

OF GOD'S IMAGE, VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND FEMINIST REFLECTIONS

Sidney K. Berman

Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Theology, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, North West University, Mafikeng Campus
sidneybrmn@yahoo.co.uk.

ABSTRACT

This article interrogates what appears to be an inconsistency – the enduring prevalence of Christianity and the surge of gender-based violence (henceforth GBV) in Botswana, particularly as evidenced by murder-suicides. It investigates the possibility of a connection between Christianity and GBV. To search for such a connection, I used a feminist analytical approach to analyse the text of Hosea, Christian/Biblical teachings relating to gender and traditional Setswana socialisation. The book of Hosea, some Biblical teachings and some aspects of Setswana culture separate men and women in dualistic terms, present women as inferior to men, perceive women's sexuality as devious, and prescribe violent control of women. Since this flawed outlook is evident in GBV in Botswana, I was led to investigate a hypothetical connection between GBV and Christian/Biblical teaching. The article ends with recommendations for a response and for reconstructing a gender-empowering alternative.

Key words: Gender-based violence; feminism; gender empowerment; Christian-biblical teaching; Hosea; Botswana cultural socialisation; patriarchy.

Introduction

It is safe to assume that the strong presence of a religion such as Christianity can have a bearing on a society's psychological make-up and way of life. Towards assessing the Botswana context, I am drawn to the statistics that reveal that over 70 per cent of people living in Botswana identify themselves as Christians.¹ A Christian mind-set can therefore be expected to permeate domestic, political, educational, economic



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and other institutions of the country. Yet, knowing the complex nature of religion, its impact could be positive, negative or both. On the domestic level, the Botswana society has recently been beleaguered by a surge of single-parent families, unsteady and insecure marriages, orphaning of children and gender-based violence (GBV), among others (Mookodi 2004b).² Could religion possibly be among the influences that contribute to this scenario?

Concerning GBV, much research in Botswana reveals that most of the violence 'is meted out by men against their female partners, wives, co-habiting partners and girlfriends, leading to the conclusion that most violence against women occurs within domestic settings' (Mookodi 2004a, 119). Whereas the home is supposed to be a safe haven for women, it has become a place of insecurity and uncertainty. Worse still, starting about a decade ago, the home in Botswana has become a place of death for many women. The country has seen spates of murder-suicides wrongly labelled as 'passion-killings',³ in which more than 90 per cent of victims have been women since the epidemic started around 2002 (Gabaitse 2012, 194). In these so-called passion killings, jealous boyfriends and husbands murder the women and commit suicide after accusations of unfaithfulness. Therefore, considering the prominence of Christianity in the nation all along, I borrow Rakoczy's call that we should 'honestly and critically examine the role of religion, religious beliefs and teachings on male-female relationships' (Rakoczy 2000, 43).

As a father, I have pondered on the reality that my daughter will one day belong in her own home with her intimate partner or husband. I often end up fearing that she may live with a violent partner. Will her partner believe in gender equality, or will he think he is superior to her? I started hoping that she will find a God-fearing Christian man who will not abuse her physically or emotionally. Then the concept of a God-fearing man led me to Biblical examples such as the patriarchs, apostles and prophets. Among these, the prophet Hosea was appealing because of his extraordinary love for his wife, Gomer. While she was persistently unfaithful, he was persistently loving. However, my preliminary narrative observations of the text brought me back to the dilemma of the Botswana context – there were certain aspects of the text that immediately appeared to sanction the spirit behind passion killings. Thereafter, I commenced to use the text of Hosea to investigate the possible connection between these two realities. My goal became to identify the meeting place of Biblical texts, Biblical interpretation and Tswana cultural socialisation that could possibly create a gender-violent environment for women.⁴ In the process, a way might be found to address GBV in the nation.

