

A Historical Analysis of Gender Discrimination in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church: Insights from its Manicaland Province Headquarters

Ezekiel Baloyi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9166-7625>
University of the Free State
Reformed Church University
revbaloyi@gmail.com

Chiratidzo Zvashura

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6938-3755>
Reformed Church University
chiratidzozvashura@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper presents a historical analysis of gender discrimination within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, with a focus on its headquarters in Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe. The study explores the church's doctrinal evolution, traditional gender roles, and marriage practices, highlighting their profound impact on the educational and economic opportunities of women. Rooted in both biblical interpretations and African cultural norms, the church's teachings emphasise male authority and female subordination, perpetuating gender inequalities. The analysis is enriched by detailed case studies from Manicaland Province, illustrating women's lived experiences and the intergenerational effects of these discriminatory practices. Furthermore, the paper compares the Johane Marange Apostolic Church with other African Initiated Churches (AICs) to contextualise its unique challenges and reform efforts. Despite significant resistance to change, there are emerging voices advocating for gender equality within the church, driven by increased awareness of human rights and external support. The paper concludes with recommendations for promoting gender equality through educational initiatives, legal reforms, community engagement, and support services, emphasising the need for a multifaceted approach that respects cultural and religious contexts while advancing women's rights.

Keywords: Johane Marange Apostolic Church; gender discrimination; Manicaland Province; African Initiated Churches; traditional gender roles; education and employment

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Introduction

A diverse mix of traditional African religions, mainstream Christianity, and various independent churches characterises Zimbabwe's religious landscape. Among these, African Initiated Churches (AICs) have emerged as significant religious movements, often in response to the perceived inadequacies of missionary Christianity imposed during the colonial era (Daneel 1971). These churches sought to integrate Christian teachings with African cultural and spiritual practices, resulting in a uniquely African expression of Christianity that resonates deeply with local communities.

The colonial period in Zimbabwe, which lasted from the late 19th century until 1980, was marked by the imposition of Western cultural and religious values through European missionaries. These missionaries aimed to convert the indigenous population to Christianity, often dismissing or actively undermining traditional African beliefs and practices. This led to significant cultural disruption and resistance among the local populations (Maxwell 2006).

In response, African religious leaders began to establish their churches, which combined Christian doctrine with African cultural traditions. These independent churches were not just religious movements; they were also acts of cultural and political resistance against colonial domination. The AICs became a way for Africans to reclaim their spiritual and cultural identity while adapting the Christian faith to their context (Daneel 1971).

Among these AICs, the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, founded in the early 20th century by Johane Marange, is particularly notable. It emerged during a time of significant social and political change, as African communities sought to navigate the pressures of colonial rule and the rapid social transformations it brought. The church's foundation was based on a vision received by Johane Marange, who claimed divine instruction to establish a new religious movement that adhered strictly to biblical laws and African traditions (Maxwell 2006).

Johane Marange Apostolic Church

The Johane Marange Apostolic Church, established in 1932 by Johane Marange, is a prominent African Initiated Church (AIC) in Zimbabwe. Johane Marange, originally named Muchabaya Momberume, claimed to have received divine revelations that led him to found a religious movement that combined Christian teachings with African traditional beliefs (Daneel 1971). His visions emphasised the need for a return to a purer form of Christianity that resonated with African cultural and spiritual practices, thereby addressing the alienation felt by many Africans towards the brand of Christianity propagated by European missionaries.

The church rapidly gained a substantial following, particularly in Manicaland Province, due to its appeal to African identity and autonomy in the face of colonial oppression.

Marange's teachings, which included prophecy, healing, and strict adherence to biblical laws interpreted through an African cultural lens, struck a chord with many Zimbabweans seeking an alternative to Western religious practices (Maxwell 2006). The church's growth was further propelled by Johane Marange's reputation as a healer and prophet, solidifying his leadership and the legitimacy of the movement.

Doctrinally, the Johane Marange Apostolic Church emphasises a patriarchal interpretation of the Bible, aligning closely with traditional African social structures. Key scriptures, such as Ephesians 5:22–24 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12, which call for wives to submit to their husbands and restrict women from holding authority, are often highlighted to justify the subordination of women (Chitando 2004). These teachings have entrenched gender roles within the church, where men occupy leadership positions, and women are relegated to supportive and domestic roles.

Polygamy and early marriage are notable practices within the church, justified by both biblical references and traditional norms. These practices aim to preserve social and economic stability and ensure the moral integrity of young women (Mangena and Mhaka 2010). However, they also significantly limit women's educational and economic opportunities, reinforcing their dependence on male family members (UNDP 2020). Despite its adherence to traditional practices, the church faces internal and external pressures for reform. Younger members and women's rights advocates are increasingly challenging gender norms, advocating for greater educational and economic opportunities for women (Gunda 2010). These efforts, while met with resistance, indicate a potential for gradual change within the church.

