

## The power of silence in marriage: a gender-based reading of John 4:1–11

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### Abstract

Silence speaks louder than verbal speech, penetrating deeper into the hearts of those to whom it is directed. Marriage, as any other institution, is often surrounded by moments of silence between couples, which leads to thoughtful suffering. Contextualizing the theory of Spiral of Silence of Noelle-Neumann in the Bena context in Tanzania, this article provides a reading of the text in the Gospel according to John to discern the way in which it enlightens the real life situations of the church in regard to the role of silence. The article argues that the silence of Jesus in the text, as was his silence in the passion narratives, is a form of expression of his urgency and the communication of his power against the public opinion. In this case, the reading intends to look at the implication of silence within the prism of gender with specific reference to emotional abuses exerted by the church to marginalized people.

### Keywords

*Communicative silence; Mosaic Law; public opinion; silence; spiral of silence; Kingdom of God*

## 1. Introduction

“Silence can cut sharper than a knife and pierce the heart more keenly than an arrow” (Van Regenmorter 2010:38). This statement indicates that silence and speech are two inter-playing realities in human life. A human being may choose to provide speech or keep silent to communicate meaning. In this case, both silence and speech are means of communicating ones intended meaning.

The motive of silence runs throughout the gospels, and even the Bible. One can easily see it in the passion narratives. Wijngaards (1975:132) clearly narrates the various events of Jesus’ silence in the passion narratives:

The high priest stood up in the Sanhedrin and asked Jesus: “Have you no answer to make?” But Jesus “was silent and made no answer” (Mk 14:61; Mt 26:63). While Jesus was in Herod’s court, he maintained the same silence. The Scribes accused Jesus vehemently. Herod questioned Him at length. His courtiers ridiculed and mocked him. But Jesus “made no answer” (Lk 23:9). Pilate too was exasperated by Jesus’ reticence. “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?” But apart from an occasional word, “Jesus gave no answer” (Jn 19:9). Neither did He give an answer to the Pharisees who derided Him during the crucifixion. His only reply was the prayer “Father, forgive them” (Lk 23:34). Jesus’ silence is a datum of ancient tradition firmly embedded in the passion accounts.<sup>1</sup>

In all the passion communications between Jesus and people of authority, Jesus remained speechless. This speechless nature of Jesus poses to us some questions: What did the silence of Jesus mean to his contemporaries? What does Jesus’ silence mean to us today in the context of the mission of the church? These questions are the focus of our exploration as we reflect on the text from the Gospel according to John. I argue in this paper that the silence of Jesus is both an expression of Jesus’ urgency and a form through which Jesus communicates power over the existing public sphere of opinions. Moreover, it is a form of communication that breaks the power of the existing conventions.

Before going into details of this paper, allow me to narrate a marriage event that truly happened in Mbeya region, Tanzania. The narrative concerns the silence of the wife to the cheating deeds of her husband. The information about the narrative concerned my close relatives and was collected through an interview done to the wife in Kiswahili and tape-recorded through a mobile phone. The interview materials were transcribed, organized and presented. However, the names for the couples are withheld for ethical purposes.

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1 Cf. Muck (2012:5). There are different ways through which Jesus responded to questions directed to him: through straightforward answering, through telling a story relating to the question, and through not answering (see 2012:5). In most of the questions of the passion narratives Jesus answered by not answering them, i.e., by keeping silent.

## **2. A narrative of silence in married life**

The narrative concerns the wife and the husband who lived in Mbeya City, Tanzania, both belonging to the Bena ethnic group from Njombe region. The husband was a vendor, selling tomatoes, onions and Irish potatoes at one of the small markets in Mbeya City, and the wife was a nurse in one of the hospitals within the city. The couples contracted their official Christian marriage in one of the churches in town. They lived a peaceful life, respecting each other as husband and wife. However, the husband was not faithful to his wife.