Narrative observations of Hosea

After postulating that Botswana church-going men are likely to respect Biblical opinion about women, I searched for texts with a strong gender bias. How would they respond to explicit Biblical gender bias? Such texts abound that describe an intimate

relationship between a man and a woman, and which depict God as the husband and Israel as God's wife. Texts based on marriage metaphors tend to give the most elaborate and liberal descriptions of women's promiscuity and its consequences. Of all such texts, scholars have identified Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel as containing the most graphic descriptions of such battered women in a relationship of inequality with a man (Weems 1995, 1-2). Among the three prophetic books, Hosea's metaphor could be easier to connect with because of its narrative base in contrast to Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's exclusive verse. Hosea's and Gomer's marriage and family life are presented in a story that describes the life struggles of a married couple – an actual man⁵ (Hosea the prophet, who stands for God) and an actual woman (Gomer, who stands for Israel) whereas in Jeremiah and Ezekiel there is only God (depicted as a husband) and Israel (depicted as a wife).⁶

The narrative of Hosea presents the main characters as Hosea the husband and Gomer the wife on the metaphorical side (1:2) and Israel and God on the actual social side (1:2). Gomer was 'bought' back from an adulterous relationship after she had rebelled against her husband, and consequently he set conditions for her (Podhoretz 2002, 144; Smith 1895, 179). Gomer is passive and not active mainly because the patriarchal text constructed her that way, yet she is as indispensable a player as Hosea.⁷ Gomer is characterised as a 'woman of promiscuity' and Israel has prostituted herself away from the Lord (1:2). Other (minor) characters that influence the course of the narrative are the children, namely Jezreel, King Jehu's household and the Baals/lovers (throughout Chapters 1 and 2). The Baals are other gods – the religious seducers of Israel (1:5) and the children represent Israel (2:1). Jehu's household is the rebellious ruling class of Israel that will be annihilated (1:4) because it is largely to blame for the nation's apostasy (5:1).

The plot features the marriage of Hosea to Gomer as the main event. The Word of the Lord comes to Hosea with the directive: 'Go, take for yourself a woman of promiscuity and children of promiscuity, for the land is guilty of the vilest adultery, departing from the LORD' (1:2). Without this marriage, there is no narrative. Other events to observe are Gomer's conceptions and Hosea's naming of the children, still under God's directives 'Call him Jezreel' (1.4), 'Call her Lo-ruhamah' (1.6), and 'Call her Lo-ammi' (1.9). Jezreel means 'he sows', but is also the name of the place where King Jehu massacred many people. When used at the time of Jezreel's birth, the name warns that God will punish the Israelite monarchy for the massacre, but when used after God reclaims God's people, the name means that God will sow blessings in the land of Israel. Lo-ruhamah, on the other hand means 'not loved' while Lo-ammi means 'not my people'. The names reflect the sour relationship between God (the man) and Israel (the wife), for they are 'children of promiscuity' (v.2). The rest of the events in the book follow from the marriage and the naming of the children. All these events present the way God feels about the nation's apostasy. This article explores the possibility that the apparently unpleasant relationship between the husband and wife could breed some GBV.

Feminist interpretation

Having observed that both GBV and Christianity are prevalent in Botswana, I applied a feminist interpretive methodology to investigate possible elements of GBV in Hosea and Tswana cultural socialisation. Treating Hosea and Gomer as the two most important actors of the marriage metaphor, I discovered that the Motswana man's social context places him in the same category as Hosea, and his wife or girlfriend as Gomer. That means the man is more affirmed by the metaphor than his female counterpart. Hosea calls her 'woman of promiscuity' (1:2), although we discover that she has a real name, 'Gomer' (1:3). Hosea, son of Beerai, married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim. Since she is a disgrace to her father, a prostitute is not identified with a father; she would be disowned or stoned at the gate (Deuteronomy 22:21; Landy 1995, 23). Yet in this marriage, two families meet, for 'father' represents the father's household or family. Therefore, Gomer is not a prostitute (Freedman and Andersen 1980, 161). Calling her 'promiscuous' is therefore subjective, just like in the context of passion-killings where the woman is murdered whether the charge of promiscuity is founded or not.

The marriage metaphor features threats of violence against Gomer. She could be stripped naked and slain with thirst (2:3); she could be hedged around so that she does not move (2:6); and her vines could be destroyed (2:12). The text 'allows' the man to beat Gomer, 'to even expose her private parts and violate her sexually' (Nadar 2007, 11). The problem is that these actions are equated to God's actions as the husband to the wife Israel, who deserves discipline or punishment. Not only is God likened to the husband in the text, but in traditional Biblical thought and its integration in today's cultures, God supposedly sanctions male headship and abhors equality. Even more abusive is the perception that regardless of how much the other partner is violated, God does not support divorce (Maluleke and Nadar 2002a, 9).

