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# CHRISTIANITY AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES: TRANSFORMING BOTSWANA HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY USING THE JESUS OF LUKE

Lovemore Togarasei

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

University of Botswana

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## Abstract

*In dealing with dangerous hegemonic masculinities, there is need to rethink the position of Christianity since the religion itself is sometimes used in the construction of such dangerous masculinities. This is true of the case discussed in this article. The article shows how culture, traditional religion, colonial attitudes and Christianity help in the construction of dangerous masculinities in Botswana. Having done that, it then argues for a specific use of certain biblical traditions, in this case the tradition of the Jesus of Luke's Gospel. The article shows how Jesus' attitude to women as presented in this gospel was revolutionary and called for a new way of defining a man. It then concludes by showing that, in communities that still value the life and teaching of Jesus, the masculinity expressed by Jesus can serve as a model to address dangerous hegemonic masculinities.*

**Key Words:** Christianity; Hegemonic Masculinity; Botswana; Jesus, Proverbs; Culture; Religion.

## Introduction

The past ten or so years have witnessed the emergence of studies focused on understanding men,<sup>1</sup> thanks to feminist scholars who exposed the dangers of patriarchy especially to contemporary societies. There is little doubt that it is these feminist scholars who gave rise to gender studies. As SB Boyd, WM Longwood and MW Muese say, "From feminist perspectives, we have learned that males have been prone to regard themselves as generic humans rather than gendered persons conditioned by historical and cultural processes."<sup>2</sup> However, through gender studies, it can be observed that feminist studies tended to make monolithic representations of men and masculinity. This did not help much in transforming men. Attempts to correct this gave birth to masculinity studies. These masculinity studies have helped a lot in our understanding of men. From these studies, four important observations on masculinities can be made. First, we have learnt that there is no one masculinity but rather many masculinities in each given society. These masculinities

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<sup>1</sup> JC Anderson, SD Moore and SH Kim, 'Masculinity Studies: A Classified Bibliography,' in SD Moore and JC Anderson (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities*, Atlanta: SBL Publications, 2003:23-42 list literature on masculinity studies. The bibliography shows the proliferation of literature on this subject from the 1990s.

<sup>2</sup> SB Boyd, WM Longwood and MW Muese, 'Men, Masculinity and the Study of Religion,' in SB Boyd, WM Longwood and MW Muese (eds.), *Redeeming Men: Religion and Masculinities*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996:xiii.

contest for dominance resulting in the emergence of what scholars<sup>3</sup> call hegemonic masculinity. By definition, hegemonic masculinity is that masculinity that dominates both women and other masculinities in the society.<sup>4</sup> It is usually a result of the predominant culture giving power and privilege to those who own the culture. It therefore marginalizes other masculinities, putting pressure on these subordinate or marginalized masculinities to measure up if they are to be considered man/masculine.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, it has been observed that often hegemonic masculinities are dangerous both to women and men. This is because hegemonic masculinities are generally characterized by toughness/strength, dominance/power/authority (especially over women), minimal emotional expression, risk-taking behaviour, heterosexuality, antihomosexuality, sexual prowess/drive, competitiveness and such other characteristics.<sup>6</sup> I consider these characteristics 'dangerous' as they not only expose men to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS, but also encourage violence, oppression and marginalization of women and other men. The fact that hegemonic masculinities harbour some dangerous behaviours such as control and risk taking does not, however, mean that all hegemonic masculinities are dangerous. However, this article will focus on hegemonic masculinities that have proved to be dangerous in the Botswana community and therefore generally equates hegemonic masculinities to dangerous masculinities. Dangerous masculinities are here defined as such masculinities that pose danger both to men and women. For example, masculinities that are violent to women and children, masculinities that are oppressive to other forms of masculinity and that make men sexual risk takers are considered dangerous.

Thirdly, from masculinity studies we have learnt that masculinity is a social not a biological construct. It is socially, politically, historically and culturally constructed. Although a number of studies have emphasized men as the constructors of masculinities, Talbot and Quayle have correctly argued that women also play a key role in the production of masculinities. They say, "women are not simply resources for men to pull in to their own constructions of masculinity, but active agents in the production of acceptable and – therefore – hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity; they actively and passively co-produce, normalize, and even fetishize masculinities."<sup>7</sup> Lastly, because masculinities are socially constructed, we have learnt that they are not fixed. They can be changed and transformed for the good of society at large if found to be dangerous. Because masculinity is socially constructed, issues of culture, colonialism, politics, economy, religion and the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, RW Connell, *Masculinities*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> R Morrell, 'The Times of Change: Men and Masculinity in South Africa,' in R Morrell (ed.), *Changing Men in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001:1-21. In a recent article Msibi also argues that hegemonic masculinities are responsible for the opposition to homosexuality in Africa. T Msibi, 'The Lies We Have Been Told: On (Homo) Sexuality in Africa,' *Africa Today*, Vol. 58/1 (2011:54-77).

