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Indigenous research methods and African women's theology: A theo-analytical engagement[1]

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to address the following question: To what extent can we draw a parallel between the methodology of African women's theology and that of African indigenous research? It sets out on the premise that indigenous methodologies strive towards research authenticity, from an insider perspective, as opposed to an outsider's overview. Understanding the concept of relationality in the indigenous methods is critically important as we comparatively engage African women's theology. Does the latter embrace an all-inclusive approach that encompasses axiology (aesthetics and ethics), epistemology (knowledge and truth), political philosophy (the state and government), logic (argumentation and reason), and metaphysics (reality and being), as in the former? In vouching for a cosmological interconnectedness, women theologians have approached their discourses from a broad spectrum that seeks to preserve and nurture a two-winged society of men and women. In using a theo-analytical engagement, this article reviews relevant literature, in order to understand its concern.

1 This article foregrounds the interface between IRM and the scholarly contributions of African women's theologies. It reiterates that the failure to use the resources from the AIKS points to a delay in decolonising research methods in tropical Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

African indigenous knowledge system (AIKS) can be defined as a knowledge system that is rooted in indigenous phenomenology, home-grown techniques of survival and learning, experiences, religio-cultural carry-overs from previous generations, and the broader aspects of the African heritage. As an indigenous phenomenon, it is incorporated in all departments of life (Mbiti 1969; Kenyatta 1938), including environmental conservation, norms and customs, medicine, gender relations and the division of labour, agricultural practices, and socio-economic activities, among others. It is largely contrasted with Western knowledge systems (Nel 2005). As noted in this article, indigenous research methodologies (IRM) are an offshoot of the indigenous knowledge system. Scholars have used the former as a measure of de-westernising and/or decolonising research in various parts of the globe where westernisation of research methodologies and its alien nature have been viewed as an impediment to authentic studies, especially in the African context. Further, this research article establishes that there is a difference between AIKS and [African] IRM or AIRM, although the two concepts are interconnected. In essence, AIKS is the "what" and IRM/AIRM is the "how". Put differently: While AIKS is a body of knowledge, IRM is the methodology used to study or engage with that knowledge respectfully.

In their research article, Olaitan and Oloruntoba (2023:1) propound the view that African women are poorly represented, even within the "feminist thought". This is due to "the elevation of Eurocentric knowledge system", which is dismissive of African experiences on matters concerning production and knowledge. The panacea to this, they argue, is to embrace the AIKS as the epistemological model of re-centering African women in "feminist thought" (Olaitan & Oloruntoba 2023:2). This will further aid in their holistic representations in the public square.

> This embrace of AIKS by African scholars and other global south scholars will provide more visibility for indigenous knowledge as a mode of knowing, practice, and ways of doing, without waiting on external validation. It allows for the decentralization of knowledge from the universal Eurocentric/western-centric knowledge we are used to (Olaitan & Oloruntoba 2023:2).

Although African women's theologies do not necessarily proclaim their dalliances with the AIKS and the resultant IRM as their critical point of reference, this article argues that it remains one of their significant partners in their gendered discourses. The lack of overt endorsement of AIKS, in these pedagogic works, is partly informed by the fact that the latter are largely underused research tools in tropical Africa. This underutilisation of AIKS

and IRM obtains despite the fact that it energises the calls for decolonised research methodology (Chilisa 2012; Harvey 2002). Does this underline the view that research tools in contemporary Africa are largely imperialistic in their motif, hence lacking in indigeneity? Put differently: Are the current tools of research in the African context an imposition from outside that risks irrelevance and/or ineffectiveness? In striving to deconstruct imperial research tools, as in the case of over-reliance on former colonisers' languages (French, Portuguese and English) and cultures, AIKS strives to resist the temptation of elevating "alien" tools as the most suitable instruments of solving global and local concerns. By appearing to appreciate some research tools that emanate from the AIKS (Phiri 2004a), such as storytelling, African women theologies appear to confirm the view that there is no Christian theology that can claim authenticity if it is insensitive to indigeneity, irrespective of its qualitative or quantitative nature (Mugambi 1995).