Oppressive Setswana socialisation and Biblical texts

Indeed there are some points of convergence between Setswana traditional culture and violent Biblical texts. In contexts where the traditional culture is patriarchal, the Bible does serve to reinforce cultural practices that oppress women. For example, on the one hand, the Bible says that women should submit to their husbands as to the Lord and should not speak in church but wait until they can ask their husbands at home (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Corinthians 14:34). On the other hand, traditional cultural values of Botswana men present women as subordinates.⁸ Proverbs abound that present men as leaders and women as followers. For example, the proverb *ga di ke di etelelwa ke manamagadi pele, di ka tloga tsa wela ka mamena* says that 'cattle are never led by a cow, otherwise they will fall into a gorge'. It means that a woman cannot be a leader. A poem about the boy child by Thobega says: '*fa e le go laolwa ke basadi gone, ga se mo ba go tsaletsweng*' (1976, 29). It says that a boy

child should learn not to be controlled by a woman (or girlfriend/wife). The poem goes on to say that real boy children are 'very few – who know proper relationships between men and women...who know how to build a family' (29). The Bible and traditional culture apparently subscribe to the same kind of socialisation that teaches that boys and men are to be 'leaders, authority figures, independent, strong and aggressive [etc.] while girls and women are to be followers, obedient, dependent, [etc.]' (Maluleke and Nadar 2002a, 14-15).

Church-going Batswana men tend to subscribe to these views which come from both Setswana culture and the Bible. For example, in response to a question on gender power imbalance between Hosea and Gomer, a sample of church-going Batswana men answered, 'the man is older than the woman, and the woman should recognise the man's position' (cf. Berman 2012, 205).⁹ In Tswana culture, 'age and seniority are of considerable importance in social life where juniors are taught to honour and obey seniors without hesitation or question, and to submit to their authority under penalty, if need be, or severe chastisement' (Langen 2005, 189). This has implications for all other areas of life as far as power imbalances are concerned. The woman becomes a minor. The respondents' interpretation that the woman is younger upholds the perception of the Hosea text which gives Gomer the status of a minor or a dependent. This line of thinking can easily imagine God endorsing the violent behaviour of Hosea the husband. Similarly, an abusive church-going man can imagine God endorsing inequality or the disciplining of his wife.¹⁰ This is possible in both the Setswana traditional and Biblical contexts where seniority, authority and discipline often merge with abuse.

In this system, the men are socialised to assume and demand the position of decision-maker and to perceive women as minors, especially in instances where important decisions are needed concerning the couple. The result is, obviously, boundless freedom to abuse and to be irresponsible. The problem is even more glaring in the area of sexuality. Ntseane (2004) did a study which uncovered that (among other things), many Batswana men took pride in having multiple sexual partners (Ntseane 2004, 6, 13). Other forms of sexually dangerous behaviour included extramarital relationships and refusal to use a condom. Dintwa (2010) also did a study that revealed that many men believed that women's bodies were merely meant to please men and have babies (Dintwa 2010, 285). The men disclosed that they controlled the timing of sex and decided whether it will be protected or unprotected. Apart from these studies, many men are popularly known to challenge condom use with the declaration that 'one cannot eat a wrapped candy' (Dube 2012, 324).¹¹ These sexually oppressive attitudes come from Batswana men's socialisation.

Economic oppression is another aspect of traditional socialisation that targets both men and women but which makes women vulnerable to male violence. On the one hand, it turns women against themselves by making them depend on men for livelihood. On the other hand, it exerts pressure on men by teaching them that they are the economic providers for women. For instance, the Tswana historian and

grammarians, Mogapi (1991) uses the proverbs *korwe ke je ke bapalela tseti* and *photi tlaa o je lethodi* for the man's primary role in the family (Mogapi 1991, 9). They mean that the woman is expected to join the man to consume and that wherever the man is, he should be working towards providing for the wife. Although much weaker than traditionally, this worldview is still extant, and continues to plague many relationships, some sporadically and others constantly.