<sup>5</sup> A Hirose and KK Pih. 'Men Who Strike and Men Who Submit: Hegemonic and Marginalized Masculinities in Mixed Martial Arts,' *Men and Masculinities* 13/2, (2010:190-209) argue that the boundaries between hegemonic and marginalized forms of masculinity are much more interactive than oppositional. They write, "To be sure, we do not deny the existence of power that defines the asymmetrical relationship. At the same time, we contend that hegemonic forms do not necessarily oppose and reject marginalized forms entirely" (192).

<sup>6</sup> K Talbot and M Quayle, 'The Perils of Being a Nice Guy: Contextual Variation in Five Young Women's Constructions of Acceptable Hegemonic and Alternative Masculinities,' *Men and Masculinities*, 13/2 (2010:255-278).

<sup>7</sup> K Talbot and M Quayle, 'The Perils of Being a Nice Guy,' 256.

like have to be considered in studying men and their behaviour. C Isike and UO Uzodike, for example, use culture to call for the transformation of African dangerous masculinities.<sup>8</sup>

Religion is another factor that has also been, and should continue to be, used to transform dangerous masculinities. This is the line this article follows: broadly, it seeks to investigate ways by which Christianity as a religion claiming on average over 72% of the population in most sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>9</sup> can be used to transform dangerous hegemonic masculinities. It thus investigates African, specifically Botswana masculinity from two perspectives: traditional culture and religion and Christian/biblical. There is, however, some ambivalence in investigating masculinity from these two perspectives and I need to point these out for the clarity of our discussion. On one hand, both African culture and tradition and Christianity can be accused of producing dangerous masculinities. This is because most religions (including Christianity and African Traditional Religion) are patriarchal. In Africa, Traditional Religion and Christianity have often been used by men as a two edged sword against women. However, on the other hand, traditional religion and Christianity can also be used to produce responsible and life-affirming masculinities. Thus in this article I begin by considering how African traditional religion and culture and Christianity have produced dangerous masculinities before I focus on how Christianity can also help transform such dangerous masculinities. In traditional religion and culture I focus specifically on Setswana popular sayings and proverbs that tend to perpetuate dangerous masculinities. MW Dube has done excellent work to expose patriarchy in these proverbs and sayings.<sup>10</sup> Therefore I do not repeat much of what she has said but simply highlight the major issues in preparation for demonstrating how Christianity can help mitigate the effects of these teachings. In Christianity I will look at how some selected biblical texts have given rise to dangerous masculinities. Having done this I will then focus specifically on the Jesus of Luke to see how he can be used to transform Botswana masculinities into redemptive Christian masculinities.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Construction of Botswana Men**

In discussing Botswana men, I need first to accept my generalization. Although Botswana is a country of only about 2 million people, the people are of diverse backgrounds linguistically, culturally, religiously and traditionally. The construction of men in the different cultural groups is therefore different. Be that as it may, the construction of men in Botswana, as in the rest of Southern Africa, can be generalized to a large extent with some

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<sup>8</sup> C Isike and UO Uzodike, 'Modernizing without westernizing: Reinventing African patriarchies to combat the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Africa,' *Journal of Constructive Theology* 14/1 (2008:3-20).

<sup>9</sup> This is based on World Council of Churches estimates ([www.oikumen.org](http://www.oikumen.org), accessed 8 October 2012).

<sup>10</sup> MW Dube, 'Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS: Understanding and Acting on the Issues,' in MW Dube (ed.), *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003:84-100.

<sup>11</sup> Because what I say about Botswana men is to a large extent true of most African men, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana and Africa are sometimes used interchangeably in this article. The masculinities I am advocating for in this paper are aimed at Christians who believe in the teaching of the Bible and in the salvific role of the person and figure of Jesus and who aim to live by these Christian standards. In taking this position, I am influenced by studies which have already shown that religious traditions are handy in transforming dangerous masculinities (See A van Klinken, 'St Joachim as a model of Catholic Manhood in times of AIDS: A case study on masculinity in an African Christian context,' *Cross Currents* (2011:467-479).

degree of justification.<sup>12</sup> This is because even if there are different groups, they also share many similarities. These similarities come from shared traditional practices and beliefs and also from similar colonial experiences. Radio, television and other modern forms of media also expose people to similar cultural practices. As L Theo correctly notes, “People in Africa, particularly in urban spaces, often aspire to Euro-American sensibilities, while at the same time maintaining a ‘local’ sense of self arguably often based on a combination of indigenous perspectives and historical western influences, resulting in what could be described as a melting-pot of invented selves.”<sup>13</sup> Though one can talk of a ‘melting-pot of invented selves,’ the similar cultural influences result in a number of shared cultural views and practices. This is particularly true when it comes to hegemonic masculinities.