In summary, the Johane Marange Apostolic Church represents a unique blend of Christian and African traditional beliefs, with a significant impact on its followers' social and gender dynamics. Its doctrines and practices reflect a complex interplay of religious and cultural values that continue to shape the lives of its members (Maxwell 2006).

Objectives of the Paper

The primary objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive historical analysis of gender discrimination within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, with a particular focus on its headquarters in Manicaland Province. This analysis seeks to uncover the historical roots of gender bias and its manifestations in the church's doctrines and practices. By examining the interplay between religious teachings, cultural traditions, and societal norms, the paper aims to shed light on how gender roles are constructed and perpetuated within this religious community (Daneel 1971; Chitando 2004).

Additionally, the paper aims to explore the impact of these gendered practices on the lives of women within the church, particularly in terms of their educational and economic opportunities, health outcomes, and overall well-being. Through detailed case studies and a comparative analysis with other African Initiated Churches (AICs), this

study will highlight the unique challenges faced by women in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church and the broader implications for gender equality in Zimbabwe (Maxwell 2006; Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

Furthermore, the paper intends to propose potential strategies for promoting gender equality within the church, drawing on examples of reform efforts and resistance to change. By doing so, it aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and the role of religious institutions in shaping gender norms (Gunda 2010; UNDP 2020).

Historical Background

The Johane Marange Apostolic Church was founded in 1932 by Johane Marange, born Muchabaya Momberume, who claimed to have received divine revelations instructing him to establish a new religious movement. These revelations, according to Marange, occurred while he was in a state of spiritual ecstasy, during which he was called to restore a purer form of Christianity that resonated more deeply with African cultural and spiritual practices (Daneel 1971). Marange's vision was to create a church that integrated the teachings of the Bible with traditional African values, offering a spiritual path that was both familiar and sacred to the local people.

The Johane Marange Apostolic Church is largely known for pioneering the famous white garment and bald hairstyle. But that is not all that is to it; very few people know about its genesis and evolution. While recent wrangles between Mr Clemence Momberume and Mr Noah Taguta were in the public domain, the grandson of the former Mr Collen Momberume took time to narrate the genesis of the church, which now has followers around the African continent and beyond. Read on:

Johane Marange was born Muchabaya Momberume, and his father was named Fuleni. While working for Chief Marange, Fuleni fell in love with his daughter in Mafararikwa, leading to the birth of Arnold, Cornolius and Muchabaya and some girls. Fuleni couldn't afford to pay lobola to Chief Marange. As a result, Chief Marange decided to adopt Muchabaya, the youngest of the boys, as payment for lobola. That's how he became Muchabaya Marange. In 1917, at the age of five, Muchabaya received the Holy Spirit, which revealed to him he was to be called John the Baptist. This happened while he was herding cattle, and people went to report to Chief Marange how the young boy was speaking in tongues. The chief thought he had been possessed by a spirit and was contemplating returning the child to his parents because he was speaking about God. At that time, only the missionaries were allowed to speak about God and lead churches. Yet this child was contemplating registering a church. This scared the Chief, and he planned to disown the child before the missionaries (*Sunday Mail*, 29 March 2015).

On the other hand, Fuleni had sent his brothers to consult *sangomas*, who confirmed God was in control of the situation. Through the Holy Spirit, Muchabaya spoke in English about Basil Bridge's journey coming into Zimbabwe, thereby convincing the

missionaries to register his church. On realising that the missionaries liked the boy, Chief Marange confessed that Muchabaya was his son, resulting in Muchabaya carrying his surname. This would strengthen his chieftainship. He was to be called Johane Marange from then on. This saw the birth of his church, *Sangano reMapostori*.

This is how the Johane Marange Apostolic Faith church, the first African church, was born in 1912. From then on, he was told by the Holy Spirit to preach the word of salvation. His theme was “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Between 1912 and 1930, he was preaching and performing miracles. He spoke of Jesus and healed with water. He would also prophesy about what had happened during the liberation struggle and how the whites would be defeated. The church seemed to attract poor people because at that time, those who attended the likes of the Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches were well-to-do people (Daneel 1971).

As a result, Johanne Marange embraced them all. But today they are not poor, they are very educated. In the course of life, Johane Marange bore 12 sons, with St Clemence being the sixth born. Before my grandfather died, the Holy Ghost had already revealed to him how the church would be run after his death. So, he instructed the elders that his sons would run the church as priests.

All this time, he was doing everything by himself, having received training from heaven. The 12 sons who had worked together as pairs since growing up were then instituted into a structure. His sons were Abel, John, Macbes, Judah, Oliver, Clemence, Tephros, Raphnos, Ignatius, Ambrose, Ebernezer, Israel, and Cleopas. He brought them together and gave them their duties in different departments. But Clemence, being the sixth born, took the Baptist role. The children of Johane Marange’s two brothers also got into the church. There is confusion about the surname of Momberume because Johane’s children became known as Marange. However, these are cousins who share the same Momberume surname.

