on self-help projects. They started the Ruwadzano/Manyano Centre and developed their first administrative policy book. Moreover, Mrs Chirisa also chronicled the history of the organisation in her book on the history of Ruwadzano. Her book was a milestone in the history of the organisation. Unfortunately, the literature did not stay in the market for long, resulting in very few

2 Baba is a Shona word that means father.

members of Ruwadzano/Manyano knowing the history of the women who ministered from the margins to transform the MCZ story.

Mrs Chirisa was succeeded by Mrs Mary Mukandi, who led from 2000–2004. In 2005, MCZ had a leadership crisis (see Mujinga 2020), which resulted in Rev. Margaret James being appointed the acting presiding bishop. Having a female presiding bishop meant that Ruwadzano/Manyano did not have a constitutional leader. The Ruwadzano/Manyano Committee appointed Rev. Gloria Hokonya, the wife of Harare East District Bishop Rev. Munetsi Hokonya, to be the acting president. Mrs Hokonya led the organisation up to August 2005, when MCZ Conference appointed Rev. Simbarashe Sithole, thereby automatically making his wife, Mrs Adalaide Sithole, to be the president up to 2011. Mrs Sithole handed over the leadership to Mrs Mercy Ndhumbi, who steered the organisation from 2011 to 2016. She was succeeded by Mrs Wadzanai Zwana, who led from 2017 to 2021. Mrs Zwana was succeeded by Mrs Pelagia Mawire in 2021.

In the districts, the wives of the bishops were always the presidents. However, there were scenarios where the district organisation was not led by the wife of the bishop. For example, in the Marondera district between 1994–1999, when Rev. Margaret Mawire was the bishop, the organisation was led by Mrs Mbadzo. In Gweru, Rev. Chishamiso Nyabonda was the district bishop from 2018 to 2022, and Ruwadzano/Manyano was led by Mrs Veronica Chibuda, who was later replaced by Mrs Future Marima after the demise of Rev. Stuart Chibuda in 2021.

Ruwadzano/Manyano Policy and its Impact on the Growth of the Methodist Movement

The Ruwadzano/Manyano policy was designed in such a way that after enrolling as a member, Methodist women were not ordinary females, but transformed women of integrity, responsible for their families, society and the church. The policy contains membership qualification, structure, committees, conferences, subscriptions, activities, uniform, and duties of various office bearers from Connexion³ that is their highest body to the grassroots, which is the society (MCZ 2015). African women came to the missions, not as a *tabula rasa*⁴; their culture had stamped them with expectations and insights with which they imbibed and moulded the Christian message. They viewed religion as a resource. Their cultural expectations reinforced missionary promises and facilitated Christian conversion.

Ruwadzano/Manyano policy led women to be religious specialists. This status made women gain status, respect, social and economic security in pre-colonial society because they provided necessary and important services. Within the patriarchal Christian denominations, African women often exhibited an assertiveness that missionaries

3 Connexion has the same meaning as head office.

4 An absence of preconceived ideas or predetermined goals or a clean slate (Merriam-Webster 1828).

misunderstood and maligned (Moss 2002). Ruwadzano/Manyano policy compels women not to use vulgar words, steal, drink alcohol, brew beer, fight, and misuse church funds, and to be present at all Ruwadzano/Manyano committees for those in leadership. The policy also forbids extramarital relationships, encourages women to attend class meetings of the church, not to smoke and not to consult traditional healers. Women are compelled to be honest, not greedy, read the Bible and pray with their family every day. Members are also encouraged to have a civil marriage since this is regarded as marriage security.

Social Responsibility Activities of Ruwadzano/Manyano Movement

Since its inception, Ruwadzano/Manyano has always been involved in the lives of the weaker people of the community. For example, in 1930, the organisation had £75, and £50 was given to the African church-building fund (Carter 1974, 2). Gifts from the organisation were also used to assist needy people. They also gave bursaries to girl children, assisted charity organisations like Jairos Jiri and the African Children's Home (now Matthew Rusike Children's Home), a Methodist-run orphanage. Women also supported the ministers' widows and fellow widows, orphans and vulnerable children, building houses for the disadvantaged families and supporting the ministers' wives through upkeep. Moreover, the organisation empowered women by creating clubs to support fellow women to buy kitchen utensils, clothes, pay fees and support their parents.

Ruwadzano/Manyano organisation is always speaking for the poor and comforting bereaved families, taking care of the widows, orphans and child-headed families. Moreover, the organisation is also known for family care, Bible study, and evangelistic campaigns. Given their work in the community, Ruwadzano/Manyano is the backbone of the MCZ. This point was also supported by Mkhwanazi (2002) in reference to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, who mentioned that without such an organisation, the church could not have grown very fast.