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The term "indigenous" refers to peoples who are the original inhabitants of a given corner of the world and are viewed as the *de facto* descendants. AIKS denotes an all-inclusive "system" used by indigenous peoples in their learning and all-rounded practices (Olaitan 2024). It is described as a "system", due to its broad spectrum that is visible in all the vicissitudes of life. In this understanding, AIKS and IRM are not homogeneous entities that apply uniformly across the globe. Indeed, there are the indigenous Africans, the Maori of New Zealand, the Mayas of Guatemala, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia, the First Nations, the Inuit and the Metis of Canada, the Saami of Northern Europe, the Native Americans, the Alaska Natives of the United States of America, and the Celtic people who inhabited the United Kingdom since the Iron Age (Chikaire *et al.* 2012). A contextual approach in dealing with AIKS and IRM is certainly critical.

IRM are grounded in indigenous, cultural, and epistemological ways of doing and being (Smith 1999). As research decolonising tools, they insist on communality, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility, and integrate traditional practices of gathering knowledge. Such practices include, but are not limited to storytelling, folklores, rituals, legends, dances, myths, drama, designs, architecture, visual art, songlines, languages, songs, and laws (Wiafe 2023). As a rule, IRM collects contextual knowledge that resonates with indigenous peoples rather than exclusively depending on positivist research methods of the West – a phenomenon where the latter insists on quantitative data collection, analysis characteristic of traditional Western research methods, and objectivity (Smith 1999).

In seeking to de-westernise research methods through an emphasis on IRM, it is worthwhile to appreciate that research is the progression whereby a newfangled understanding of things is established (Conti 1997). It is the compass that maps out direction for the entire society, as it enhances epistemological inventions and is indeed the engine of sustainable development (Traore 2004). In building a conceptual framework of decolonising and/or de-westernising research methods, the key cornerstones are the six Rs: Respect (respect for indigenous world views and identities); relationship (where components of indigenous identities relate with the cosmos in terms of nature, ancestors, community, future generations, and land, among others); relevance (where cautious reflection is made to ensure peoples' world views and ways of knowing or living are addressed); reciprocity (where parties involved in research engage in perpetual dynamic association); responsibility (where the researchers are accountable for their own narratives, peoples, and future generations), and representation (where the researcher writes, speaks or documents faithfully on behalf of the wider community) (Smith 1999). Certainly, the 17 sustainable development goals, adopted by all United Nations members in 2015 to boost peace, clean energy, zero hunger, zero poverty rates, prosperity, gender equality, reduced inequality, environmental justice, and general well-being, among other implied goals, can only be realised via commitment to research and publication as critical starting points (Al-Raeei 2023).

Although IRM are aligned with some Western qualitative approaches, there are clear demarcating lines (Smith 1999). IRM flow from national-ethnic epistemologies and are sometimes specific and central for their respective contexts. Lambert (2023:3) perceptively notes:

> Some of those distinctions [for IRMs] include a relationship with the person telling the research story or data. Another distinction is the relationship that the researcher has with the story, how it is told and how the informants or collaborators and the researcher interpret the story. In Western models, traditionally, the research project and the data are separated from the researcher. The researcher is an onlooker. While in Indigenous models, the researcher is included in the research process. The researcher's voice and story is heard. … Indigenous/Native peoples have always engaged in research [despite the fact that] we have no name in any of the Indigenous languages for the word "research". To us, it means finding out how the world works, understanding our land, our place, our environment. Our ancestors applied research and careful observation long ago to determine the use of medicinal plants, to understand the migratory patterns and behaviour of animals, to observe the celestial constellations, to anticipate weather

> patterns and to develop cultural life ways. For example, in the areas of environmental/biological science, American-Indians managed to develop some of the most outstanding horses on the planet through inter-breeding.