Mookodi (2004a, 124-12) quotes some studies to explain the current dynamics of this problem for the woman. I summarise his discussion as follows: Firstly, it is normal for a woman to receive economic aid from a man either occasionally or frequently, although nowadays her dependence on any particular man is no longer necessary or absolute. She now has the freedom to find a new man if she thinks the present man is becoming abusive. This happens among married women, who escape by means of divorce and single women, who can no longer be bound by a man or a traditional cultural law. Secondly, men face unemployment, economic hardships and the resultant inability to support (or impose their support on) women. Meanwhile, socialisation does not discard the ideal of an economically powerful and socially authoritative man. Thus, out of socially-imposed pressure, some men insist on spending resources on women even when their economic situations do not allow it. The problem is that they tend to blame the women for it. Thirdly, women now partake in wage earning and small business projects which increase their independence and power. Thus, the Motswana man has generally lost his economic and administrative power over the woman. This state of affairs is true for Christians as they are for non-Christians. Many men have no other way to control the woman apart from abuse (Mookodi 2004a, 124-126).

In reality, both parties in a relationship share ownership of each other's resources because they primarily invest in each other's lives. For example, Gomer obviously tended Hosea's vineyards, helped plough and produce corn for the family, cooked and cleaned for Hosea and raised his children. She was distracted (probably prevented) from venturing into separate personal investments. The economic investments of women in a similar situation to Gomer's are difficult to identify.¹² Schapera, the anthropologist to the Batswana, reports industriousness as one of the most wanted qualities in a traditional Motswana wife (Schapera 1992, 40). Wives, daughters and mothers traditionally tilled the fields, planted, weeded, fetched water from the river, gathered firewood, pounded the corn, prepared food, made beer, collected wild edible plants and built and repaired huts, grain storages and courtyards (Schapera and Comaroff 1991, 21).¹³ Yet as a minor, her investments could not contribute towards her ownership of the economic resources that she was involved in. Contemporarily, Batswana women still make tremendous investments in the acquisition and/or maintenance of economic resources – whether directly or indirectly – that are sometimes owned only by the men.¹⁴ In the case of Hosea, the husband threatened to reclaim his vineyard and other economic commodities from Gomer so as to starve her (Hosea 2:9 and 2:12). In many instances of 'passion

killings' in Botswana, the man complains that the woman has consumed his economic resources. This complaint arises once she chooses to end the relationship or once he starts accusing her of unfaithfulness. Considering her input, however, rather than owe the man, the Motswana woman should be owed by the man, and Gomer should rightfully own the resources that she was involved in.

Otherness, dualism and distance in the Hosea metaphor

The Hosea metaphor is embedded in otherness, dualism and distance. It equates men (Hosea) with the outraged God, and women (Gomer) with sinful Israel (1:2), thereby reinforcing the belief that women are related to sin (Nadar, 11). In Hosea 2:5, we see the stereotypical sinful wife who gives in to sensual desire and runs after lovers, leaving the husband at home. This oppressive concept is so strong that even some church fathers revelled in it. Tertullian blames women for The Fall (Genesis 3) saying, 'you are the unsealer of the forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law...you destroyed so easily the divine image, man' (Wren 1989, 24). Martin Luther, the reformer, declares that Adam's righteousness surpassed that of Eve so that 'if the serpent had tempted Adam, Adam would have triumphed by stamping upon the serpent and ordering him to be quiet, for "the Lord commands otherwise"' (Douglass 2003, 80). According to Philo of Alexandria, man corresponds to mind, spirit and reason – woman corresponds to flesh, body and emotion. From such a perspective, man-woman corresponds to divine-material, holy-unholy, superior-inferior, disciplined-sensual and others. Human beings are therefore urged to leave behind the weak feminine passion of sense perception and cultivate manly reasoning schooled in fortitude (Wren 1989, 34). Aquinas, another church father, adopted Aristotle's Greek philosophy of the male seed being superior and carrying all the life potency. He declares that the female is 'something defective and misbegotten... the result either of the debility of the active power...or of some change in external influences' (Johnson 1992, 24). He concludes that because her physical state is defective, even her soul is defective, her mind weak in reasoning and her will fragile in choosing the good (Johnson 1992, 24). How can the patriarchal man be expected to relate on a basis of equality with such a lesser being?