Developmental Projects of Ruwadzano/Manyano: The Centre

Ruwadzano/Manyano runs a number of projects. These projects are divided into profit-making, developmental and social projects. The developmental project is the Ruwadzano/Manyano Centre. The idea to build the centre started in 1986. The centre was poised to be built at Mbare Methodist Church in Harare. Fundraising efforts were conducted to erect a perimeter wall. Each member was expected to contribute a dollar⁵ towards the project. Fundraising efforts were scaled up, and members were expected to pay four dollars. The organisation approached the corporate world in order to be assisted. However, the plans failed when the Harare Municipality indicated that the

5 Zimbabwean currency has gone through many levels of inflation and hyperinflation. Any currency mentioned in this paper can only be understood in the context of when it was being used.

place earmarked for the Ruwadzano/Manyano Centre was designated for a railway line from Harare's central business district to Chitungwiza town.

In the spirit of building the centre, the Ruwadzano/Manyano Committee wrote to MCZ to request a stand. In 1995, MCZ donated land of seven hectares in Epworth to Ruwadzano/Manyano. The project was possible because, since 1921, the Epworth mission had been active with Ruwadzano/Manyano activities. The years between 1992 and 1995 were silent on the developmental project. In 1996, the project resumed. Many donations came from individuals and organisations. On 15 July 1995, there was a ground-breaking ceremony at the proposed centre. This action marked the beginning of the long journey of success in developmental projects for women. However, there arose a dispute from Epworth, and the residents staged a demonstration against the establishment of the Ruwadzano/Manyano Centre. Among the protesters were Ruwadzano/Manyano members in the Epworth circuit. The Ruwadzano/Manyano Committee met in Masvingo on 13 July 1996 and resolved that Epworth Society Ruwadzano/Manyano members who took part in the demonstration should be de-bloused and that the branch should be closed. The Committee requested the district chairman (now bishop) Rev. John Jabangwe, Mrs Jabangwe the district Ruwadzano/Manyano president and Mrs Chibi, the circuit Ruwadzano president, to sanction the discipline (MCZ 1996).

Ruwadzano/Manyano engaged Rachael Nyati-Mawire from 1991 to 1995 to be the coordinator. Mrs Mawire was sent to Zambia for training in 1989 and was appointed in 1991. Her responsibility was to organise training, visit circuits, and teach Ruwadzano/Manyano women and do the secretarial work. Mrs Enetty Chombo was appointed as liaison officer to coordinate the women's work.

The developmental plans for the centre continued, and on 12 July 1997, the centre was officially opened by Hon Thenjiwe Lisabe, the then Minister of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperatives. Office furniture was donated. A management board was elected to run the centre. The aim of the centre was to promote self-knowledge, self-reliance, leadership development and the sustainability of the Ruwadzano/Manyano women. It was also constructed as a place of meeting for women of different religious, political, social and ideological backgrounds and denominations, for different programmes. Moreover, the centre was a place for promoting women's handwork, to provide space for a gallery and shop where women would display and exhibit, thereby promoting women's artwork. As the work started, women's empowerment also started. Mrs Mwerenga and Mrs Machakaire were engaged at different times to help in the sewing of uniforms. In 1998, Mrs Nkomo was the teacher. Ladies were trained for two months at a guest house in Marondera. In the same year, the first Ruwadzano/Manyano policy book was launched after having started compiling it in 1996.

On 11 May 2001, Mrs Chombo reported on a group of Ministers' wives from Marondera, Harare East and Harare West, who were trained by Mrs Machakaire at the Ruwadzano Centre. Only three managed to attend. Between 8–12 April, 10 spouses of students at the United Theological College were trained. Faced with a number of challenges, there was the consideration of selling the centre, but the idea was rejected as retrogressive. By 2011, the Ruwadzano/Manyano centre had embarked on a massive project of a gazebo with a kitchen. The aim of the gazebo was to rent it out for social events like weddings, seminars and graduations. A borehole was also sunk. Apart from these developments, they also built some dormitories. Intensive work was done between 2011–2015 under the leadership of Mrs Sithole and Mrs Ndhumbi in particular. By 2021, the centre had accommodation for 98 guests, and the beauty of the centre can be seen on the hostels labelled with the names of some church leaders.

Ruwadzano/Manyano Sustainability Programmes: The Shop

Ruwadzano/Manyano is sustained by projects. These projects started when the centre was opened. However, because of the geography of Epworth from the city, few people were going there to buy material. Following this challenge, Ruwadzano/Manyano relocated to the Connexional office in the city. The Ruwadzano/Manyano projects are all marked with a Methodist and sometimes Ruwadzano/Manyano logo. The organisation sells mugs, cups, dinner plates, bags, umbrellas, t-shirts, logo material, and clerical shirts, among others. Apart from the material, they also sell shirts, scarfs, Ruwadzano/Manyano literature, jerseys, pins and cards. These sales have made the organisation self-sustainable and able to run its own affairs as a business entity.

Conclusion

It cannot be denied that Ruwadzano/Manyano has established itself as an organisation that developed from the margins to transform the lives of women in general and the MCZ in particular. Their history shows that the organisation was started by women whose identity was looked down upon by society. In spite of these humble beginnings, the organisation developed in difficult circumstances and managed to do a number of developmental projects, also contributing significantly to the social responsibilities that were aimed at humanising the dehumanised women. In the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Ruwadzano/Manyano remains a force to be reckoned with, and is sometimes referred to as “the church” in reference to their membership, sound financial statements, their projects and how they have impacted society.

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