IRM have been critiqued as not matching the ideal positivist/post-positivist methodology of the Western knowledge systems (Chilisa 2012). In a sense, IRM could have failed to earn universal acceptance, due to cultural heresies that are evidently displayed by the Western world (Adelaja 2013). In considering that the Western world is proud of their cultural identity, which goes hand-in-hand with their respective knowledge systems, it remains a tall order for the latter to embrace "other ways of knowing" (Williams & Shipley 2023:468). Rather, cultural superiority bars the Western world from elevating "other ways" of knowledge acquisition and its resultant methodologies. Speaking from their Western backcloth, Williams and Shipley (2023:469) confess their Western and/or American upbringing that had no room for non-Western ways of learning:

> Like many, we were indoctrinated from an early age into the importance and superiority of science, and we are, to an extent, personally and professionally invested in the usefulness of science to answer certain kinds of questions, so we understand the reflex to defend it. Nevertheless, it is important that the reader override this reflex and approach [in] this work with an open mind. For example, anthropologists who believe that their discipline has particularly good relations with Indigenous peoples may reflexively reject the claim by some Indigenous writers that anthropology represents all that is truly bad about research.

Another challenge of employing IRM are the wrong perceptions that, unlike the Western methodologies of research, IRM are a reactionary and oppositional process that can only be a back-up to the Western model rather than a self-fulfilling process (Adelaja 2013; Bhanye *et al.* 2023). In other words, non-indigenous scholars view IRM as inadequate and unreliable ways of gathering data or knowledge for that matter. Considering the old adage that only the wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches, indigenous scholars and their respective societies will only find authenticity in IRM, and would view Western indoctrinates as in need of dialogue with the IRM, or in need of rejuvenation by the latter. The wrong perceptions of IRM have several implications (Harvey 2002). First, there is the need to invigorate, replicate, and endorse IKS and IRM, as is implicated and functionally affirmed by African women's theologies.

Secondly, there is a need to revisit our "indoctrinations" that make some scholars view IRM as contemptuous. This will drive us to revise the wrong assumption that views Western science as the only acceptable global model of knowledge acquisitions.

Thirdly, with human and social sciences, or even the medical science, embracing varied epistemologies, axiology, cosmologies, teleology, ontologies, logics, and metaphysics, a rich hybridity will trigger a more knowledgeable world, and is bound to inform our new praxis. Indeed, the rich cultural diversity boosts the global community. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) experiences affirm this point, as the reliance on African medicine, as the global community awaited the coming of vaccines, proved successful. As COVID-19 vaccines hit the global market in March 2021, local medicines, derived from AIKS, had been acknowledged as critical tools and/or "confirmed as critical partners in the fight against" the pandemic (Gathogo 2022:1).

Besides these COVID-19 experiences, a renowned Nigerian sociologist/anthropologist, Alex Egodotaye Asakitikpi (2018:101), confirmed the uniqueness of indigenous knowledge prior to the pandemic in 2019. In the course of his researches, he established that indigenous medical knowledge and general healing operate in a dualistic way. He specifically pointed out that

> African healer operates within cognitive framework that believes in both an objective and subjective reality that exists over and above the human mind and a world and experience that are socially constructed (Asakitikpi 2018:101).

Such discoveries not only affirmed the uniqueness and efficacy of indigenous resources, but also speak broadly for the holistic nature of IKS and methodologies that call for deeper introspections before making a decisive verdict on related concerns.

Fourthly, the use of indigenous forms of data gathering, which is culturally acceptable to the local contexts of research, and the ability to present or publish it within acceptable ways strengthen the case for IRM. In his book, *From liberation to reconstruction: African Christian theology after the cold war*, Mugambi (1995) cites the case of the Acholi Bible which was translated by European missionaries who employed Western tools of learning, researching, and documenting local cultures. He cites the Ugandan poet, Okot p'Bitek who laments the meaningless of the translated English Bible to the Acholi language of Uganda. In the European missionaries' insistence on studying the Acholi vernacular, by appealing to all language components (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, implicature, and pragmatics) just as they did with the English language, they ended up with insulting words that were included in the otherwise Holy Bible (Mugambi 1995). In view of this, indigenous methodological approaches tends to reach out to the targeted community and/or linguistic society under consideration effectively, as they

underline the locals' values, needs, protocols, and respect (Chilisa 2012). Indigenous methodologies also engage the society under consideration with a sense of reciprocity, maturity, relevance, and responsibility (Adelaja 2013).