As was usual for nurses and doctors, the wife had noon and night shifts/routines to attend patients. The husband always left early in the morning towards his market and so did the wife towards her work if she had a morning session. They had neither a female or male helper, nor a child by that moment. The unfaithful husband used the hospital shifts/routines of his wife as an opportunity to cheat on her. Left alone at home while the wife had a night shift, the husband enjoyed love with other women. The husband did so for a long time without being caught by his wife.

One day, the situation changed. The wife went to her work at night but did not stay there for the whole night. She came back earlier after exchanging her night session with another nurse. As usual, the husband had another woman with him, making love in the master bedroom of their house. Since he knew that his wife would not come back that night, he did not bother to lock the doors. When the wife came back that night, she just opened the outside door and went straight to the master bedroom. As she entered there, she found her husband naked and making love with another woman. What did she do? The wife said to them, “I am sorry that I have interrupted your love. Please continue in peace!” Then she left them. It was a very difficult time for the two to come out of the bedroom because they thought that the wife had gone to call other people to bear witness as they got out of the room. Unfortunately, the wife did not do so. Instead, she went to the kitchen to prepare some warm water for them to take a bath when they finished making love.

When they came out of the bedroom fearfully, the woman wanted to leave the house without talking to the husband’s wife. However, the wife of the man charmingly said to that woman, “No, no, you cannot leave my house

that way. While you were making love with my husband, I was preparing some warm water for you to have a bath with him after you finish. Just go to the bathroom to have a bath.” The woman wanted to reject the offer, but the wife of the man kept on strongly emphasizing and telling the woman that there is nothing bad for her to go bathing after a tough job they had been doing. Eventually, the woman and the husband together went to the bathroom and had a bath together. Then, the wife of the man escorted the woman as she left the home. What do you think happened to the couples after the woman left? The wife refused to do the act of marriage with her husband and did not ask anything of her husband in regard to the cheating event. As a result, the husband initiated separation; and they separated. Each one of them lived his and her own life.

### **3. Theoretical perspective**

I should clearly say that most of the Bena of Njombe, especially the Sovi, are introverts. They hardly speak openly. The couples from the above narrative belong to this sub-ethnic group of the Bena. For them, silence is a weapon that speaks louder than actual verbal speech. Hence, this paper uses the theory of the “spiral of silence” as the basis for its argument and interpretation of the text of the adulterous woman in John 8:1–11, contextualizing it in the Bena context of Tanzania.

The theory of spiral of silence was developed by the German political scientist and social psychologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (see Noelle-Neumann 1984 & Noelle-Neumann 1977:143–158). In her theory, Noelle-Neumann developed an expression to answer the question: Why do some people keep silent and others afford to speak openly when disclosed to the public? The phrase “Spiral of silence” refers to the pressure that compels people to hide their viewpoints for fear of being isolated because they feel themselves to be in the minority.

The theory of spiral of silence suggests that the ability of people to speak in public or keep silent depends on the opinion such people hold, minority or majority. The more the majority viewpoint they hold, the more they will be encouraged to speak; and the more minority viewpoint they hold, the greater they will be motivated to keep silent. It means that their motivation to speak depends on how close to the majority viewpoint their viewpoints

are. And, according to this theory, this majority viewpoint is what is called “public opinion”. Public opinion means the things, issues, or viewpoints which a person can express in public without being in the risk of being isolated by those who hold the majority viewpoints.

The theory further purports that the great force that accelerates the silence is the fear of isolation. People fear being isolated. Due to this fear, they tend to examine or assess the climate of the public opinion if it conforms to their viewpoint or not. If they find that it conforms, they will be motivated to speak; but, if it does not, they will just keep silent. They keep silent not because they are unable to speak, but because they do not want to lose their popularity or self-esteem. In that case, isolation becomes the main weapon of social control of the public. The people’s assessment of the public opinion will be done to ensure that their opinion conforms to that of the majority; and if not, they will just keep silent for fear of isolation.

