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Religion & Development publishes peer reviewed research and analyses in the emerging field of religion and development. It seeks to foster critical investigation of the intersection of religion and development in global perspective. The journal is transdisciplinary and welcomes contributions from across the humanities and social sciences as well as reflections from policy and practice.

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Southern African Perspectives on Religion and Social Transformation

Editorial

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Abstract

This editorial introduces *Religion & Development* Vol. 3, Issue 1. The articles in this issue spotlight on the role of religion in social transformation in Southern Africa, with a focus on Botswana, Madagascar, Tanzania and South Africa. They cover various dimensions of development and take up important current issues in the field: gender and power relations, asset-based community development, caregiving and aging, COVID-19, science and religion and the contested politics of religion and development in historical perspective.

Keywords

religion – development – COVID-19 – gender – asset-based community development – aging – politics of religion and development

Southern African Perspectives on Religion and Social Transformation

We are delighted to present the first issue of *Religion & Development's* third volume, which features three research articles, a policy and practice note and three book reviews. The articles engage with various themes related to religion and social transformation, with case studies on gender and power relations in a development project in Madagascar, the issues facing senior citizens in Botswana, the contested politics of religion and development in Tanzania and the role of the ecumenical movement during the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa. These articles coalesce to provide a regional focus on Southern Africa.¹ At the same time, the articles' themes and content have substantial relevance beyond the case studies' immediate geographic focus. We therefore believe this issue will be of great interest to scholars, students, policymakers and practitioners of religion and development in Southern Africa as well as globally.

The broad relevance of this issue's themes is exemplified by the first article, Zo Ramiandra Rakotoarison's "Gender and Power Relations in a Malagasy Congregational Asset-Based Community Development Project". In her work, the author examines gender and power dynamics in the development work of the Malagasy Lutheran Church, focusing on the "Use Your Talents" project. Through a comprehensive qualitative empirical study, the author uses power relations as a conceptual lens to analyse gender dynamics within the project. The article identifies four key dimensions of power: "power over", "power to", "power with" and "power within". The article reveals that "power over" favoured adult men; 'power to' differentiates women and men's possibilities and limitations; 'power with' is a collaboration between women, men and young people and activities based on gender and age, and 'power within' comes from God and from skills based on gender". These findings reveal the ambivalent nature of gender and power in the "Use Your Talents" project – which is characteristic for other development projects as well. While women are active in the community-based development work and the project's activities follow collaborative approaches (along the dimension of "power with"), leadership and control are largely dominated by men.

The second article, "Socioeconomic Determinants of Successful Aging in Southern Africa: Socio-Theological Gerontology" by Tshenolo Jennifer Madigele, examines how socioeconomic factors shape aging experiences in Southern Africa. The author focuses on an under-researched theme in the

1 Southern Africa is understood here as including the member states of the Southern African Development Community.

context of Southern Africa: the situation of senior citizens. Due to declining birth rates, several societies in Southern Africa—including Botswana, where the case study is located—are undergoing a demographic shift (World Bank 2017) in which the elderly population is expected to increase over time, underscoring the well-being of senior citizens as a concern in social development. Madigele's article zooms in on the important role elders play in caregiving, often looking after grandchildren orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Botswana and other Southern African contexts. The study discusses the economic, medical and social challenges faced by elderly caregivers, as well as the substantial gender inequality in caregiving, where women bear most of the caregiving load. The author argues that successful aging requires more than social development or biomedical interventions; indeed, she advocates for integrating spiritual and cultural dimensions through a socio-theological gerontology framework that promotes well-being of the elderly in view of the region's demographic transition.

In the article "Religion and Development in Postcolonial Tanzania: Contested and Negotiated Terrain", Salvatory Nyanto traces the notion of development as initially conceptualized by the government via Ujamaa initiatives in the postcolonial period. These initiatives were critiqued at that time as "anti-religious". The author argues that in later years, as people sought alternatives to the notion of Ujamaa, religion emerged not only within development discourse, but also as a key player in Tanzanian development praxis. The rise of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity in Tanzania is then discussed, focusing on the prosperity gospel and faith healing. These perspectives and practices have introduced new complexities and contestations regarding holistic healing and its intersection with development, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite ongoing contestations, this article makes it clear that religion is here to stay, and in the context of neoliberal capitalism and multi-party politics, certain religious streams continue to influence discourse about economic and social change.

The policy and practice note in this issue, "The South African Council of Churches and the Science and Religion Debate during the COVID-19 Pandemic" by Simangaliso Kumalo and Honoured Taruona, examines religious actors' responses to COVID-19, using the South African Council of Churches (SACC) as a case study. Starting with a review of the main arguments in the debate on science and religion, the note establishes a theoretical framing that views "religion and science as distinct but inseparable entities". This allows the authors to explore science and religion as complexly and richly intertwined in the SACC case. The authors explain how the SACC views the complementarity of religion

and science so that during the pandemic they supported messages from public health authorities and health experts, supported lockdowns even when it meant cancelling Easter celebrations, “baptized” public health messages and spoke out against other religious leaders who defied COVID-19 measures. When the lockdown was lifted, they issued guidance for reopening churches, and when vaccines became available, they described them as “a gift from God”. Along with other religious groups, they formed the Religious Forum Against COVID-19 to help promote vaccination. It is highly necessary that we continue to document and learn from the examples of religious groups during the pandemic and put forward those lessons learned from the examples for future public health emergencies, in which it is clear that the critical engagement of religious actors is crucial for the success of public health initiatives.

Finally, the issue includes three reviews of recent book publications in the field of religion and development, curated by our book review editor Barbara Bompani. The section includes reviews of two collections, *Stuck in the Margins? Young People and Faith-Based Organisations in South African and Nordic Localities*, edited by Ignatius Swart, Auli Vähäkangas, Marlize Rabe and Annette Leis-Peters (reviewed by Lovemore Togarasei) and *Interfaith Networks and Development: Case Studies from Africa*, edited by Ezra Chitando and Ishanesu Sextus Gusha (reviewed by Hansjörg Dilger), as well as Seb Rumsby's recent monograph *Development in Spirit: Religious Transformation and Everyday Politics in Vietnam's Highlands* (reviewed by Philip Fountain).

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We would like to express our appreciation to the contributors for publishing their work in *Religion & Development*. We extend special thanks and appreciation to the colleagues who volunteered their time and expertise as anonymous reviewers for the articles in this issue. The publication of this issue would not have been possible without the outstanding work of the journal's editorial assistant, Esther Mazengera, and our copyeditor, Daniel Ross. Finally, we are grateful to our publisher Brill, especially to Maike Hannen, Juliane Herzer, Izaak de Hulster and Friederike Lonz, for their excellent collaboration and support.

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Research Articles





Gender and Power Relations in a Malagasy Congregational Asset-Based Community Development Project

Research Article

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Abstract

Managing power relations is a development concern, and this study adds to research addressing questions of power and gender balance in local community development projects. It analyses power relations and gender roles within a Malagasy congregational asset-based community development project called “Use Your Talents”. In local communities as well as in larger society, power relations and gender injustice are interlinked. This paper is part of a qualitative study with data collected in 2018 at four Lutheran congregations in Madagascar with forty-one female and male informants. In analysing the interview, the following themes emerged: “power over” in favour of adult men, ‘power to’ that differentiates between women’s and men’s possibilities and limitations, ‘power with’ as collaboration between women, men and young people and activities based on gender and age, and “power within” from God and from skills based on gender. The study revealed that Use Your Talents mostly emphasises the ‘power within/with’, and where power is exercised ‘to and over’, it is mainly adult men exercising power. The study also found that women contributed significantly to congregational community development projects. The study concludes that the church provides both women and men opportunities for development through the Use Your Talents approach, but they exercise different aspects of power. This is reinforced by Use Your Talents and affected their roles, relations and activities in congregational

community development. The difference in power favours adult men, while limiting economic and social possibilities for women.

Keywords

gender – power – asset-based – congregation – women – community development – Use Your Talents

Scholars argue that poverty affects women and men differently and unequally (Kabeer 1994, 115–126, 141; Razavi 1999, 410–411, 418, 424). This unequal aspect of poverty for women and men means that social rules and norms governing women and men in accessing resources and fulfilling their needs differ. In local communities as well as in the greater society, power relations and gender injustice are interlinked. Previous research indicates that managing power relations is a development concern (Myers 2011, 92), in that the misuse of power might contribute to poverty. Asset-based community development (ABCD) seeks to address poverty in local communities, where the participants, both women and men, are the project owners and drivers. In this paper, questions of power and gender balance are addressed. The aim is to analyse power relations at work, and gender roles applied, within a Malagasy congregational asset-based community development project called “Use Your Talents” (UYT). Talents designate skills, abilities and resources (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2019, 125), which in UYT were intended to be used primarily for community development. The primary research question was to identify how gender and power relations both affect and are affected by UYT projects. Additionally, this study examined specific roles women play within congregational development activities, based on the UYT approach, by examining power structures. This study is based on empirical research conducted in three synods in the Fiangonana Loterana Malagasy (FLM) – translated into English as Malagasy Lutheran Church – and complements earlier articles on faith (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2021, 4) and ABCD (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2019) in understanding and describing the complexity of UYT.

The terms “gender” and “power” are among the most debated concepts within development studies and practice and beyond. These concepts will be used in this article as a lens to interpret the findings. In this paper, “gender” is conceptualised as “the socially constructed and culturally defined differences between men and women, which are usually identified through a set of role expectations of men, and women” (Haddad 2003, 429). “Power” is

conceptualised as “having the ability/capacity to influence the action of others or to act or to change in a desired direction at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and/or community level” (adapted from Gaventa 2006, 24). Gender disproportionally disadvantages women socially, institutionally and economically. This study examined the ways in which different dimensions of power – “power over”, “power to”, “power with” and “power within” – operated within the UYT projects. These dimensions were used to frame the data analysis. This paper is structured as follows: a description of the UYT project, the presentation of the theories, the research design and methods, the findings and the discussion.

1 “Use Your Talents” Project

Asset-based community development conveys the idea of sustainable development based on the mobilisation of a particular community and its assets, as well as with assets outside that community. ABCD values the contribution of communities in the process of community development and emphasises a focus on assets more than on needs (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, 1–2; Mathie and Cunningham 2005, 2–3, 6–7). With an ABCD approach, community members own local development through their participation in the planning and execution of community development work.

UYT is an approach the FLM uses to contribute to community development based on local skills, knowledge and experiences (Danladi, Ralivao, and Rakotondranaivo 2010, 11). This approach is the result of FLM’s decision in 2004 to strengthen the involvement of its members in the diaconal work of the church (Malagasy Lutheran Church 2004, 3, 7–10, 20–21). From 2008, UYT has two seemingly opposed characteristics. At the national level in Madagascar, UYT is a top-down initiative with a small amount of external funding from Norwegian partners (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2019, 124), sufficient for one full-time employee. At the local level, it is a participative and grassroots community development model, as individuals and groups from congregations and local communities make decisions independent of national directions to initiate and implement community development projects (FLM and NMS¹ 2007, 1–6; Haus 2017, 17–19). In addition to the full-time employee, other persons involved in UYT projects are volunteers; they do not receive salaries or other financial compensation for their work.

1 Norwegian Mission Society (NMS)

UYT embraces the idea that development is carried out and owned by local people. The idea of UYT is in a process of maturing (Waketa 2017, 154), as its concept, principles and practices have been developed since its inception and continue to evolve. Within the faith-based framework, the term “talents” is synonymous with ABCD methodology “assets”. As an asset-based project, UYT highly values local resources, assets and power for local development. UYT focuses on and values “talents”, a term that refers to the biblical story on “The Parable of the Talents” in Matthew 25:14–30 (Haus 2017, 16–18) and is based on the idea that God supplies people with talents and gifts to be utilised for the well-being of all in local communities. Through UYT, the church plays a facilitating role in engaging its members and local people in community development work. UYT in Madagascar is integrated into the church structure, within a development department named FANILO² (Danladi, Ralivao, and Rakotondranaivo 2010, 3). It is also a method used by church associations and groups. Trained volunteers, called “*animateurs*”, from the synods/regions and districts promote UYT. They educate about the approach, provide various practical training, and encourage and lead congregational community development activities.

Women are actively engaged in UYT projects and compose the majority of the local-level members of the groups of talents (FLM Empowerment Program 2017, 17), as well as of the trainees on entrepreneurship (FLM Empowerment Program 2018, 13). Some of the women also work voluntarily as FANILO coordinators³, members of FANILO committees, *animateurs* and trainers (Danladi, Ralivao, and Rakotondranaivo 2010, 14). Despite the active engagement of women, for almost two decades, according to UYT reports, men dominated leadership positions such as the synods’ FANILO coordinators (FLM Empowerment Program 2016, 20–31) and as members of the FANILO committees (FLM Empowerment Program 2017, 29). Men attending the training in the congregations are also more numerous than women (ibid.; Malagasy Lutheran Church Empowerment Program 2013, 19).

FLM also has a strong lay involvement within the Shepherd’s movement, an indigenous Christian movement of revival, where power and decision-making structures involve both men and women (Rich 2004, 220). UYT was inspired by this movement (Danladi, Ralivao, and Rakotondranaivo 2010, 9), and it planned a well-organised way of mapping talents (FLM and NMS 2007, 2–5; Malagasy Lutheran Church Empowerment Program 2013, 20–23). Assets

2 FANILO stands for FAmpanandrosoana ANIvon’ny LOterana, designating the structure that is in charge of the church’s development work.

3 Generally, at the local level, rather than at the synod or national level.

were mapped and mobilised through the biblical understanding of “talents” that needed to be utilised. Through biblical stories, the church aimed to raise the awareness of its members of the value of individual contribution to the well-being of the community. The *animateurs* were supposed to map talents, while in another study, the mapping of talents appeared to be primarily unstructured (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2019, 135–136). The UYT approach encourages the voluntary involvement of individuals through their participation in collective and mutual work. Local development activities are initiated through gathering individuals with the same interests into groups, who then decide, plan and implement the work.

2 Theoretical Background

In this paper, the literature that discusses the topic of gender and power relations in faith- and asset-based community development projects within the Christian religion is roughly grouped into two categories. The first category encompasses research situated within local religious communities. The second category is focused on local development activities related to, yet outside of, the instituted religious structures (Marshall and Taylor 2011). The research on local religious communities focuses on church partnership programmes (Anderson 2012), church and ecclesial community development projects (Zachariassen 2012, 482; Rakotoarison 2013; Skjortnes 2014; Skjortnes 2016, 215–216) and group activities (Garlington et al. 2019, 24–25), particularly those of women (Haddad 2003, 443–446; Oluwafunmilayo 2006, 409–410). Among the vast number of publications related to the topic of gender and power relations in faith- and asset-based community development projects, Garlington et al.’s article (2019, 25) specifically explores gender and power relations in four faith- and asset-based community-organising models in the United States. These scholars argue that community/social relationships are valuable and relevant in making community change and in strengthening community power. They recognise that participation in community-organising activities is affected by gender division of roles and spaces. They also show that the power of community members, particularly women, was strengthened when these members were previously trained and enabled to express their concerns and to challenge public authorities, either directly or through intermediaries (*ibid.*, 30). These research findings support the idea that public- and conflict-oriented organising strategies allow women and their community to influence public officials and leaders.

Other research publications analyse the link between religion and gender. According to these publications, religion can, on one hand, contribute to gender inequality and oppression (Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2015, 3; Marshall and Taylor 2011, 31) and, on the other hand, contribute to a change in behaviour with regard to gender equality (Oluwafunmilayo 2006, 419; Anderson 2012, 11–12), or both (Rakotoarison 2013, 62; Skjortnes 2016, 220, 224). However, development organisations, whether religious or secular, do not self-evidently advocate for gender equality or treat women as subordinate (Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2015, 6). Haddad (2003, 440) is critical of the view that churches have a privileged position compared to other institutions/organisations in their work with the poor, comprised mostly of women. Yet churches, according to Skjortnes, have the capacity to inspire more people to contribute to enhanced living conditions and provide development opportunities for both women and men in difficult situations (Skjortnes 2014, 85–98, 121–133; Skjortnes 2016, 214, 221–223). Haddad (2003, 441), however, argues that churches as institutions do not always use human and physical resources for effective social transformation. Instead, some poor people – particularly women – struggle, whether it be alone or as part of a group, to work for their development using their faith and physical resources (Haddad 2003, 441; Oluwafunmilayo 2006, 409). Even if women gain economic power through church work, this power does not help in challenging the structural gender issues in the church and local communities (Rakotoarison 2013, 57–59). Including women and gender issues in all areas of the church's projects can be a stepping stone to lift gender equality issues to the institutional level of a church organisation (Zachariassen 2012, 489–490).

2.1 *Power Theories and Asset-Based Methodology: From Power Above to Power Within*

Power is a productive force necessary for change (Lotherington 2005, 105–107; Gaventa 2006, 22). The concept of power can be approached from four perspectives: “power over”, “power to”, “power with” and “power within” (Kabeer 1994, 223–262; Rowlands 1997, 13; Gaventa 2006, 24; Eyben, Harris, and Pettit 2006, 8). Each perspective can be exercised in three ways: individually, as part of a group and/or within an institution. These four perspectives may overlap.

“Power over” could be understood from two points of view. First, from a regulatory perspective, it refers to the ability to override the agency of others and control resources (Kabeer 1994, 133). It is about the ability to limit the action of other actors (Meade, Shaw, and Banks 2016, 8; Gaventa 2006, 24), such as silencing some actors in the name of tradition. Power is then used to “dominate and oppress others” (Maclure 2022, 3). Second, from an empowerment perspective, “power over” is the ability to affect the action and thought of

others without using force or coercion (Eyben, Harris, and Pettit 2006, 6). Both perspectives of “power over” can be exercised at individual and group levels. At an institutional level, “power over” can be seen as the ability to create norms (Kabeer 1994, 225–227).

“Power to” occurs when people in general – particularly the marginalised – have access to resources, and are capable of attaining their goals and satisfying their own needs (Mathie and Cunningham 2005, 4). With this power, individuals and community identify, challenge and transform the social structural mechanisms that cause their subordination and powerlessness, and develop the capacity to change their life circumstances (Rowlands 1997, 122, 130). With power, individuals and communities are creating new possibilities. They use their collective strength to participate in the wider process of socio-political development (Kabeer 1994, 256). This means that they are agents of their own development, and have a role outside of their local context. Their development actions involve the state and/or other national and international institutions/organisations. This form of involvement is ideal for community development, as it represents a bottom-up approach in which the community and individuals challenge power structures and become involved in structural transformation.

When the members of a community unite their strength to work collectively in mutuality, “power with” is at work (Kabeer 1994, 253). “Power with” is about collaboration with mutual respect and trust, a sense of belonging and the ability to relate to and work with others. Working together impacts the individuals, community and beyond. It is not about competition (Rowland 1997, 15), but rather about sharing common values and creating a collective identity. When a community gives space to individuals to grow as individuals and as a group, the members of the community are mutually empowering and transforming. This power dimension also occurs when individuals contribute, become involved, are active and interdependent, and when they use their resources, express their abilities, give and receive gifts. This dimension of power offers individuals and the community alike an opportunity to be creative and resilient.

“Power within” is about self-esteem, a sense of agency and confidence. This dimension of power is prerequisite to action that improves people’s lives. A positive valuation and appreciation of individuals’ and collective resources is a source of potential power and influence, leverage and the release of power challenging certain beliefs about a person’s negative status and opportunities. Positive valuation means being conscious and aware of one’s social situation, one’s capacity to perform, and ways to bring social change. Recognising “power within” is about accepting and respecting oneself and others as equal (Rowlands 1997, 13). Exercising “power within” means having the capacity to analyse, question and act upon one’s own subordination (Kabeer 1994, 229).

It also means having access to time, resources and space. This dimension of power is critical in relation to the needs focus in development work, as the latter might represent emptiness. The focus on assets recognises giftedness, and views individuals and communities as never being empty-handed. This form of engagement in community development based on giftedness is the ideal in ABCD.

ABCD's principles include the engagement of community members as active participants and owners of the activities using local assets. This participation infers a relationship in which different aspects of power are at work. ABCD is a way to build up local communities with local assets. It means community members are empowered to solve their problems and improve their well-being by themselves. The goal is to help individuals and communities to identify and mobilise assets, build relationships and give community members more roles and power (Mathie and Cunningham 2005, 2, 10; Nel 2020, 274). These aspects of ABCD represent at least three of the four dimensions of power. They primarily emphasise, however, the "power within". An emphasis that scholars criticise, as it ignores power dynamics (Ennis and West 2010, 407; Maclure 2022, 2–6) and individualises/privatises development issues and responsibilities (Healy 2005, 168; MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 436).

2.2 *Power and Gender in Faith Communities/FLM*

Faith communities are spaces for the exercise of power and of gender through their practices and the language they use (Wood 2019, 6) and religions shape gender roles and relations (McIntosh 2021), gendered expectations and experiences (Tomalin and Starkey 2021, 15). The different perceptions and treatment of women and men in some religious communities, as within Christianity (Wood 2019) and within Islam (Ahmed 2011, 108–109), are justified by biology, culture, economy and religious texts and traditions. In different religious traditions, selected sacred text passages are (re)interpreted by the powerful (Khalaf-Elledge 2021a) and used to promote and justify women's cultural subordination, sustain belief in women's inferiority and internalise oppression and control (Lummis 1999, 601–602, 607; Ahmed 2011, 108–109; Wood 2019, 2, 6; Khalaf-Elledge 2021b). This belief is used to categorise women with specific roles, conduct and socio-political places. The categorisation with specific roles such as mothering added to hostile attitudes constitute challenges for women who want to break out of the religious and social norms (Mari and Cheeseman 2023, 95). In Madagascar, this difference of treatment has a negative impact on young people (Rich 2004, 215, 217) as, traditionally, social differentiation based on seniority, physical strength and leadership capabilities (Dahl 1999, 81–85) was distorted and reinforced by promoting adult men above

women and young people. Scholars of gender in religion stressed the importance of taking into account the intersectionality of oppression and inequality (McIntosh 2021, 7–8, Mari and Cheeseman 2023, 95–96).