We have noted above that Botswana men are constructed through culture, religion, colonial experiences and media. Traditional culture had specific gender expectations for both men and women. Though it gave more power to men, there was a significant level of complementarity between men and women. Although there is an outcry over the erosion of some African cultural practices, traditional cultural influence on gender formations remains strong. Media forms, especially television and radio, also have a strong influence on the construction of Botswana men.<sup>14</sup> However, even these do not contradict the traditional constructions especially in as far as establishing male authority over women is concerned. Thus here I focus on Setswana popular sayings and proverbs together with some Christian teachings that help in constructing dangerous masculinities. Traditional African societies used proverbs for teaching the fundamental values of a society. As a result these proverbs have withstood the test of time being found influential in teaching even in modern societies. Thus writing on the value of idioms and proverbs in Africa, T Gurganious observes that, “the idioms and proverbs do not need to be changed as society changes. They hold truth despite the fact that they were first coined in prehistoric times.”<sup>15</sup> MW Dube has done some commendable work on gender studies in Botswana in general.<sup>16</sup> She has also written specifically on the construction of Botswana men. In an article on Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS, Dube identifies nine ways and/or stages by which Botswana men are constructed into who they are.<sup>17</sup> She notes that this construction happens throughout the different stages of life, from birth to death. But Dube makes a very important observation concerning how culture and religion help in the construction of gender. She says: “Something as deep and as pervasive as gender needs a range of social support that helps to maintain it and keep it alive through the generations. It can only thrive through myth and

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, articles by R Gabaitse, T Shoko, G Masengwe and J Hlatswayo (in E Chitando and S Chirongoma (eds.), *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012) that agree on similar aspects of masculinity in different Southern African contexts. R Gabaitse identifies some of the proverbs which are the subject of this article.

<sup>13</sup> L Theo, ‘The Trouble with Men: Frameworks for African Masculinities,’ <http://www.gendernamix.co.za/content/view/284/204/>, 2007, accessed 6 December 2011.

<sup>14</sup> M Dube (‘Youth Masculinities and Violence in an HIV and AIDS Context: Sketches from Botswana Cultures and Pentecostal Churches,’ in E Chitando and S Chirongoma (eds.), *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012:323-353), points out that the media has helped in constructing dangerous masculinities.

<sup>15</sup> T Gurganious, ‘The Value of African idioms and proverbs,’ <http://www.helium.com/items/1454710-the-value-of-african-idioms-and-proverbs>, May 2009, accessed 23 November 2011.

<sup>16</sup> MW Dube, ‘Introduction: Gender Mainstreaming in Teaching, Research, Management and National Issues in the University of Botswana,’ *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 21/1, (2007:2-14).

<sup>17</sup> MW Dube, ‘Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS,’ 84-100.

cultural and religious beliefs that give a stamp of approval and a 'blessing' to what is certainly a social construct."<sup>18</sup> As a result, despite the fact that hegemonic masculinities tend to oppress them, women play a role in their formation. Gabaitse correctly notes this by saying, "When boys are still small it is the women who teach them how to be boys and/or men by teaching them in speech and in action, behaviours, expectations, assumptions and attitudes that are expected from a boy and/or a man."<sup>19</sup> I argue here for the power of Setswana popular sayings about gender in constructing present Botswana masculinity. Many of these sayings say something about women but as Sabo (2000) notes, male gender identity is not only constructed in reference to the prevailing hegemonic masculinity but also in relation to women and cultural definitions of femininity.<sup>20</sup> I argue that these sayings and proverbs about women help in constructing Botswana masculinity.

The first saying I will analyse, is *Ga di ke di etelelwa ke manamagadi*. This is a proverb that literally means a herd of cattle is not led by a cow. The proverb is then used to emphasise that it is men who should take leadership in all things with women following them. The proverb helps in constructing men who find it difficult to accept women as leaders both in the family and in society. *Ga di ke di etelelwa ke manamagadi* underlines patriarchy with the dominance of men over women in all spheres of life: in public (politics and government), family-based decision making, socio-legal systems and inheritance practices. For this reason, traditional Tswana societies were headed by males only. Lineage was traced through males and only males could be appointed chiefs.<sup>21</sup> Although there have been improvements in women empowerment through government policies on gender equity, the view that women cannot be leaders is still seen in the absence of women in key decision making positions. For example, of the 57 members of the Botswana National Assembly, only five are women, three of whom have been specially appointed,<sup>22</sup> that is, they were appointed by the President of the country not by the electorate through the ballot. Also, despite the fact that women are the majority in the population of the country, there are as few as only two female chiefs in the National House of Chiefs.

