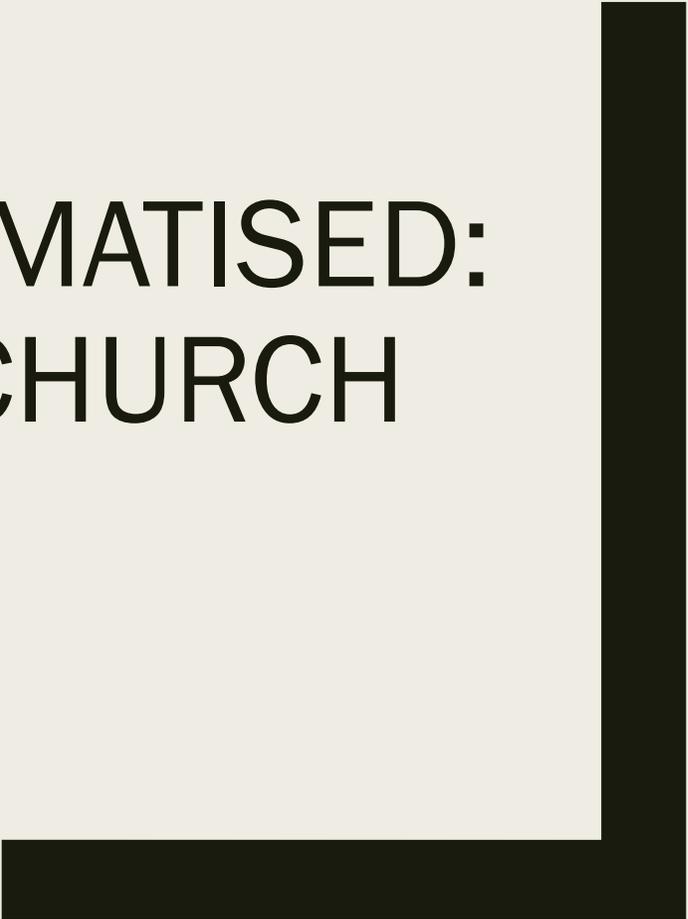




SILENCED, SHAMED, STIGMATISED: THE COMPLICITY OF THE CHURCH

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Violence Against Women - South African Context

- South Africa has high levels of violence against women
- Involves both intimate partner violence and as well as criminal acts in the wider society
- Three women die every day at the hands of their partner
- Femicide is five times higher than the global average
- Estimated that 450 000 rapes occur annually, (only 50000 are reported)- many include young girls under 18
- Despite many pieces of legislation to protect women such as the Domestic Violence Act (1998), Protection from Harassment Act (2013), and the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking of Persons Act (2013)

Silenced, Shamed and Stigmatised

- Women that are sexually abused feel great **shame**
- They find it difficult to tell others, as they either feel culturally this is “normal” in a marriage or they feel that it is their fault as they are not being a “good wife”
- Rape particularly is **stigmatised** with the woman being blamed
- Here women are told that either they “deserved it” by their behaviour or “they were looking for it by the way they dress” or a host of similar reasons
- Women are not believed, even in courts of law
- So they remain **silent**

African Culture and Gender Based Violence

- African culture is patriarchal
- Men are dominant in all decision-making in the public sphere and in the private sphere of the home
- Women are subservient in the home and discriminated against in the public sphere
- Culture sanctions multiple sexual relationships for men as well sanctioning violence against wives for being “disobedient”
- African proverbs-
 - “A woman lies behind a man”
 - “A woman and a donkey carry the same burden”
 - “It is good for a man to plough in many fields”

Culture and African women's theology

“Culture is the leading issue, which has pre-occupied the theology of African women. Culture has silenced many women in Africa and made us unable to experience the liberating promises of God. Favourable aspects of our cultures, which enhance the well-being of women, have been suppressed. Those that diminish women continue to be practiced in various degrees of our societies, often making women objects of cultural preservation”

Musimbi Kanyoro

- Name a proverb from your culture that seems to sanction violence against women
- Discuss how your culture shames, stigmatises and silences women who have been abused by men
- Name one aspect of your culture that enhances the well-being of women that has been suppressed

Christian beliefs and domestic violence

Christian beliefs that may promote abusive relationships

(Carolyn Heggen)

- the belief that God intends men to dominate and women to submit
- the belief that women are morally inferior to men and do not trust their own judgment
- the belief that suffering is a desirable quality for a Christian, and women in particular have been chosen to be “suffering servants”
- the belief that all Christians are commanded by God to forgive and be reconciled with those who sin against them

Silencing of women by the church

A woman went to her pastor for help. "My husband is abusing me," she told him. "Last week he knocked me down and kicked me. He broke one of my ribs."

Marleen's pastor was sympathetic. He prayed with Marleen--and then he sent her home. "Try to be more submissive," he advised. "After all, your husband is your spiritual head."

Two weeks later, Marleen was dead--killed by an abusive husband. Her church could not believe it. Marleen's husband was a Sunday school teacher and a deacon.

How could he have done such a thing?

“The Church is our Absalom”: A safe and dangerous place

- Discuss how in your context, culture and the church work together to keep women subservient
- How is the church “our Absalom” for women?
- What makes the church safe for women?
- What makes the church dangerous?

Restoring Survivors- Breaking the Silence

- Survivors of sexual violence will never be restored if the church does not stop **silencing, shaming, and stigmatising** women
- It must move from being an ambiguous place to a safe place for women

- Begin to re-read biblical texts that on the surface appear to sanction the domination of women by men
- Become more willing to tackle patriarchy within the structures of the church
- Women theologians need to begin organizing in order to write and publish theological texts from their perspective
- Men must engage other men in education and support so that men are talking about gender based violence amongst themselves
- Gender based violence must be integrated into theological curricula
- Prevention efforts need to be both primary and secondary
- This means that we need to explore not just our pastoral response to violence against women, but our theological and cultural traditions that provide motivation to address this issue, and to act against all forms of violence in our societies