Gendered-based practices are often legitimised by a religious community's structure or decision-making bodies, which if dominated by one single gender, result in an engendering of the division of labour (Chisale 2020, 2, 4–7). Practices also depend on the history of the religious community, its organisational style, teaching and theology, values and its openness towards external influences and ideas (Lummis 1999, 603). The consequences of gendered practices in faith communities on women, men and young people are segregation and the creation of unequal access to resources (Tomalin 2011, 41). Within an attempt to hold on to power (Khalaf-Elledge 2021a, 13), a gendered practice may result in injustice and alienation and limit the possibilities of either women or men or both (Rich 2004, 212), when they are not in positions of leadership. All of these elements shape both individuals and communities' understanding of the appropriate roles and places of women, men and young people in the family and the society, and relatedly, of what is expected and permitted for them. It is noted that even with restricted access to decision-making and resources, women are not entirely powerless (Kabeer 1994, 224), as they exercise some form of agency (Nyhagen 2021).

Most historical churches, like FLM, restrict leadership positions to adult men (Rich 2004, 211; Skjortnes 2014, 58). FLM's theology and organisation are influenced by those of its mission founders, particularly of the Norwegian Mission Society. In general, women are not allowed to administer the sacraments, which is the exclusive role of the ordained ministers. However, they take active and even leadership roles during the worship services, and in various church ministries (Lummis 1999, 607–611; Rich 2004, 218–220). Since the church is predominantly governed by adult men, and mandates that only men are qualified to serve as pastors, decision-making structures have been dominated by men. Church politics (Rich 2004, 214), supported by its constitution, are beneficial to men, as half of the members of ecclesial decision-making bodies, as well as the presidency, are pastors. These elements of church structures and organisation also define the type of pastoral work women are allowed to participate in (Skjortnes 2014, 58).

Nevertheless, development activities are, to a large extent, carried out by women (Rich 2004, 218). In Madagascar, Christianity – especially the Lutheran mission – to some extent altered the traditional gender roles regarding important positions in the family and the community (Rich 2004, 213).

Before colonialisation, women held leadership positions as queen or as traditional religious leaders, and had relative autonomy (Skjortnes 2014, 58; Rich

2004, 211). With colonialisation, women rarely occupied leadership positions, either in political/governmental or religious domains. Women lost some of their power with the Malagasy male leaders yielding to western influences with its gender ideology of adult male headship reinforced by women's lack of access to education (Altius and Raveloharimisy 2016, 137; Rich 2004, 211–213). However, this change did not hinder some Malagasy women from regaining religious leadership through the revival movement and continuing to engage in economic activities and inheritance (Skjortnes 2016, 220–224).

Women's groups, both in the church and in society, have operational autonomy and permission to organise. These groups constitute the space in which women have the opportunity to be in contact with other women without necessarily being governed by men, in order to acquire and exchange values and skills (Kabeer 1994, 251; Anderson 2012, 7) with empowering relationships (Nyhagen 2021, 6). In the church, even without positions of leadership, women are often among those who contribute substantially to the financial resources of the church through these groups. Leadership positions in church-related social services/organisations, such as in education, health, social work and development, do not require ordination. Thus, representations of women and men in these organisations within the church are flexible and dynamic. Even if women did not always occupy a religious leadership role within the Christian tradition, history has also proven that some women became famous evangelists and organisational leaders (Rich: 2004, 220). One example is Volahavana Germaine within the revival movement.

3 Research Design and Methods

Data were collected between July and October 2018 as part of a qualitative study (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2019, 126; Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2021, 4). The sampling sites comprised of congregations from the city and rural areas, both from the highlands and the coast of Madagascar. The research sampling design was a purposeful selection of women and men, both young people above fifteen years of age living with their parents at the time of the interview, as well as adults. The aim of the selection of sites and informants was to be able to observe a variety of experiences from different contexts and different gender and age groups, and to find out whether the social construction of gender roles was decisive for their opportunities, participation in and benefiting from community development initiatives. Incorporating a gender perspective into the research design was intended to inform the development of a gender-appropriate approach for congregational community

development. Gender perspective means the gender dimension was considered throughout the research process, particularly in the selection of informants, the analysis of the data and reporting of the findings. This gender perspective considered who was active in UYT activities, who made the decisions, and what kind of activities male and female adults and youths were involved in.

Data sources encompassed one-on-one interviews of forty-one individuals, five group interviews, and observations (field diary). Interviews as a method of data collection helped “to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view” (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, 3). The interviewees included Lutheran family members, UYT volunteer *animateurs* and church leaders at local, regional and national levels. Leaders included members of the church board and FANILO committees. These families, volunteers and leaders were likely the people who knew the congregation’s involvement or non-involvement in community development. Face-to-face interviews lasted from fifteen minutes to more than one hour. They were semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring the participants’ experiences regarding using talents. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. All informants were asked their perspectives about the difference between the experiences of men and women in using talents in relation to their faith. Thematic content analysis facilitated the exploration of themes common to research participants. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD 60548) gave approval to conduct the field research.

The four types of power mentioned above are used in this paper as an analytical frame. These helped in making sense of and understanding the data,

TABLE 1 Description of the sample

Link with UYT/ church roles					
Gender/age	No involvement in UYT projects	Participants in UYT projects	Trained volunteer <i>animateurs</i>	Leaders	Number of interviewees
Women	1	8	2	6	14
Young women	3	3			6
Men	4	6	3	15	17
Young men	3	1			4
Total	11	18	5	21	41

and in structuring the presentation of the findings. In analysing the interview data using a power and gender perspective, the following themes emerged: “power over” favoured adult men; “power to” differentiates women and men’s possibilities and limitations; “power with” is a collaboration between women, men and young people and activities based on gender and age, and “power within” comes from God and from skills based on gender.

4 Findings

4.1 *“Power Over”: In Favour of Adult Men*

The interviews provide evidence that decision-making and roles belong more to men than to women and young people. Decisions are made by committees composed of more than 80% men, and are habitually chaired by a man. Often a leader – alone, or as member of a church or group committee – decides about a specific activity, the assignment of tasks or occasionally the selection of participants. A male informant (Leader man 2) stated that, for himself, a leader plays a role in community development. He personally is compelled to identify people’s talents and give them a task. According to this male informant, the decision about the work of community development depends on leaders. They are expected to lead and organise the work. This male informant’s view shows that leaders are supposed to have “power over” in the mapping and mobilising of assets. In contrast, women as well as young people are doers. The experience of one young female informant and women in her church in the building of a well near a village is an example. Not all church members work, but only the members of the groups were appointed to do work. “I went there (to the well construction site) because there are some people such as the elderly who cannot do the job any more. They (the leaders) assigned the tasks to the youth, the fresh ones” (Site 3, young woman, family 3). In this case, some individuals were appointed to do the work considering individuals with physical or family limitations. The reference to “fresh ones” seems to indicate an appreciation or appraisal of young people’s physical strength as “power within”. This situation also confirms the traditional social division of responsibilities based on age and physical strength (Dahl 1999, 81–85). Young people working on behalf of weaker persons, particularly the elderly, is both a duty and a demonstration of unity and solidarity (*ibid.*).

The interviews also show that “power over” occurs in the form of ideas introduced to local communities/congregations. A fishery project in one synod is an example of external influence. The preparation for the implementation of that project was organised beyond/above the local community, as meetings

were held at national and regional levels with representatives from the church districts. These representatives were mostly men selected from local villages. This could be interpreted both as “power over” and an activity based on gender, because the organisers and the participants were predominantly men. In this case, the project appears to have used a top-down more than a bottom-up approach.

As such, the structure is occasioning some unheard voices, as experienced by this female informant from another synod: “I suggested that idea (of having the saving club).... ‘Yes, yes’ they said, but everyone is unwilling to go further. No concrete plan of action was agreed” (Site 1, woman, family 4). Her comment represented the fact that women have ideas for the well-being of the community but, as is the case with many women who lack access to decision-making bodies, she was not listened to. Her idea was ignored, and it was not addressed to a committee and not part of the group/church programme, as another female informant commented. The relationship between the leaders and the participants in these projects then could be interpreted as displaying gender inequality. The two interviews above indicate that the elaboration of a community project sometimes occurs without consultation of church members or consideration of their interests, particularly of women.

Some women, however, when equipped with new skills and knowledge, could affect the thought and actions of those around them, which is one form of “power over”. One woman, trained in church on the fabrication of an environmentally friendly stove and dry-rice cultivation, became the trainer of both her family and other people in her community. One male informant mentioned: “I did not attend the training (fabrication of an environmentally friendly stove), but my wife did. But even if I was not there, she taught me, and we did it together” (Site 2, man, family 1). Thus, UYT may provide women with the capacity to change ways of living and acting within their family and community when UYT educated them and facilitated opportunities to influence. However, one aspect of access to education is that most of the training skills and activities the church organised seem to fit with the women’s principal daily occupation: household care.

4.2 *“Power To” That Differentiates Women and Men’s Possibilities and Limitations*

The interviews showed women to have “power to” when they have skills, while men’s exercise of “power to” is often seen in a position of leadership. The youth seemed deprived of “power to”, as they acted from adults’ instructions. The woman trained on the fabrication of an environmentally friendly stove is an example. Like other women in her region, learning new skills and techniques

was a strategy used to improve families' livelihoods with the possibility of acquiring new sources of personal income. Another female informant, a hairdresser, saw the success of her work as an opportunity for others to acquire new skills and start their own business. She reasoned "so that they can have work in the future" (Volunteer 1). Providing young people with new skills, she said, would also support a parent in backing and sustaining their children's education. She also saw the multiplication of her talents through others in reference to the Bible story about talents. Use of talents based on the experiences of the two respondents above is more a transmission of knowledge than a financial response to life issues.

The study found that women's capacity to act, to realise their potential, to create possibilities for themselves and others is limited in relation to their access to resources. One female informant, for instance, did not take part in a project of rice cultivation in her church, as the field she got from her brother had limited access to water and was unproductive. In her area, land traditionally belongs to men. She could only have access to land through her father or her brother. In that case, the quality of the resources differentiates her possibilities with her brother's.

In addition to advantageous access to resources, men exercised agency when they were in a position of leadership, or had some interests and concerns. One male informant relied on his use of talents, knowledge on improved agricultural techniques, to validate his worth and position. To keep up with the work of his predecessor, which he esteemed, the male informant commented: "It pushed me to strive to find ways to keep the level of development of the area" (Site 2, man, family 3). Community development or "concern with the livelihood" of the members, as he called it, then became one of the male informant's solutions to secure his new position. Another male informant was motivated to use his construction talents in a hope for future benefits such as a possible job offer, as he commented: "It would be a source of income in case I get employed as people saw the quality of my work" (Site 3, man, family 2).

4.3 *"Power With": Collaboration between Women, Men and Young People and Activities Based on Gender and Age*

The data also provide evidence that UYT projects are open to the collaboration of women and men, but most projects are organised by women. In activities in which women and men work together, the division of tasks followed a gendered cultural pattern. The construction of a well near a village mentioned earlier is one example. "There were people (men) who did the mason works and I transported sand ... Then they (men) used these sand and stones to make the mortar" (Site 3, young woman, family 3). In the village where this young female

informant lives, the inhabitants had difficulties accessing drinkable water for years. Through the parish's FANILO coordinator – a man – their village got assistance in building a well. According to the interviews, the distribution of responsibilities followed a differentiation between women's and men's tasks. In addition, there was age bias, as the men conducted the construction work, and the women and the young people transported sand and stones. Besides this, the elderly were exempted from the communal work because of their lesser physical strength.

Almost all female informants in this study, both young and adult, participated in community development projects. In these projects, women's group members had the opportunity to work together, to learn from other women and to share their knowledge from attending local, regional and national meetings. In some cases, women's activities were designed as a response to a specific situation, a female informant shared. "The women's group had a vision of poultry farming and growing rice. Women's groups from two congregations agreed to collaborate in some agricultural farming activities because of the difficult life situation" (Site 1, woman, family 1). Women's groups were used to organise themselves to find solutions to the economic issues they were facing. Female informants from different sites mentioned different ways of collaborating, such as contributing the same amount of money to one farming project, and using a rotation schedule for feeding chicken at another site. At one site, the women's group from the synod encouraged the cultivation and transformation of the noni plant and fruit (*Morinda citrifolia*). This activity offered women the opportunity to care for their health and bodies, and to have income from selling juice and other products extracted from the noni plant and fruit.

4.4 *"Power Within": From God and from Skills Based on Gender*

The data also demonstrated that both women and men emphasised their "power within" as the source of their engagement in various community development projects. "Power within" was the same for women and men when it comes from God, but is different when referring to another person's skills. For instance, several informants mentioned being compelled to use their talents in relation to their understanding of God's expectation towards his people. "Knowledge is God's grace given freely so we should share what we know freely" (Site 1, man, family 5). Several informants believed that their knowledge and skills are gifts from God. They held that they were mandated to use these gifts to contribute to the well-being of Christians and of the other people around them. This means that congregational community development is inclusive in nature, as those who benefited from the church work encompass both its members and non-members. The idea of a mandate also indicates that

inclusion is not a choice, but an obligation. The informants mentioned above had the same view that Christians are accountable to God with regards to their contribution to the common good. This finding implied that involvement in community development does not depend on the community or an individual's disposition, but on God, who sends Christians. These ideas of Christians' social involvement, according to some informants, were mostly grounded in the Bible, which, for them, provides Christian ethics and principles of social life based on love.

In addition to the godly origin, "power within" is also identified through the individual's attitude of valuing personal skills and capacity as instruments to be used for the well-being of the community. One male informant participating in the building of a well near his village was an example. He demonstrated confidence in his skills when he mentioned that his work will probably be inspected as it is done to a high standard. He even said that such construction work "does not need the intervention of people from the higher level of church/social structure, because local people have some construction abilities" (Site 3, man, family 2). Other informants shared this idea of local and individuals' responsibilities, pointing to the unachieved promises of political candidates and the limited development work the government has offered, both locally and nationally.

This individual valuation of personal skills was also related to socially constructed gendered skills, a traditional association of skills with a specific gender. Some informants seemed to think that certain tasks and skills belonged solely to women or to men, and each could be competent only in their own domain. A young female informant remarked: "For me, the use of talents of women and men are not the same because men know about carpentry and women do not. Men know how to weld, but women do not [laughter]" (Site 2, young woman, family 1). Her comment was based on gendered skills she sees and experiences in her everyday life. Some tasks and responsibilities within families and in society are segregated between women, men and young people. For instance, among the young people interviewed, young men had various small jobs ranging from transporting various objects to roofing houses and working in the fields with the zebu/cattle, while young women were doing laundry, helping the family with agricultural work and involved in some small trades. Moreover, a young male informant stated that "women are more inclined than men to use their talents" (Site 1, young man, family 5). Thus, the involvement of women, men and young people in community development seems to relate to an assumption of attributions of certain roles and skills, either exclusively to women, or to men or the youth. Those findings point out that an individual's "power within" may have both spiritual and subjective sources.

5 Discussion

This article sets out to answer how gender and power relations both affect and are affected by UYT projects. In the analysis of UYT projects in Madagascar using gender and power perspectives, three main findings stand out. First, UYT/ABCD emphasises the “power within/with”. Second, where power is exercised to and over, it is mainly adult men exercising power. Third, women contribute largely within the projects in most cases of congregational community development projects.

The study first shows that the UYT approach emphasises “power within” and “with”, corroborating the results of earlier research on the church’s community development work. Skjortnes (2014, 157–158) for instance, shows that the church in Madagascar helps individual adults, women and men, to be aware of and recognise their “power within”. The church’s teaching and religious activities help these adults build self-trust and a positive self-image (Skjortnes 2016, 223–225). Young people’s awareness of their “power within” could be drawn from the way they understood their participation in UYT as an appreciation of their value. Informants point to the importance of the godly origin of their talents and use of talents. This indicates that UYT emphasises the role of faith as an asset that promotes change in the community (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2021, 9), an equal ground for the source of “power within”. The experience of informants from this study also demonstrates that “power within” is acquired through teaching and the training of skills in UYT projects. These teachings highlight the fact that each person has the capacity to contribute to the well-being of the community. Relying upon the recognition of their assets, the informants then use their skills and knowledge to improve their life conditions and those of others. The findings show that trained informants, mostly adults, possess the capacity to solve their problems and improve their well-being. It might mean that the UYT approach, among other factors, provides the informants with a basis to value each person and their assets, an appreciation that tends to encourage involvement in community development work. However, gender inequalities in UYT tend to intersect with seniority, level of education and geographic location of a person.

The findings also show that UYT resembles the ABCD approach in its appreciation of and emphasis on individual and local assets as a source of power (Nel 2020, 274), which help to recognise the “power within”. As with a remark from a male informant on the building of the well, the reasons for his emphasising individual and local involvement in community development are at least threefold. First, the work is for the benefit of the community. Second, involvement might also profit the individual participant. Third, the government’s

development work is limited, locally. Thus, the building project helped him to value local resources, among them the contribution of women, a contribution that is important particularly in the development process (Kabeer 1994, 63). But this idea of local contribution seems not to address social and political power structures, as most women and young people involved in UYT projects did not question the male leadership or decisions. All the work seems to remain only on the shoulders of local actors (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hailamo 2019, 135), mostly women. This suggests that the recognition of “power within” does not necessarily imply the possession of “power to”. The findings, then, confirm the criticisms of the ABCD approach in regard to its ignorance of power dynamics (Ennis and West 2010, 407) and individualisation/localisation of development issues and responsibilities (Healy 2005, 168; MacLeod and Emejulu 2014, 436).

The findings also demonstrate that the second form of power the UYT approach emphasises is the “power with”. Earlier research found that participants in UYT are encouraged to work in groups and organise collective activities (Rakotoarison 2013, 56). Church groups are sites of micro-development within the church and mainly a form of network of solidarity of women (Haddad 2003, 442, 445). In these groups, lay Christians create networks, work collectively, formulate visions and build collective strength. These groups tend to encourage individuals’ participation in community development projects and teach them not to compete (Eyben, Harris, and Pettit 2006, 7–8), but to collaborate in various development work. Group or church members are the main actors in implementing the work and on some occasions, they collaborate with other people in the local community (Rakotoarison 2013, 56). The experience of the informants in this collective work shows a clear division of labour following a gendered pattern. This division of work strengthens the idea of complementarity in the community between women and men, the adults and youth, and maintains a division of power (Kabeer 1994, 65, 267–268). UYT seems to strengthen the position and roles of women in the community as executor/subordinate and housewife and of young people as subordinate and dutiful to their seniors. Thus, it leaves the situation of subordination unchallenged. This finding supports earlier research that the church is an institution that nurtures patriarchy (Chisale 2020), in the case of UYT through the practice of community development. In addition, UYT seems only to a small degree to encourage people involved in projects to use their collective strength to challenge social or oppressive structures, or to participate in socio-political development. However, another study shows that some Malagasy women, outside of the church setting, manage to participate in the country’s socio-political

arena through women's political activism and self-empowerment (Altius and Raveloharimisy 2016, 138–140). Research on community organising also shows that marginalised women and communities could acquire the capacity to challenge those in authority when they are provided with appropriate strategies (Garlington et al. 2019, 30).

Secondly, the findings suggest that men exercise more “power over” than women, even if some privileged women hold leadership positions. Like other faith communities, FLM has gendered practices, as in the UYT projects men mostly occupy the positions of leadership and national trainers and most women and the youth are the executors and local *animateurs*. This study shows that men exercise power as individual leaders or as a group through the church committees at different levels. This gendered practice could be related to the ways local communities and the church distribute tasks based on gender and age (Dahl 1999, 81–85). Thus, this study agrees with other research that shows the religious structure legitimising the gendered practices of the church (Chisale 2020, 4–7). The well construction and one male informant's comment about the role of church leaders are examples of legitimisation of gendered aspects of church practice and “power over”. Even the way UYT implements some of its projects reflects “power over”, from above. The fishery project that earlier research described appears as a national project intended to be implemented at the local level (Rakotoarison, Dietrich, and Hiilamo 2019, 130–131). Findings of this study demonstrate that male leaders at the national level decided about the planning, implementation and participation in this project, while others executed it locally. This finding agrees with other research on community development work, which indicates that men's involvement remains at the political and leadership level, and not necessarily in the implementation (Kabeer 1994, 275). UYT in this study then appears to use top-down decision-making, which results in unheard voices, particularly of women without access to leadership positions and decision-making bodies.

Additionally, this study shows that “power to” in UYT projects favours men. Through their positions as leaders in the church and community, they control resources and limit the action of other people, particularly of women. As female informants from some areas of Madagascar experienced, women depend on men for access to resources. This difference of access to resources adding to their experience of being unheard limits the “power to” of women, as their participation in the community development activities is hindered or restricted. Besides, as mentioned above, the church through UYT did not provide women or young people with appropriate strategies to challenge those in authority, unlike members of women's groups outside the church setting. One

example of women lacking “power to” in this study is the case with the rice cultivation in one church.