When the church became popular in the 1970s, congregants increased to 5,000. People who came never knew the difference upon seeing Arnold or Johane; they were all from Momberume, but Johane, being humble, never said anything. Johane died in 1963. When Clemence was told that he was to lead the church, he was only eight years old, so they had to install Abel to lead while he grew up. In a family, if a person has been singled out to be a king, you know the element of jealousy arises, and so it happened between the two families (*Sunday Mail*, 29 March 2015).

As a result, the other cousins abandoned the family of Johane to befriend other non-priestly houses to get support. Abel, therefore, took over with his father, Arnold, announcing that he would help him deal with difficult issues. Nobody knows why, upon Johane’s death, they didn’t announce that Clemence was going to take over the priesthood. As time went on, Abel passed on. Arnold’s other son arose, he coveted the

position and took over, thereby giving birth to today's friction that has seen various Johane Marange sects dotted across the country.

Cultural and Religious Context

The establishment of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church took place during a period of significant social and political upheaval in Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia. The colonial era was marked by the imposition of Western cultural and religious values through European missionaries. These missionaries often dismissed or actively sought to eliminate indigenous African beliefs and practices, leading to a cultural dissonance among the local populations (Maxwell 2006). The new church provided a form of religious expression that reasserted African identity and autonomy in the face of colonial oppression. The church quickly gained a following, particularly in Manicaland Province, where Johane Marange was based. His message resonated with many Zimbabweans who were seeking an alternative to the Christianity propagated by European missionaries. Marange's ability to blend Christian doctrines with African traditions created a compelling spiritual framework that attracted a broad base of adherents (Daneel 1971). The church's growth was further supported by Marange's reputation as a healer and prophet, which added to his appeal and legitimacy among the local communities. Despite its rapid growth, the church faced challenges and resistance, both from colonial authorities and from established Christian denominations. The colonial government viewed the church's practices and teachings with suspicion, often perceiving them as a threat to their control. Additionally, mainstream Christian churches were critical of the syncretic approach of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, condemning its incorporation of African traditions as incompatible with orthodox Christian beliefs (Daneel 1971).

In concluding this section, the founding and early development of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church were marked by a complex interplay of divine inspiration, cultural resistance, and social cohesion. Johane Marange's vision of a church that blended Christian doctrines with African traditions created a unique religious movement that resonated deeply with the local population. The church's early growth and doctrinal foundations laid the groundwork for its enduring influence in Zimbabwe's religious landscape (Maxwell 2006).

However, attempts at doctrinal reform have faced significant resistance from the church's leadership and more conservative members. The deep-seated belief in the divine origin of their practices makes change challenging. Church leaders often view efforts to alter these doctrines as threats to their religious and cultural identity. Consequently, although discussions have taken place and some minor adjustments have been made, the core patriarchal values remain largely intact (Mangena and Mhaka, 2010).

Gender Roles and Expectations

In the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched and are a reflection of both biblical interpretations and African cultural practices. These roles dictate that men are the heads of households and primary decision-makers, while women are expected to be obedient wives, caretakers, and homemakers (Chitando 2004). This patriarchal structure is justified through selective readings of biblical texts, as has been mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, such as Ephesians 5:22–24, which calls for wives to submit to their husbands, and 1 Timothy 2:11–12, which restricts women from teaching or having authority over men (Gunda 2010).

From a young age, girls in the church are socialised to prioritise domestic responsibilities over personal ambitions. They are often encouraged to marry early, sometimes as young as 12 or 13, to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers, which truncates their educational opportunities and personal development (Mangena and Mhaka 2010). Boys, on the other hand, are groomed to assume leadership roles both within the family and the church, reinforcing the gender hierarchy.

Women's participation in religious activities is largely confined to supportive roles, such as preparing communal meals, singing in the choir, and other auxiliary functions during church services (Maxwell 2006). Leadership positions within the church are predominantly male, further entrenching the notion that spiritual and administrative authority rests with men. These traditional gender roles significantly impact women's autonomy and agency within the church community, perpetuating a cycle of dependence and subordination (UNDP 2020). Addressing these ingrained norms requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, advocacy, and supportive policies to promote gender equality within the church and the broader society.

Marriage Practices

Marriage practices within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are deeply embedded in both religious doctrines and traditional African customs. These practices not only reflect the church's teachings but also a means of maintaining social order and community cohesion. The church places significant emphasis on marriage as a sacred institution, with specific roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women. This section examines the church's marriage practices, including polygamy, early marriage, and the implications of these practices for women's lives.