However, two types of minority people challenge Noelle-Neumann’s theory: on the one hand, the hard-core nonconformists are people whom society (people holding the majority point of view) has rejected along with their beliefs, and can only speak out their views because they have nothing to lose by speaking out their viewpoint. They look at the past and what happened to them. They consider that the isolation they encountered was the price they had to pay for speaking out their opinions.

On the other hand, the avant-garde are people who are convinced themselves to be ahead of the times and can just speak their opinions. This group of people includes the intellectuals, artists, and reformers within the minority group. Their conviction of being ahead of time makes them endure the negative responses of people holding the public opinion. They just look at the future of what they have just said.

Despite the above challenges, Noelle-Neumann’s theoretical perspective indicates that human life is always controlled by the public sphere. It is always bound by existing conventions of what should be done, how it should be done, where, when and why do it. The human being is not at all free. He or she is always vulnerable to exclusion in cases of non-conformity. Being so vulnerable, those who do not conform create mechanisms to exist. Silence is one such mechanism. Using this theory of spiral of silence, we now turn to reflecting upon the text from the gospel of John.

#### **4. Content reflection on John 8:1–11**

There are some agreements among scholars that this text is historically not of Johannine origin. External evidence indicates that the text is lacking in the ancient texts [Papyri (66 and 75), in the Codices (N and B) of the fourth century, and in all major text types (Alexandrian, Byzantine, Caesarean and minuscules of the 15<sup>th</sup> century)]. Moreover, internal evidence indicates that there is a smooth transition from John 7:52 to John 8:12 leaving John 7:53–8:11 being distinct in vocabulary and style from the normal Johannine tradition (Kaczorowski 2018:322–323). Scholars link this text with stories in synoptic gospels which try to put Jesus into a trap in order to catch him, e.g., the Gospel of Luke after 21:38 and 24:53 and also parallels Mark 12:13–17 where Jesus is put into a trap about paying taxes to Caesar (Manus & Ukaga 2017:59–60). It also resembles the texts in Luke where Jesus has compassion with women sinners for example Luke 7:26–50; and the mention of the group of “Scribes and Pharisees” resembles Matthew 15:1–7, 23:23; Mark 3:6, 5:27–30 and Luke 5:17–21, 7: 36–50. In this case, Manus and Ukaga (2017:61) agree that “the story reflects a Lukan composition uncritically appended by a Christian evangelist in the third half of the second century of the Christian Church who knew well of the Johannine tradition of Jesus’ life-affirming stance.” Having established the position of the text in relation to the Johannine and synoptic traditions, my reading of the text provides the following themes:

##### **4.1 Jesus the homeless and great teacher of the truth (7:59–8:2)**

The very first scene portrays the kind of person Jesus was. In the first verse of the text Jesus manifests himself as a pastor, a great teacher of the truth. The dispersion of people to their homes depicted by verse 1 indicates that it was habitual for people to gather in the temple to receive some teachings then go to their homes. In verse two, Jesus enters the temple “again” in the next day, as it was habitually done, to continue with the teaching activity. Jesus sits and people follow him to receive teachings (cf. Manus & Ukaga 2017:65–66).<sup>2</sup> However, when people disperse to their homes as indicated

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2 What did Jesus teach the people? The author of the gospel does not tell us. However, Manus and Ukaga presuppose that Jesus taught them the treasures of the Mosaic Law as a way of Jesus building of his new family of God (see Manus & Ukaga 2017:66).

by verse one, Jesus then goes to the Mount of Olives and sleeps there, indicating that he was possibly a homeless person. Verse two provides clues that Jesus possibly slept at the Mount of Olives because it does not say from where Jesus comes when he comes to the temple (cf. Lk 21:37). Moreover, his disciples are not mentioned to be together with him in the temple, and probably did not accompany him at the Mount of Olives. Here we find the homelessness of Jesus which is also depicted in Luke 9:58 when Jesus himself says, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.”