Thirdly, this study shows that women contribute largely to the congregational community development projects considering the active participation of women in community development in different church projects and among women's groups, a finding supporting earlier research (Rich 2004, 218–219). Participants in UYT projects, particularly women, were trained to find ways to tackle the immediate/local issues related to individual and family livelihood. They were subjects and drivers of development locally, as they influence their family and their neighbours through their agricultural and manual skills, such as making stoves or hairdressing. The change in the community through women's influence shows that women are not powerless (Kabeer 1994, 255). Women exercise power as a group, and within their group. Nevertheless, this research shows that the creation of groups of talents does not necessarily provide women skills to deal with structures that affect their livelihood (Rakotoarison 2013, 56–57). UYT projects grant additional economic power to women through increased skills but seem to be limited only to economic transformation. Economic power does not automatically allow women and men to transform the social structure mechanism (Kabeer 1994, 225; Rowlands 1997, 7). The findings of this study thus confirm earlier research that the church does not fully use its resources (human and material) for effective social and political transformation (Haddad 2003, 440–441).

While this study demonstrates that power, gender and, to some extent, age affect UYT projects, it has some limitations. The first limitation is related to the topic of this paper itself: power and gender within the church is a difficult and sensitive subject to discuss. This paper showed that intersectionality plays a certain role in UYT, thus the place and role of youth could be further studied. In addition, this study is limited to only four congregations, which does not allow for an overview of the whole church. This shortcoming could be further addressed with a quantitative study that covers the whole FLM. The researcher's closeness to the object of research might constitute some limitations to the study, as she is a woman and a church member, earlier responsible for the UYT project. She is then both an insider and an outsider, positions which might be reflected in the findings.

This paper demonstrates that the church, through the UYT approach, provides both women and men opportunities for development (Skjortnes 2014, 85–98, 121–133), but they exercise different aspects of power, which are both reinforced by UYT and affected by their roles, relations and activities in congregational community development. The difference of power favours men,

while limiting economic and social possibilities for women. The difference also comes from gendered skills and cultural boundaries and restrictions, which is reinforced by unequal access to resources and to decision-making bodies. However, the findings in this study agree with Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's research (2015, 6, 8), in that these differences do not allow religious organisations and communities, such as FLM, to be regarded as either merely oppressive to women or in favour of gender equality.

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Research Ethics

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) project number 60548 and this study adhered to NSD's accepted ethical standards. Written informed consent was obtained from all subjects before the study.

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Socioeconomic Determinants of Successful Aging in Southern Africa: Socio-Theological Gerontology

Research Article

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Abstract

The demographic landscape in Southern Africa is experiencing a shift toward an older age group, and traditional family structures are being influenced by factors such as rural – urban migration and industrialization. This article examines the socioeconomic determinants of successful aging in Southern Africa, with a focus on the intersection of socioeconomic factors and theological perspectives on aging. It utilizes data collected in a 2018–2019 study that explored pastoral care for elderly caregivers of HIV and AIDS-affected children in Ramotswa, Botswana. The article employs a socio-theological gerontology framework to understand how socioeconomic determinants can support or hinder successful aging in the region. It emphasizes the importance of integrating contextual factors and intrapersonal aspects in addressing the aging phenomenon and provides recommendations for contextually informed policies and practices.

Keywords

aging – caregiving responsibilities – determinants of successful aging – pastoral care – socioeconomic determinants – socio-theological gerontology – Southern Africa

1 Introduction

In Southern Africa, the concept of successful aging is shaped by a mix of socio-economic factors, cultural values, and religious beliefs. As the region undergoes a demographic shift toward an aging population, addressing challenges and opportunities necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. This article delves into the dynamics of successful aging in Southern Africa, specifically examining the interplay between socioeconomic factors and theological perspectives. Utilizing socio-theological gerontology, a framework that integrates insights from social sciences, theology, and gerontology, the article recognizes the complexity of aging, influenced by both social and spiritual dimensions. In a region where cultural and religious values are integral to daily life, socio-theological gerontology becomes essential. It offers a structured approach to comprehend the intricate interplay between socioeconomic factors and theological perspectives on aging.

This framework facilitates an analysis of how cultural norms, socioeconomic challenges, and theological beliefs intersect to impact the well-being and quality of life of older adults. By adopting this approach, we move beyond a narrow biomedical or economic perspective, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences shaping the lives of older adults in Southern Africa.

Research emphasizes that successful aging is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors, including genetics, lifestyle choices, social support, healthcare access, and positive psychological attitudes (Rowe and Kahn 1997, 437). Additionally, the aging experience is shaped by cultural, economic, and policy contexts within diverse societies (WHO 2015, 22). We also learn that Southern Africa exhibits diverse levels of economic development, healthcare infrastructure, and social support systems (Cohen and Menken 2006). Understanding these variations is crucial for comprehending the diverse influences on aging experiences in the region.

Moreover, Southern Africa's family structures have evolved due to rural – urban migration and industrialization, bringing about significant changes. This shift challenges traditional intergenerational support systems, particularly impacting rural-based older adults who now bear increased caregiving responsibilities, especially for grandchildren affected by HIV and AIDS (Madigele 2020). This changing landscape exposes a gap in comprehensive strategies for successful aging. Therefore, it is essential to research socioeconomic determinants and theological perspectives to better understand and address the distinct challenges faced by older adults in the region.

In light of these considerations, the research question of this article is: How does the integration of socioeconomic determinants, theological perspectives,

and cultural dimensions contribute to understanding and promoting successful aging among older adults in Southern Africa? This research question serves as the guiding inquiry for the article's exploration into the intricate relationships shaping the aging experiences of older adults in the region.

This article aims to improve our understanding of successful aging in sub-Saharan Africa. It does so by examining the socioeconomic factors that influence aging experiences and well-being, as well as exploring how theological perspectives intersect with socioeconomic factors. The article also delves into the cultural and spiritual dimensions of aging, emphasizing the need for contextually informed policies to address the unique needs of older adults in Southern Africa. Drawing from existing literature and data collected during a study in Ramotswa, Botswana (Madigele 2020), the article seeks to contribute to knowledge on successful aging in the region and provide insights to enhance the quality of life for older adults. The subsequent sections discuss the socioeconomic determinants of successful aging, the implications of socio-theological gerontology, study findings, and policy implications, ultimately advocating for a holistic approach to promote successful aging in the region.

1.1 *Background*

The growing aging population in Southern Africa presents unique challenges and opportunities for successful aging. Successful aging, defined as maintaining physical, mental, and social well-being during the aging process (Bowling and Dieppe 2005, 1550), is notably shaped by socioeconomic factors. Understanding the connection between socioeconomic factors and theological perspectives provides insights into the cultural and spiritual dimensions of successful aging.

Aging constitutes a natural, inevitable progression involving changes in body tissues and functions over time (Jean-Pierre and Ritu 2017; Fallon and Karlawish 2019). These factors include dimensions such as income, employment, social support, cultural influences, and gender (Abud et al. 2022).

Understanding the determinants of healthy aging is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of older adults. Factors such as healthcare accessibility, disease prevention, health-conscious lifestyles, education, economic stability, and robust social networks contribute to the aging experience (Payne et al. 2017). Education, in particular, enhances cognitive abilities and economic prospects, fostering successful aging. Economic resources are foundational for sustaining a good standard of living, while social networks and community support play pivotal roles in well-being (Wandera 2015). Additionally, gender disparities in resource access can impact the successful aging journey, particularly for older women (United Nations 2017).

Studying what religion says about getting older helps in understanding how people see aging, death, and what happens afterward. These beliefs assist individuals in dealing with age-related challenges and give meaning to their later years. Cultural traditions and rituals play a significant role in the well-being of older adults, and religious communities provide support and care networks (Koenig 2012, 80). Socio-theological gerontology emphasizes the importance of policies that respect the cultural and spiritual values of older adults, supporting successful aging by addressing their unique needs (Koenig 2012, 82).

This article contends that effectively addressing the elderly's requirements in Southern Africa necessitates an inclusive consideration of determinants underpinning healthy aging. This encompasses socioeconomic parameters, cultural norms, resource access, and community engagement. Such a holistic understanding is important in shaping policies and interventions conducive to successful aging, thereby augmenting the well-being of older adults across the region.

2 Socioeconomic Determinants of Successful Aging in Sub-Saharan Africa

Various determinants, including income level, education, occupation, and healthcare accessibility, distinctly influence the outcomes of successful aging in this region (Chatterji et al. 2008; Gómez-Olivé et al. 2010). Research highlights that higher educational attainment is linked to improved health outcomes in later life. Education empowers individuals with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about health and to access essential healthcare services (Chatterji et al. 2008, 1056). Similarly, the significance of income levels is evident in the narrative of successful aging. Higher income enables better access to healthcare, proper nutrition, and various resources that collectively support overall well-being (Gómez-Olivé et al. 2013, 60). Conversely, being poor can hinder successful aging. Not having enough money can mean you don't get proper healthcare or good food and may feel isolated, all of which can harm the process of successful aging.

2.1 *Health and Access to Healthcare*

Having access to good healthcare is crucial for successful aging. Quality healthcare services, including preventive measures and managing chronic conditions, play a vital role in shaping positive aging outcomes for older adults (Gómez-Olivé et al. 2013, 86). However, the healthcare landscape in Southern Africa often faces limitations, leading to challenges in accessibility for older

individuals. These challenges include not having enough healthcare facilities, a shortage of healthcare staff, a lack of medical equipment and supplies, and geographical barriers that make it difficult for older adults to reach healthcare centres (World Health Organization 2023, 30). These obstacles have significant effects on the path of successful aging, highlighting the complex relationship between healthcare availability and the overall well-being of older individuals in the region.

2.2 *Education and Literacy*

In Southern Africa, education and being able to read and write are important for successful aging. If someone is well-schooled, they understand health better and they make better choices for their health. Also, going to school helps people be more involved with others and their communities, which is a big part of successful aging (World Health Organization 2002).

However, in this region, many older people didn't get to go to school much, mainly because of challenges like poverty, gender differences, and limited access to schools (United Nations 2017). Having less education makes it harder for them to understand health information, leading to bad health results. It is therefore important to have programs where older adults can keep learning throughout their lives and improve their reading and writing skills. These programs help older people learn new things and stay active (United Nations 2017). Besides boosting their brainpower, these programs also help them connect with others, making them feel better (World Health Organization 2015).

2.3 *Income and Economic Security*

For older people to age well, having sufficient income helps them meet basic needs, get necessary healthcare, and take part in social activities. However, many older people in Southern Africa face high poverty rates, leading to financial instability and limited access to essential resources. A good example is when grandparents have to take care of their grandchildren, and this situation puts a strain on their finances, affecting their own well-being (Musil et al. 2009, 390). It is worth noting that older people in this region often can't work formal jobs because of age restrictions and retirement norms. So, they end up doing informal jobs like trading or agriculture to support themselves and their dependents, including grandchildren. Adding to their challenges is the lack of strong policies and social support specifically designed for older people, making them more economically and socially vulnerable (Kinsella and Gist 1995, 80).

Therefore, it's crucial to have policies that improve income security and promote economic stability. Implementing programs like social protection and pension schemes and creating suitable job opportunities for older people

is vital for a strong economic foundation in later life. These measures work together to strengthen economic resilience and empower older adults to navigate the challenges of aging with improved well-being and sustained financial stability (Ferreira and Lindgren 2008, 100).

2.4 *Social Support and Community Engagement*

In the world of successful aging, it's clear that social support and being involved in the community are incredibly important for older adults in sub-Saharan Africa. Evidence shows that having good social connections, emotional support, and meaningful engagement lead to better physical and mental health for this age group (Glass et al. 1999, 480). However, many older people in sub-Saharan Africa face challenges like social isolation and limited support networks due to factors like migration, urbanization, and changes in family structures (Ofori-Dua 2023, 270).

It is therefore important to have interventions that promote social connections and community involvement. Interactions between different generations, where older adults and younger people benefit from each other, have become essential. For older adults, these interactions provide companionship, mentorship, and a renewed sense of purpose. At the same time, younger generations gain respect, empathy, and a break from age-related stereotypes. Additionally, community-based support programs, offering things like home visits, group activities, and easy access to healthcare and social services, show promise in boosting social support for older adults in sub-Saharan Africa (Ofori-Dua 2023, 272). These initiatives create spaces where seniors can connect with peers, share experiences, and get support, reducing social isolation and improving overall well-being.

Moreover, encouraging older adults to be actively involved in their communities brings significant benefits. Those who stay engaged through activities like volunteering, joining community groups, or participating in local decision-making processes experience increased social integration and a deep sense of belonging. This involvement goes beyond social interaction; it gives older adults a chance to share their wisdom, skills, and life experiences, fostering a lasting sense of purpose and personal fulfilment (Rowe and Kahn 1998, 438).

2.5 *Gender and Aging*

In Southern Africa, the experiences of older women are shaped by gender inequalities and discriminatory practices, leading to unique challenges (Bowling and Dieppe 2005, 1550). These women often face limitations in accessing crucial services like healthcare, education, job opportunities, and social support due to deeply ingrained gender biases (Zhang and Hayward 2006, 640). It is of great importance to address and correct these gender disparities.

This involves creating fair gender norms in policies and initiatives focused on aging. Empowering women, ensuring their access to resources and services, and challenging harmful gender stereotypes are essential steps. These efforts, promoting gender equity and social justice, can significantly contribute to achieving successful aging across the region.

Understanding the impact of these factors on the well-being of older adults in the region is key to improving their quality of life. Targeted efforts that improve healthcare access, promote education and literacy, strengthen economic stability, build robust social support networks, and address gender disparities collectively create an environment that fosters and sustains successful aging throughout Southern Africa.

3 Socio-Theological Gerontology

Socio-theological gerontology is a comprehensive approach that blends social, theological, and gerontological perspectives to understand the implications of aging for individuals, communities, and religious institutions (Madigele and Baloyi 2023, 79). It explores cultural, religious, and social aspects of aging, analyzing their interconnectedness. From a social standpoint, it examines how societal norms, values, and structures influence older adults' roles, expectations, and experiences. Simultaneously, from a theological perspective, it looks at how religious beliefs and practices shape the aging process, offering meaning, purpose, and support. Socio-theological gerontology aims to inform policies that enhance the well-being of older adults in both religious and secular contexts (Madigele 2020, 80).

This framework recognizes the crucial role of socioeconomic factors in shaping the aging experience. Elements like income, education, and access to resources significantly impact the quality of life of older adults (World Health Organization 2015). Socio-theological gerontology seeks to understand how religious beliefs intersect with socioeconomic determinants, influencing successful aging. It acknowledges that socioeconomic disparities may affect access to religious activities, impacting social connections. Additionally, socioeconomic factors can influence the availability of essential resources like healthcare and social services, crucial for maintaining health in later life (*ibid.*). The framework advocates for understanding how religious communities and theological teachings can address these socioeconomic determinants for successful aging, promoting social justice and support, especially for marginalized older adults.

Socio-theological gerontology also emphasizes the importance of recognizing diverse experiences and connections to societal structures. Gender and

culture are highlighted as significant influences on health needs and experiences, particularly for grandmothers. Approaches like intercultural pastoral theology stress contextuality and the acceptance of various perspectives (Klaasen 2020, 121). In pastoral care, a holistic approach considering physical, social, emotional/psychological, and spiritual dimensions is encouraged (Rego and Nunes 2019, 284). This aligns with cultural perspectives, acknowledging the equal significance of individual and communal well-being (Magezi 2019, 135). Pastoral caregivers play a role beyond facilitation, providing emotional support, spiritual guidance, and community-building (Lartey 2003). Socio-theological gerontology captures the multifaceted nature of aging through an interdisciplinary approach, involving diverse disciplines to understand and address aging challenges.

In essence, socio-theological gerontology offers a multidimensional approach to studying aging. By combining social, theological, and gerontological perspectives, it aims to understand the complex dimensions of aging and their interplay. The framework recognizes socioeconomic determinants, advocates for social justice, and emphasizes considering cultural, gender, and individual diversity in interventions for older adults. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and engagement with stakeholders, socio-theological gerontology seeks to inform policies and practices that enhance the dignity, inclusivity, and overall quality of life for older adults.

4 Research Methods and Design

The research methods and design used in this study aimed to assess how the Christian Church in Botswana extends pastoral caregiving to grieving elderly caretakers of orphans affected by HIV and AIDS. The research approach adopted was exploratory-descriptive and contextual. Exploratory research was utilized to gather data from church leaders and pastoral caregivers regarding their experiences and challenges in providing care to the grieving elderly (Polit and Beck 2021, 96). Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted with ten pastoral caregivers and five church leaders from the Ramotswa Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana (ELCB) congregation. A separate focus group was also held for the grieving elderly caregivers to allow for open and honest discussions among participants who shared similar experiences.

A descriptive approach was employed to interview 40 grandparents aged 60 years and older who are caring for one or more AIDS orphans in Ramotswa village. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by these elderly caregivers. The goal of the descriptive approach was to paint a

realistic picture of the situation and inform the improvement of care standards for this specific group. The research design also incorporated a contextual approach, recognizing the importance of considering the environment, conditions, and cultural context of the participants. The data collection took place in Ramotswa, located in a rural area in the south-east of Botswana, where there are a significant number of orphans under the care of elderly individuals. Door-to-door visits were conducted to collect data within the participants' context (Holloway and Wheeler 2002, 34).

As a researcher with a background in pastoral counselling, I acknowledge that my previous experiences may influence my interactions with participants and my interpretation of their experiences. To mitigate potential biases, I employed strategies such as reflexive journaling and member-checking. Additionally, I collaborated closely with local pastoral caregivers to build trust and ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. The research primarily utilized qualitative inquiry methods, allowing a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perspectives of the grieving elderly caretakers. Qualitative research provides an opportunity to understand phenomena from different dimensions and perspectives, offering new ways of understanding the world (McLeod 2001, 2). The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the opinions and pain experienced by the grieving elderly in their caregiving roles.

4.1 *Participants and Sampling*

In this study, snowball sampling was employed as a technique to select participants. It began with older individuals aged 60 years and above who were fluent in Setswana. Initially, those who had already consented to participate were asked to recommend or recruit additional participants from their acquaintances or church community. The resulting sample included a total of 40 older persons caring for AIDS orphans, along with ten pastoral caregivers and five church leaders, totaling 55 participants (see Table 1).

To facilitate data collection, the researcher collaborated with pastoral caregivers to gain access to the homes of the grieving elderly caretakers. This collaborative effort was instrumental in establishing trust and ensuring a smooth data collection process. Face-to-face interactions were employed, and data were collected through a combination of focus group discussions and individual interviews. The focus group discussions involved ten pastoral caregivers and five church leaders, while the interviews were conducted with the 40 older persons providing care to AIDS orphans. During these interviews, semi-structured interview guides were utilized to delve into the experiences, challenges, and perceptions of the grieving elderly caretakers,

TABLE 1 Sample of participants in Ramotswa village

Description of participants	Number of participants
Older persons	40
Pastoral caregivers	10
Church leaders	5
TOTAL	55

fostering in-depth conversations and the collection of rich qualitative data (Madigele 2021).

4.2 *Data Analysis*

For data analysis, a thematic approach was employed in this study. This approach involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the collected data set (Braun and Clarke 2006, 76). The data analysis was conducted in both Setswana and English languages. The researcher began the analysis process by familiarizing herself with the data. This involved reading and rereading the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content. The researcher searched for meanings and patterns within the data while transcribing them.

Next, initial codes were generated from the data. These codes represented the initial categorization of different segments of the data. The researcher then collated these codes, organizing them based on their similarities and relationships. Following the generation of initial codes, the researcher proceeded to identify themes. This involved sorting the different codes into potential themes and examining the coded data extracts within each theme. The aim was to identify overarching patterns or topics that emerged from the data. To assist in defining and naming the themes, thematic maps were used. Thematic maps provide a visual representation of the relationships between codes and themes, aiding in the identification and organization of themes.

4.3 *Results and Analysis*

4.3.1 Sex

The results and analysis section of the study focused on the demographic variable of sex among the grieving elderly caregivers. The data was presented in terms of frequency, percentages, and ranges. The majority of the participants in this study were females, accounting for 35 participants or 87.5% of the total. There were only five male participants, representing 12.5% of the total.

These findings suggest that caregiving roles are more commonly taken up by elderly females than elderly males. These findings are consistent with the Population and Housing Census 2011 Analytical Report, which found that the majority of the elderly population over the age of 65+ in Botswana are females, accounting for 59.8% of the total. The report also states that 42.5% of orphan caregiving households in Botswana are headed by grandmothers (Statistics Botswana 2014). These statistics highlight the need to address the burden of caregiving primarily falling on women and to promote a more equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities.

The study suggests that traditional barriers that have prevented men from taking on caregiving responsibilities should be broken. It also acknowledges that some elderly men may feel more comfortable being cared for by other males, while some elderly women may prefer to be cared for by their spouses rather than strangers. Overall, the findings indicate a gender imbalance in caregiving roles among the grieving elderly caregivers in this study. This highlights the importance of addressing gender disparities and promoting equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities to alleviate the burden on women.