Polygamy is a prominent and accepted practice within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, justified through both biblical references and traditional African norms. The church draws on Old Testament examples, such as Abraham, Jacob, and Solomon, to legitimise the practice of men marrying multiple wives. This practice is seen as a way to ensure social and economic stability, as well as to fulfil religious and cultural obligations (Daneel 1971). In the context of the church, polygamy is often viewed as a means of increasing family size and ensuring that religious and community duties are

adequately fulfilled. Financially capable men are encouraged to take multiple wives, with each wife expected to contribute to the household and the community. Polygamy is also seen as a way to support women who may otherwise remain unmarried, providing them with social status and economic security (Chitando 2004).

Early marriage is another prevalent practice within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church. Girls are often married off at a young age, sometimes as early as 12 or 13, following both religious and cultural expectations. These early marriages are typically arranged by families and sanctioned by church authorities. The church teaches that early marriage helps preserve the purity and moral integrity of young women and ensures their adherence to the church's doctrines from a young age (Mangena and Mhaka 2010). The emphasis on early marriage is justified through selective interpretations of biblical texts that prioritise the protection of a girl's purity and her duties to her future family. This practice significantly impacts girls' educational and personal development, as they are often required to leave school to assume their roles as wives and mothers. The early assumption of marital responsibilities curtails their opportunities for further education and personal growth (UNDP 2020).

In marriage, the Johane Marange Apostolic Church assigns distinct roles and responsibilities to men and women, deeply rooted in patriarchal interpretations of biblical teachings. Men are seen as the heads of the household, responsible for providing for their families and making major decisions. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be obedient and supportive wives, focusing on child-rearing and household duties (Gunda 2010).

These roles are reinforced through church teachings and community practices, ensuring that gender norms are maintained within the family structure. Women's roles are primarily domestic, and their contributions to the household and community, while vital, are often undervalued compared to those of men. The expectation of submission and obedience extends to all aspects of a woman's life, limiting her autonomy and decision-making power (Chitando 2004).

Resistance and Reform

Despite the deep-rooted nature of these practices, there are emerging signs of resistance and calls for reform within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church. Some community members, particularly younger women, are beginning to challenge traditional norms and advocate for greater educational and economic opportunities. These efforts are often supported by NGOs and community groups that provide education, vocational training, and advocacy for women's rights (Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

However, efforts to reform these practices face significant challenges. The deeply entrenched nature of these beliefs, justified by both religious and cultural arguments, makes change difficult. Church leaders and older community members often resist efforts to change, viewing them as threats to their religious and cultural identity.

Nonetheless, gradual changes are occurring, driven by increased awareness of human rights and gender equality, as well as external pressures from governmental and non-governmental organisations (Chitando 2004).

The marriage practices of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are a complex interplay of religious doctrines and traditional African customs. While these practices aim to maintain social order and community cohesion, they also perpetuate gender inequalities and limit the opportunities available to women. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that respects cultural and religious contexts while promoting gender equality and human rights. Efforts to provide education, vocational training, and support services are crucial steps towards empowering women and fostering a more equitable community (UNDP 2020).

Education and Employment

In the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, educational opportunities for women and girls are significantly limited due to deep-seated religious and cultural norms. These limitations are rooted in the church's strict adherence to traditional gender roles, which prioritise domestic responsibilities and early marriage for girls over formal education (UNDP 2020). The church's teachings often discourage girls from pursuing education beyond primary school, emphasising instead their roles as wives and mothers. This educational deprivation is further exacerbated by the practice of early marriage, which is prevalent in the church community (Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

Early marriage forces girls to leave school prematurely, cutting short their academic and personal development. The emphasis on early marriage is justified through selective interpretations of biblical texts and traditional African beliefs that prioritise the protection of a girl's purity and her duties to her future family (Chitando 2004). These practices ensure that women remain dependent on their husbands, reinforcing the patriarchal structure of the church and limiting women's potential to contribute meaningfully to the broader society. The restricted access to education for women and girls in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church has long-term economic implications. Without sufficient education, women have limited employment opportunities and are often confined to low-paying, unskilled jobs if they can work outside the home at all. This economic dependence on male family members further entrenches gender inequalities and perpetuates the cycle of poverty within the community (Maxwell 2006).

In the broader Zimbabwean context, women's economic participation is crucial for national development. However, the educational deprivation faced by women in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church means that a significant portion of the population is unable to contribute fully to the economy. This exclusion from economic activities not only limits individual economic independence but also hampers overall economic growth and development. The inability of women to access decent work opportunities leads to a loss of potential human capital that could otherwise contribute to the nation's prosperity (UNDP 2020).

The educational initiatives face several challenges. Cultural resistance within the church community remains a significant barrier. Many church members, particularly those in leadership positions, view the initiatives of vocational and Informal Education with suspicion, fearing that they may undermine traditional values and the established social order (Maxwell 2006). Additionally, logistical challenges such as funding, accessibility, and the availability of qualified instructors can hinder the effective implementation of these programmes.