Pobee (1997:24), a scholar of note in African theology, captures the holistic and/or pluralistic nature in indigenous researches, especially with regard to the African context:

> This fact of pluralism [and holistic nature] in society, not least in African society, appears to be part of the divine economy. First, the historical nature of revelation implies a pluralistic situation. Second, the whole theology of love operating through human life implies pluralism, because love can be accepted only freely and not by imposition. Freedom and the possibility of choice and variety go together. Third, the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 2:1-9) affirms pluralism as part of God's economy for the world.

Phiri (2004a:16) affirms the holistic nature of understanding African women's theology (AWT), and academic research in general, by insisting that AWT does not refer to "theology" but rather to "theologies". She sums up its key methodological considerations by asserting that

> African women theologians want to acknowledge that even within Africa, there is diversity of women's experiences due to [the] differences in race, culture, politics, economy and religion (Phiri 2004a:16).

Likewise, the pioneer African woman theologian Oduyoye affirmed the holistic-inclusive nature of AWT in her 1989 inaugural speech that insisted on a "two-winged [inclusive] theology" of both men and women who must necessarily deconstruct ramshackled walls collectively, and ultimately build a stronger Africa together (Njoroge 1997:77). In using the imagery of a bird during this inaugural conference, Oduyoye largely affirmed the power using indigenous methods in reclaiming Africa from patriarchy, division, gender disparities, neo-colonialism, Western bias, and shattered dreams, among other concerns. Oduyoye (in Njoroge 1997) also tried to protest against exclusivism, a colonial hangover – whose wall had refused to give way to the dictates of post-colonial Africa, in various domains of life, including the family sphere. A two-winged approach to theologising was thus the ideal way that is well-implied in AIKS and IRM.

3. METHODOLOGY IN AFRICAN WOMEN'S THEOLOGY

Despite the affirmation of the plural-holistic nature in doing AWT, the extent to which it uses indigenous research methods remains the concern of this article. To what extent can we draw a parallel between the methodology among AWT and African indigenous research? The broad outlook in AWT drives us to view it as "theologies", rather than "theology" of African women (Phiri 2004b, 1997; Oduyoye 2001). In its findings, the article noted some of its key methodologies.

3.1 Contextualisation approaches

Although the term "contextual methodology" appears too Western, as opposed to indigenous methodology, it cuts across academic divides and is thus useful across the board. Basically, contextualisation refers to the "process of relating the message to the context" (Mugambi 1995:64). This translates to aligning concepts from one culture with another, or engaging in a dialogue, and/or drawing a parallel between two entities dialogically. By implication, this amounts to providing our thoughtfulness on our neighbours' approach to life settings and ultimately also ushering in our own inputs. In view of this, AWTs have employed this dialogical approach since 1989 when AWT became an academic discipline. In light of this, Okure, the celebrated Professor of Biblical Theology at the Catholic Institute of West Africa, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, cites the 2009 edition of the *Journal of Theological Studies* as one that contextually celebrates and commemorates the 30th anniversary of Virgilio Elizondo's

> ground-breaking dissertation, which addressed the significance of the Galilean Jesus for U.S. Latinos … and the 40th anniversary of the option for the poor of the Latin American Bishops at Medellin (1968) (Okure 2009:402).

Although the concern for the poor appears like a progression from liberation theologies (Boff & Boff 1987; Gathogo 2007; Gutierrez 1973; Massie 1973), it nevertheless remains a contextual approach. In this commemoration, Okure (2009) went on to situate the "Galilean Jesus and the Samaritan woman" from an African perspective.

Further, the idea of commemorating the contributions of African ancestors is well implied in festschrifts, commemorations, and in appealing to the past experiences of society, which is evident in AWTs (Okure 2009; Oduyoye 1996; Phiri & Nadar 2006). Besides Virgilio Elizondo, leading women theologians who have been elaborately commemorated include, among others, Mercy Oduyoye, Isabel Phiri, Musa Dube, and Letty Russell (Gathogo 2010; Oduyoye 1996; Phiri & Nadar 2006; Togarasei 2008). In the case of AWTs,

this commemorative approach resonates well with contextualisation, as contributors relate the message of the character under consideration to the prevailing realities. Stressing the need to abolish the use of expressions such as "ancestor" and "ancestral spirits" rather than "spirits" and the "living dead", Mbiti (1969) acknowledges the value of ancestral veneration and the commemoration of heros and heroic acts of individuals in society, some of whom are honoured as diviners, priests, medicine persons/herbalists, seers, prophets, rainmakers, mediums (fortune-tellers and counsellors), elders, healers, and kings, among others. In the indigenous society, everyone is remembered or commemorated for his/her ontological significance.