#### 4.2 The Pharisees’ misuse of the woman’s silence (8:3–6a)

In verse three we begin to see the interplay between silence and speech in the interaction of characters within the text. The Pharisees and Scribes, who were exponents of the Mosaic Law in the Second Temple of Judaism and representatives of the dominant Jewish patriarchal culture, have speech.<sup>3</sup> They come to the temple with a woman together with them, putting her at the midst to make the woman more visible to all who were in the temple. They interrupt Jesus pastoral activity of teaching in favor of their own accusations as being more serious than what Jesus is doing (O’Sullivan 2015:2) They might have been troubled by his teachings, which re-formulated some of the legal conventions in their society. In that case, the challenge of his teachings likely pushed them to put Jesus into a test in regard to the situation of the woman versus the dictates of the Mosaic Law (Manus & Ukaga 2017:66).

In their interruption, they address Jesus with the title of authority, “teacher” (*didaskale*) to exemplify him as a man of wisdom who teaches the true way of God everywhere and to all people (Mt 22: 16; Mk 12: 14; Lk 20: 21; cf. Acts 21: 28). They know about Jesus compassionate love for sinners and are curious to see how Jesus can manage to extend his love to an issue quite legally obvious as that of the woman. Most likely with a tone of sarcasm, they bring a charge against the woman whom they say was

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3 The gospel of John does not predominantly speak of ‘Pharisees (the Jewish strictest sect according to Acts 26:5) and Scribes (the copiers and experts of the law)’; rather, it speaks of ‘Chief Priests and Pharisees’. It is in this text where “Scribes” appear for the first time in the gospel. This provides the evidence that the text is not of Johannine traditional origin, but of synoptic tradition (Manus & Ukaga 2017:67).

“caught in the very act of adultery” (8:4). Their accusations are backed up by the Law of Moses that the woman had to die by stoning. They say: “Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such” (8:5a, cf. Deut 22:22–24 and Lev 20:10) (see Bolayi 2010). As Manus and Ukaga (2017:67) state, “In the social political history of Palestine in Jesus’ time, the Romans denied the subject peoples the *ius gladii* – the right to kill with the sword ...” They seek for Jesus’ opinion on the woman’s destiny, whether he conforms to the Mosaic Law arousing the Romans’ displeasure as they prohibited the Jews from executing death penalties (see Jn 18:31); or he rejects the Mosaic Law and conforms to the Roman Law and loses the reputation as a Jew. In other words, the Pharisees and Scribes asked Jesus: “Moses commands us to stone such a woman to death, but the Romans command us not to: what do you say?” (Manus & Ukaga 2017:70). Any side which Jesus sided could bring him into danger, either to the Jewish patriarchal society or to the Roman colonial masters.<sup>4</sup>

However, from the time they caught the woman to the time they placed her at the midst of the temple for accusations, she was silent. She was speechless, just watching the interplay between Jesus and the Pharisees and Scribes about her case. According to Manus and Ukaga, “There is no doubt that she remained silent to respect the Jewish legal prescription that demanded women to be speechless in the presence of men. She remains silent to avoid being accused of another transgression, namely by engaging in an argument with men, she could quickly be arraigned for commission of *erwat dabari*, something indecent in her, prescribed in Deuteronomy 24:1–4, that could easily be used by her accusers to get her dismissed from her husband’s house.” (Manus & Ukaga 2017:69)

The woman was a Jew; she probably knew the law of Moses and what it said about the act of adultery. However, as Maitland (2008:28) clearly notes, we should bear in mind that “There is no silence without the act of silencing, someone having been shut up ... Silence is oppression and speech, language, spoken or written is freedom ... silence is a place of non-being, a place of control ... all silence is waiting to be broken.” In this text, the woman’s

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4 See the way Jesus is put into a test in a similar way in Mark 12:13–17. The Pharisees and Herodians also addressed Jesus by the title of “Teacher.” This similarity attests for the possible origin of the text from the synoptic tradition.



silence is totally passive. According to the Law of Moses for which she is accused, the woman is silenced and suffers her guilt consciousness. She is under control and her silence waits to be broken by a counter power. The Pharisees misuse the silence of the woman in favor of their own Jewish conventions. This means that the woman was passively silenced by the Jewish conventions not to speak. Her silence is not communicative; it is passive and imposed silence. The woman assesses the public opinion about her case. The atmosphere is not in favour of her opinion because she holds the minority point of view.