Moreover, even when women acquire vocational skills, they often face significant obstacles in translating these skills into sustainable income due to limited access to markets, capital, and supportive networks. The patriarchal structure of the community can also restrict women's ability to engage in business activities independently. These barriers highlight the need for comprehensive support systems that not only provide education and training but also facilitate access to resources and markets (Gunda 2010).

The Role of Government and Policy Interventions

Government policies and interventions play a crucial role in addressing these educational and economic disparities. The Zimbabwean government, in collaboration with international organisations and NGOs, can implement policies aimed at promoting gender equality in education and employment. Legal reforms that enforce the minimum age for marriage and ensure compulsory education for all children are essential steps in this direction (UNDP 2020).

Furthermore, policies that support women's economic empowerment, such as microfinance programmes and small business grants, can provide women with the financial resources needed to start and sustain their businesses. These policies should be designed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in patriarchal communities like the Johane Marange Apostolic Church (Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

The educational and employment challenges faced by women in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are deeply rooted in religious and cultural norms that prioritise traditional gender roles. However, through the combined efforts of NGOs, community initiatives, and supportive government policies, there is potential to improve educational access and economic opportunities for these women. Empowering women through education and employment not only enhances their individual lives but also contributes to the broader socio-economic development of Zimbabwe. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that respects cultural contexts while promoting gender equality and human rights (Mlambo 2013; Chitando 2004).

Manifestations of Gender Discrimination

The religious teachings and practices of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are deeply intertwined with both Christian doctrines and African traditional beliefs. These teachings form the foundation of the church's social structure and significantly

influence the lives of its members, particularly women. This section explores the core religious doctrines of the church, their interpretation, and their impact on gender roles and practices within the community.

The Johane Marange Apostolic Church, like many African Initiated Churches (AICs), places a strong emphasis on the Bible as the ultimate authority. However, the church's interpretation of biblical texts is heavily influenced by African cultural norms and traditions. This syncretic approach results in unique religious practices that differentiate the church from mainstream Christian denominations (Daneel 1971).

One of the key doctrinal beliefs of the church is the subordination of women, which is justified through selective interpretations of the Bible. Scriptures such as Ephesians 5:22–24, which call for wives to submit to their husbands, and 1 Timothy 2:11–12, which restricts women from teaching or having authority over men, are frequently cited to support the church's gender hierarchy. These interpretations reinforce traditional African patriarchal values, where men are seen as the heads of the household and community leaders, while women are relegated to supportive and subordinate roles (Chitando 2004).

Marriage practices within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are a significant reflection of its religious teachings. Polygamy is a common and accepted practice within the church, seen as biblically justified and culturally appropriate. The practice is often supported by references to Old Testament figures such as Abraham, Jacob, and Solomon, who had multiple wives. Polygamy is perceived not only as a religious duty but also as a means of ensuring social and economic stability within the community (Maxwell 2006). Early marriage is another prevalent practice within the church. Girls are often married off at a young age, sometimes as early as 12 or 13, under both religious and cultural expectations. These early marriages are typically arranged by families and sanctioned by church authorities. The church teaches that early marriage helps preserve the purity and moral integrity of young women and ensures their adherence to the church's doctrines from a young age (Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

Roles of Women in Religious Practices

The roles of women within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are strictly defined and limited by religious teachings. Women are primarily seen as caretakers of the home and children, responsible for maintaining the household and supporting their husbands. In religious settings, women's participation is often restricted to specific activities such as singing in the choir, preparing communal meals, and performing other supportive roles during church services (Gunda 2010).

Leadership positions within the church are predominantly held by men. The church's interpretation of biblical texts excludes women from positions of authority, including pastoral and prophetic roles. This exclusion reinforces the perception that women are inherently less capable of spiritual leadership and decision-making. Despite their

significant contributions to the church's daily functions, women's voices and opinions are often marginalised in decision-making processes (Chitando 2004).

Rituals and Ceremonies

The religious rituals and ceremonies of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are deeply rooted in African traditions. These rituals often involve elaborate ceremonies that mark important life events such as births, marriages, and funerals. Women play a crucial role in these ceremonies, although their participation is usually in supportive and secondary capacities (Maxwell 2006).

For example, during marriage ceremonies, women are responsible for preparing food, organising the event, and ensuring that traditional customs are followed. Similarly, in funeral rites, women take on roles such as mourning and preparing the body for burial, adhering to strict cultural and religious protocols. These roles, while vital to the community, are often undervalued compared to the leadership roles occupied by men (Daneel 1971).