*Monna ke selepe, wa adimanwa* (A man, like an axe, is exchanged) is another Setswana proverb that constructs Botswana men. Possibly originating in a context where axes were few and therefore shared amongst households, the proverb encourages sharing. A man is then compared to an axe with the implication that he can be shared by a number of women. Although it is believed that the sharing of the men originally had no sexual connotations,<sup>23</sup> scholars like Dube<sup>24</sup> and Gabaitse<sup>25</sup> argue that many Botswana men now use such proverbial sayings to justify promiscuity. Related to this proverb is *Monna ke poo ga a agelwe lesaka* (A man is like a bull, he cannot be confined to one kraal). Thus just as a bull

<sup>18</sup> MW Dube, 'Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS,' 88.

<sup>19</sup> RM Gabaitse, 'Passion Killings in Botswana: Masculinity at Crossroads,' in E Chitando and S. Chirongoma (eds.), *Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012:305-321.

<sup>20</sup> D Sabo, 'Men's Health Studies: Origins and Trends', *Journal of American Colleges of Health* 49/3, 2000:133-149.

<sup>21</sup> G Mookodi, 'Male Violence Against Women in Botswana: A Discussion of Gender Uncertainties In a Rapidly Changing Environment,' *African Sociological Review* 8/1, 2004:118-138.

<sup>22</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_current\\_members\\_of\\_the\\_National\\_Assembly\\_of\\_Botswana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_members_of_the_National_Assembly_of_Botswana), accessed 14/11/11.

<sup>23</sup> Informal discussion with Dr P Seloma, lecturer in AfricaLanguages, University of Botswana: February 2012.

<sup>24</sup> MW Dube, 'Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS,' 88.

<sup>25</sup> RM Gabaitse, 'Passion Killings in Botswana,' 312.

can be in charge of many cows, a man can have more than one sexual partner, this proverb says. And because he cannot be confined to one 'kraal' another Setswana proverbial saying has it that *Monna ga a botswe kwa a tswang* (A man is not asked where he is coming from). Men then use such sayings to deny their spouses the freedom to ask them about their whereabouts and their goings in and out.

Christianity also promotes some dangerous masculine attributes among Botswana men. The saying *Monna ke tlhogo ya lelwapa* (the man is the head of the family) is influenced by tradition, colonialism<sup>26</sup> and Christianity. Biblical texts on creation, especially the second creation story (Gen. 2:4ff), and Pauline teachings on the headship of men (Ephesians 5:22) are used to underline this position. Especially when the headship of Christ is compared to the man's headship of his wife, this teaching tends to produce very dangerous masculinity. Headship here entails decision making, provision, authority and therefore unquestioned belief in the man's decisions, goings out and comings in. According to this saying, manhood is tied to being independent, having a family and being in control of the family as head of the household. Unfortunately even those who are not able to play the headship roles of provision for the family and financial independence still want to claim the role of headship and the 'privileges' associated with it. From his studies on Men, Masculinities and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Botswana, SD Rakgoasi interviewed a man who said the following on male headship of the family:

A man is the head of the family, whether the woman enjoys higher social and economic status or not, when it comes to the family unit, a man is the head. This is because he initiates the family unit by getting married to the woman. It's the man who marries the woman, not the other way around. It may happen that the woman may have a higher position at work, but that doesn't change the fact that at home, the man is still head of household and family.<sup>27</sup>

These sayings, together with other factors, however, contribute to moulding the kind of man found in Botswana. As Dube correctly observes, these sayings and proverbs, together with stories often told around the fire in traditional Africa, were a cultural bank that helped in moulding specific gender qualities.<sup>28</sup> Botswana hegemonic masculinity therefore sees a real man as the leader of the family, holding some leadership position in society and basically in control of women around him. In the words of Rakgoasi, Botswana hegemonic masculinity perceives men, "as natural leaders, more rational, unemotional and decisive than women; in control of the family..."<sup>29</sup> This hegemonic masculinity is probably partly responsible for gender based violence that Botswana has experienced in the past five to seven years.<sup>30</sup> It is, possibly, also responsible for the spread of HIV in the country. As Mookodi correctly observes that the advancement of women through education and other

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<sup>26</sup> By introducing 'paper based marriages' that made women assume their husbands' surnames as Mrs X or Y, it can be argued that colonialism exacerbated the male perception of female ownership that was already entrenched in tradition. The South African, Zimbabwean and Botswana traditional practices I am aware of called a married woman by her totemic name (e.g. MaGumbo for those of the Gumbo totem) or simply as mother/grandmother of X or Y (usually the first born child, e.g. Mai Lovemore is what my mother was called).