Several questions can be asked in this first part of the scene. Where did they catch the woman committing adultery? Why did they not fulfill the requirements of the law by casting stones at the woman soon after they had caught her? Why is the woman (the adulteress) not provided with a chance to defend herself in regard to the nature of the act – whether forced or voluntary? After all, if they caught the woman in the very act of adultery, they acknowledge to know the adulterer; where then is the adulterer in this scene? Is the Law of Moses silent about him? These questions are not simple ones. However, all of them point to the one aim of the Pharisees as a character, “to test him [Jesus], that they might have some charge to bring against him.” (8:6a) It means, therefore, that the interplay between the Pharisees, the woman and the people at the temple aims at comparing three different opinions – that of Moses, that of the Romans and that of Jesus – in regard to the woman’s case.

#### 4.3 Jesus’ proper use of silence (8:6b–7)

Jesus does not enter into dispute about the requirements of the Mosaic Law of which he knows quite well and came not to abolish it but to fulfil (Mt 5:17). He responds to their test with a silence, bending down and writing secret words on the ground with his finger. What does it entail, writing down with his finger? What type of silence does Jesus show in this response? Why does he decide to use such kind of silence? Jesus’ finger is the finger of God, symbolically depicted in Luke 11: 20. It is probably the judging power of God. However, scholars have different opinions about what Jesus wrote on the ground (see Mligo 2011:67–68; Manus & Ukaga 2017:67–68). Most likely Jesus wrote the judgment which the woman was worth (death penalty) according to the law which Jesus came to fulfill.

Despite the varied opinions of scholars, Manus and Ukaga write that Jesus writing on the ground depicts an extraordinary or “superhuman *dunamis*,” the power invested to Jesus by God to fight evils that threatened humanity in his ministry. According to Manus and Ukaga, Jesus’ finger can be lined with the three sayings in the Lukan tradition: *The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in Luke 11:18–19* and parallels, *the dealing with Beelzebul in Luke 11:21–22*, and *the binding of the strong man in Luke 11:21–23*. In these three passages, including the text under study, Jesus is depicted as mightily doing battle against the demonic forces that frustrate human life.” (Manus & Ukaga 2017:68 italics are in original; cf. Kaczorowski 2018:324–328)

Moreover, two kinds of silence can be distinguished in this narrative: the silence caused by silencing as the one which the woman faced, and the silence as power, i.e., the silence one decides to use in order to communicate meaning. The woman’s silence discussed above is mostly the silence due to silencing. McGraw (2015:6) states that silence due to silencing imposes into a person two main problems: deprivation of urgency, an inability to influence the world, and communicative disablement, an inability to communicate one’s ideas because of non-conformity. The woman is silenced because of lack of conformity to the public point of view. She is unable to both influence the existing public sphere of opinions and communicate her own opinions due to existing Jewish conventions that bound her.

Jesus’ silence is different; it is the silence as power to communicate meaning. Jesus silence is a means and a mechanism to resist the hegemonic power of the existing public opinion. It is a mechanism of resistance. It resists the violent communicative sphere of the Jewish community. In fact, “Jesus blocked them by his silence, because they are biased in their interpretation, as they fail to consider the value of the human being” (Manus & Ukaga 2017:70). In this case, Jesus uses silence to resist existing religious powers which want to subjugate his authority, and the value and dignity of the woman. In other words, Jesus’ silence has a meaning that goes against the existing climate of the public opinion.