The ideal of a patriarchal man is detachment, even if he were surrounded by other men (cf. Hampson 1990, 154). Attachment and dependence are weaknesses to him. This is a man's dream as depicted by Western film stars: tough and strong-willed, heroic and daring, but largely independent of any woman or man, detached emotionally from any one person – a man whose world is complete in his person alone. Wren (1989) captures the negative aspect of this mentality with his observation that, 'patriarchy is characterized by divisions and oppositions based not on equality but subordination, not this-*with*-that but this-*over*-that' (Wren 1989, 32). Hosea distances himself from his wife, calling her 'not my wife' (2:2) and claims that he is the only one who provided her with material benefits (2:8). This is similar to the Motswana

man's distancing himself from his wife, children and the domestic space (see the paragraph below). He is certainly not a co-worker with his wife. Even the mothers of Hosea and Gomer are left out when the fathers are mentioned. Patriarchal culture even refuses to acknowledge that the father and mother are partners in procreation. In this framework, the husband-wife relationship is not of togetherness but of distance.

In the Botswana context, some aspects of socialisation construct a Motswana man in terms derisive of women. Thobega's poem talks about '*bophara-meseseng*,' that is, 'foolish men who enjoy the presence of women' (Thobega 1976, 49). The poem reminisces over the times of long ago 'when men never sat at home' (Thobega 1976, 49). Women's Affairs Division (WAD) remarks that men who publicly express love and commitment to their wives are derided. In other words, the supposed ideal Motswana man should not enjoy prolonged companionship with his wife (and children) but must distance himself from them and from the domestic sphere (WAD 1995 19). Such artificially constructed attitudes against an intimate partner can be said to converge with those found in Biblical texts like Hosea that can produce a Motswana man who is inwardly contemptuous of his female partner. In that regard, control, physical violence and eventual 'passion killings' are mere outward signs of this construction.

Ownership and violent control of women

In patriarchal frameworks, men do not only own economic resources – they also own and control the women. For example, Hosea controls Gomer's movement by putting a thorn hedge around her (2:6). Anderson (2005) studies the concept of violence against women in the construction of gender by the book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic law and gives a historical background of how women's bodies were controlled by men. Her study shows the extreme to which violent control of women's sexuality by their fathers and husbands could go (Anderson 2005, 69ff). Patriarchy in this case says that women are incapable of controlling themselves, so they should be controlled by men (Wren 1989, 37). In the Botswana context, jealous husbands determine where their wives can and cannot go. They are often responsible for taking their wives out of employment, school, church and other social groups. WAD handled a case where, in that family, the wife was the economic provider (WAD 1995, 76). The insecure husband often beat her and sometimes followed her to work to demand money. Eventually, 'he broke her fingers so that she could no longer work. She is now registered as a destitute' (WAD 1995, 76).

This kind of ownership and control is extended to women's sexuality. Patriarchal thinking holds that the woman's sexuality belongs to the men in her life – to her husband when she is married, and to her father before marriage (Bird 1993, 298). In the same way, a man's honour rested on a woman's controlled sexual behaviour, be it his wife, daughter, sister or mother (Yee 1998, 210). It would be quite dishonouring

to Hosea if he were to fail to control his wife's sexuality. Concerning the Botswana context of murder-suicides, Gabaitse (2012) argues that, having been privileged so much and for so long, the man fails absolutely to accept the loss of control over her body (Gabaitse 2012, 315; cf. Dube 2012, 333), so he murders her and commits suicide.

The patriarchal man revels in his ownership and control of women's bodies so much that he likens it to his exploitation of nature. Wren (1989) explains the philosophy whereby women, being equated with nature, are being uncovered, penetrated and brought under the control of male reason (Wren 1989, 37). He reports:

The image of female nature was made explicit in a statue, in the medical faculty of the University of Paris, of a young woman, bare-breasted, her head slightly bowed beneath the veil she is taking off. The statue bore the inscription: "Nature unveils herself before Science." (Wren 1989, 37-38)

Francis Bacon coined sexually violent metaphors about nature – of unveiling and penetration – and called on his fellow men to move towards the dominion of man over the universe (Wren 1989, 38). However, the results of such an endeavour presently include a destroyed ozone layer, global warming, weapons of mass destruction, floods and other disasters where humanity and nature are being destroyed. Likewise, the violation of women's sexuality cannot benefit humanity.