<sup>27</sup> SD Rakgoasi, *Men, Masculinities and Sexual Reproductive Health in Botswana*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 2010:217.

<sup>28</sup> MW Dube, 'Culture, Gender and HIV/AIDS,' 90.

<sup>29</sup> SD Rakgoasi, *Men, Masculinities*, 218.

<sup>30</sup> G Mookodi, 'Male Violence,' 118-138.

government programmes and policies have seen some women climbing up the social ladder.<sup>31</sup> There are many Botswana women who have enjoyed greater success in life than their male counterparts. There are many women who earn better salaries than their spouses, many who do not need a man to provide for them. Frustrated by their failure to live up to the standards of a real man, some Botswana men therefore act violently against women. As unemployment levels increase and more and more women can stand on their own without men in their lives, surely the Botswana traditional masculinity will remain in crisis. Can the figure of Jesus, especially as presented in the Gospel of Luke be of any significance in transforming such a masculinity?

### **Transforming Botswana Hegemonic Masculinities**

That traditional masculinities are in crisis, not only in Botswana but elsewhere in Africa and the world, is a known fact.<sup>32</sup> The sayings discussed above prove the crisis as they pose much danger in the present Botswana context. Men's dominance of women has led to gender based violence and the masculinity attribute of risk-taking has led many men to contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. The contemporary Botswana hegemonic masculinity is therefore dangerous and creates a crisis. The question is how to address this crisis. Gabaitse calls on the family, the school and the Church as institutions that must transform dangerous masculinities.<sup>33</sup> However, she notes correctly that the Church has tended to promote male dominance. As we have noted above, this is because of the way certain texts of Scripture have been used. For long biblical texts that marginalize women have been promoted by the Church. The Church has also tended to ignore texts (e.g. Judges 19) that promote masculinities that are violent to women and those (e.g. Genesis 19:8 where Lot offers his daughters to be raped) that see women as men's property. Resultantly biblical Christianity has been accused of promoting dangerous masculinities.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps now is the time to highlight those texts that promote equity between sexes and engage with those that are typically patriarchal. In this article I argue for a Christian model of masculinity based on the Jesus of the Gospel of Luke as one among many possible ways by which the Church can engage and transform dangerous masculinities. My suggestion in using the figure of Jesus of Luke is that now is the time to expose and undermine biblical texts that are not life-affirming and to highlight those that are life-affirming to both men and women. Studies have already shown that religious traditions are handy in transforming dangerous masculinities. For example, A van Klinken has shown how the tradition of Joachim, the father of Mary the Virgin, is used in transforming dangerous masculinities in a Zambian Catholic Church.<sup>35</sup> I propose the use of the figure of Jesus because, whereas most of the books of the Bible are accused of underlining patriarchy, Jesus stands out as an ideal masculine figure, one who was ready to challenge the hegemonic masculinities of his day. How can the same Jesus, especially as presented in the Gospel of Luke, be used to transform dangerous Botswana masculinities?

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<sup>31</sup> G Mookodi, 'Male Violence,' 121.

<sup>32</sup> G Mookodi, 'Male Violence,' 118-138.

<sup>33</sup> RM Gabaitse, 'Passion Killings in Botswana,' 320.

<sup>34</sup> This point is made by scholars such as E Chitando, *Acting in Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS 2*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007:46 and TS Maluleke, 'Men, Religion and HIV-AIDS in Africa: Complex and Paradoxical Relationships, Paper presented at the AASR conference, Gaborone, Botswana, 26-29 July 2007.

<sup>35</sup> A Van Klinken, 'St Joachim as a model,' 467-479.

## The Lukan Jesus as an Alternative Masculine Model (in early Christianity)<sup>36</sup>

Whereas there can be debates on the gender of God, it is commonly held that Jesus was male.<sup>37</sup> As male, Jesus was therefore exposed to hegemonic masculinities of his day. The way he dealt with such masculinities can be a good guide to his followers today on how they should also deal with hegemonic masculinities of their time and contexts. To understand how he did this, it is necessary to start with a reconstruction of such masculinit(y)ies. This can be done through an analysis of the position of men and women in Jesus' world, because each society constructs a model of masculinity often through articulation of differences with a variety of others, especially differences between men and women.