3.2 Oral techniques

Considering that the vast majority of people in the world "are oral thinkers and oral learners" and since "God's proclamations were originally oral" (Sharma 2016:269), oral techniques are gaining currency across the various schools in academia. As orality is allied to the study of oral tradition, oral techniques ignite the reader/audience, prick his/her imagination, and transport him/her "to the world of ideas, dreams, myths, and fables" in an amazing way (Sharma 2016:270). In oral techniques, AWTs have strongly embraced a global and indigenous trend that is rapidly gaining currency in social and human sciences, largely due to its originality (Dube 1998, 2009; Masenya 2004; Oduyoye 2001, 2004; Phiri 2004a; Okure 2009; Phiri 1997, 2004a, 2004b; Phiri & Nadar 2006). Although critics have poked holes in oral techniques for fear of inconsistencies of memory, particularly in situations where interviews are recounted years later, they remain critical pillars of research in AWTs, history, and literature, among other disciplines (Roberts 2002).

Indeed, oral techniques provide a mechanism that helps us comprehend the cultural milieu within which we lead our lives. Hence, their strengths are noted in their experiential focus. Rather than generalising, oral techniques are critical in capturing specific experiences of individuals and societies, especially as the writer/researcher narrates his/her experiences. This is clear from scholars who employ post-colonial theories that appeal to memory, drama, personal communication and interviews, archival materials, unpublished works, conference minutes, theses and dissertations as sources of information, novels, festschrifts, biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, storytelling, and commemorations, among others (Gathogo 2021). While the use of peer-reviewed works sounds too ideal, oral techniques are equally credible, as they cultivate societal honesty and confidence in local resources irrespective of their status as published or not, oral or written, minutes or dissertations. African women theologians lead the parade in these fields that are critically inspiring to the incoming generations, as more oral literatures will, ultimately, be published. In a sense, they inspire us in their first-hand

information, which initially impresses us as an unadulterated truth. A critique in every area or step of research is always necessary and will always find its way in these discourses.

In employing a narrative design, Dube (2009:133-146) narrates an empowering story of a Congolese woman, Kimpa Vita (1684-1706), also called Dona Beatrice, who can be said to be the *de facto* founder of African instituted churches. She could also pass on as the mother of Africa's indigenisation theology. In her narration, she was inspired to oppose colonial ideologies in both the church and the state. This went beyond gender, race, religion, class, texts, and cultural divides. Dube (2009) relates Kimpa Vita's works to those of key African women theologians, as in the case of Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahhllele) (2004) "Bosadi (womanhood) hermeneutics", Dube's "postcolonial feminist Biblical hermeneutics", Oduyoye's (2001, 2004b) "in-culturated feminist hermeneutics", and the "*Talitha cum* (little girl wake up) hermeneutics" (Dube 2009), which is an empowering biblical story, drawn from Mark 5:21-43. In Dube's (1998:118) post-colonial hermeneutics, she uses key concepts that are commonly used in indigenous research methods, including, among others, post-colonialism, decolonising, liberating dependence, imperialistic tendencies, and cultural liberation. Her works, as with other African women theologians, is clearly in continuum with indigenous research skills.

> Postcolonial readings of the Bible must seek to decolonize the biblical text, its interpretations, its readers, its institutions, as well as seeking ways of reading for liberating interdependence. Liberating dependence here entails a twofold willingness on the part of readers: first, to propound biblical readings that decolonize imperialistic tendencies and other narrative designs; second, to propound readings that seek to highlight the biblical texts and Jesus as undoubtedly important cultures, which are nonetheless, not above all, but among the many important cultures of the world (Dube 1998:118-119).