In the Hebrew patrilineal system, women were defined by their role as bearers of children who will perpetuate men's family names (Bird 1993, 209; Keefe 2001, 162). The children are not hers: they are the husband's, and he will name them alone (Hosea 1:4, 6 and 9). This is similar to the Tswana patriarchal system. Primarily, the custom of *bogadi* (bride price) functioned as licence to acquire the woman's children (Brown 1925, 62). However, the fact that *bogadi* is paid to her father and not herself means that the children are not acquired from her but from her father. They have her father's name when she is not married and acquire her husband's name when she is married. She could not legally own children even when married to their father. In this system, the woman's value is described in terms of what can be taken out of her rather than primarily in herself as a human being.

The additional injustice in this system is that a man's body is controlled by himself and not by the woman. Extra marital activity was tolerated for the husband but inexcusable for the woman (Yee 1998, 210). A man was not punished for sex with another woman unless the woman was married and he was caught in the act. In the double standard, it was acceptable for a man to engage the services of a prostitute. The example that comes to mind is the story of Judah who engaged the services of a prostitute – only to discover that it was his daughter-in-law, Tamar (Genesis 38). In the case of the Motswana man, proverbs like *monna poo ga a agelwe lesaka* ('a husband is like a bull which cannot be contained by a kraal') and *monna selepe oa*

adimanwa ('a husband is like an axe that should exchange hands') give men the message that they are free to engage in extramarital sex.

Idolised maleness

The metaphor of the ruling man does injustice to the image of God by reducing divine mystery to a single description. The picture of the ruling man becomes an idol, being likened to and honoured like God. The symbol loses its ability to point to ultimate truth (Johnson 1992, 36). In the Hosea metaphor, we deduce that the husband, being on the side of God, is of much greater worth and value than the wife, who is on the side of Israel. Considering that Israel was primarily seen as the total opposite of all the attributes that described God, Gomer becomes the total opposite of that which is divine. A husband is very close to the divine, according to the implications of the metaphor, and the wife very far in the opposite direction (Hampson 1990, 152). One can recall some attributes of God – holy, majestic, faithful, sovereign, all-powerful and worthy of respect and worship – attributes that are not associated with Israel, considering Israel's humanity and the evils Israel is accused of. The implication is that the husband, in relation to his wife, is holy, majestic, faithful, sovereign, all-powerful and worthy of respect and worship. Yet who can worship God if not the one who is not God – woman? An example of Sarah calling Abraham her 'lord' comes to mind (Genesis 18:12). The first letter of Peter actually cites this act of Sarah's and exhorts young Christian women to honour their husbands in the same way (1Peter 3:6).

By ascribing God's image to itself alone, patriarchal society has made God in its image and is guilty of worshipping an idol. God is identified with a male – with Hosea, the husband. Nadar quotes Mary Daly to argue that 'If God is male then male is God' (Nadar 2007, 11). The problem is difficult to combat because its language is Biblical. God is He, King, Father, Master and not She, Mother, Queen or other feminine titles. This restricting of God to the male image is a breach of the commandment against idolatry (Exodus 20:4). God is diverse, unfathomable holy mystery, which is why God forbids being described through any fixed picture (Johnson 1992, 36). It is why God's image is not only male but also female. Thus, one does not mean to argue that femaleness is perfect as opposed to maleness, but holds that an equally shared participation in humanity and the God-image can lead to a healthier state of God's creation. Going by the Bible's declaration that God is perfect, it is a serious wrong to worship this biased imperfect construct. On the Trinity, Schussler-Fiorenza (1999) argues that 'Focusing on the figure of Christ as Lord, and as the Son of the Father doubles women's self-alienation' (Schussler-Fiorenza 1999, 94). She explains that to be female is not to be Lord, Son of God or to be divine. This privileges men and devalues women. Problematising the Gospels, Schussler-Fiorenza (1999, 94) says

that God is represented as an elite and antidemocratic male, but ironically, Christian women are compelled to find their identity in that man.