The world of Jesus was the ancient Mediterranean region. Studies on that world<sup>38</sup> and from the Hebrew Scriptures show that this was a highly patriarchal world that limited the lives of women to the domestic sphere with very little access to the public. On this BJ Malina and JH Neyrey write:

If females represent domestic space, an inward direction towards the centre, males relate to public space and an outward direction. Hence there are male places and male things, such as farm implements and wine presses and draft animals. If female honor is related to remaining at home and within that sphere, male honor demands that they represent the family outside the home, and so they must be out and abroad.<sup>39</sup>

Women were segregated from men both in secular activities and in worship. For example, in worship, Jewish women were excluded from the Jerusalem Temple and had to remain behind a screen in the synagogue. Hebrew Bible texts show that women were generally considered to be sources of sin (Lev. 12:2-5). Women were not counted in the number ten which was the minimum required to hold a synagogue service. Except for a few women such as Deborah who was a judge, Jewish women did not assume leadership positions. As Judaism developed, women became more segregated and among the morning prayers of orthodox Jews was this prayer, "I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou has not made me a woman." Later Jewish writers like Ben Sirach considered daughters a total loss as they were a constant source of shame.<sup>40</sup> Men were therefore discouraged from talking to women

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<sup>36</sup> One of the reviewers of this article commented, "My problem with the above-mentioned theological argumentation is that we know actually nothing about the masculinity of Jesus. What the researcher tries to do is to analyze Jewish paradigms within the Jewish culture and tradition and to compare these paradigms with the cultural and social notion of hegemonic masculinity. Such a hermeneutical approach is acceptable. But the masculinity of Jesus and Jesus as model is questionable. The problem with Jesus is: there was never a MR Jesus. Jesus was mediator and in one way or another, his human existence (enfleshment/ incarnation) is intertwined with his divine character in a very mysterious way. To derive a model for masculinity from Jesus is to degrade his mediatory work to the level of merely our human condition and is wide open for speculation." Although I agree with the reviewer in seeing Jesus as a mediator, I disagree that using him as a model of masculinity degrades him. I am guided by a theology that sees Jesus as having set a model to which all his followers must aspire. As the author of 1 Peter 2:21 says, Christians are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Though the reviewer says Jesus was divine, I believe he became human in order to set an example for humanity.

<sup>37</sup> The author of Luke-Acts clearly refers to Jesus as *aner*, the Greek word for man (Luke 24:19).

<sup>38</sup> For example by RS Kraemer, 'Jewish Women and Women's Judaism(s) at the Beginning of Christianity,' in RS Kraemer and MRD'Angelo (eds.), *Women and Christian Origins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 50-79.

<sup>39</sup> BJ Malina and JH Neyrey, 'Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values of the Mediterranean World,' in BJ Malina and JH Neyrey, *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991:43.

<sup>40</sup> KE Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2008:89.



in public. Women's witness had no validity in law courts. By the time of Jesus, segregation of women had become harsher. They were forbidden to take part in a meal when someone was invited to the house.

Raised in such a world, one would expect Jesus to have treated women in a similar fashion. However, the gospels, especially the Gospel of Luke, show that Jesus was not subject to such hegemonic masculinity. Instead Luke presents a Jesus who would fail to stand up to the challenges of being a 'real' man in the first century world in light of what we highlighted about the position of women above. In a world where hegemonic masculinity generally marginalized women, the Jesus of Luke paid special attention to them. Notable is Luke's pairings of Jesus' dealings with both men and women (for example, the raising of the widow of Nain's son (7:11-17) and the raising of Jairus' daughter (8:41-46)).<sup>41</sup> Often when the Jesus of Luke did one thing to a woman, he would do another to a man or vice versa.<sup>42</sup> According to H Flender, this meant, "that man and woman stand together and side by side before God. They are equal in honor and grace; they are endowed with the same gifts and have the same responsibilities."<sup>43</sup> He accepted many female disciples (8:1-3), allowing them to leave their homes and following him. He even praised those who abandoned domestic chores to take their places among male followers (Luke 10:38-42). Women were not only his disciples; they were his and his other male followers' key financial supporters (8:2-3). Women are also the key witnesses of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in this gospel (23:49, 23:55-24:11). Unlike in other gospels, the Lukan Jesus also made women subjects of his parables (15:8-10, 18:1-8). No wonder there have been descriptions of Jesus as a 'sissy boy.'<sup>44</sup> Not only does Luke present a Jesus who associates with women closely, rather, the Lukan Jesus also associates with vulnerable people on the margins of society; an attribute which would make him less of a 'real' man. His contemporaries even described him as "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:34). All these qualities left him falling short of being a 'real man'.

Jesus also broke many cultural taboos concerning women that would lead his contemporaries to consider him unmanly. He forgave a woman who was a sinner (7:36-50) allowing her to touch and kiss him. He also allowed a haemorrhaging woman to touch him (8:43-48).<sup>45</sup> Against cultural taboos that forbade men from speaking to women in public, Jesus spoke publicly with the widow of Nain (7:12-13), with the haemorrhaging woman (7:48) and with a woman who called him from the crowd (11:27-28). He accepted women as disciples (8:3) and allowed Mary to sit at the position of a student as he allowed her the choice of intellectual and spiritual development (10:39). Jesus' breaking of these taboos shows that his manhood was not defined simply by culture and tradition but transcended these as he sought to present women as full human beings. Commenting on Jesus' reference to women as daughters of Abraham (e.g. 13:16), Bloesch argues that Jesus was according

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<sup>41</sup> For more of the pairings see MR D'Angelo, 'Representations of Women in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke-Acts,' in RS Kraemer and MR D'Angelo (eds.), *Women and Christian Origins*, 171-195.