Similarly, Phiri (1997, 2004b) appraises oral techniques as critical tools in delivering the promise in AWTs. "[S]torytelling is one of the powerful methodologies that African women [theologians] have revived" (Phiri 2004b:156). She cites Dube who developed "a unique methodology" in biblical hermeneutics through the storytelling technique, in the context of globalisation. Phiri (2004a:20) says of Dube:

> …. she depicts the multi-faceted experience of oppression and marginalisation of the African continent (The Samaritan Woman [John 4:5-30] and her many husbands, with Mr Globalisation as the sixth husband). Through storytelling, African women are highlighting to the world their spiritual, emotional, and physical suffering and their potential to transform their oppression.

Employing sarcasm to display Mr Globalisation as the sixth "husband" of Africa (personified as the Samaritan woman), Dube (2009) views previous "spouses" from a historical perspective, including, among others, slavery and slave trade; colonialism that came with the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885; the Bretton woods institutions (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organisations, and the International Finance Corporation), which tend to advise Africa according to their interests, and the Arab and Portuguese conquests of the 16th century. Such sarcasm shows the interconnectedness of oral techniques in AWTs, as it also implies the post-colonial technique.

In turn, the post-colonial approach and the deconstruction of patriarchy, as research methods in AWTs, are also implied in Potgieter's works. Potgieter (1996) expresses her discomfort concerning church symbols, ecclesiastical ladders, the laity-cleric ministries that lack harmony, and other related concerns. She views ecclesiastical symbols as patriarchal tools. This expression also finds its parallel in Ackerman (cited in Phiri 2004b:157) who dealt with the issue of sexist language, the Bible, theology, and church liturgies that make women say that they are "sons of God". Prior to this, a western feminist theologian, Rosemary Ruether (1983) expressed related concerns. While Potgieter (1996) insisted on their meaninglessness, Ruether (1983) felt that ecclesiastical symbols are male-dominated. Concerning women who adopt titles such as Reverend, Bishop, Moderator, Archbishop, Canon (although Catholics have not allowed women Cardinals), Rural Deans, Archdeacons, the Very Reverend, and who wear clerical garments, the need to understand their symbolisms remains an area for research. For the purple shirt, mainly worn by bishops, was initially the dress for the medieval kings in Europe to signify power, wealth, and the divine right to rule. These kings would also wear cloth in gold or red colours (Connor 2002). Hence, in critiquing symbols, Potgieter (1996) and Ruether (1983) seek to understand the modern society by appealing to history. This is also a common trend in indigenous researches that tend to constantly appeal to the past, in order to understand the modern times and the future (Adelaja 2013; Bhanye *et al.* 2023).

3.3 Relationality and cultural appeal

In attempting to deconstruct patriarchy, which is well-rooted in the indigenous culture, African women have employed the same tool to reconstruct such disparities. Considering the relationality of African cultural philosophies, a two-winged approach, where men and women deconstruct patriarchal odds collectively, has been viewed as the most effective (Njoroge 1997:77). A two-winged approach means gender inclusivity in addressing the concerns of men and women. Indeed, gender relationality in indigenous society was/is well expressed through the division of labour, a phenomenon where duties were/are performed by a particular gender, as others were/are done by

both male and female as part of a mutual celebration of life. An interesting matter concerning the division of labour is that an individual was part of and responsible to the whole country (Gathogo 2001:15). Matters of religion, as one of the key pillars of culture, were a major relational concern that invited everyone across gender divides to contribute and play diverse roles.

In time of drought, plague (as in the case of the corona virus disease 2019, HIV and AIDs, ebola, cholera outbreak, and other recent pandemics), and other calamities, leading elders (priests) invited all people to gather for worship. They congregated at designated sacred places and offered sacrifices to God. In such sacrifices, both male and female played diverse roles (Kenyatta 1938; Mbiti 1969). Hence, the interconnectedness between men and women in doing AWTs has its well-defined roots in the indigenous society; a phenomenon where important matters of societal good are not left to one gender under the camouflage of division of labour or social constructions.