4.3.2 Percentage Distribution of the Elderly by Work Sector

In this study, the percentage distribution of the elderly participants by work sector was examined. The majority of the participants, accounting for 65%, were not working. Interestingly, among these unemployed elderly, two thirds of them viewed being out of the job market as an advantage because it allowed them to fully focus on their caregiving responsibilities. They believed that being a primary caregiver was a full-time job that involved more than just providing physical care. However, it is worth noting that there were some elderly individuals who still sought employment. Some expressed a desire to stay active and involved, while others preferred to work for economic reasons.

Formal employment, defined in this study as employment that provides regular wages or salaries, was reported by two male participants, accounting for 5% of the total. One participant was employed by the government, while the other worked for a nongovernmental institution. The duration of employment for the elderly caregivers ranged from two years to 50 years or more. On the other hand, informal employment accounted for 30% of the participants, with twelve individuals engaged in various activities. This included owning livestock or small stock, crop production, selling traditional beer, owning rental property, and selling firewood. While the participants stated that they were unlikely to sell livestock for their daily needs, small stock such as goats, poultry, and sheep could be easily sold to meet household needs. Crop production was mostly at the subsistence level due to harsh weather conditions and unpredictable rainfall.

TABLE 2 The employment status of the participants

Employment status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Formal	2	5
Informal	12	30
Not working	26	65
TOTAL	40	100

This suggests a significant relationship between gender and employment among the elderly caregivers, with men being more likely to have formal employment. Additionally, societal expectations may contribute to women being primarily responsible for domestic duties, while other roles are considered secondary. However, studies in Botswana have shown that women may struggle to cope with caregiving demands as they age (Kangethe 2014, 9). Leaving women to shoulder caregiving responsibilities alone in the context of the dynamic nature of HIV and AIDS can be seen as a form of gender exploitation.

The findings highlight the employment status of the elderly caregivers and the gender disparities that exist. Addressing these disparities and supporting elderly caregivers, particularly women, is crucial in ensuring their well-being and reducing gender exploitation in caregiving roles.

4.4.3 Main Occupation/Economic Activity of the Elderly Widowed Household Head

In total, 20 (50%) widowed elderly caregivers were interviewed in Ramotswa. Some of the elderly widows had lost their husbands due to HIV and AIDS, while others had died from other illnesses. This study discovered that farming is the main economic activity of elderly widows, although the set of economic activities of the elderly is diverse. Thirty-two (80%) of the households reported that farming is their primary economic activity. Other economic activities include livestock keeping and self-employment in non-agricultural activities. In this study, 15 (72%) of the elderly widows reported having lost some property of their deceased husbands due to confiscation by relatives. In many instances, however, no action had been taken against the culprits. There is a lack of knowledge on existing policy and legal and social protection structures and their functions.

Only one of the elderly widows in this study is self-employed. Self-employment suits the elderly more than employment in the public or private sector. It requires little capital injection and is not subject to policies,

TABLE 3 Main occupation/economic activity of the elderly widowed household head

Activity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Farming	32	80
Too old/retired	1	2.5
Sick/disabled	2	5
Other	5	12.5
Total	40	100

rules, principles, and practices that discriminate against the elderly in terms of employment. A quantitative study in Botswana (Heymann et al. 2007, 20) showed how caregivers balance the demands of holding a job with providing care for those who have become ill or orphaned by HIV and AIDS. It discovered that caregivers experienced more work – care conflicts, work less, and spent less time caring for their children.

Examining the impact on widows’ participation in the labor force, caregiving impacts working widows more because they carry a larger share of AIDS care responsibilities, still grieving the loss of their partners and child(ren), and are dealing with the challenges of aging. Rajaraman, Earle, and Heymann (2008, 72) compared working HIV and AIDS caregivers with other caregivers in Botswana and found that HIV and AIDS caregivers were more likely to take time off work for caregiving.

4.4.4 Percentage Distribution of the Elderly by Household Income Per Month

In terms of the percentage distribution by household income per month, a study conducted in Botswana found that the majority of the respondents’ earnings ranged from BWP 1,500¹ to over BWP 7,500² (Statistics Botswana 2018). This highlights the economic dependence of the elderly population in Botswana. It suggests that the elderly population in Botswana relies significantly on their monthly earnings, as indicated by the distribution of household income. In other words, the majority of the elderly population’s income falls within a certain range, emphasizing their economic reliance on these earnings for their

1 1,500 Botswana Pula in United States dollars was \$110.84 as of October 20, 2023.
2 7,500 Botswana Pula in United States dollars was \$554.18 as of October 20, 2023.

financial well-being. Agriculture was identified as the main economic activity among the households surveyed. Additionally, older people in Botswana receive a non-contributory old age pension of BWP 230³ per month, which serves as a source of income for many elderly individuals (*ibid.*).

The government of Botswana provides rations and destitute allowances to support the elderly population. The study revealed that 75% of the elderly received government rations, while 10% received destitute allowances (Statistics Botswana 2018). Other sources of income for the elderly include employment, inheritance, farmland and livestock, remittances, pensions, and property rentals. Notably, poverty incidence is higher among female-headed households, with 55% of poor households being female-headed and 45% being male-headed (*ibid.*). This indicates the presence of gender disparities and economic challenges faced by elderly women in particular. It is important to address these economic disparities and provide support to elderly individuals, especially women, in order to alleviate the burden of caregiving and ensure their well-being (Statistics Botswana 2018). The following are some of the experiences and challenges faced by elderly individuals expressed in relation to economic difficulties:

I receive a small pension, but it's not enough to cover all my expenses. I have to prioritize basic necessities like food and medication, and sometimes I have to make difficult choices and cut back on other expenses, such as transportation or leisure activities (Thebe, interviewee, June 12, 2019).

The respondent highlights the struggle of managing daily expenses with a limited pension. The mention of difficult choices and cutting back on non-essential expenses underscores the financial challenges faced by elderly individuals in Botswana. This quote reflects the common experience of many elderly people who must prioritize basic necessities, like food and medication, due to limited income, which can affect their overall quality of life.

In another account, a widow expresses concern about relying solely on her late husband's pension, which is barely sufficient to cover her basic needs. The mention of anxiety over unexpected expenses highlights the financial insecurity faced by some elderly widows. This interviewee emphasizes the vulnerability of elderly widows who lack additional sources of income or savings, leaving them financially fragile in emergencies (Tlthagiso, interviewee, June 12, 2019).

3 230 Botswana Pula in United States dollars was \$17.01 as of October 20, 2023.

The following is an account of another interviewee, Boleane:

I used to work in agriculture but had to retire early due to health problems. Finding alternative income is a struggle. Limited job opportunities and low pay make it challenging to maintain a decent standard of living (Boleane, interviewee, June 12, 2019).

This individual discusses the challenges of transitioning from a career in agriculture to retirement due to health issues. The struggle to find alternative sources of income and the limited opportunities for part-time work reflect the economic difficulties faced by elderly individuals who can no longer engage in their previous livelihoods. This quote illustrates how health-related retirement can disrupt an older person's financial stability and underscore the importance of accessible and appropriate support systems.

The following is an account of another interviewee:

I live in a rural area where job opportunities are scarce. The lack of employment options and the decline in agricultural productivity have made it difficult for me to generate income. I rely heavily on government assistance and the support of my family, but it's still not enough to meet all my financial needs (Tshepong, interviewee, June 12, 2019).

This individual resides in a rural area with scarce job opportunities, and the decline in agricultural productivity has further limited income generation. Their reliance on government assistance and family support underscores the economic challenges faced by elderly individuals in rural regions. This quote highlights the unique economic circumstances of elderly individuals in rural areas, where traditional livelihoods may no longer be viable, and where access to social and economic resources can be limited.

Another account is given by another interviewee:

I want to contribute to my family's expenses, but my age and health restrict my ability to work. I feel a sense of guilt and frustration because I used to be the primary breadwinner, and now I have to rely on others for financial support. It's a blow to my self-esteem and independence (Dipole, interviewee, June 12, 2019).

The respondent expresses a desire to contribute to their family's expenses but faces constraints due to age and health. The feelings of guilt and frustration reflect the emotional struggles associated with financial dependence in older age.

TABLE 4 Percentage distribution of the elderly by household income per month

Household income level per month (BWP)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<1,500 per month	30	75
1,501–3,500	5	12.5
3,501–7,500	3	7.5
> 7,501	2	5
TOTAL	40	100

These examples illustrate some of the economic challenges faced by elderly individuals, including insufficient pensions, limited job opportunities, reliance on government assistance, and emotional struggles related to financial dependence. Personal accounts provide more nuanced and specific insights into the experiences of elderly individuals in different contexts. Overall, the lack of economic resources has been shown to negatively affect caregiving and presents a significant challenge for those involved in orphan caregiving. Addressing these economic disparities and providing support to elderly individuals, particularly women, is crucial in alleviating the burden of caregiving and ensuring their well-being.

4.4.5 Education

In terms of education, the majority of participants in the study had attained primary education, with 25 (62.5%) participants, followed by 10 (25%) participants with secondary education (see Table 5). These findings indicate a generally low level of literacy in the study areas. According to Statistics Botswana (2018), the literacy rate among the elderly in Botswana was 42.6% in 2015. This represents an increase from 29.2% in 1991, with an average annual growth rate of 14.05% (Statistics Botswana 2018). In this context, literacy refers to the ability to understand, read, and write a short, simple statement, as well as perform basic arithmetic calculations.

The national findings regarding literacy rates align with the findings of this study, where 95% of the elderly participants were found to be literate. However, despite their literacy, many of the elderly expressed difficulties when seeking assistance from government departments. They also reported inadequate dissemination of information regarding matters that concern them and their living conditions. Therefore, it is evident that elderly caretakers require more than just literacy; they need to be equipped with coping skills, capacity-building skills, and the ability to provide for themselves and their dependents.

Laakkonen et al. (2012, 178) emphasize the importance of education in primary care, highlighting the need for a case manager to manage follow-up care. This suggests that education plays a vital role in equipping elderly caretakers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively manage the care of themselves and their dependents. Here are some accounts based on the issue of education and literacy among the elderly:

I'm Sarah, 68, with limited education. I can read and write basics but struggle with complex documents. Workshops to improve literacy and understand government forms would boost my confidence in navigating these processes. (Sarah, interviewee, June 20, 2019).

Sarah highlights the challenges she faces in understanding complex documents and navigating bureaucratic processes. She expresses the need for resources or workshops to improve her literacy skills and gain confidence in dealing with government and healthcare forms. Sarah's experience reflects the digital and administrative challenges older adults may encounter. It underscores the importance of accessible literacy programs and support for older individuals to engage with formal institutions effectively.

Thomas, a 73-year-old retiree with secondary education, mentions his struggle to adapt to technological advancements. He emphasizes the importance of accessible resources or training programs to help seniors like him stay connected in a rapidly changing digital world. Thomas' account highlights the digital divide and the need for technological literacy among older adults. It emphasizes the importance of digital inclusion initiatives to ensure older individuals can access essential online information and services (Thomas, interviewee, June 20, 2019).

Maria, an 80-year-old who values education, expresses her desire for continued learning but faces limited educational opportunities for seniors in her community. She hopes for accessible educational programs or community centers catering to older adults' needs and interests. Maria's account underscores the lifelong learning aspirations of older adults. It calls attention to the need for age-friendly educational initiatives that promote personal growth and fulfilment in later life (Maria, interviewee, June 20, 2019).

James acknowledges his proficiency in reading and writing but struggles with basic arithmetic calculations. He relies on others for financial tasks and wishes for workshops or resources to improve his numeracy skills and financial independence. James' experience highlights the importance of numeracy and financial literacy among older adults. It emphasizes the role of education and

TABLE 5 Summary of the educational qualifications of the participants

Educational qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary	25	62.5
Secondary	10	25
Tertiary	3	7.5
Never been to school	2	5
TOTAL	40	100

support in empowering older individuals to manage their finances effectively (James, interviewee, June 20, 2019).

These accounts highlight the challenges faced by elderly individuals in relation to education and literacy. They emphasize the need for tailored resources, training programs, and support systems to address the specific educational needs of older adults and empower them to navigate various aspects of life more confidently.

4.4.6 The Distribution of Elderly Caregivers’ Burden on the Burden Interview Scale

The findings on caregivers’ burden highlight the challenges faced by elderly caregivers in their role. The 12.5% of caregivers who reported no burden suggested that they are able to manage their caregiving responsibilities without experiencing significant strain. However, the majority of caregivers, comprising 87.5% of the respondents, reported some level of burden. The 37.7% of caregivers experiencing a mild to moderate level of burden indicates that caregiving responsibilities have some impact on their well-being and daily life. This level of burden could manifest as increased stress, emotional strain, or disruptions to their own routines and activities. Furthermore, the 50% of caregivers experiencing a moderate to severe level of burden suggests that caregiving responsibilities significantly impact their physical and emotional well-being. These individuals may face challenges such as exhaustion, increased health risks, and compromised quality of life due to the demands of caregiving. Lastly, the 12.5% of caregivers who reported a severe level of burden indicate that a subset of elderly caregivers are reported to be facing overwhelming challenges in providing care to orphans. This level of burden may have profound effects on their mental health, social support, and overall ability to cope with their

caregiving responsibilities. Here are some personal accounts to illustrate the distribution of burden experienced by elderly caregivers:

I'm Mary, and I'm 75 years old. I've been taking care of my orphaned grandchildren, and you know, I don't feel burdened at all. In fact, I find so much joy and fulfilment in being able to support and nurture them. It really hasn't had a significant impact on my daily life (Mary, interviewee January 20, 2019).

Mary seems to have found a sense of purpose and fulfilment in caring for her orphaned grandchildren. Her lack of perceived burden suggests that her caregiving role brings her emotional satisfaction and a sense of joy. Mary's positive outlook on caregiving highlights the potential for older adults to find meaning and fulfilment in providing care to their family members, even in challenging circumstances.

Here is the second personal account to illustrate the distribution of burden experienced by elderly caregivers:

I'm John, and I'm 68 years old. I've been looking after my niece and nephew since their parents passed away. I love them to bits, but I can't deny it's been a bit challenging. Sometimes, it gets a bit stressful, and it's definitely changed my daily routine (John, interviewee, January 20, 2019).

John experiences a mild to moderate level of burden in his caregiving role. Despite his love for his niece and nephew, he acknowledges the stress and disruptions caregiving has brought to his life. John's experience reflects the complex reality of many elderly caregivers who may have conflicting emotions, balancing love and responsibility with the challenges of caregiving.

In another account, Sarah faces a moderate to severe level of burden in caring for her orphaned grandchildren. Her physical and emotional struggles highlight the significant impact caregiving can have on an older adult's well-being. Sarah's experience underscores the need for support systems and resources to help elderly caregivers cope with the demands of caregiving, especially when it affects their health and daily life (Sarah, interviewee, June 20, 2019).

These interpretations and contextualizations provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of the elderly caregivers, illustrating the range of emotions and challenges they face in their caregiving roles. Integrating such interpretations into the analysis can enrich the qualitative findings and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic determinants of successful aging in Southern Africa.

5 Discussion and Recommendations

The socioeconomic determinants of successful aging in sub-Saharan Africa are complex and multifaceted. In this discussion, we explore the role of socio-theological gerontology in understanding and addressing these determinants, and provide recommendations for promoting successful aging in the region. Socio-theological gerontology is an interdisciplinary approach that combines sociological and theological perspectives to study aging and its implications within a socioeconomic context. By integrating these perspectives, we can gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors that influence successful aging in sub-Saharan Africa.

One important socioeconomic determinant of successful aging in the region is access to healthcare. Adequate healthcare services, including preventive care, treatment, and support for chronic conditions, are essential for maintaining good health and well-being in older adults. However, many older adults in sub-Saharan Africa face barriers such as limited healthcare infrastructure, financial constraints, and lack of awareness about available services. Socio-theological gerontology can help identify these barriers and develop strategies to improve healthcare access for older adults.

The intersection of socioeconomic factors and socio-theological gerontology in sub-Saharan Africa can facilitate the mobilization of resources for the well-being of older adults. Religious institutions and faith-based organizations possess social capital and networks that can be leveraged to address socioeconomic challenges faced by older adults, such as poverty, healthcare access, and social support. Religious beliefs and practices on the other hand can foster social cohesion and community engagement, providing a sense of belonging and support for older adults. This can mitigate the negative impacts of socioeconomic challenges and promote social integration, reducing social isolation and loneliness among older adults (Schatz and Ogunmafun 2007, 1350).

Theological perspectives on aging often emphasize the holistic well-being of individuals, encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. This aligns with the growing recognition of the need for holistic approaches to gerontological care. By incorporating socioeconomic factors into socio-theological gerontology, interventions and policies can address the multiple dimensions of well-being for older adults in sub-Saharan Africa.

Another determinant is social support and intergenerational relationships. Older adults who have strong social networks and meaningful relationships tend to have better mental and emotional well-being. Socio-theological gerontology can explore the role of religious and community organizations in fostering social connections and intergenerational solidarity, and recommend

interventions to strengthen these networks. In sub-Saharan Africa, informal social support systems, such as family and community networks, play a crucial role in providing care for older adults. These networks are often influenced by religious beliefs and values, with community members rallying around older adults during times of need. The socioeconomic context influences intergenerational relationships in sub-Saharan Africa. Economic challenges can strain family resources and impact the care and support that older adults receive from their families. Religious beliefs and values often shape expectations for intergenerational relationships and the roles of older adults within families and communities (Phaswana-Mafuya and Peltzer 2017, 1).

Furthermore, the study highlights that gender differences and functionality status among older people have an impact on their health and well-being. This finding aligns with previous studies that show elderly women are disadvantaged in various aspects of their lives compared to older men, often due to sociocultural contexts (Knodel and Ofstedal, 2003; Aboderin, 2004). The research identifies low socioeconomic status and poor living arrangements as negative determinants of successful aging and well-being. It is crucial to address these socioeconomic challenges through policy interventions and support systems. However, limited resources, including financial, human, and infrastructural, pose challenges to implementing effective socio-theological gerontological interventions. Ensuring equitable access to resources and services for older adults, particularly those in rural and remote areas, requires addressing socioeconomic disparities and strengthening healthcare and social support systems.

The study suggests that caregiving roles, particularly among elderly women, can lead to physical strain and impact mental wellness. Cultural expectations and caregiving responsibilities are often aligned, which can further affect the mental well-being of elderly individuals, especially in the context of HIV and AIDS (Nyirenda et al. 2013, 780; Ice et al. 2009, 712). Providing support and resources for caregivers, along with addressing the cultural norms and expectations, can improve the quality of life for elderly individuals.

Caregiving is associated with high financial costs, and many elderly caregivers in the study reported limited or no support from family, community, or religious institutions. HIV and AIDS have significant financial implications for the elderly, particularly those with low incomes. Addressing financial challenges and providing support for elderly caregivers can improve their quality of life. Moreover, promoting physical activity among the elderly can lead to increased independence, improved cognitive capability, enhanced social networks, and better overall well-being. Interventions should focus on facilitating physical activity that meets the real-world needs and health aspirations of the elderly (Campos et al. 2015, 580).

Policies and strategies aimed at improving the quality of life of elderly individuals should consider their social, cultural, physiological, and spiritual needs. A person-centered approach to care, involving families and considering individual desires, values, and circumstances, can promote independence, self-awareness, and effective care strategies. It is essential to treat elderly individuals as equal partners when planning, developing, and monitoring care services (The WHOQOL Group 1995, 1400).

Recognizing the inner strengths of elderly individuals, informed by their spirituality, can be an empowering catalyst. Understanding their life histories and using them to develop appropriate solutions, while also addressing self-destructive beliefs, is crucial. Interventions should aim to address the whole person, affirm strengths, and improve weaknesses. On the other hand, sub-Saharan Africa is culturally and religiously diverse, with a wide range of beliefs, practices, and value systems. It requires sensitivity and inclusivity to avoid marginalizing certain religious or cultural groups.

6 Conclusion

This article highlighted the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors and the aging process in sub-Saharan Africa. The findings underscore the importance of addressing the socioeconomic disparities and challenges faced by older individuals to promote their well-being and successful aging. The study reveals that socioeconomic factors such as income, education, and access to healthcare significantly influence the aging experience in Southern Africa. Poverty, limited educational opportunities, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure contribute to poorer health outcomes and reduced quality of life among older individuals. Additionally, the impact of HIV/AIDS further exacerbates these challenges, particularly among those already facing socioeconomic disadvantages.

Furthermore, the article highlights the role of socio-theological gerontology in understanding and addressing the spiritual and religious dimensions of aging in Southern Africa. Religion and spirituality play a significant role in the lives of older individuals in this region, providing them with sources of support, meaning, and resilience. Recognizing and incorporating these aspects into gerontological research and interventions can contribute to a more holistic and culturally sensitive approach to promoting successful aging. The study also emphasizes the importance of social support and intergenerational relationships in the aging process. Family and community networks play a crucial role in providing care and support for older individuals, particularly in the absence of robust social welfare systems. However, changing socioeconomic dynamics,

urbanization, and migration patterns pose challenges to these traditional support systems, necessitating the development of alternative mechanisms to ensure the well-being of older individuals. Addressing the socioeconomic determinants of successful aging in sub-Saharan Africa requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses interventions at the individual, community, and policy levels. This includes improving access to education, healthcare, and social protection programs for older individuals, as well as promoting inter-generational solidarity and supporting the role of religion and spirituality in their lives.

By adopting a socio-theological gerontological perspective, researchers and practitioners can better understand the unique challenges and strengths of older individuals in sub-Saharan Africa and develop contextually appropriate strategies to enhance their well-being and promote successful aging. Ultimately, such efforts can contribute to building more inclusive and equitable societies that value and support their aging populations.