<sup>42</sup> It is possible that Jesus could not have done this in reality.

<sup>43</sup> H Flender quoted by B Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988:129.

<sup>44</sup> MJ Bayley, 'Jesus was a sissy,' <http://thewildreed.blogspot.com/2010/06/jesus-was-sissy.html>, accessed 20/11/11.

<sup>45</sup> Jewish law taught that contact with a woman with flow of blood made one unclean and called for a cleansing ritual (Leviticus 15:19ff). Jesus did not observe such taboos.

women a spiritual status equal to that of men.<sup>46</sup> This is because this title is never used in Judaistic writings and it appears Jesus deliberately used it to show the value he placed in women.

Although some scholars doubt the authenticity of the above presentation of Jesus and give the texts interpretations that show that he was not different from his contemporaries,<sup>47</sup> the majority of scholars think Jesus saw women as having an intrinsic value equal to that of men, as a result he addressed them and saw them as genuine people on their own not only to be seen in relation to men. Based on Jesus' attitude to women, some scholars would like to argue that pristine Christianity was free from any misogyny or gender bias.<sup>48</sup> They see current gender bias and misogyny in Christianity as influenced by Judaism and other Graeco-Roman polytheistic religions and cultures.

Our argument in this article is that the Jesus of Luke "celebrates women's discipleship, self determination and leadership even as it heralds a reversal of systemic inequalities."<sup>49</sup> Jesus and his emissaries therefore expressed a masculinity that resocialised people of the Greco-Roman world with a new vision of life on earth.<sup>50</sup> As MJ Evans puts it, Jesus' approach to women was revolutionary compared to his contemporaries.<sup>51</sup> He viewed women as full human beings not to be defined in relation to men. In the next section I therefore argue that Jesus can be used as a model to transform dangerous masculinities such as the Botswana ones outlined above.

### **The Lukan Jesus as an Alternative Masculine Model (in contemporary Botswana Christianity)**

Above we have seen how Botswana men are constructed and the subsequent emerging hegemonic masculinity. Let me add here that colonialism heavily contributed to hegemonic masculinities. Although all African countries have removed the yoke of colonialism, Africa still remains largely colonized mentally.<sup>52</sup> The colonial view of women that limited them to such roles as secretaries, nurses, teachers and housewives remains strong in most African psyches. Contemporary African hegemonic masculinities are defined along these lines. It has been emphasised that such hegemonic masculinities pose danger to both men and women, thus calling for its transformation. We have also looked at how Jesus dealt with hegemonic masculinities of his day and saw how he resisted them and especially treated women as equal human beings. In communities where the Bible remains the basis of

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<sup>46</sup> D Bloesch cited by JA Borland, 'Women in the Life and Teachings of Jesus,' in J Piper and W Grudem (eds), *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991:115.

<sup>47</sup> The book, *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, A Levine with M Blickenstaff (eds.), London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002 shows the different views scholars have on the use of the Gospel of Luke for female emancipation.

<sup>48</sup> For example, RS Kraemer, 'Jewish Women and Christian Origins: Some Caveats,' in RS Kraemer and MR D'Angelo (eds.), *Women and Christian Origins*, 36.

<sup>49</sup> A Levine, 'Introduction,' in A Levine with M Blickenstaff (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Luke*. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002:1.

<sup>50</sup> JM Arlandson, *Women, Class and Society in Early Christianity: Models from Luke-Acts*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997:121.

<sup>51</sup> MJ Evans, *Women in the Bible*. Exeter, The Paternoster Press, 1983:45.

<sup>52</sup> This is seen particularly in identity formation through media technologies among the youth. Dube (Youth Masculinities) discusses the matter at length.