In appreciating that "a person is a person because of other persons" (Latin: "*homo est propter alias personas*", Nguni language "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*") (McGlamery 2020), the first conference that inaugurated the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, held in Accra-Ghana in 1989, identified rituals as "very important in African culture and religion" (Phiri 2004a:20). This appreciation of relationality in Africa's religion-culture points to a bold acknowledgement that AWTs were not set as isolated entities in academia and in the social domain. Rather, their ontological value is rooted in the African heritage, where life components are existentially set in mutual dialogue with other variables of survival. This translates to remaining in relationship with "other" dialogues so as to remain effective tools of deconstruction and reconstruction of a gendered world. Critically, however, the humane call for appreciating that "a person is a person through other persons" (*ubuntu* philosophy) evokes diverse concerns, particularly when theo-cultural digression becomes its *modus operandi*. This refers to situations where we fail to uphold the *ubuntu* philosophy as the unifying vision across gender divides, ethnic configurations, racial diversity, along political party lines, among poor versus rich, linguistic plurality, and among weak versus strong (Gathogo 2008).

In cases where there is too much literature on women or men as the "aggressors", a phenomenon which turns one gender as the propagandist tormentor of the other, *ubuntu* likewise is replaced by intellectual inhospitality, especially in cases where one gender is "helplessly" portrayed as "very bad". The challenge of African researchers in the 21st century is to live up to the example set by St Luke (1:3) and strive to give an accurate orderly account of our research, so that others "may know the truth concerning the things of which they have been told" (Luke 1:4).

3.4 Other approaches

Other research methods that are well captured in AWTs include, but are not limited to women's experiences as its starting point (Phiri 2004b); the cultural hermeneutics approach (Kanyoro 2002), and an appeal to family health concerns (Chirongoma & Naicker 2023; Phiri & Nadar 2006). Further, in addressing the key methods used in biblical hermeneutics by one of the key scholars in African women's theology (Musa Dube), Togarasei (2008) discusses seven methodologies. To an extent, these methodologies speak for AWT in general. The first method is "reading with non-academic readers" in mind (Togarasei 2008:59). This is geared towards reducing the pressure created by historical-critical methods such as radical, traditional, source, form, and redaction criticisms. Ultimately, this makes it less complicated for untrained readers. It makes the Bible and theology an every person's storybook rather than "the property of intellectual readers only" (Togarasei 2008:59).

The second method is "postcolonial biblical interpretation" in Africa (Togarasei 2008:61). In her post-colonial theory for biblical hermeneutics, she radically posits that scripture is imperialistic for the vast majority of people in the world who are reduced to subjects. She goes on to develop her thesis by citing an African saying: When the Europeans migrated to Africa, they had the Bible and the locals had the land. The Europeans told the oblivious Africans, who were notoriously religious (Mbiti 1969:1): "Let us pray", whereafter the land was taken away. Bibles replaced the former (Dube 2000a).

The third method in Dube's works, as noted in Togarasei (2008:63), is "feminist biblical interpretation". Although she mainly uses a post-colonial perspective in her works, she contends that feminist biblical hermeneutics has to necessarily remain multi-methodical. She logically views feminism as a broad-based political movement with diverse colours (Togarasei 2008:63).

The fourth method is "translation studies" (Togarasei 2008:64), where she underlines the value of translation as a tool of inculturation. Dube blames the London Missionary Society (LMS) for the poor translation of the Bible, as "evil spirits" were referred to as "*badimo*" (ancestors). For the Batswana people, *badimo* is a positive term meaning "high ones, ancestral spirits who are mediators between God and the living" (Dube 1999:35).

The fifth method is "divination", which developed from reading with non-trained readers of the Bible (Togarasei 2008:66), the believers in African AICs. Like bones or other divining objects are thrown by healers in indigenous society, Bibles have a divination connection among the AICs. Hence, researching among the AICs or with some new religious movements (NRM) calls for such epistemological sensitivity (Dube 2000b).

The sixth method in Dube's feminist hermeneutics is "storytelling and social location" (Togarasei 2008:67). She appears to appreciate that, as in the AIKS and the IRM, stories and storytelling are central to indigenous communities (Khupe 2014, 2017). She vouches for the hermeneutics that uses African storytelling techniques, especially with reference to pandemics such as COVID-19 and HIV and AIDS, by showcasing the story of the bleeding woman in Mark 5:24-43 (Dube 2001).