#### 4.4. The power of Jesus’ silence (8:8–9)

As pointed out in the previous theme, Jesus’ communicative silence vividly becomes different from the woman’s silence, which comes from the process of silencing. Jesus silence bears with its power, the power to communicate

meaning. In the two verses (verses 8 and 9), Jesus remains silent and writes on the ground after uttering a word. Jesus' silence goes contrary to Noemann's theoretical perspective above. Instead of being exacerbated by fear of isolation, as the theory states, Jesus' silence is exacerbated by an urge to break someone else's fear. In the whole communication, Jesus speaks few words and communicates a considerable meaning through his silence. In this case, Jesus' silence and writing on the ground using his finger form what Scott calls the "hidden transcript." It is an art of resistance which represents a transcript of his own,<sup>5</sup> unknown to the Pharisees, the Scribes and the "people" who control the "official or public transcript" (Scott 1990:1–2). As I stated in the beginning of this Paper, Jesus' silence and his writing on the ground are both expressions of his urgency and forms of expression of his power (cf. McGraw 2015:9).

Jesus' silence and writing on the ground pose a challenge to the Pharisees, the Scribes and the people to reconsider their own status before they can assess the status of the woman they silence. According to me, two challenges are posed: first, it challenges them to rethink their own status in relation to the convention they use to accuse the woman. Have they kept the Mosaic Law and all its demands with its due diligence? In other words, are they sinless in regard to the demands of the Law of Moses? Second, it challenges the convention itself. It challenges the Law of Moses itself and its efficacy in relation to Jesus' presence in the world. Does Jesus' presence and teachings favor the observance of the Mosaic Law and its demands? (Mligo 2011) In this case, "Jesus' *finger* is not that of Moses who wrote on a tablet of stones, but in the heart of living sons and daughters of Abraham inviting them for a change of heart ..." (Manus & Ukaga 2017:69)

The power of silence of Jesus' act of silence and writing on the ground with his finger is vivid in their response to his speech. Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to through a stone to her" (8:7b). In response to Jesus' speech, the text says, "they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman

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5 Scott mostly conceived of the "hidden transcript" in the form of speech which is shared and becomes known only to those at the margins against those who are in power. Silence is the form of hidden transcript which is different from Scott's conception. It is not a counter speech against the speech of those in power; rather, it is a speechless transcript which subverts the transcript of the powerful (cf. McGraw 2015:10).

standing in front of him” (8:9). Possibly, they understood the challenge of Jesus’ silence and writing on the ground and the assertion of the Jewish scriptures (the *Tanakh*) that all people have sinned (see Isaiah 53:6; Ecclesiastes 7:20).<sup>6</sup> They left the scene full of shame.

Two things are significant in regard to their departure: first, the convention which the Pharisees used to accuse the woman was not only for the Pharisees and Scribes who brought the woman to Jesus, but also for those whom Jesus was teaching at the temple when the Pharisees brought the woman. It seems in this scene, that the ‘people’ whom Jesus taught in the temple shared the same point of view with the Pharisees and Scribes, which led them to depart after assessing themselves about their own spiritual status. Second, the assessment of status was individual; it was not group solidarity. This is what it means when the text reports that “they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest ...” (8:9). Their departure indicates that sin is individual; and Jesus divides them and rules. He conquers their group ambitions and hypocrisies by allowing time for each one of them to assess oneself and judge. This is the vivid power of his silence as manifested in this text.

#### 4.5 The implication of silence (8:10–11)

When Jesus lifts his head, he sees nobody. Neither the Pharisees and Scribes who brought the woman, nor the normal Jews whom he used to teach in the Temple remained there. Only himself and the convicted woman in front of him (8:10a) (Mligo 2011:209–210). Only the sinless Jesus has the right to pronounce judgment upon the woman, not them with their human frailty. What implication does this show? It certainly implies that Jesus’ silence and his writing on the ground have conquered. Their plan to test Jesus’ reputation in regard to the Jewish and Roman conventions has failed, and the opinion of Jesus about the woman’s case is stronger than the public opinion. The silence of Jesus has silenced the power of the existing conventions. The Pharisees and Scribes who once had speech and wanted to use the woman’s case to bring Jesus into a trap have been silenced. They

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6 The problem facing resistance in the form of silence is misinterpretation. They can be interpreted in ways not intended. In the questioning of Pilate to Jesus, for example, the speech response of Jesus and its subsequent silence were not understood. These led into the death of Jesus and the release of Barabbas (see Mk 15:1–15)

have moved from speech to silence. The text testifies that they went away, one after the other speechlessly. The shackle of the Law of Moses which dominated the public sphere of the Jews and which silenced the woman has been broken. The woman is left free and with speech. Through Jesus silence and writing on the ground the speech-based counter-discourse of the Jews is undermined.