The reformer, Martin Luther came close to liberating the image of God in women, only to turn round and contradict his own teachings on that subject (Douglas 2003, 76-80). He rejected Aristotle's view of women as imperfectly formed men, which the early church fathers had adopted, and held that women 'share the image and likeness of God, as well as the rule over all things' (Douglas 2003, 77). However, Luther goes on to say that, 'even though the woman is a most beautiful work of God, she still does not equal the glory and worthiness of the male' (Douglas 2003, 78). Of course there is no mention of that difference in the text that Luther was interpreting. Genesis 1:26-28 only presents the creation in the God image of male and female. Luther must therefore have been feeling the tension on the one hand between that text and other Scriptural texts that subjugate women, and on the other hand, the culture he was in. This tension exemplifies the extent to which readers, texts and cultures would go to discredit the image of God in females.

Violent sexual metaphors against women and nature

Hosea's violation of the woman's nakedness reveals patriarchy's violence against female sexuality. Apart from presenting the female body in a negative light, the Hosea text is criticised for promoting sexual violence against women by men. That criticism is in view of the implications of stripping the wife naked and dragging her before the public (2:3 and 10). Weems (1995, 41) observes that the metaphor reveals a perception that female sexuality is deviant and threatening to the wellbeing of men. Likewise, Sherwood (1996, 300) argues that the treatment of the female body by the Hosea text suggests that 'whoredom is part and parcel of the female body'. Her understanding of the text is that it 'promotes, as contemporary pornography does, hostility, male power, and the graphic depiction of women as vile whores' (Sherwood 1996, 300). It is pornographic, sexually violent and disastrous for the safety of women.

A similar mentality is responsible for the violence that is associated with murder-suicides in the Botswana context. The Setswana label for 'whore,' namely *lebelele*, is rich in contempt, violence and devastation of a woman's image. It has a verbal force akin to stripping a woman naked in public, just as Hosea threatens. The jealousy that normally fuels the 'passion killing' is often accompanied by the false perception that the woman is a vile whore, so the man is ending the whoredom once and for all. Yet where there is evidence, it often reveals that the woman merely found an alternative partner, whereupon the man refused to let go. The label *lebelele* often results from malicious intent, jealousy and hearsay. This label is grammatically neuter, but when directed at a man, it loses its sting.

Deconstructing violent mind-sets and reconstructing a liberating gender framework

If the growing trend of GBV in a largely Christian nation is anything to go by, then the following question is valid: If there were a habitual practice of questioning oppressive texts and interpretations in the long history of Christianity in Botswana, would it not have socialised the nation towards less GBV by now? It appears that in the Botswana context, Christians have generally continued to uphold oppressive Biblical teachings and/or to gloss over patriarchal texts. Judging by the continued prevalence of GBV, this approach to reading Biblical texts, as well as patriarchal Tswana socialisation, merge to fashion a Motswana man who disdains women and who has GBV tendencies. It is likely to contribute to the high prevalence of GBV. Whilst this can only be demonstrated by a long-term anthropological study, a link between the approval of violent texts and violence in the country can be hypothesised. The starting point for a Christian towards combatting GBV is to challenge gender oppressive Biblical texts.

The perception that women are inferior or unequal to men is only a social construct. The perception that God is male is also a construct. If it were natural, we would not find that many African conceptions of God are not masculine but are neuter. For example, *Modimo*, the Tswana name for God, is a class two noun and takes the impersonal plural prefix *me-*. *Modimo* is impersonal and fits the pronoun 'it' rather than 'she' or 'he' (Cole 1955, 75). The Supreme Being is also neuter in Shona, Zulu and many other southern African traditions (Mbuwayesango 2006, 69). Thus, southern African tradition presents alternatives that are more gender-empowering than those in the Bible. The Supreme Being was artificially transformed into a male God by missionary translators.

Since the gender-biased Biblical/Christian God is a construct, we should learn to choose which perspective offered by the Bible is worth devoting one's energies to implementing (Weems 1995, 104). The Hosea metaphor has to be removed from its place as the norm for how men and women should relate. Furthermore, breaking the silence on the religious and cultural principles of oppression should be carried over to the society and the church. The community's and the church's silence on violence against women should be challenged (Maluleke and Nadar 2002b; West 2000, 37). Rather than be hidden, texts like Hosea that violate women's equality and security should be exposed and reinterpreted for the empowerment of women.