The seventh method in Dube's works is "HIV and AIDS' reading of the Bible" (Togarasei 2008:67). Having served as the World Council of Churches Theological Consultant for Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) for sub-Saharan Africa (2001-2003), she ably brings out realistic methodologies on this subject. In her publication, "*Talitha cum*! A postcolonial feminist and HIV/AIDS reading of Mark 5:21-42", Dube (2004:115-140) views indigenous communities as equally bleeding, and therefore in need of healing from the haemorrhage. She urges the need to invoke the *Talitha cum!* (Little girl wake up) mantra, especially to those who are dying of the pandemics (Dube 2004:138).

In all these methods, techniques that are in tandem with indigenous researches are evident. Their points of departure are, however, noted in the fact that the former are biblical and theocentric discourses, whereas the latter are neutral. They are not necessarily aligned to creeds and dogmas of the God of Christendom or any other religio-cultural setups.

4. ANY METHODOLOGICAL CONVERGENCE?

Although the AWT, which became an academic discipline in 1989, was geared towards gender inclusivity across African nationalities, it cannot escape Western methodological trajectories. Characteristically, Western research methodologies focus on quantitative data, standardised procedures, hypothesis testing, objectivity, belief in universal truths, and certainly positivist epistemology (Olaitan & Oloruntoba 2023). This limits their applications to other global contexts outside themselves. Nevertheless, the methodology in AWT[2] is not directly driven as progressions of AIKS or as by-products of IRM. Equally, AWTs are not a replica of Western canons of research. Rather, they present a hybridity of the two, without necessarily proclaiming it, at least in their published works that the researcher has read. To an extent, they are beholden

2 This includes contextualisation approaches, oral techniques, relationality and cultural appeal, reading with non-academic readers, post-colonial biblical interpretation, feminist biblical interpretation, translation studies, "divination", which developed from reading with non-trained readers of the Bible, storytelling and social location, as well as HIV and AIDS' reading of the Bible.

to the rich African heritage that embraces some of their methodological considerations such as storytelling, community, and contextualisation, among others. In embracing an all-inclusive approach that encompasses axiology (aesthetics and ethics), epistemology (knowledge and truth), political philosophy (the state and government), logic (argumentation and reason), and metaphysics (reality and being), among other methods, in their general treatise confirms that they are not an antithesis of Western research methodologies. But again, their vouching for a cosmological interconnectedness that seeks to preserve and nurture a two-winged society of men and women makes them lean towards the IRM (Phiri 2004a, 2004b; Dube 1998, 2009). On the whole, oral techniques in AWTs is evident in virtually all their works. They find it a strong tool of communicating cutting-edge issues facing tropical Africa. In a narrating continent which has relied on oral techniques from time immemorial, an appeal to storytelling and symbolic gestures thus remains a critical component of theologising gendered concerns. To a large extent, embracing the AIKS and the resultant methodologies, as the epistemological model of re-centering African women in the mainstream society, will enrich their two-winged agenda of inclusivity across gender-social divides.

5. CONCLUSION

In using a theo-analytical approach, this research article set out to understand the extent to which we draw an informed parallel between the methodology among AWT and African indigenous research. This was methodologically achieved by first understanding the relational nature of AIKS and the IRM. It also involved the study of key contributions by some of the leading AWTs and their methodological considerations, in order to correlate informed data. AWTs included Teresa Okure, Isabel Phiri, Musa Dube, Mercy Oduyoye, Madipoane Masenya's (Ngwana Mphahhllele), Sharon Potgieter, Musimbi Kanyoro, and other leading scholars in this field. In its findings, the article established the methodologies used by AWTs, including, among others, contextualisation approaches, oral techniques, post-colonial approach and deconstruction of patriarchy, relationality and cultural appeal, women's experiences as its starting point, cultural hermeneutics approach, appeal to family health concern, translation approaches, reading with non-trained readers of the Bible, and an appeal to *Talitha cum!* (Little girl wake up) mantra. Although it is easy to draw a parallel between the methodologies in AWTs and indigenous research, religious and/or theocentric, and (sometimes) Christocentric emphasis among the former becomes their point of departure. With AWT emerging as Christian theology in Africa from an African woman's perspective, its parameters are well spelled out. On the contrary, AIKS and IRM are not confined to gender nor

to the God of Christendom. The general methodology, however, has a great deal in common. To a large extent, AWTs employ indigenous techniques such as storytelling, post-colonial approach, as well as relationality and cultural appeal, among others.

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