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Research Ethics

In this study, ethical considerations were of utmost importance to safeguard the well-being and rights of the participants. The researcher provided comprehensive information about the study, enabling participants to make informed decisions about their involvement. Participants were assured of their freedom to withdraw at any time, with a commitment to respecting their decision and maintaining confidentiality by destroying their personal information in their presence. The study also took steps to minimize potential risks or discomfort for participants. Additionally, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Botswana institutional review board and ethics committee to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines and regulations. Confidentiality was a key focus, especially in AIDS-related research, with measures in place

to maintain anonymity, protect privacy, and obtain consent before disclosing any information. These ethical considerations aimed to prioritize participant rights, trust, and well-being throughout the research process.

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Religion and Development in Postcolonial Tanzania: Contested and Negotiated Terrain (1961–2022)

Research Article

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Abstract

In the 1960s, when Tanzania embarked on people-centered development initiatives under ujamaa, leaders of the newly independent government warned all religious organizations that they should not mix religion with politics to build a secular state. Accordingly, ujamaa grew into what critics described as anti-religious, and public discussion of ujamaa in religious terms was forbidden. Yet government leaders used religious meetings as integral podia to clarify policy statements and to seek Muslim and Christian support for its socialist programs. The place of religion in development gained momentum after the decline of ujamaa as people sought alternative paths to the predicaments of the economic crisis. This article weaves through Tanzania's post-colonial experience to show the place of religion in shaping development imperatives. It attempts to show how religion became a contested and negotiated terrain in the development discourses and more especially the rise of Pentecostalism as new contested terrain. Ultimately, the article seeks to demonstrate that an understanding of religion and development ought to consider the social context shaping the country's development path.

Keywords

religion – development – public sphere – Tanzania – ujamaa

1 Introduction

On Friday, April 17, 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the then President of the United Republic of Tanzania, the late President John Pombe Magufuli, called Tanzanians to turn to their respective religions as a preventive measure against the spread of the disease. He declared three days of prayer as the remedy to the dilemmas of the disease. He said, “Fellow Tanzanians, following the coronavirus pandemic, I urge you to use three days from April 17–19 (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) to pray to the Almighty Lord, who has power over everything to save us from this disease. Let us all pray, each in their faith, He [God] will listen” (*The Citizen* 2020). Unlike other countries that embarked on lockdown as a coping mechanism, the president ruled out the locking down of the country, thus allowing people to continue with their “daily economic activities” (*Daily News* 2021).

Although the country had recorded six new COVID-19 cases, the president asked Muslims and Christians to pray and fast in mosques and churches, insisting that “God has never forsaken *this nation*”. As a nation, said Magufuli, “we won it last year [2020] and graduated to middle-income status” and “that project’s implementation went on without imposing a lockdown” (*The Citizen* 2021). Religious leaders “exercised the moral responsibility” in the fight against the disease through prayer and fasting “putting God first” (*kumtanguliza Mungu*). The president insisted that “there are no other means except to humble ourselves before God” (*The Guardian* 2020a; *Nipashe* 2020). The president’s insistence that “our God is above Satan and he (Satan) will always fail” and that “all precautions be taken in line with prayers against the scourge” shows how the virus was linked to satanic works and that its aversion could only be possible through prayer (*Daily News* 2022). The emphasis on faith, prayer, and fasting corresponded with “local remedies” such as *nyungu* (steam inhalation) and scientific methods, including sanitizers and hand-washing, as part of the public arsenal in fighting the COVID-19 in urban and rural Tanzania (Mbago 2020; *Uhuru*, 2021).

The story of the government and religious response to the COVID-19 pandemic provides glimpses into the increased influence of religion on development in contemporary Tanzania. This article provides a historical account of the role of religion in development in postcolonial Tanzania. It shows that

while party and government leaders evoked people-centered development initiatives, the collapse of ujamaa in the 1980s left the country with an “ideological vacuum that could not adequately be filled by the market ideology” (Bakari and Ndumbaro 2006, 342). Religion consequently became a “contingent social resource and survival strategy” amidst the puzzles of the economic crisis (Lal 2010, 2). At the end, the article demonstrates that the mushrooming of Pentecostal churches and faith healing ministries has become an important force in terms of healing, prosperity, and poverty in twenty-first century rural and urban Tanzania.¹

The article, therefore, attempts to show how religion became a contested and negotiated terrain in the development discourses. It seeks to show that an understanding of religion and development ought to consider the social context shaping the country’s development path. Ultimately, the article seeks to put religion and development at the center of discourse by bringing the voices of leaders and Christians in selected churches, Pentecostal churches, and faith healing ministries of rural and urban Tanzania into a discussion with ujamaa, religion, and development.

2 Pentecostalism and Development in Tanzania

Ideas about religion, development, and Pentecostalism have attracted the attention of historians, anthropologists, and religious studies experts for more than two decades of knowledge production in Africa. Some studies centering on Pentecostal churches have examined the relationship between Pentecostalism, modernity, and neoliberalism, and the transnationalism of Pentecostalism

1 In weaving through the story of religion and development, I use “prosperity gospels” or “wealth and health” gospels from the definition provided by the Harvard Divinity School, whose doctrine emphasizes “believers’ abilities to transcend poverty and/or illness through devotion and positive confession” (<https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/faq/prosperity-gospel>). For Kate Bowler, prosperity gospel is an “extractive industry” linked to “faith and economy” where preachers and ministers use it to “extract tribute from others” (Bowler 2015, 630). I also use “spiritual healing” from the Cambridge Dictionary to mean the activity of making a person healthy without using medicines or other physical methods, and “spiritual healers” to encompass someone who tries to make a person healthy without using medicines or other physical methods. I use the concept of “ujamaa” as an African socialism developed in 1960s and 1970s Tanzania. I derive its meaning from its architect, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, who envisioned ujamaa to mean living together in a village, farming together, marketing together, and collaboratively sharing resources as a community. The concept also aimed at designating the roles of men and women within a broader conception of national familyhood (Nyerere 1969; Nyanto 2020).

(Maxwell 1998, 2005, 2006; Gifford 2004; Robbins 2004; Hasu 2012). While some studies have examined the role of songs in the discourses of prosperity theology and reinforcement consumerist and materialist culture among the urban youth (Gukurume 2018; Ajose 2020), others have demonstrated the interface between culture and exploitative rhetoric among African prosperity gospel ministers to argue that “[African] culture has significant influence on the exploitative power of prosperity gospel ministers” (Udechukwu 2021, 267). However, others have depicted the prosperity gospel as an “extractive industry” because it hinges on “faith and economy” to show ways in which preachers use the gospel to extract tribute from poor believers (Bowler 2015, 630).

In Tanzania, interest in religion, state, and politics has attracted the attention of scholarship to show how the adoption of multi-party politics in 1992 gave rise to influential Pentecostal preachers whose critical speeches to the government won the downtrodden (Ludwig 1996). Others, drawing examples from the Marian Faith Healing Ministry, show how the followers (*wanamaombi*) openly opposed corrupt government leaders and supported the opposition presidential candidate for the 1995 general election, Augustine Mrema, because he was against misuse of public properties, adultery, witchcraft, and lack of justice (Comoro and Sivalon 1999). The recent work by Derek Peterson provides insights into how revivalists created tensions with ethnic patriots, government, and local authorities in Kenya, Uganda, and north-western Tanganyika. It enables us to see religious conversion in another dimension: a religious belief, a way of self-expression, a new way of life, and a form of political and cultural criticism (Peterson 2012).

Although Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have become central to political agitation, they have been centers of divisions, tensions, and cessations. For instance, some studies exhibit how the politics and skirmishes within the Tanzania Assemblies of God mounted tensions between its leaders, Moses Kulola and Emmanuel Lazaro, leading to the formation of the new Evangelical Assemblies of God Tanzania under Moses Kulola (Mlahagwa 1999). Other studies drawing examples from established churches show that the rifts between Father Felician Venant Nkwera and the Dar es Salaam Catholic Archbishop Polycarp Pengo (later Cardinal) led to the dismissal of Fr. Nkwera from the Catholic Church. He formed an independent healing ministry with his followers – the Marian Faith Healing Ministry – which continues to perform healing services and exorcisms to date (Comoro and Sivalon 1999; Wilkens 2011).

The concentration of research has caused uneven coverage of Pentecostalism in East Africa, as studies seem to limit inquiries to urban Tanzania (Hasu 2012). Besides healing services, studies depict Pentecostal churches and healing

ministries as catalysts for social development to show how “the Pentecostal ethic most clearly supports the spirit of development” (Freeman 2012, 22). Preachers’ commitment to social services, particularly hospitals, radio, television, and schools, aims “to educate the new generation of saved leaders and to stimulate religious and social development” (ibid., 73–74). For Pentecostal preachers, studies show that poverty is not a will of God, and neither is it sinful to become wealthy because born-again Christians deserve to become both healthy and wealthy to satisfy their needs and contribute to the ministries (Hasu 2006).

The dominance of scholarship on Pentecostalism for the past three decades of knowledge production has attracted studies on the relationship between Pentecostalism and development to show the contribution of Pentecostal churches and faith healing ministries to poverty alleviation and the socio-economic positions of adherents (Dilger 2007; Hasu 2012; Lindhardt 2010). Some studies have widened the horizons of academic inquiry by looking into places of Pentecostal churches in reinforcing social transformation, gendered transformation, and women empowerment in society (cf. Freeman 2012; Parsitau 2012).

The theme of urban Pentecostalism and social development has also gained momentum among social and medical anthropologists to examine Pentecostalism as a social development tool in response to social and moral challenges (Dilger 2007). Despite these achievements of Pentecostal churches, studies show that schools, health centers, mobile clinics, and other social services are part of the process of making and remaking social, spiritual, and “urban space” because they contribute to the making of new institutional infrastructure in both the city and surrounding areas (Dilger 2013, 6). Further, studies demonstrate that the entanglements of faith, morality, and the education market in Tanzania have raised Christian and Muslim schools to prominence in the public sphere and among parents as important targets of the quest for the “good life” which entails among others a happy and prosperous life with a decent job (Dilger 2022, 1).

3 Sources and Methods

To tell the story of religion and development, I rely on primary and secondary sources deposited in the archives and libraries in Tanzania. At the University of Dar es Salaam, I read *The Nationalist*, *Uhuru*, and *Tanganyika Standard* newspapers, which covered stories about Tanzania’s ujamaa, the Arusha Declaration, and responses from politicians and citizens in rural and urban Tanzania. The

contemporary newspapers *The Citizen*, *Daily News*, *Uhuru*, and *The Guardian* reported the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic to show how prayer, fasting, and herbal medicine gained momentum as remedies to the pandemic.

I also consulted various articles and booklets from the Arise and Shine Ministry under Boniphace Mwamposa (alias Bulldozer) and the Marian Faith Healing Ministry under Fr. Felician Venant Nkwera, both in Dar es Salaam. The newspapers from the Arise and Shine Ministry include “*Badilisha Lugha Yako*” (Change Your Language), “*Kutanishwa na Watu Sahihi*” (Meet the Right People), “*Kila Tatizo Litazaa Faida*” (Every Problem Will Yield Benefits), “*Baraka*” (Blessings), “*Kuhamia Level*” (To Move to the Next Level), “*Nguvu Ya Shukrani*” (The Power of Thanksgiving), and “*Kutoka*” (Exodus). These newspapers contained a section, “*Nguvu ya Shukrani*” (The Power of Thanksgiving), which presents testimonies on faith healing among believers from far and wide to show the influence of religion on healing, health, and development in the public sphere. They demonstrate how religion has transformed people’s lives from witchcraft, diseases, and poverty to prosperity in business, health, work and employment, and service to the community.

The Marian Faith Healing Ministry workers provided me with access to booklets and Fr. Nkwera’s special pamphlets, including “*Kanisa, Msikiti, and Serikali: Toba Rabi! Ukimwi na Rushwa*” (The Church, Mosque, Government: Repentance! HIV/AIDS and Corruption), which is about penitential as a remedy to diseases including HIV/AIDS. The second publication, “Request: A National Day of Repentance,” calls for a national day of repentance to heal the nation from diseases, calamities, and epidemics, including the COVID-19 pandemic. These readings call for individual and national penitence, suggesting no solutions to the problem besides penitence, prayers, and moral adherence (Nkwera 2020a: 12, Nkwera 2020b: 2). I had access to reports and speeches deposited in the Chama cha Mapinduzi Archives (CCM) in Dodoma and the Archives of the Archdiocese of Tabora in Tabora town. They included reports, policies, Julius Nyerere’s speeches, and party documents of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU). The documents provide useful hints into understanding of faith, development, and the role of socialism in nation-building.

At Tabora, reports and missionary correspondence about creating Christian communities provided insights into the principles of ujamaa villagization. Central to the Christian communities were the developmental projects that Christians established to help them address the challenges arising in the communities. Other documents included directives on establishing Small Christian Communities in villages and a case study of Ntobeye Christian Community in northwestern Tanzania. I supplemented the information from libraries and

archives with oral history research where I held interviews with members of Pentecostal churches and faith healing ministries in Dar es Salaam. They included men and women who joined Pentecostal churches and faith healing ministries between the 1980s and 2019. Their voices provided me with useful insights into the experiences of becoming born-again Christians and the varied perceptions on religion and development in the everyday lives of members in Tanzania.

This study uses a historical approach as an analytic category to contribute to the existing scholarship on religion and development. It weaves through Tanzania's postcolonial experience to show the place of religion in shaping development imperatives and, as mentioned above, attempts to show how religion became a contested and negotiated terrain in the development discourses.

4 Ujamaa as Faith: Secularization, Nation Building, and Rural Development

The independence of Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1961 and 1964 necessitated the countries to rethink their development strategies. Between 1961 and 1966, the Tanzanian government struggled to develop the country within the inherited liberal development model. It set in motion the development plans of 1961–1964 and 1964–1969 that emphasized “improvement” and “transformation” approaches for agricultural development and private-investment-driven industrialization (IBRD 1961). The failure of the newly independent country to attract the private investment it had anticipated encouraged the ruling party (TANU) to reconsider its development strategy. Hence, President Julius Nyerere and TANU leaders embarked on a people-centered approach to development to rid the country of the vestiges of colonialism and the “three enemies of development,” namely poverty, ignorance, and disease (Kuhanga n.d.). The campaign against the enemies of development was central to Nyerere's launching of the Arusha Declaration in 1967 that enunciated the policy of ujamaa and self-reliance as a rural development strategy where people would live together, farm together, look for markets together, and communally share the acquired resources (Aminzade 2013; Nyerere 1969; Pratt 1976). Communal production and ownership of resources corresponded to equality, freedom, democracy, and secularism as basic tenets of Nyerere's ujamaa (TANU 1967; Magoti 2014).

Because the government adopted the declaration as a model for development, it became a “faith” (*imani*) and “it had to be built by people who believe in it and abide by its principles” (TANU 1967). A true member insisted the declaration “[had to be] a true socialist” and that his/her socialist colleagues, who are also believers of this faith, “include everyone who fights for the rights of

farmers and workers in Africa and the world at large" (TANU 1967, 8). These tenets and many others, which corresponded to the policy of socialism and self-reliance, insisted the document, "depend on leaders because ujamaa is faith and it is difficult for leaders to build the policy of socialism if they do not conform to its faith" (ibid.). For Nyerere, collective faith was important in ridding the country of "the problems they had inherited" and that leaders had to conform to the "faith of ujamaa" and its basic pillars of equality and human dignity (CCM 2022a, 46).

That ujamaa had become a prerequisite for the faith and heart of the nation (*imani na moyo wa taifa*) and not "Sunday tithes" (*zaka za Jumapili*) meant that Tanzania ideally had to become a secular state (CCM 2022b, 127; Kavazi la Mwalimu Nyerere 2018). Julius Kambarage Nyerere and TANU nationalist leaders envisioned Tanzania as a secular state and that under ujamaa, citizens were bound to fulfil their obligations to society. Thus, the government attached no importance to the numerical strength of any sect or religious community, nor did it submit to religious communities' demands irrespective of their influence. Although the state and the ruling party did not have religion, nor did they favor a particular religion, they fully guaranteed and respected the right and freedom of people to a religion that best fits their aspirations (Shivji 2020). The government used religious festivals and inter-religious meetings as integral podia to clarify its attitudes toward religion in society, to make policy statements, and to seek Muslim and Christian support for its socialist programs (Yusuf 1990).

Shivji (2020) says Nyerere's focus on secularism was hinged on two factors. First, the predominance of Muslim Waswahili from the coast, who initiated him into active politics and was brought up with non-secular education and Swahili culture. They were instrumental in founding political organizations, including the African Association, which later became the Tanganyika African Association. Secondly, Nyerere feared the disparity in education between Muslims and Christians, "if politicized, would become divisive, threatening his nation-building project" (Shivji 2020, 52). Cognizant of Muslims lagging in secular education, Shivji argued that the Muslim elite in the party also "dared not raise it for the fear that they would be accused of mixing politics with religion" (ibid.). The result of the declaration of Tanzania as a secular state is that it relegated religion to the margins of the preoccupations of government and party leaders. Instead, they were only obliged to tell the people about ujamaa and social relations in the country (Nyerere 1970).

Nyerere's emphasis on secularism, writes Evaristi Magoti, was rooted in four principles. Firstly, the principle suited the Tanzanian multiple religious contexts and that authorization of one religious view "would automatically

have put the state at loggerheads with other religious views” (Magoti 2014, 159). Secondly, Nyerere espoused the aspiration that Tanzanian society should shape itself on “the principle of social democracy, a political philosophy that centers on secularism” (ibid., 159–160). Thirdly, because ujamaa coincided with Cold War politics during a time that the USA and USSR struggled to exert their influence in Africa, Nyerere’s adoption of the principle of secularism was imperative in demonstrating to the Western powers that “ujamaa was non-aligned, it was neither capitalist nor communist and that it [had] incorporated elements of both East and West” (ibid., 160). Lastly, the adoption of the principle of secularism aimed at regulating relations between the state and religions through its four main principles of separation, neutrality, freedom, and tolerance (ibid.).

In his speech to the interreligious seminar in Tabora, Nyerere fervently stated that neither the country nor TANU had a religion, but acknowledged that people were undoubtedly religious. He said, “Our country does not have religion [but] our people have religion. Some do have, and others do not have ... I am Catholic, but it neither belongs to Tanzanians nor the government nor CCM” (Nyerere 1995; CCM 2022b, 401). Consequently, Nyerere’s emphasis on secularism reduced religion to the “apolitical sphere,” and religious debates were strictly forbidden in the political discourse (Westerlund 1980, 57–58). It is no wonder that when Sheikh Takadir wanted to know about the number of Muslim candidates in the election, TANU immediately expelled him. Furthermore, in March 1963, TANU’s National Executive Council disbanded the Elders Council (*Baraza la Wazee*) “for allegedly mixing politics with religion” (Shivji 2020, 54). To resolve the problem, the National Executive Council formed a committee with some influential Muslims in the government, launching a countrywide campaign against mixing religion with politics, which, as Shivji notes, “was primarily aimed at Muslim agitation” (ibid.).

In his essays on *Freedom and Socialism*, Nyerere hinted at the role of ujamaa, arguing that “socialism is concerned with man’s life in this society” and that “organization of life on earth” was its central concern (Nyerere 1969, 12). That ujamaa centered on people’s lives and organization in society seemed to suggest that it “[did] not involve any supposition about life elsewhere or about man’s soul or the procedure for fulfilling the will of God or gods” (ibid.). Nyerere’s perspective on religious beliefs in building socialist Tanzania suggested that its organization of society and life on earth did not necessarily require religious beliefs. Unsurprisingly, in his writings and speeches about Tanzania’s ujamaa, he made no reference to God in the organization of society. A subsequent result of this was that religious beliefs played no part in the

running of the government or the formulation, articulation, and implementation of ujamaa policies (Magoti 2014).

While government and party leaders claimed to have no religion, “the doors [of the government and party] were wide open for many religious leaders” and that “whatever issues they had to discuss with the local, district, regional and national government and party leaders, including the President, they were warmly welcomed” (Bakari and Ndumbaro 2006, 341). That the doors were open to religious leaders to discuss with party and government at all levels accounts for why researchers of state–religion relations in Tanzania have argued that the relations between the state and religions and Christian–Muslim relations had been harmonious during ujamaa (*ibid.*). Cuthbert Omari explains that ujamaa favored the development of a “united secular state” and that leaders struggled to promote unity and eliminate divisions among the people (Omari 1984, 373). The ethos of unity, love, respect for one another, and sharing the basic necessities of life shaped the way Christians and Muslims related in ujamaa villages (Ludwig 1996).

In meeting the country’s aspirations for people-centered development initiatives, Protestant and Catholic churches embarked on a “faith and development” approach to “securing acceptance in local communities for state’s policies” (Jennings 2008, 65–66; Hasu 2012, 69). Faith-based organizations (both Islamic and Christian) became important facets of meeting the country’s development agenda because, unlike secular organizations, writes Jennings, they “were less vulnerable to government’s attempts to impose greater controls and restrictions on their activities” (Jennings 2008, 65). Church leaders allied their internal development agenda to the government’s people–development paradigm because they had “a willing acceptance of ujamaa ideology and the right of the state to direct development” (*ibid.*, 66). Subsequently, faith-based organizations acted as “instruments of the state” in channeling foreign aid to development programs in rural and urban Tanzania (*ibid.*).