Impact on Women's Lives

The religious teachings and practices of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church have a profound impact on the lives of women. The emphasis on early marriage and polygamy limits women's educational and economic opportunities, reinforcing their dependence on male family members. The restricted roles in religious and community life marginalise women's contributions and diminish their agency within the church and the broader society (UNDP 2020).

Women's health and well-being are also affected by these teachings. Early pregnancies associated with early marriages pose significant health risks for young women, while the lack of access to education and economic opportunities limits their ability to seek healthcare and support. Additionally, the church's teachings on submission and obedience can contribute to an environment where domestic violence and abuse are more likely to be tolerated or overlooked (Mlambo 2013).

Challenges to Reform

Efforts to reform these practices within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church face significant challenges. The deeply entrenched nature of these beliefs, justified by both religious and cultural arguments, makes change difficult. Attempts to challenge or change these practices are often met with resistance from church leaders and community members who view them as fundamental to their identity and religious convictions (Maxwell 2006).

However, there are signs of gradual change. Increased awareness of human rights and gender equality, partly due to external influences such as NGOs and government policies, is beginning to influence some members of the church. Education and

advocacy are key tools in this process, helping to shift attitudes and promote greater gender equality within the church community (Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

In summing up this subdivision, the religious teachings and practices of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church play a crucial role in shaping the gender dynamics within the church and its community. These teachings, deeply rooted in both biblical and traditional African beliefs, reinforce patriarchal norms and limit the roles and opportunities available to women. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that respects cultural and religious contexts while promoting gender equality and human rights.

Impact and Implications

These case studies from Manicaland Province reveal the deeply entrenched nature of gender discrimination within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church. Early marriage and limited educational opportunities for women create a cycle of dependence and subordination that is difficult to break. However, they also highlight the resilience and agency of women who strive to improve their lives and challenge oppressive norms.

The stories of Maria, Ruth, Esther, and Nyasha illustrate the diverse ways in which women navigate and resist gender discrimination. Whether through informal education, advocacy, or familial support, these women are finding ways to assert their rights and seek better futures for themselves and their children. Their experiences underscore the importance of providing educational opportunities, legal protections, and support services to empower women within the church community (Maxwell 2006; Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

In the end, the case studies from Manicaland Province offer a poignant glimpse into the lives of women in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church. They highlight both the challenges posed by entrenched gender norms and the potential for change through education, advocacy, and support. These stories reinforce the need for comprehensive strategies to address gender discrimination and promote gender equality within the church and the broader Zimbabwean society.

Comparative Analysis with Other AICs

The Johane Marange Apostolic Church is one of many African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe. A comparative analysis with other AICs reveals both commonalities and unique aspects of gender discrimination and practices within these religious communities. This section examines the similarities and differences in gender roles, doctrinal beliefs, and reform efforts among AICs such as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), the African Apostolic Church (AAC), and the Zion Christian Church (ZCC).

Gender Roles and Doctrinal Beliefs

AICs across Zimbabwe often reflect a blend of Christian and African traditional beliefs, resulting in similar gender roles that emphasise male authority and female subordination. For instance, the ZAOGA, founded in 1960 by Ezekiel Guti, shares a strong patriarchal structure where men hold leadership positions, and women's roles are primarily domestic and supportive (Chitando 2004). This is similar to the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, where male dominance is justified through selective biblical interpretations and traditional customs (Maxwell 2006).

The African Apostolic Church (AAC), founded by Paul Mwazha in 1959, also upholds strict gender roles. Mwazha's teachings emphasise the importance of women obeying their husbands and fulfilling their roles as mothers and caregivers. Polygamy, while not as prevalent as in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, is still practised in some communities within the AAC, highlighting the acceptance of traditional marriage customs within the church (Daneel 1971).

In contrast, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), one of the largest and oldest AICs in Southern Africa, exhibits some differences. Founded by Engenas Lekganyane in 1910, the ZCC has a more centralised and hierarchical structure, with less emphasis on polygamy. However, like the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, the ZCC maintains strict gender roles, with men occupying leadership positions and women primarily involved in supportive roles and domestic duties (Mawere 2013).

Reform Efforts and Resistance

Efforts to reform gender roles within AICs have been met with varying degrees of resistance. In the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, there has been significant resistance to change, often justified by appeals to tradition and the belief that current practices are divinely ordained (Gunda 2010). This resistance is mirrored in other AICs, although the intensity and reasons may vary.

For example, ZAOGA has shown some openness to change, particularly in urban congregations where exposure to broader societal changes and gender equality movements is more pronounced. There have been initiatives within ZAOGA to promote women's education and involvement in church activities beyond traditional roles, although these changes are often met with resistance from more conservative members (Chitando 2004).

The African Apostolic Church has also faced internal debates regarding gender roles. Paul Mwazha's influence remains strong, and his teachings continue to shape the church's stance on gender issues. However, there have been instances where younger members, particularly women, have pushed for greater involvement and recognition within the church. These efforts are often localised and face considerable opposition from traditionalist factions within the church (Daneel 1971).