Christian teaching, it is the same Jesus that people are still urged to emulate. E Chitando raises very important questions concerning African Christian men. He asks, "Are they (African Christian men) challenging conventional forms of masculinity? How can hegemonic masculinities be deconstructed among Christian youth and men?"<sup>53</sup> My suggestion is that the figure of Jesus, especially as presented in the Gospel of Luke can be useful in challenging dangerous hegemonic masculinities, such as the Botswana one discussed above. Jesus is therefore the right model to use for the transformation of Botswana dangerous masculinities among Christians. I am aware that the Jesus figure, especially interpreted in terms of headship, can be questioned when it comes to gender justice, but I believe when the Jesus texts are interpreted properly, especially as presented in the Gospel of Luke, it can help in addressing dangerous masculinities. This is because Jesus resisted all the three sources of masculine formation: culture, religion and colonial influence. As we have seen above, these are also the sources of masculine formation among Botswana men. Jesus provides a model for dealing with these sources of masculinity. For example, we have seen above that Jesus was not afraid of breaking social customs when he felt it necessary. He was not bound to Jewish religion as he was free to alter some of the teachings to give women their full dignity (for example, whereas Jewish religion allowed men to divorce their wives, Jesus taught against this in Luke 16:18). Jesus also resisted some colonial influences on masculinity. As we have seen above, he did not observe the Roman (and Jewish) view of women that limited them to the home.<sup>54</sup> Botswana followers of Jesus should therefore have a masculinity that values women as full persons with self-awareness, personal freedom, self-determination and personal responsibility for their actions. Jesus had all these attitudes towards women as we have seen above. He ministered to women in the same way he ministered to men and treated all the women he came across with dignity and respect. The masculinity shown by Jesus as we have seen above is a masculinity of love and care as opposed to masculinity of power and dominance.

Botswana has seen an increase in the number of so-called passion killings or intimate femicide.<sup>55</sup> These are murder cases involving lovers. Often it is men who kill women when the relationship goes wrong. Botswana police statistics show that between 2004 and 2008 there was a steady rise in the number of passion killings (from 56 in 2004 to 86 in 2007)<sup>56</sup>. The sayings we analysed above contribute a lot in constructing a masculinity that does not allow women to ask men where they have spent the night. There are many cases of passion killings that are a result of men feeling that their masculinity has been challenged. Jesus provides a model for transformation of such dangerous masculinities. This is because, as we have seen above, Jesus expressed a masculinity that continuously questioned what tradition, religion, culture and colonialism taught as it sought life in its abundance for all, men and women, children and adults.

The Jesus of Luke also provides a model of a man who accepts the complementarity of men and women. Jesus did not teach men to 'lord it' over women but showed the men of his time that women were daughters of Abraham as much as they were sons of Abraham. This equality and dignity of women accorded to them by Jesus would go a long way in addressing some cultural formations of men in Botswana. This figure of Jesus can go a long

<sup>53</sup> E Chitando, *Acting in Hope*, 40-41.

<sup>54</sup> B Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988:16.

<sup>55</sup> RM Gabaitse, 'Passion Killings in Botswana: Masculinity at Crossroads,' in E Chitando and S Chirongoma (eds.), *Redemptive Masculinities: Men , HIV and Religion*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012:305-321.

<sup>56</sup> Botswana Police, 'Passion Killing Statistics,' Gaborone central police station, 2009.

way in teaching Batswana men to deal with cultural, religious and colonial influences in their definition of a man.

## Conclusion

Contemporary hegemonic masculinities are by and large oppressive to women. Religions, including Christianity, are suspects in this status quo. In order to transform dangerous hegemonic masculinities there is need for rethinking and creativity in the use of religion and culture. Particularly, the role of Christianity in transforming hegemonic masculinities has remained ambivalent. Attempting to answer the question, "Is it manly to be Christian?", EA Kirkley writes about those who answer the question in the negative saying:

Men could realize authentic manhood only by rejecting Christianity. Christianity robs a man of his manhood – his dearest possession; takes away his right to exercise his reason, his common sense, and makes of him a slave, a crawling, cringing, cowardly thing, a being who walks the earth with fear and trembling, who doubts his sense and denies his convictions. The church has created a horde of mentally castrated little Willies, ready to hop into any pre-arranged or present hell that our political and religious priests may have prepared for us.<sup>57</sup>

This seems to be an extreme view of the negative role of Christianity in the formation of men. As mentioned above there is also another extreme that sees Christianity, especially through what its Scriptures teach, as constructing a patriarchal man prone to abusing women. In this article I have argued for a selective use of a biblical tradition. I have argued for the use of the Jesus of the Gospel of Luke in transforming Botswana hegemonic masculinity, taking seriously the view that Jesus' approach to women was revolutionary and therefore his masculinity was revolutionary as well. His approach stood in startling contrast compared to the general view of women among his contemporaries. To make this argument, we first analysed proverbs, common Setswana sayings and Scriptural texts that are used to construct Batswana men. In doing so, it became clear that the resultant hegemonic masculinity is dangerous both to women and to the men themselves. The article then proceeded to analyse how Jesus dealt with hegemonic masculinities of his day concluding that his model can be used by communities that still value his life and teaching.

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<sup>57</sup> EA Kirkley, 'Is it Manly to be Christian?: The debate in Victorian and Modern America,' in SB Boyd, WM Longwood and MW Muese (eds.), *Redeeming Men*, 81.