Efforts to promote “faith and development” imperatives began in the mid-1960s, with Catholics and Protestants taking the lead in developmental projects which directly impacted the everyday lives of the people in urban and rural Tanzania. In 1971, the Tanzania Episcopal Conference centralized all developmental projects under Caritas – as its “economic wing” to coordinate charitable as well as social development activities in the dioceses of Tanzania “to ensure that its efforts were unified and coordinated in response to the needs of the nation” (Jennings 2008, 70). Its activities included empowering communities to improve their living conditions through equality between men and women, development programs, emergency relief, humanitarian assistance, and skill training to promote income-generating activities (Caritas n.d., Phillips 2013). Similarly, the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT), established

in 1964, became “the central authority of development projects of the main protestant churches” because it was duty-bound to facilitate and coordinate “networking [among member churches – Anglican, Lutheran, Mennonite, and Moravian], advocacy and socio-economic development for the benefit of the community” (Jennings 2008, 69; see also Hasu 2012, 70). In 1972, the CCT prepared a five-year development plan alongside the state’s. By 1975, the CCT had extended its control of development projects among Protestant churches following the establishment of a national CCT development program and the CCT Standing Committee (Jennings 2008, 69).

Amid the ujamaa, Christians also carved out a separate sphere of moral reform. Experience from the Catholic Church shows how Christian communities carved out a separate space of moral reform and regulation beyond the spheres of ujamaa, state authority, and global discourses at play in 1960s and 1970s Tanzania. In the Catholic archdiocese of Tabora in western Tanzania, Small Christian Communities began in 1972 at Tabora, Kaliua, Urambo, Makokola, and Ipuli parishes where family members living on one street invariably met to pray, sing, and discuss religious and social affairs (AAT Box 325 fol.013, 1976; Nyanto 2020). Of course, the adoption of cell-like Small Christian Communities paralleled the influence of the ten-cell structure and decentralization in ujamaa villages. The group spirit of working and sharing resources that had dominated everyday life in ujamaa villages inspired families to establish developmental projects to help them address the challenges arising in the communities (AAT Box 325 fol.013, June 6–29, 1978).

In northwestern Tanzania, Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, Ordinary of Rulenge Catholic diocese, was nicknamed the “Ujamaa Bishop” because he was central to the creation of Christian communities that reflected the principles of ujamaa villagization (Healey 1981, 16). His involvement in the ujamaa villages and his model of Complementary Christian Communities (*Jumuiya za Mkamilishano*) or “Bishop’s communities” (*Jumuiya za Askofu*) formed the basis for the establishment of Small Christian Communities in Tanzania. The bishop often lived to the principles of ujamaa and translated them into his daily interaction with Christians in the villages (ibid.). At Ntobeye Christian Community of Buhororo Parish – where two American Maryknoll Sisters lived in the community and shared the everyday village life the ideals of ujamaa dominated the public sphere under the vehicle of “Ntobeye gospel sharing group,” “small neighborhood groups,” and “integration of Christians into the village community” (AAT Box 325 fol. 013, July 1976). Eventually, Ntobeye was registered as an ujamaa village in 1971 and other developments such as running water, a primary school, a teacher’s house, a staffed dispensary, a cooperative shop, and a storehouse followed with government assistance and cooperation with villagers (ibid.).

5 Crisis of Ujamaa, Ideological Vacuum, and the Rise of Pentecostalism in Tanzania

Although ujamaa succeeded in reinforcing people-centered development programs, a series of economic impasses between the 1970s and 1980s, which unfolded in various ways, became “the first test to Tanzania as an independent nation” (Kahama, Maliyamkono, and Wells 1986, 40). Poor weather conditions in the early 1970s rendered the country prone to drought. As such, agricultural produce declined, and the harvest obtained could not sustain the needs. The 1973/1974 increase in the price of oil and food imports was “a hard blow” to the country because the total cost of oil imports increased to 10 per cent while food imports rose from USD 5 million between 1971 and 1973 to USD 80 million in 1979 (Svendsen 1986, 66).

The Kagera War of 1978/1979 also halted the economy as it disrupted agricultural production, caused hardships and psychological problems, destroyed properties in the Kagera salient, disrupted transport services, increased the import of military equipment and fuel, and increased defense spending, amounting to USD 1.85 million (Havnevik 1993; Mabati 2016). Adding still more complexity with regards to the economy, the disintegration of the East African Community in 1977 called for the government to set a new administrative structure for civil aviation, harbor administration, railways, and services for post and telecommunication, which had previously been spread out among member states. These unplanned structures caught the government unprepared in its budget and accounted for “the high share of external borrowing and aid in the financing of imports” between 1976 and 1978, leading to an external deficit of USD 675 million (Svendsen 1986, 62).

These economic predicaments meant that ujamaa could not be sustained as a model for development. Instead, structural adjustment policies linking development aid to reduced government spending, privatization, and market liberalization seemed ideal in setting socio-economic changes in motion (Hasu 2012). Despite the new reforms, the collapse of the ideology of ujamaa and its welfare policies (socialism and self-reliance and socialism and rural development), which had appealed to the majority poor, left “an ideological vacuum that could not adequately be filled by the market ideology” (Bakari and Ndumbaro 2006, 342). The absence of a “national value system” that could “put the community at the center” accounted for socioeconomic problems in Tanzania because the new market ideology and practice “could not sustain the egalitarian values, attitudes and behavior” that existed during ujamaa (*ibid.*). Further, the structural adjustment programs, despite their efforts in grappling with poverty, write Hasu (2012) and Dilger (2007), made life in both rural and

urban Tanzania untenable because of the rise in living costs and increasing impoverishment, stagnation of workers' salaries, increase in rural–urban migration to make ends meet, and decreasing informal employment opportunities in urban Tanzania that exerted pressure on women to engage in income-generating activities.

While ujamaa had by the 1980s declined as a viable people-centered development strategy, it had helped spread Pentecostal churches in ujamaa villages. The many villages established in rural Tanzania increased the demand for preachers and evangelists, and it was, therefore, easy for Pentecostal preachers to penetrate villages that had hitherto been under mainstream churches because their message of hope, unity, and personal holiness and salvation appealed to villagers (Ludwig 1996). Although mainstream Catholic and Protestant churches were less flexible in matching with the villagization program, enforced mobility through operation villages (*operesheni vijiji*) encouraged the growth of Christianity in villages beyond missions through the work of teachers and evangelists (Nyanto 2022). The collapse of ujamaa inspired Charismatic preachers to use the ideological and economic vacuum to hold sermons about eternal peace, prosperity, and deliverance that caught the attention of the poor and marginalized communities. Women, as the down-beaten, were adversely affected by the crisis and structural adjustment programs and found it important to join Pentecostal and Charismatic movements as a solution to their socioeconomic predicaments (Ludwig 1996; Comoro and Sivalon 1999; Hasu 2012).

Beginning in the mid-1970s, crusade evangelism provided grounds for the rise of a ministry based on the operational principles of the first New Testament church, as shown in the Book of Acts of Apostles, especially the first four chapters, which center on the power of the Holy Spirit and spiritual healing (Acts 1:8; 2:14–36; 3:9; 4:4). Edmund John, a lay Anglican in Dar es Salaam, emerged as a powerful preacher in the city, preaching for the return of Jesus Christ. In due course, his movement became interdenominational, involving “born-again” Christians from various denominations, and assumed a new dimension of evangelization that manifested in the House-to-House Evangelical Prayer and Ministry (*Huduma ya Uinjilisti na Maombi Nyumba kwa Nyumba*). The house-to-house ministry attracted people, especially the socially marginalized, to the revival movement. In 1986, as the spirit of revivalism had become an important force in Dar es Salaam and its vicinity, born-again Christians organized the November Crusade that recorded hundreds of people delivered from “diseases and demonic bondage,” which seems to suggest that people had increasingly turned to spiritual healing as a remedy to socioeconomic and spiritual quandaries amid the ideological vacuum (Mlahagwa 1999, 302).

By the mid-1980s, the influence of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity had spread in urban and rural Tanzania, attracting adherents from far and wide and from mainstream churches. Open-air meetings under the umbrella of the “Big November Crusade Ministries” took place in Dar es Salaam and surrounding suburbs (Mlahagwa 1999, 302). Because the crusade was organized by representatives of the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, the Anglican Church, and several other churches in the city, it attracted Christians from the city and its environs, becoming an important avenue for spiritual healing, salvation, and socioeconomic changes (Ludwig 1996). In due course, Dar es Salaam became a center of Charismatic Christianity, attracting international preachers, including the German preacher Reinhard Bonnke, to crusade evangelism. By 1991, the influence of the Big November Crusade had spread to twelve regions of Tanzania, with Christians organizing “crusades” in towns and centers (*ibid.*).

That revivalism engaged socioeconomic tight spots arising after the collapse of ujamaa informed the idioms of health, healing, and development. Capitalizing on people’s socioeconomic problems, preachers in Dar es Salaam and towns which had gained the influence of revivalism used crusade ministries as podia to weave through the message of spiritual healing and hope to the demoralized in society. Preachers such as Christopher Mwakasege, Emmanuel Mbwambo, and Zakary Kakobe emerged as eloquent preachers in the revival movement and organized fellowships and offered deliverance from diseases and demonic servitude (Mlahagwa 1999). Although Mbwambo and Kakobe established their ministries, Mwakasege operated within his Lutheran church. He founded his Mana Ministry and emerged as one of the Charismatic preachers in Tanzania whose ministry has become a household name in urban Tanzania (*ibid.*).

Other ministries which were equally strong in the revival movement included the East African Evangelistic Enterprise under the leadership of Festo Kivengere and later Bishop Graceford Chitemo, the Tanzanian Fellowship of Evangelical Students, and Campus Crusade for Christ (alias Life Ministry), whose impact on changing the lives of youth was widely acknowledged in higher learning institutions and colleges (*ibid.*). By the mid-1990s and early 2000s, faith healing ministries had risen to prominence, attracting adherents of diverse religious and social backgrounds to make it the fastest-growing movement in the country. Cities and towns such as Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Arusha, Kigoma, Moshi, Tabora, Mbeya, Morogoro, Mwanza, Shinyanga, and Iringa became centers of Pentecostal and Charismatic healing ministries and crusade evangelism (Hasu 2006).

6 Prosperity Gospels, Economy of Heaven, and Faith Healing in Tanzania

The adoption of a neoliberal market economy inspired the development of what has been referred to as “prosperity gospels” or “wealth and health” gospels that became the central message of preachers as solutions to socio-economic problems (Coleman 2000; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Hasu 2012, 67). In the early 2000s, following the mushrooming of faith healing ministries, the idioms of “prosperity,” “heavenly richness,” and “heavenly investment” dominated the sermons of preachers in urban and rural Tanzania (Hasu 2006, 679). Eventually, faith healing gained the support of people from far and wide because its preachers took to task the doctrines of prosperity as a means of “enabling adherents to make the best of rapid social change” to prevent its followers from “falling into extreme poverty and destitution” (Hasu 2012, 70).

The Mana Ministry under Christopher Mwakasege and the Arise and Shine Ministry under Boniface Mwamposa (alias Bulldozer) epitomize the interface between “prosperity gospels and enchanted worldviews” that have shaped the “theological discourses of development, empowerment and agency” in urban Tanzania (Hasu 2012, 71). Mwakasege’s ministry operating within the Lutheran church and New Life in Christ holds seminars in Dar es Salaam, Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Kilombero, Dodoma, and Tabora, attracting people across denominations and socioeconomic backgrounds. His teaching that “it is not God’s will that we are poor” inspires believers to get rid of “poverty” at the expense of the “economy of heaven” and “heavenly banking.” The rhetoric of the “economy of heaven” is built on the assumption that “it is the right of every Christian to give contributions to God at his meetings to receive a hundred-fold” call for donations from his followers in anticipation of returns in their spiritual and material life experience (Hasu 2006, 682; 687).

The discourse against poverty has also been evident in the testimonies of Christians at the Arise and Shine Ministry under Mwamposa. It is no wonder to find that testaments such as “*azidiwa na wateja baada ya upako*” (she/he is overwhelmed by customers after anointment), “*Biashara yangu imeinuka na kuangaza baada ya upako*” (my business has thrived after anointment), and “*nilipigwa sana kiuchumi ... baada ya maombi ya mtume nimepona*” (I was economically hit ... I am healed by the prayer of the God’s servant) dominate the everyday services at the ministry to show ways in which the urban residents in Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Zanzibar, and Kilimanjaro have turned to faith healing amid the economic conundrums (Arise and Shine 2022a; 2022b). The ministry also launched the “spiritual checkup” and “women’s clinic” for expecting women and for other issues regarding the reproductive organs. The increasing cases of women attending the spiritual checkup indicate how the doctrines of

Genesis about creation and birth have impacted discourses of reproduction and related problems (Arise and Shine 2022a; cf. Genesis 1:27, 3:15, and 4:1).

Furthermore, some long-standing diseases have also become part and parcel of the discourses on modernity and globalization, including HIV/AIDS, which has come to be known as a “modern disease” (*ugonjwa wa kisasa*) (Dilger 2007, 60–80). The claim of Bishop Kakobe of the Full Gospel Bible Fellowship that he had God’s ability to cure HIV/AIDS and other untreatable diseases caused by evil spirits (*pepo wachafu*) increased hope to the afflicted, and resulted in many turning their attention to the ministry in search of miraculous healing (Dilger 2007). Linked to this was the notion that the reason for physical, social, economic, or emotional stress was “divine punishment for sinfulness” and “lack of faith and demonic influence” (Nkwera 2003a, 3; 2003b, 27; Wilkens 2009, 302).

In the Marian Faith Healing Ministry, the persistence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is thought to be a “divine punishment for sinfulness” because moral decline constitutes one of the “symptoms of the disease.” Increased sexual promiscuity and corruption are the “biggest evils” of contemporary society and lead to retribution (Nkwera 2003a, 27). Fr. Nkwera, leader and founder of the ministry, believes that biomedicine cannot contain the problem of sinfulness but the only treatment for HIV/AIDS is penance through “a national day for repentance” for people to ask for “God’s mercy” (Nkwera 2003b, 3–5). Nkwera’s call for individual and national repentance suggests no routes to the problem besides penitence, vigilant prayers, and moral adherence.

Nkwera’s call for penitential measures further suggests three issues as coping strategies to get rid of HIV/AIDS predicaments. First and foremost, people ought to know that the solutions to the problem are beyond human imagination. Secondly, HIV/AIDS is attributed to increased moral decadence. And thirdly, it is blasphemous, in Nkwera’s view, to assume that AIDS is “an accident at work” (*ajali kazini*); instead “[it] is God’s punishment” (Nkwera 2003b, 3–5). As a strategy and cure for AIDS, Nkwera urges his followers and society to cease fornication, observe the Ten Commandments, and live decent lives (Nkwera 2003a; 2003b). He encourages his followers to treat their bodies as “temples of the Holy Spirit” to echo Paul’s insistence to the Corinthians in grappling with the moral conundrum of the disease (Nkwera 2003b, 28; 1 Corinthians 6:19).

7 Faith and Development: COVID-19 Pandemic and Spiritual Healing

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic affected the economy and social life in urban and rural Tanzania. The majority, especially women who

lived hand to mouth, were adversely affected (*The Guardian* 2020b). Statements like “*tumtangulize Mungu*” (let us put God first), “*nchi iko salama*” (the country is in safe hands), “*Mungu ndiyo jibu la kila kitu*” (God is an answer to everything), “*Mungu ndiye mshindi wa kila kitu*” (God is the winner of everything), “*Mungu yuko pamoja na Watanzania*” (God is with Tanzanians), “*tuchape kazi*” (let us work hard), and “*tutaishinda corona*” (we will defeat Covid) dominated idioms of work and faith during the pandemic (*Mwananchi* 2021). The then president of the United Republic of Tanzania, Dr. John Magufuli, orchestrated the idioms between faith, COVID-19, and development in two ways. First, he warned the Ministry of Health against rushing to acquire vaccines for the COVID-19 pandemic without verifying their efficacy. He also ruled out the government’s imposition of a lockdown on the country, thus allowing people to continue their daily economic activities. Secondly, the president also called upon Tanzanians to be firm and continue praying to God while taking precautions against the pandemic, as issued by health experts. He insisted that “the country has stayed for almost a year without the virus, our God is above Satan, and he (Satan) will always fail” (*Daily News* 2021).

For the president, imposing a lockdown would have plunged the country into a severe food shortage because it would have deprived the people of the means to harness the rains for agriculture. Amid the anxiety and fear which had engulfed the public, Magufuli ardently made it clear that “I do not expect that I will impose a lockdown” (*sitgemei kutangaza hata siku moja kwamba tunajifungia ndani*) because “our God is alive and continues to protect us [from Covid]” (*Mungu wetu yupo hai na anaendelea kutulinda*). Instead, people ought to *work hard* while taking necessary precautions (*Mwananchi* 2021). The president also had a firm conviction of people’s ingenuity over alternative healing methods, including steam inhalation from medicinal plants (*Mwananchi* 2021). While steam inhalation had a relatively less scientific explanation for treating the COVID-19 pandemic, the public switched between indigenous therapeutics and Western vaccines (Feierman 2000, 317–344).

No sooner had the idioms of faith and development and alternative healing become household names in urban and rural Tanzania than some pastors in some healing ministries emerged, claiming to have spiritual and medicinal power to save people from the pandemic. The claim over spiritual powers surfaced early in March 2020 when two pastors based in Arusha, Daudi Mashimo of Apostles in Tanzania Church (*Kanisa la Mitume na Manabii Tanzania*) and Moses Ibrahim, leader of Church of Service and God’s Word (*Huduma ya Neno la Mungu na Maombi*), used the pandemic to take advantage of people’s spiritual quandaries over the COVID-19 pandemic (Zomboko 2020). By contrast, the Marian Faith Healing Ministry based in Dar es Salaam associated

the outbreak with “increasing immorality and sinfulness” (Nkwera 2020a, 12). Like HIV/AIDS, Nkwera believed that “Covid [would] be cured by prayer, offerings, and repentance” (*corona itaondoka kwa sala, sadaka na kutubu*). He called people to repent and turn their ways to God “with a heart of repentance” (Nkwera 2020b, 2). Thus, on Tuesday, May 5, 2020, Fr. Nkwera and his followers organized a prayer crusade pleading to “Jesus the Great Physician” to save the country from the pandemic. The prayer crusade had two objectives: a call for contrition to save Tanzania from the threat of COVID-19 and the Marian Faith Healing Ministry to “recognize their evils, heal corona patients, [and] pray for peace in Tanzania” (Nkwera 2020b, 12).

That prayer crusade became dominant in faith healing ministries in urban Tanzania, and the quest for therapy inspired established churches and Muslims to call for prayer, repentance, and fasting as a spiritual remedy to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Dar es Salaam, the Archbishop of the Dar es Salaam Catholic Archdiocese, Jude Thaddeus Ruwa'ichi (OFM. Cap), called the faithful to repentance over COVID-19. He claimed that the virus “had become a threat” (*janga la kutisha*) and that people should “turn to God for repentance and prayer” (*Mtanzania* 2020). Similarly, the National Muslim Council of Tanzania in its observance of the month of Shaaban, called its believers for three days of regret because it believed that “God would stand with [them]” (Mwananchi Digital 2020). The claim that God would stand with them corresponds to the story of the Ninevites, living in a city north of Babylon, who prayed and fasted for three days, dressed in sackcloth and sitting in ashes to save themselves and their city from God’s fierce anger (Jonah 3:1–10).

8 Religion and Development: Different Voices and Aspirations of Born-Again Christians

The interviews collected among born-again Christians in Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Tabora unveil the different voices, aspirations, and interpretations on the place of religion and personal development, be it spiritual or socioeconomic change. In Mwanza, Innocent Makanza said that “excessive drinking made me live bad lives” (*ulevi ulinifanya niishi maisha mabaya*) and that in 1985 “I heard homilies that Jesus heals and transforms sinful lives” (interview, Innocent Makanza, January 6, 2024). Becoming a born-again Christian changed his life because he left his teaching position to become pastor of the Free Pentecostal Church of Tanzania, and was later promoted to bishop. As bishop, said Makanza, “I stopped drinking” (*niliacha kunywa pombe*), “my salary has increased” (*mshahara wangu umeongezeka*), and “I have bought a car

and a farm and built a house" (*nimenunua shamba, gari, nimejenga nyumba*) (ibid.). By contrast, Paulina Makanza and Ester Kimenyi became born-again Christians due to spiritual healing, testifying that "the devil ill-treated me a lot" (*shetani alinionea sana*) (interview, Paulina Makanza, Nyakato-Mwanza, January 6, 2024).

These testimonies indicate that many born-again Christians joined faith healing ministries because they acknowledged that becoming born-again Christians (*kuokoka*) helped them transform from "bad lives" (*maisha mabaya*) to "better lives" (*maisha mazuri*), and reinstated new "lives of hope and development" (*maisha ya matumaini na maendeleo*) (interview, Gilbert, January 8, 2024). Some testified that employment, business, and promotion in work have increased since they were saved and that "developments are evident and are visible every day" (*maendeleo yapo na yanaonekana kila leo*) (interview, [John*²] Christopher, January 10, 2024). Christians who claim that being saved entails transformation of both body and soul thought that "spiritual development reinforces transformation of the body" (*maendeleo ya kiroho hupelekea mabadiliko ya mwili*), which implies socioeconomic change of an individual Christian (ibid.; interview, John Nunda, Phinias Munyamunya, Asnat Joseph*, and Joseph Fadi, January 10, 2024; Sharaza Yohana and Erica Edward Makala, January 12, 2024).