The Zion Christian Church has made some strides in promoting gender equality, particularly in educational initiatives for women. However, the core leadership remains male-dominated, and significant cultural and doctrinal barriers still prevent women from achieving full equality within the church. The ZCC's approach to reform is gradual, reflecting a balance between maintaining traditional values and adapting to modern societal norms (Mlambo 2013).

Socio-Cultural Contexts and Gender Norms

The socio-cultural context of each AIC plays a critical role in shaping its gender norms. In rural areas where traditional beliefs are more deeply ingrained, AICs like the Johane Marange Apostolic Church and the AAC tend to adhere more strictly to patriarchal norms. These areas often lack exposure to gender equality movements and modern educational opportunities, reinforcing the status quo (Mangena and Mhaka 2010).

In contrast, urban congregations of AICs, including ZAOGA and the ZCC, are more likely to experience pressure to conform to broader societal changes. Urbanisation, access to education, and interaction with diverse communities can lead to a gradual shift in gender norms. However, even in urban settings, deeply rooted beliefs and the authority of church leaders can slow the pace of change (Chitando 2004).

Impact of External Influences

External influences, such as human rights organisations, government policies, and international gender equality movements, have varying impacts on AICs. The Johane Marange Apostolic Church has been notably resistant to external pressures, often viewing them as threats to their religious and cultural identity (Maxwell 2006). This resistance is not unique to the Johane Marange Apostolic Church; many AICs, including the AAC and the ZCC, share a similar stance.

However, some AICs have shown a degree of adaptability. For instance, ZAOGA has engaged with non-governmental organisations to promote health and education initiatives, which indirectly support gender equality by empowering women (Chitando 2004). The ZCC has also participated in public health campaigns, particularly those addressing maternal and child health, which contribute to improving women's status within the church and community (Mlambo 2013).

In conclusion, while the Johane Marange Apostolic Church shares many similarities with other AICs in terms of gender roles and resistance to change, there are also notable differences in how each church navigates these issues. The degree of openness to reform, the influence of socio-cultural contexts, and the impact of external pressures all play significant roles in shaping the gender dynamics within these religious communities. Understanding these nuances is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote gender equality within AICs and beyond.

Societal Implications of Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church has far-reaching societal implications, impacting not only the women within the church but also the broader Zimbabwean community. These implications span various aspects of life, including education, economic development, health, and social stability.

Education

One of the most significant societal impacts of gender discrimination is on education. In the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, girls are often married off at a young age, truncating their education and limiting their future opportunities. Early marriage and the prioritisation of domestic responsibilities over schooling mean that many girls do not complete their primary or secondary education. This lack of education perpetuates a cycle of poverty and dependence, as women without education have limited access to employment opportunities (Chitando 2004). The broader societal implication is a less educated population, which hinders national development and economic growth (UNDP 2020; Mavhunga 2020).

Economic Development

The economic impact of gender discrimination is profound. Women in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church are often economically dependent on their husbands due to limited educational and employment opportunities. This dependency reinforces patriarchal norms and limits women's ability to contribute to the economy (Daneel 1971). Moreover, the practice of polygamy can strain family resources, as men must support multiple households. In a broader context, the exclusion of women from the workforce and economic activities means that Zimbabwe is not fully utilising its human capital, which is crucial for economic development and competitiveness in the global market (Maxwell 2006; Gunda 2010).

Health and Well-being

Gender discrimination also affects health outcomes for women and girls. Early marriages often lead to early pregnancies, which pose significant health risks for young mothers and their children. The lack of education and economic independence further restricts women's access to healthcare services, leading to poor health outcomes (UNDP 2020). Additionally, the emphasis on women's submissive roles and the prevalence of domestic violence within the community can result in physical and psychological trauma. The societal implication is a burdened healthcare system and higher mortality and morbidity rates among women and children, which undermine public health efforts (Mangena and Mhaka 2010; Mlambo 2013).

Social Stability

The perpetuation of patriarchal norms and gender discrimination can also lead to social instability. Discrimination fosters an environment where women and girls are

marginalised and oppressed, which can lead to increased social tensions and conflicts within communities. The lack of gender equality can hinder social cohesion, as half of the population is systematically disadvantaged (Gunda 2010). This social fragmentation can impede efforts to build inclusive and resilient communities, essential for national unity and progress. Furthermore, the resistance to change within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church reflects broader societal challenges in addressing gender equality, indicating deep-seated cultural and ideological divides that need to be bridged (Chitando 2004; Mawere 2013).