The ideal worldview to be reconstructed is the one in which both males and females fully recognise the image of God in themselves, in others and in the whole creation, and where there are no dualisms and oppressive hierarchies. This includes representing God with male, female and nature-based metaphors (Hampson 1990, 149). Indeed feminine imagery for God exists such as the maternal instinct of a hen or a mother bear which protects her young (cf Matthew 23:37; Hosea 13:8). Similarly, God is likened to a human mother who comforts God's children (Isaiah

66:13). There are also expressions for God that fall under non-human categories such as the beauty, mystery and vastness found in nature. People need to be free from a confining, inadequate and patriarchal vocabulary.

Phiri (2002, 26-30) presents Kretzschmar's four strategies that will help halt the culture of violence against women. They are as follows: First, self-esteem has to be cultivated in women, especially consciousness of the full God image in themselves just as in men. This would move them towards partnership in marriage and society. Second, a culture of solidarity among women has to be cultivated despite their differences, starting with church groups. Third, women will need to develop skills to identify their oppression so as to fight it better. Fourth, patriarchy has to be challenged persistently in women's groups and in public. These strategies are universal and quite important for the Botswana context. In order to achieve success, both men and women will have to work at implementing these strategies.

Conclusion

This article asked why gender-based violence in Botswana has risen at an alarming rate amidst unprecedented growth of Christianity in the country. Whereas scholarship is widely known for challenging some gender imbalances in Tswana cultural socialisation, scholarship has begun to investigate the possible influence of gender-biased Biblical teaching on male-female relationships. This article endeavoured to make a contribution to this scholarship. Analysing the patriarchal text of Hosea and related Christian/Biblical teachings, we explored the shared gender-violent principles between such teachings and Tswana cultural socialisation, using the feminist method of interpretation. Flawed tendencies towards gendered dualisms, ownership, control, idolisation of maleness and violation of women's sexuality were uncovered in Christian history and Biblical teachings. This paper argued that on the one hand, the Motswana Christian and the church continue to uphold gender-biased teachings while on the other hand, oppressive Tswana cultural socialisation continues unabated. These conditions do produce a contemporary Motswana man who disregards women and is violent against women. The way forward is to untiringly challenge this violent construct and reconstruct a life-affirming Motswana man. This article contributes towards such efforts.

ENDNOTES

1. Cf. also IRIN Humanitarian News and Analysis 2005.
2. The meaning and origin of the term 'passion killing' has not been established.
3. This study does not claim that the church-going Motswana man is a product of only these two dynamics hypothesised here, namely the Bible and Tswana cultural socialisation. For instance, modern entertainment media might have its own contribution. I limited

the scope of the study to these two for a sharper focus and because of space and time constraints.

4. 'Actual' in the sense that he exists in the narrative, not necessarily historically. This is in comparison with the other two prophets' presentation, which comprise no human spouses as characters.
5. Jeremiah intermittently refers to the nation as the adulterous wife of God whereas Ezekiel devotes two long chapters (16 and 23) to the matter of Israel's harlotry.
6. Sherwood observes: 'The claim that patriarchy dispossesses the woman of language, speech and voice is perfectly demonstrated in a text that obstinately refuses to allow woman the right to self-expression' (1996, 300).
7. Women Affairs Division of Botswana's Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs (WAD 1995: 6). These views were more explicit in the traditional culture of the Batswana, but contemporarily they are more discreet.
8. In the original qualitative study, the researcher had investigated Africa Evangelical Church men's interpretations of the text of Hosea and its underlying gender-related assumptions. Four focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 20 men from diverse backgrounds and age groups.
9. Traditionally, it was difficult to challenge violence when it was disguised as authority and discipline, even when it manifested itself in physical abuse. New conceptualisations of violence are beginning to take effect, which encompass 'physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty, and; economic deprivation' (PEPFAR 2006, 3; PEPFAR is the Botswana government's Presidential Emergency Partnership for AIDS Relief).
10. In this article, I do not claim that all Batswana men are sexually irresponsible and oppressive because indeed some aspects of current Batswana masculinities are more redemptive than previously. However, several contemporary Botswana societal problems discussed in this article are subtle manifestations of traditional forms of oppression.
11. Mookodi (2000) discusses this difficulty in the case of Batswana women. Sometimes the resources that the woman brings into the relationship are taken over by the man over time, as she settles into the roles of reproduction and home-making and the man becomes the primary economic provider.
12. The men primarily bred cattle, held administrative meetings and protected the nation from enemies.
13. In such cases, the married woman is legally more protected than the co-habiting woman.

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