Some Christians became born-again because of "the behaviors of other born-again Christians" (*mienendo ya watu waliokoka*) and that their decision changed completely their lives. We learn from Rogers Kimenyi that becoming a born-again Christian earned him the trust of the people, leading to employment because "people would look for you because of your behavior" (*watu watakutafuta kwa sababu ya tabia yako*) and "my boss raised my salary" because of his trustworthiness and hard work (interview, Rogers and Annastazia Kimenyi, January 8, 2024). That trust allowed him to earn money, which enabled him to own hardware and receive "many customers" (*wateja wengi*) because "God brings them" (*wanaletwa na Mungu*) (ibid.). Similarly, Meshack Richard's testimony shows that his economic situation changed in 2018 when he was saved as he gained a decent job as a marketing officer, a position which elevated him from a nursery school teacher (interview, Meshack Richard, January 10, 2024).

The claim from Rogers Kimenyi that customers are "brought by God" and Meshack Richard's assertion that "I am sure of getting three million per month" (*nina uhakika wa kupata milioni tatu kwa mwezi*) exhibit the idioms of the transformations of the socioeconomic aspects of believers who attribute their

2 *The name is adopted as a pseudonym because the respondent did not want to disclose his full name.

successes to God (Kimenyi, January 8, 2024; Richard, January 10, 2024). Hence, the expression, “It’s God who gives” (*mpaji ni Mungu*) dominates the everyday life of born-again Christians in ministries and at home. The idioms of “God the giver” (*mpaji ni Mungu*), “the transformer of lives” (*ndiye anayebadilisha maisha*), “the blessings [economic prosperity] I have come from God” (*baraka nilizo nazo zimetokana na Mungu*), “you will get hundredfold” (*utapata mara mia*), “my past life is not similar to the current life” (*yale maisha ya zamani siyo kama ya sasa*), and “*ukiokoka utapata uzima wa milele*” (if you are saved you get everlasting life) have remained potent among believers (Kimenyi, January 8, 2024; Makanza, Nyakato-Mwanza, January 6, 2024; Kamafa Hilbert, January 30, 2024; Noel Makanza, January 31, 2024). The rhetorical question, “if Jesus abides in me where do I get time to backbite people?” (*Yesu akiwa amejaa ndani yangu napata wapi muda wa kusenganya watu?*) shows how the discourses of good behavior, blamelessness, and good-hearted Christians are associated with their inner relations with Jesus (Gilbert, January 8, 2024). Gilbert’s claim that “I have got the immunity of life” (*nimepata kinga ya maisha*) is suggestive of ways in which the saved Christians associate their new lives in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity as an immunity that saves them from the worldly lives and dangers (ibid.).

These experiences leave no doubt that becoming born again for many believers in Pentecostal and faith healing ministries signifies “life immunity” (*kinga ya maisha*), “knowledge” (*maarifa*), “removes all barriers” (*huondoa vifungo vyote*) and inculcates the saved Christians with “many talents” (*vipawa vingi*) (Gilbert and Esther, January 8, 2024; Eliya Amos, January 13, 2024; Denis Bashulula, January 28, 2024; Shalom Kamagenge, January 30, 2024). These attributes are evident in the various testimonies of saved ones who claim that becoming born-again Christians empowered them with many talents as some of them rose to the highest positions in churches and ministries while others secured employment in religious organizations, government, and civil societies, and some extended networks of friendship, even leading to marriages (Makanza, January 6; Gilbert, January 8, 2024 and Rogers Kimenyi, Mkolani-Mwanza, January 8, 2024). For others, being saved changed their lives from drunkenness (*ulevi*), excessive smoking of cigarettes (*uvutaji sigara*), and fighting (*ugomvi*) and to higher positions in churches, ministries, and the civil service (Interview, Emmanuel Mambo, January 10, 2024). For instance, Gilbert’s testament that “I got a leadership position in the choir as discipline master” (*nilipata uongozi kwenye kwaya kama mtunza nidhamu*) and Emmanuel Mambo’s claim that “I was appointed Principal of College of Youth Education in Tanzania” (*niliteuliwa kuwa Mkuu wa Chuo cha COYETA*) epitomize the changing roles and status of saved Christians in churches, positions

which they would not have ascended into had they remained unconverted to Pentecostalism (Gilbert, January 8, 2024; Mambo, January 10, 2024).

However, some saved Christians have challenged becoming born-again Christians as having unfulfilled expectations, unreal with “fake imitation” (*kuigiza*). Simon (who did not want to disclose his second name), criticized becoming Christian as “unreal” because many leaders “find money from people” (*wanatafuta pesa kwa watu*) (interview with Simon, Tabora, January 13, 2024). Simon Philbert* also questioned miraculous healing as “unreal” (*siyo kweli*) because “they perform fake miracles to people” (*wanawafanyizia watu miujiza ya uongo*) and that “they were after money” (*walifuata pesa tu*) (ibid.). For miraculous healing, claimed Simon, many faith healers in Tabora took people from the Ulyankulu refugee camp and performed “fake miracles” (*miujiza ya uongo*) on them. His question “Why didn’t they perform miracles on the crippled people of Tabora town who are known?” (*mbona hawakuwafanyizia walemavu wa mjini Tabora wanaofahamika?*) shows uncertainties surrounding faith healing, which have led some born-again Christians in faith healing ministries to believe that their leaders who call themselves prophets (*manabii*) are “simply liars” (*waongo tu*) (ibid.).

The claim that some leaders of faith healing ministries are likely liars has led some Christians to argue that they perform miracles because they are looking for money from people. The need for money has created binaries between leaders who become rich at the expense of poor Christians, who cannot see the economic benefit of being saved. This view is shared by many born-again Christians who cannot see the difference in their daily earnings since joining ministries. We learn, for instance, that being saved did not seem to have transformed Esta Pandi’s life and economic situation as she openly stated, “I see myself still a sinner” (*najiona niko vilevile yaani mwenye dhambi*) and that “I have made no economic gains” (*kiuchumi sijaongezeka kipato*), (*najiona niko vilevile yaani mwenye dhambi*) to show that nothing has changed (interview, Ester Pandi, January 12, 2024). These opposing views indicate the multiple expressions about religion and development in the context of faith healing. They are also symptomatic of the complex and interwoven meanings attached to faith healing and the economic well-being of believers.

9 Conclusion: Religion and Development in Twenty-First-Century Tanzania

The dominance of religion amid the COVID-19 pandemic is reminiscent of its place in shaping the course of Tanzania’s postcolonial development

imperatives. As we have seen, while party and government leaders relegated religion to the margins of ujamaa people-centered development initiatives in order to build a secular state, the conspicuous ideological vacuum after the collapse of ujamaa was not filled by market ideology, but rather rendered it vulnerable to neo-Pentecostalism (Bakari and Ndumbaro 2006). Nevertheless, the proliferation of faith healing ministries in the era of liberal economy and multiparty politics has increased the place of religion in society as “prosperity gospels” have continued to shape the discourses of “economic and social change” and a means of preventing adherents from “falling into extreme poverty and destitution” (Hasu 2012, 70).

Nevertheless, the varied experiences across time and space of born-again Christians in the faith healing ministries of Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, and Tabora have demonstrated the different voices, aspirations, and interpretations on the place of religion and personal development. While some have embraced faith healing ministries as an important force of spiritual healing and socioeconomic change, some have rebutted the ministries and their leaders as “unreal” and “fake prophets” (*manabii wa uongo*) because they use “fake miracles” (*miujiza ya uongo*) for their economic gain. There is a glaring disparity between leaders whose “prosperity gospels and enchanted worldview” favor their ambitions and poor believers who cannot see the economic benefit of becoming born-again Christians (Hasu 2012, 67–84).

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Policy and Practice Notes





The South African Council of Churches and the Science and Religion Debate during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Policy and Practice Note

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Abstract

The relationship between science and religion has been a topical issue in the Western world, both in academic and popular literature. It has, however, been a peripheral issue in Africa, the epicentre of Christianity and where both religion and science play a prominent role. Where African scholars have written about it, it has largely focused on Pentecostal and Charismatic churches to the negligence of mainline churches. This article examines the views and responses of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the largest ecumenical body in the country, to the COVID-19 pandemic in the light of the science and religion debate. The views and responses of the SACC to the pandemic were gathered from the various press statements and documents that the ecumenical body produced between March 2020 and September 2021.

Keywords

South African Council of Churches – science and religion debate – COVID-19 – Pentecostal-Charismatic churches

1 Introduction

The speed with which the novel coronavirus spread throughout the world, coupled with the casualties that it left in its wake and the disruptions and inconveniences caused by the lockdowns imposed by most governments on their countries, left humanity in a state of panic and great psychological turmoil. Could this be a mere disease or the voice of the supernatural trying to communicate a message to humanity? In the face of such terror and dread, humanity quickly came up with explanations of what had caused the pandemic and what it could mean. In Africa, as expected, religion played a prominent role in trying to understand the pandemic. This is because Africans live, move and exist in religion (Lamin Sanneh, cited in Asamoah-Gyadu 2021, 331). Religion pervades every aspect of an African's life (Mbiti 1969, 1).

African Christians responded differently to both the pandemic and the measures imposed by the various governments to contain its spread. For some, the governments were right in implementing measures that included hard lockdowns, physical distancing and the mandatory wearing of face masks in public places, for these would flatten the COVID-19 curve and life would quickly return to normal. To them, the coronavirus was a virus like any other and these measures were the best responses to this natural pandemic. They urged all citizens to adhere to these restrictions and health protocols. They asked God to intervene and stop the continued spread of the virus, and to guide scientists towards quickly developing an effective vaccine. In this case, religion was a positive force in a health emergency.

But for others, the intensity of the pandemic made it supernatural. It ceased to be an epidemiological crisis; it was spiritualised with spiritual solutions being proffered. The medical dimension was relegated to the periphery as the spiritual dimension took centre stage. For some, the pandemic was apocalyptic; the *parousia* was imminent. Jesus was surely only a few moments away. For others, the pandemic was God's way of communicating His displeasure with humanity. It was a rod used to whip sinful humanity into line. In their view, the Christian response that would tame the virus was to fast, pray for God's forgiveness and seek His face. The solution was in the chapel (religion), not in the hospital (science). Another common explanation was that the pandemic

was a spiritual warfare between God and Satan, one that called for spiritual strategies (Nyawo 2022, 144). Christians were supposed to pray harder to “bind the spirit of the virus” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2021). Disease control was thrust in the hands of God, rather than in those of medical experts.

Some Christians were also influenced by the secular conspiracy theories and myths that were floating all over the internet. These included the theory that COVID-19 was not an accidental virus but was engineered in a laboratory. The argument in some quarters went further to state that the virus was a Western ploy to depopulate Africa (Sibanda 2022, 227), while others linked 5G technology with the spread of the coronavirus (Obadare 2022).

This article examines the views and responses of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) to the COVID-19 pandemic in the light of the science and religion debate. The first part of the article revisits the science and religion debate while the second examines the SACC’s understanding of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures that were imposed by the South African government to contain the pandemic, in light of the debate on the relationship between science and religion. The views and responses of the SACC to the pandemic were gathered from the various press statements and documents that the ecumenical body produced between March 2020 and September 2021.

The study was motivated by two factors. First, despite the relationship between science and religion being a topical issue globally, it has not been that prominent in Africa, which is the epicentre of Christianity and where both religion and science have much influence. Second, almost all studies on the African churches and their response to pandemics have largely focused on Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity to the negligence of mainline Christianity. The article therefore seeks to add to those very few studies on mainline Christianity and pandemics in Africa.

2 Revisiting the Science and Religion Debate

Historically, science and religion have had a troubled relationship. At times they have been at each other’s throats, while at others, they have worked harmoniously. The relationship has ranged from conflict and hostility to harmony and collaboration. There are three broad models on the relationship between the two. Traditionally, science and religion have been regarded as foes, locked in deadly combat. Indeed, as Barbour (1966, 44) notes, at many points the growth of science was hindered by religious ideas and by the institutional church. This is clearest in the spats that Copernicus, Galileo and Darwin had with the

church. It is not far from the truth to argue that the modern dialogue between religion and science began in conflict (Shutte 2006, 9). These long-standing tensions have led many scientists to argue that there is a necessary conflict between the two and that they are fundamentally irreconcilable. Holders of this view argue that while the truth of religious claims cannot be experimentally verified, thus cannot be subjected to the rigours of examination, science is willing to subject its hypotheses to experimentation. Religion is based on faith, thus lacks the robust probity of science, which sticks to observable facts. Christians who interpret the Bible literally also see a conflict between their faith and some scientific theories. According to this model then, science is inherently incapable of coexisting with religion. This has been called the conflict model (Haught 1995; McGrath 1999; Clements 1990).

The second model has been called the contrast (Haught 1995) or compartment model (Clements 1990). According to this model, religion and science do not, and cannot, conflict because they refer to two completely different domains (Clements 1990, 10). Science deals with the physical while religion deals with the spiritual. According to Sweet (2007, 14), science has, as its proper sphere, the realm of fact while religion's is that of meaning. Science deals with solvable problems, religion with unsolvable mystery (Haught 1995, 15). While science is concerned with asking "how" questions, religion asks "why" questions; science deals with secondary causes, while theology deals with primary causes (McGrath 1999, 50). Thus, the two are such different and completely independent ways of knowing and understanding reality that conflict between them is logically impossible. Science and religion are regarded as parallel, with no touchpoints between them. Holders of this view argue that each is valid, though only in its own clearly defined sphere of inquiry. If there is any conflict, it cannot be genuine because each one addresses completely different questions and their answers are so distinct that it makes no sense to compare the two. Two things can only be opposed to each other if they are playing the same game. Science and religion are playing different games and so cannot collide. Each one should stay in its territory and not invade the other's. Conflict only comes if either, or both, stray out of their respective boundaries.

According to this model, conflict between science and religion is caused by conflating the two in such a way that their differences are lost. At face value, conflating science and religion seems to be a good way of avoiding conflict between them. But in reality, it conceals any real relationship between them. Conflict between science and religion can be avoided by putting the two in separate domains. The church's clash with Galileo came because it encroached into the lane of science by making pronouncements on scientific issues which it did not have the competence to do. Its failure to acknowledge that science

belongs to a different domain led to its condemnation of Galileo's scientific ideas as though they were religious ideas. Religion had no business interfering in science's affairs. Thus, there can never be any real conflict between science and religion. This model provides some useful ideas for our analysis of the SACC's views about, and responses to, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Not content with either of these two explanations, some scholars have postulated that there is a possibility of complementarity between the two. The relationship between science and religion is more complex than either view allows. The third model is variously called the complementary (Clements 1990), convergent (McGrath 1999), coexistence (Larson and Ruse 2017, 6) or contact model (Haught 1995). Like the contrast model, it admits that the two are distinct, but differs from it in stressing that it is impossible to separate the two completely. The long history of conflict between science and religion is because the two operate on the same, rather than different, fields. The model also avoids conflating the two. According to this model, science and religion offer different but complementary views of reality. While this model values the relationship, it also insists on maintaining differences. Although the two are distinct, they always have implications for each other (Haught 1995, 18). The model looks for an open-ended conversation between the two. Science can broaden the horizon of religion while the perspective of religion can deepen one's understanding of the universe. While religion has no special insights that it can provide on the minute details of science, it does, however, fully endorse the efforts of science to understand the universe. Because science and religion unavoidably interact, religion ought to pay attention to developments in science. Further, as Alfred North Whitehead (cited in Sweet 2007, 3) observes, "the Christian religion is the mother of science." Or perhaps more mildly, Western religious tradition made important though indirect positive contributions to science in its formative period (Barbour 1966, 44–45).

It is this third model, which sees religion and science as distinct but inseparable entities, that we will employ in our examination of the SACC's understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because both science and religion are indispensable to the daily life of Africans as they have been regarded as "dual roads to truth" (Kagema 2014, 49). Religion is too important in Africa to be dismissed in the name of science and the reverse is also true (Thomson 2003, 13). Of course, we are alive to the complexity of the relationship between the two as they have interacted in the past, how it has shifted over time, and how it can vary in the different sections of both the Christian and scientific communities. Indeed, there have been, and still are, moments of cordiality interspaced with those of tension. The advantage of this approach is that it views religion and science as "two big messy and sometimes internally inconsistent categories of

human perception and understanding that coexist in the same place and time, sometimes in a complementary or conflicting relationship but most often in a complex one" (Larson and Ruse 2017, 14). The relationship between the two should be seen as "richly varied and nuanced, thoroughly human, and imbued with the same complexity that we find in other areas of human experience" (Lindberg and Numbers 2003, 5).

3 The SACC and the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the SACC, COVID-19 was like any other biomedical disease that required a biomedical response. Consequently, in line with the complementary model, the ecumenical body, like most religious leaders, particularly from the mainline churches throughout the world (Sibanda, Muyambo, and Chitando 2022, 8; see also Muyambo, Sande, and Tendere 2022; Muyambo and Tendere 2023; Marshall 2022), undertook to follow the advice of medical experts right from the beginning of the pandemic and accepted the restrictions with a cooperative spirit. Their media statements are littered with quotations from local and international health experts and medical organisations, such as the WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on viruses, protocols and vaccines. In the SACC's view, religious actors ought to complement scientists. The ecumenical body "baptised" the public health messages and regarded them as God's very own strategy of protecting humanity (Sibanda, Muyambo, and Chitando 2022, 9). In the view of the SACC (2020a), this was not just about accepting public health messages, but was a way of showing obedience to the divine command of loving one's neighbour, as well as faithfulness to the church. In this way, public health messages were clothed in religious apparel as the religious body sought to support public health officials in efforts to flatten the COVID-19 curve.

The SACC supported the hard lockdown that was imposed by the government, on the advice of health experts, just before the Easter celebrations. This is despite the fact that it meant the closure of churches, which in turn meant a loss of income for churches. Not surprisingly, as Mhandu and Ojong's (2021) study shows, many Pentecostal churches in South Africa (which are not affiliated to the SACC) opposed the banning of gatherings. Some argued that shutting down churches was tantamount to shutting down hospitals (Ossai 2021, 55). Some publicly said they were ready to be martyred instead of obeying lockdown measures. Bishop Bheki Ngcobo of the Nkanyenzi Church of Christ said he would not abide by any law and would happily be arrested for gathering

more than the maximum stipulated 100 people, defiantly adding, “We are God’s army, so we are going ... to fight this thing ... We will ... pray for the end of [the] coronavirus” (Nene 2020; Head 2020). In the view of these pastors, COVID-19 was not a health emergency but a spiritual problem that needed a spiritual solution. It would be defeated through prayer, not through lockdowns or observing health protocols. In that way, they were presenting themselves as more faithful than those who followed the guidance of health experts (Chitando 2022, 251). In them we see the conflating of science and religion, hence the conflict between the two. This is what the SACC sought to correct.

The SACC conceded that while the decision to cancel the Easter celebrations was difficult, it was “absolutely critical and essential” (Tanda 2020). According to the SACC, the gravity of the health emergency was such that the government was justified in heeding the advice of scientists and taking this practical measure. It regarded Christian gatherings as potential superspreaders of the virus, as health experts had warned. Against the background of Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors who argued that members of their churches and anyone who accepts Jesus as their personal saviour would not contract the virus because they “dwell in the shelter of the Almighty” (Ossai 2021, 55), the SACC (2020b) stated that no one is immune from contracting the virus, including the ordained. The ecumenical body urged South Africans to abide by the health protocols “for their own good and for the greater good”, adding that the coronavirus is not something that can be “prayed away”. The SACC described church leaders who were hinting that they would defy the government ban on gatherings as “naysayers who are testing God” (Tanda 2020). In the eyes of the SACC, religious actors can help build bridges between faith and science to strengthen the response to the pandemic (Marshall 2020). By so doing, the SACC was viewing science and religion as distinct but inseparable entities which can dialogue, interact, and have an intimate relationship.

In a letter to member churches just two months into the pandemic, the SACC refuted the conflict model on the relationship between science and religion, arguing that:

Often, people of faith tend to see science as opposed to faith or vice versa. It is all in the grace of God. By God’s grace we have the creative capacity of science to understand such things as how viruses spread and what it takes to mitigate the same. This is the same way that by God’s grace we have the creative capacity to design and create trains ... It is a matter of good faith to believe that the technology to build trains is by God’s grace; as much as it is of good faith to believe that the life-giving science of

medicine is by God's grace. Likewise, it is a matter of good faith to act and propagate in society, ways of living that not only complement good scientific observations and discoveries, but also that promote good scientific measures to promoting and advancing life and the wellbeing of society... (SACC 2020a)

The SACC was consistent in its understanding of the complementary relationship between science and religion and sought to affirm its support for the scientific community. For example, when after the first three months of the lockdown people expected the lockdown to be lifted, the SACC issued policy guidelines for its member churches in the event of the reopening of the churches. The SACC urged strict adherence to laws regarding COVID-19 at all times and all protocols as prescribed by health experts (SACC 2020b). It commended churches for the support they gave during the difficult and challenging time "and for the great respect for social distancing and the prohibition of group gatherings, leading to the cancellation of services and meetings" (SACC 2020b). The SACC was clear that as a religious organisation, and in line with the complementary model, it had no special insights that it could provide on the minute details of viruses, instead leaving it to the scientific community to provide guidance while the church supported it.