Legal and Human Rights

From a legal and human rights perspective, the practices within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church highlight significant gaps in the protection of women's rights. Despite national and international laws that advocate for gender equality and protect against discrimination, the enforcement of these laws within the church community is often weak (Mangena and Mhaka 2010). The societal implication is a lack of trust in the legal system and the perpetuation of practices that violate basic human rights. This situation underscores the need for stronger legal frameworks and better enforcement mechanisms to protect women's rights and ensure that cultural and religious practices do not undermine legal standards (UNDP 2020; Mutangi 2008).

Cultural Evolution

Culturally, the practices within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church represent a challenge to evolving gender norms in Zimbabwe. While the church maintains traditional gender roles, broader societal trends are moving towards greater gender equality and women's empowerment (Chitando 2004). This cultural clash can create tensions between progressive movements advocating for women's rights and traditionalist groups resisting change. The societal implication is a slower pace of cultural evolution toward gender equality, which can hinder efforts to modernise and align with global human rights standards (Maxwell 2006; Gunda 2010).

Impact on Future Generations

Finally, the impact of gender discrimination on future generations cannot be overstated. Children raised in environments where gender discrimination is prevalent are likely to internalise these norms, perpetuating the cycle of inequality (Daneel 1971). Boys may grow up believing in their inherent superiority, while girls may accept subservient roles as their destiny. This socialisation process hinders the development of future leaders who can advocate for and implement gender equality. The societal implication is a perpetuation of the status quo, making it more challenging to achieve long-term and sustainable progress toward gender equality (UNDP 2020; Mlambo 2013).

Gender discrimination within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church has extensive societal implications that affect education, economic development, health, social stability, legal rights, cultural evolution, and future generations. Addressing these issues

requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including the church, government, NGOs, and the broader community, to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all Zimbabweans.

Recommendations

To address the pervasive gender discrimination within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, it is imperative to implement a multifaceted approach that combines educational initiatives, legal reforms, community engagement, and support services. These recommendations aim to promote gender equality while respecting the cultural and religious contexts in which the church operates.

1. Legal Reforms

- The Zimbabwean government should prioritise the strengthening and enforcement of laws that protect women's rights, particularly in areas related to marriage, education, and employment. Legal reforms should address practices such as early marriage and polygamy, which are prevalent within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church. Ensuring that these laws are enforced consistently can help to protect women and girls from practices that undermine their rights and opportunities (Mangena and Mhaka 2010). Legal awareness campaigns within the church community can educate members about their rights and the protections available to them under Zimbabwean law. These campaigns should be designed to reach all members of the community, including those in remote areas, and should emphasise the importance of legal protections for women and children.

2. Community Engagement

- Engaging in open and respectful dialogue within the church is crucial for challenging and changing discriminatory practices. Church leaders, who hold significant influence, should be encouraged to facilitate discussions on gender equality and the benefits it can bring to the community. These dialogues can be supported by external facilitators with expertise in gender issues and cultural sensitivity (Chitando 2004). Identifying and supporting progressive church leaders who are open to change can be a catalyst for broader reforms. These leaders can act as champions for gender equality, demonstrating through their actions and teachings how the church can evolve while remaining true to its core beliefs.

3. Support Services

- Establishing support services for women who experience discrimination or abuse within the church is essential. These services could include counselling, legal aid, and shelters for those in need. Support services should be accessible and confidential, ensuring that women feel safe and supported when seeking

help (Maxwell 2006). Programmes that focus on the economic empowerment of women can help reduce their dependence on male family members and improve their overall status within the community. These programmes might include microfinance initiatives, entrepreneurship training, and support for small business development.

4. Collaboration with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

- NGOs can play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality and providing support services. Collaborations between the Johane Marange Apostolic Church and NGOs can help bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern human rights standards. NGOs can offer expertise, resources, and support to implement the recommended changes effectively (UNDP 2020). NGOs can also assist in building the capacity of local leaders and community members to advocate for and implement gender equality initiatives. Training programmes for local leaders can focus on human rights, gender sensitivity, and effective advocacy strategies.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

- To ensure that the recommended initiatives are effective, it is important to establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Regular assessments can help track progress, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments to the programmes. Involving community members in these processes can enhance transparency and accountability. Conducting impact assessment studies can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the interventions. These studies should measure changes in attitudes towards gender roles, improvements in women's educational and economic status, and reductions in gender-based violence.

Conclusion

Addressing gender discrimination within the Johane Marange Apostolic Church requires a holistic approach that balances respect for cultural and religious traditions with the imperative to uphold human rights and promote gender equality. This study has highlighted the complex interplay between religious doctrines, cultural practices, and societal norms that perpetuate gender bias within the church. The historical context of the church's formation and its subsequent evolution underscores the deep-rooted nature of these practices, which are reinforced by selective biblical interpretations and entrenched patriarchal structures. The personal stories from Manicaland Province and the broader analysis illustrate the significant impact of these discriminatory practices on women's lives, limiting their educational and economic opportunities and perpetuating a cycle of dependence and subordination.

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