Even before the COVID-19 vaccines were developed, conspiracy theories were already viral on social media, fuelling vaccine hesitancy when the vaccine was finally available. Video clips spreading misinformation found fertile ground among Christians. Many Christians were hesitant to be inoculated because of a number of myths and misconceptions that were doing the rounds. Some questioned how an effective vaccine could be developed in such a very short space of time. For some, the vaccine was a Western ploy to wipe out the Black race given the long history of unethical drug testing on Black people throughout the world (Sibanda 2022, 216; 227). A very popular myth was the association of the vaccine with the "mark of the beast" (cf. Revelation 13). It was rumoured that a microchip for satanic purposes would be implanted during vaccination, giving people 666, the mark of the beast. This myth was apparently endorsed by Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, who, in a public prayer, alluded to the possibility of a vaccine from the devil meant to infuse 666 and advance Satan's agenda or corrupt a person's DNA (Letšosa 2021, 1–2). Among many other pastors, Nigerian tele-evangelist David Oyedepo, who also has a large following in South Africa, also preached against vaccines, seeing them as indicative of a lack of faith (Asamoah-Gyadu 2021). In this context, science was becoming a loser, overruled by myths and ignorance. The SACC responded by setting up an Ecumenical Theological Task Team, made up of church

leaders and theologians from the various member churches and organisation, in February 2021, to come up with a united churches' response on the COVID-19 vaccine.

According to the task team, the development of a vaccine in such a record time was an answer to the prayers of the faith communities. It said, "Christians and other people of faith have prayed and continue to pray ceaselessly for God's intervention. The scientific community has worked around the clock and God is answering our prayers. Thankfully, a vaccine has been developed within a year of the outbreak of the pandemic, which is no mean feat in the history of vaccines" (CIHA Blog 2021). In the view of the ecumenical body, the vaccine was the only strategy for eradicating the pandemic. Describing science as "a gift from God", the SACC urged Christians to see the Spirit of God at work not just in the church but in every sphere of life:

Any medical discovery that can heal the land should be regarded as a present from God. The vaccine is not the saviour but God is. There is therefore, no legitimate Christian reason for refusing to take the vaccine. Let us rather continue praying for God to continue to give our experts, whom God has called to bring healing and end suffering, all that is needed to save lives. (CIHA Blog 2021)

In this way, the SACC viewed scientists as co-creators with God. Thus, religion and science are not at odds with each other. If anything, they complement one another.

The statement urged church leaders to be exemplary by being vaccinated in public.

Church leaders have an important role to play in communication about the vaccine and getting people to be vaccinated. Having Church leaders publicly support the vaccine is very important. When Church leaders get vaccinated in public ... they can help restore trust in vaccines among their congregants and the broader society. (CIHA Blog 2021)

To lead by example, several influential senior church leaders were vaccinated in public, while wearing their clerical attire (SACC 2021b). The SACC urged churches to offer their buildings as vaccination sites, to show the churches' support for the vaccination drive. The SACC noted that the sustainable solution in the long term is an adequate level of population immunity that is made possible by the vaccine.

The SACC identified as urgent the need to counter misinformation around the pandemic and the vaccine.

Without accurate and authentic information, people are misled by many discredited and fake tales from outlandish sources. We need to get as much information as possible from those who are knowledgeable, and we also need to encourage our congregants to seek as much information on vaccines and the pandemic as they can from experts. We should avoid being misguided by every quasi-scientific post on the internet. (CIHA Blog 2021)

To this end, the SACC set up a dedicated COVID-19 website¹ to give churches accurate, verifiable and current information on the pandemic and the vaccines.

One myth that the ecumenical body took time to dispel was the association of the vaccine with the mark of the beast. Reading the text of Revelation 13 in its historical context, the task team noted that the association of the vaccine with the beast is based on a wrong and literal interpretation of the book of Revelation. They argued that the mark of the beast is linked particularly to Roman Emperor Nero, who was deified and demanded to be worshipped even while he was still alive (CIHA Blog 2021). The SACC also addressed the concern of the safety of the vaccine, noting that even if the vaccines were produced in record time, they went through clinical trials to test their safety and effectiveness and that no steps were skipped on the way (CIHA Blog 2021). The statement also dispelled the myths that the vaccine corrupts the DNA and that it was meant to depopulate the Black race.

Noting the continued hesitancy around vaccination, the SACC and other faith communities formed the Religious Forum Against COVID-19 to serve as “a champion for vaccination”, and launched a campaign code-named #VaxuMzansi aimed at getting at least 70% of the people of faith and their communities vaccinated, thus taking the country closer to attaining herd immunity (SACC 2021a). Under the campaign, vaccination teams were created in member church branches, to continuously share COVID-19 information with their congregants and coordinate vaccination drives. The Forum declared Heritage Day (24 September) National Vaccine Day, a day to “work for a Heritage of Lives and Livelihoods not constrained by COVID-19” (SACC 2021a). It also organised one-day “vaccine events” in local religious communities for religious groups to

¹ <https://www.churchinaction.org.za>.

invite their members to come to their local church, mosque, temple etc. to get a jab, witness their religious leader get vaccinated and ask religious leaders and faith-based medical practitioners about the safety of the vaccine (SACC n.d).

4 Conclusion

In line with the complementary model, the SACC refused to trespass into the domain of science, choosing instead to stay in its own. It understood that science and religion operate on the same terrain, but admitted that it has no competence to make pronouncements on health issues. Consequently, it chose to listen to the advice of health experts and criticised pastors who spiritualised the pandemic. In its view, there was nothing spiritual about COVID-19. Spiritualising the pandemic, in the view of the ecumenical body, downplayed the seriousness of the situation and undermined efforts to contain the pandemic. In the view of the SACC, the proper relationship should be seen as that of science *and* religion, rather than science *or* religion. Science is not an enemy of religion, neither is religion an enemy of science. The church had, therefore, to cooperate with health experts and give them all the support that they needed in their attempts to contain the pandemic and save lives. In so doing, it defused the idea that there is an inherent conflict between religion and science.

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Book Reviews



**Stuck in the Margins? Young People and Faith-Based Organisations in South**

African and Nordic Localities, edited by Ignatius Swart, Auli Vähäkangas, Marlize Rabe and Annette Leis-Peters. *Research in Contemporary Religion* 31. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022. Pp. 357. Hardback: € 100, e-book: open access, ISBN 978-3-666-56855-8

This book arises from an intercontinental (South Africa and Nordic countries) research project conducted between 2013 and 2016. The book presents the findings of this research project in the form of fourteen edited chapters. These fourteen chapters are divided into three parts that reflect the book's contextual, theoretical, empirical, analytical and evaluative dimensions. The opening chapter introduces the book.

Part 1 provides the contexts and concepts of the book and comprises of four chapters. The first chapter in Part 1 is Chapter 2 by Ignatius Swart, Bjørn Hallstein Holte and Heikki Hiilamo, who explore the youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) concept and its usefulness for comparative youth research. Chapter 3 by Bjørn Hallstein Holte and Marlize Rabe draws on publicly available statistical information across the economic, social and religious spectrum to develop a more informed contextual perspective on the diverse living situations of young people in South Africa and the Nordic countries. Olav Helge Angell and Stephan de Beer explore key concepts in Chapter 4 in order to make sense of the notion of social cohesion and its multiple theoretical constructions, operationalising it for the purpose of the case study research presented in the book. In Chapter 5, Auli Vähäkangas, Elina Hankela, Elisabet le Roux and Eddie Orsmond conclude Part 1 with their contribution on a contextually relevant framework for using and understanding the concept of FBOs in the book.

With the contexts and concepts set in Part 1, Part 2 presents the core material of this book under the heading "Case Study Perspectives". The Part comprises six chapters corresponding to the six case studies undertaken by the project. The chapters are arranged in terms of the geographical sizes of the case studies localities. Chapter 6 by Ignatius Swart, Marlize Rabe and Stephan de Beer open this Part with their account of what they have learned about the situation of marginalised young people and their relationship with FBOs in Pretoria Central in South Africa. Bjørn Hallstein Holte, Annette Leis-Peters, Olav Helge Angell and Kari Karsrud Korslien follow in Chapter 7 presenting their research on

the interactions between FBOs and young people in the city district of Søndre Nordstrand in Oslo, Norway. In Chapter 8, Elina Hankela and Regie Nel present their findings on young people's diverse perceptions and experiences of the FBOs in Riverlea, Johannesburg. In Chapter 9, Eddie Orsmond, Anita Cloete, Elisabet le Roux and Zahraa McDonald present their findings on the dynamic between the FBOs and young people in NEET situations in Franschhoek in the Western Cape province of South Africa. They are followed in Chapter 10 by Christina Landman and Hannelie Yates' account of the views of the rural youth from two townships in the municipality of Emakhazeni in Mpumalanga province in South Africa. Chapter 11 concludes this Part. In it, Auli Vähäkangas, Anna Juntunen, Elina Juntunen, Johanna Vilja-Mantere and Ulla Siirto present their account of young people's experiences of the FBOs in Lammi, Finland.

Part 3 is headed "Discussions and Conclusions" and comprises three chapters. These chapters offer discussions of the case studies from intersectional, sociology of religion and theological perspectives. Marlize Rabe, Bjørn Hallstein Holte, Zahraa McDonald, Olav Helge Angell and Ulla Siirto begin with an intersectional analysis in Chapter 12. This is followed by Chapter 13 in which Annette Leis-Peters, Ignatius Swart, Anita Cloete and Per Pettersson analyse the case studies from the perspective of a sociology of religion. Chapter 14 then closes both Part 3 and the book with Auli Vähäkangas, Stephan de Beer, Elina Hankela and Annette Leis-Peters addressing the case studies from a liberation theological perspective.

This book shows the interrelationship between religion and development, especially the role that religion is playing, or should play, in the integration of the socially marginalised. I find this book very important in many other respects. First, as the editors of this book and others who have written on children and the youth (e.g. Togarasei and Kuegler 2014) have observed, the young people are generally marginalised, not only in societies but also in academic investigations concerning them. It is a very positive development to have publications such as this book that focus on young people. Second, this book provides an approach that is not common among published books in its intercontinental approach. In this way, it provides fresh insights that are missing in many books that are usually limited to one geographical context. Comparisons between what happens in the Global North and what happens in the Global South are indeed enriching. Third, the book's evidence-based approach is refreshing. Supported by case studies from empirical research, the book provides the reader with a "personal" touch of what the youth experience in the case communities. With views supported by several verbatim statements by the respondents, the reader feels very close to the events being presented and described. Despite this "personal" feeling that one gets from reading the

book, the book remains very strongly academic as it has strong theoretical and analytical bases. This is therefore a book that is useful both for academic and social engagement. It can be used both in class and by policy advocates and makers, especially those working with youth and generally marginalised communities.

The book comes with tables, charts and graphs that help the reader get a vivid picture of what the authors are conveying. It also has a rich bibliography that refers the reader to similar works on the subject of FBOs, youth and marginalisation. The reader can easily follow the presented fieldwork findings as the book contains the data collection tools appended. It also comes with an index that helps readers easily access different subjects addressed in the book.

This is indeed a book worth having on one's shelf. However, if one cannot have it in hard copy, it is available electronically online.

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Interfaith Networks and Development: Case Studies from Africa, edited by Ezra Chitando and Ishanesu Sextus Gusha. Cham: Springer Nature / Palgrave Macmillan, Sustainable Development Goals Series, 2022. Pp. 306. Paperback: €139.99, ISBN 978-3-030-89809-0.

Within the steadily growing sub-discipline of religion and development, little attention has been paid to the specific role of interfaith networks. This is surprising, since collaboration – rather than competition or rivalry – among different types of religious and/or faith-based organizations appears to be important for achieving development goals in religiously diverse contexts. The important role of interfaith initiatives in promoting development has also been highlighted by international agencies and non-profit organizations for many years, including the World Faith Development Dialogue (founded in 1998) and the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (established in 2010).

Against this backdrop, this volume seeks to “appreciate the contributions and challenges of interfaith networks in the discourse on religion and development” (p. 4), with a particular focus on their role and impact in achieving the United Nations Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 in different African contexts. With altogether 16 contributions from practitioners in the field as well as scholars from the humanities and social sciences, the volume aims to map out the terrain that interfaith networks have covered with their development-oriented work. As Ezra Chitando writes in his informative introduction, the focus on “interfaith networks” is chosen deliberately in this regard, as the term emphasizes both “social action” (as opposed to dialogue) and the “structured” nature of these initiatives (as opposed to movements) in their aim to improve human living conditions (p. 6).

Moreover, the introduction (self-)critically engages with the use of the term “development,” which has long been denounced for its Eurocentric, anthropocentric, and mostly secularist connotations. However, rather than seeking, as Chitando argues, an alternative term that would inevitably bring its own problems, the authors are more interested in proposing a holistic approach to development; one that emphasizes “the ‘world-affirming’ dimension of world religions” (p. 9). Finally, in addition to providing a topology of interfaith networks and their various areas of engagement at the global, regional, and national levels, the introduction identifies the following challenges to multi-faith initiatives’ work: the dominance of Global North actors in many of these networks (due primarily to their financial and epistemological dominance); the limited coordination among interfaith initiatives (and consequently the

overlap in their work in certain regional and thematic areas); the marginalization of women and youth in interfaith networks; and the financial constraints that impede their work.

The volume is divided into four sections that address several of the issues identified in the introduction. The first section provides an overview of interfaith networks operating at the global level, both in terms of emerging conceptual issues and their interventions in specific regional and national contexts. The second section looks at interfaith networks that address gender issues in African contexts, whereas the third section comprises case studies of interfaith engagement on development issues in different African countries. The fourth section concludes with insights into “diverse themes in interfaith networks and development.”

While it is impossible to summarize each chapter in detail, I want to highlight some of the contributions as examples of the thematic and empirical breadth of the volume. In the first section, Sokfa F. John provides insight into the work of the United Religions Initiative, which has “hundreds of members” (p. 31) worldwide and has established numerous “collaboration circles” on development issues in various parts of the world. By using data from affiliation network analysis, he shows that in West Africa it is primarily Christian and Muslim organizations that work on issues such as “peacebuilding and conflict transformation” and “youth.” In the second section, Kathleen McGarvey – founder of the Interfaith Women’s Council in northern Nigeria and a sister of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles – argues that women in this regional context are not only particularly affected by violent conflict but can also play an important role in promoting “peaceful coexistence and development” (p. 102). The *limitations* of interfaith cooperation are addressed in the chapter by Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye and Simon Kofi Appiah on Ghana in the third section. In particular, the authors attribute the continued marginalization of actors from “African Traditional Religion” – but also from the Islamic spectrum – in these collaborations to colonial notions of “civilization” as well as of “religion and interreligious relations” (p. 237). Finally, the fourth section is concluded by Nomatter Sande’s chapter on interfaith dialogue among diasporic communities in the UK, which provide both a framework for “addressing differences” (p. 291) as well as promoting development in contexts of migration (e.g., through financial remittances and the formation of transnational cultural and/or religious identities).

Overall, the volume offers valuable and novel insights into understanding the role of interfaith networks in different areas of development in southern, eastern, and western Africa, and to some extent beyond. The book is commendable for combining a wide range of methodological and conceptual angles to capture the vibrant terrain of interfaith development networks in

the region (including among others an autoethnographic account of interfaith engagement in education in northern Nigeria by Ezekiel Abdullahi Babagario). The volume also succeeds in highlighting the highly diverse ways in which different types of interfaith networks engage with the SDGs 2030, as well as the – often unexpected – regional and transnational connections that support their mobilizations (see for instance the chapter by Ishanesu Sextus Gusha on the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, an intergovernmental organization founded by Austria, Saudi Arabia, and Spain, with the Vatican as a founding observer). Finally, the author shows how interfaith networks are carving out new perspectives for their work, importantly including gender-based violence in South Africa (Fungai Chirongoma) and sexual diversity in development work in Botswana (Tshenolo Jennifer Madigele).

One shortcoming that I noticed is that most of the chapters rely in their analysis on the self-reported activities of the interfaith networks studied. From a critical social science perspective, this focus on “documenting” (p. 7) the networks’ engagements in development work often precludes a more thorough examination of what religion *de facto* contributes to development and what the social outcomes of their interventions *actually* look like. In addition, a more critical reflection on the prominent position of certain religious actors in interfaith networks, which are often dominated by Christian organizations and/or individuals, would have been desirable. To understand this dominance, which reflects simultaneously on long-standing financial and epistemological dependencies between the Global North and Global South, it would have been important to embed the emergence and engagements of these networks more systematically in translocal histories of politics, power, and socio-economic inequality (an approach that is pursued, for instance, in the chapters by Klaudia Wilk-Mhagama on Tanzania, Andrew David Omona on Uganda, and Júlio Machele and Mário Jorge Carlos on Mozambique).

Despite these shortcomings, however, this volume has the potential to become an important reference work for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers who want to learn more about the specific role of interfaith networks in development in Africa (and possibly beyond). It could also fulfil the aspiration expressed in the introduction: to be a starting point for further research as well as the strengthening of the position of interfaith networks in development in Africa – and globally (p. 5).

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Development in Spirit: Religious Transformation and Everyday Politics

in Vietnam's Highlands, by Seb Rumsby. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2023. Pp. 224. Cloth: \$79.95, ISBN 9780299342302

Seb Rumsby has written a brilliant, engaging and provocative contribution to topical debates about religion and development. The book takes large-scale Hmong conversion to Protestant Christianity in the Vietnam highlands as a starting point to reconsider religious entanglements with economic, political and social change. Viewing this conversion as an “alternative route to development” (p. 7), *Development in Spirit* provides a detailed and sophisticated examination of religious transformation.

Rumsby's research is shaped by the everyday political economy (EPE) approach, which emphasises the importance of actors and agency in people's engagements with dominant forces such as the state or market. This approach focuses attention on Hmong experiences, rationalities and ambitions. Rather than viewing the Hmong as duped by more powerful actors, Rumsby seeks to show how the Hmong have actively navigated their own paths to development. Rumsby draws on James Scott to frame religion as laden with potential for everyday acts of political mobilisation and resistance. The EPE approach requires a detailed understanding of everyday economic and political practices. The argument in this book builds on extensive qualitative research among Hmong communities.

Rumsby's narration of the context of Hmong conversion is informative, including analysis of complex historical and political dynamics. Rumsby does not see conversion to Christianity as imposed by outside actors nor as a mode of colonisation. Importantly, the Hmong in Vietnam did not convert as a direct consequence of missionary involvement. Instead, the catalyst for conversion was the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC), which began its radio broadcasts in the Hmong language in the 1960s. Rumsby argues that these radio broadcasts found a fertile and eager audience due to a range of interconnected factors, including a pervasive Hmong sense of backwardness in relation to the ethnic Kinh majority, Vietnamese state projects of territorialisation and development, and widely circulating enthusiasm for the “will to improve” (a term borrowed from Tania Murray Li). Rumsby argues that the Hmong have not traditionally distinguished secular and religious matters, and it is therefore not surprising that conversion to Christianity similarly blurs any attempt at imposing a secularist dividing line.

While development is part of the story that leads to Hmong conversion, *Development in Spirit* is primarily dedicated to exploring the development

effects that emerge from this religious transformation. Over consecutive chapters Rumsby builds a fascinating picture of the economic and political impacts of religious change. He provides a detailed comparative examination of three Hmong villages, where each has adopted a different approach to development (selective engagement with modernity, state-led development and Christian conversion). The work of religious elites is helpfully analysed as new kinds of development brokers, facilitating links between their communities and both national and transnational actors. Rumsby also assesses whether Hmong Christianity has succumbed to neoliberal rationalities and how conversion has impacted gender inequality.

Development in Spirit provides compelling evidence that Hmong conversion, as an alternative route to development, has been remarkably successful. Conversion opened possibilities for desired economic and political change, including providing new avenues for engaging with the market economy, new forms of dynamic leadership, and powerful rationalities for greater gender equality. Even so, conversion has complicated and paradoxical effects. Rumsby argues that Hmong conversion should not be idealised. Protestant gender norms impose their own constraints. Christian community facilitates new forms of solidarity and opens space for new forms of social conflict. Conversion involves sharp ruptures with Hmong tradition, but it also enables an ongoing sense of Hmong ethnic distinctiveness.

The entanglements between religion and development traced in this book find a potent metaphor in the concepts of “*vươn lên*”, which is translated as “rise up” or “improve” (p. 161). Rumsby argues that this language of ascent conflates spirituality and the economy. These are both domains of transcendence. In this context of significant economic growth, such associations are clearly potent. Scholars of development have discerned similar linguistic associations across very different contexts. I wondered about how these associations are reworked in contexts of economic decline, crisis and increasing marginalisation. How is religion invoked in contexts of forced or voluntary degrowth? Moreover, diverse religions are not all equally legible in terms of advancement or progress. This book should help inspire further research into how diverse religious imaginations are brought into conversation with technocratic passions for progress as well as decision-making about everyday livelihoods.

I read *Development in Spirit* as a clear sign of the maturation of the field of religion and development. Although there have been many attempts to address the complex entanglements between religion and development over the years, these did not constitute a sustained, critical and vibrant scholarly field until quite recently. Rumsby's selection of topics, framing of debates and

extensive citations and bibliography all clearly evidence an increasingly coherent field of scholarship in this area. *Development in Spirit* also amply illustrates why this field remains a dynamic area for future scholarship. This book will be of considerable interest to scholars working across the field of religion and development. It deserves to be read widely and will also find a prominent place on undergraduate and graduate course reading lists.

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