Jesus asks the woman, whose speech has been restored, two consecutive questions: “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (8:10).<sup>7</sup> The two consecutive questions which Jesus asks the woman, have two major aims: first to empower the silenced woman towards speech. The woman who has been silent in the whole scene opens her mouth to speak confessing the Lordship of Jesus: “No one, Lord.” (8:11a). Second, the questions provide assurance on the freedom of the woman. They assure her that she has passed from the realm of domination by the public sphere of the Jews to the realm of the Kingdom of God promulgated by Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Jesus cements this assurance with a directive: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.” (8:11b; cf. 8:15). The retaliating of the God of the Mosaic Law is silenced, and the merciful God of the Kingdom of God has been revived in the life of the woman. The woman who is equally a sinner as her accusers is now liberated and confesses Jesus as “Lord”. While she moved from silence to speech, her accusers moved from speech to silence. It is in this respect that this event becomes good news for all silenced women and men in marriages and married lives.

## 5. Married lives and God of the Kingdom

This section discusses the implication of marriage narrative related in the beginning of this paper, and the reading of the text above to the contemporary mission of the Church. What then do the two marital narratives and the

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7 Here Jesus uses the word “woman” instead of “lady” which seems to be more appropriate. However, his use of the word does not mean to look down upon the woman caught in adultery but pay respect to her. In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses the word “woman” as a respectful and courteous address to most women (see also Jn 2:4; 19: 26; and 20: 15).

8 It is obvious that the concept of the Kingdom of God is not Johannine. It is mostly synoptic. However, we use this type of concept because, as indicated in the beginning of content reflection above, its periscope is mostly synoptic, particularly from the tradition of the gospel according to Luke.

reflected text above imply in the contemporary life of marriages in relation to the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ? The text and the narratives above indicate that silence is the most effective form of resistance that communicates the individual's urgency. In the marriage narrative stated above, the offended one keeps silent to demonstrate the power of silence in making his or her urgency visible. It is a counter-discourse. The discourse of unfaithfulness by one of the couples is responded to by the discourse of silence which portrays the urgency of the offended and communicates meaning to the offender. Therefore, in the marriage narratives, silence becomes a weapon to conquer the counter-discourse of the offender.

McGraw, quoting Dhawan, writes: "Silence here [as a form of resistance] is a practice of confrontation, a 'counter-discourse.' It can function as a variation in the eternal repetition of discourses by causing a rupture in language, a subversion that turns language against itself. It is not just that one is silenced and thereby rendered invisible; rather, one can strategically choose to be silent by boycotting discourses, by refusing to participate in them. Ironically, dominant discourses require counter-discourses to continually reinforce and strengthen their hegemony" (McGraw 2015:11). It is effective because it makes the silent individual reject to cooperate in his or her own fate. This is what happened in the responses of Jesus to religious authorities in the passion narratives (see the introduction above), in the interaction of Jesus with the Pharisees and Scribes in the text from the gospel of John, and in the narratives of married couples above.

The narrative of married couples above clearly shows the context into which the Church of Jesus Christ works. How does the Church handle those who are silenced by existing conventions? How does the Church teach the communicative power of silence? Jesus taught the Pharisees, Scribes, and "the people" about the power of silence. McGraw reports that there is a need for the Church to repent from the habit it has been adopting towards those who are silenced by the existing systems. Despite teaching what the silenced masses communicate in their silences, the church has been silent about it, and been an agent of silencing the voices of such people (McGraw 2015:44).

For example, there has been a great deprivation of voice among women in the history of the Church, being justified by the church in the interpretation of

Scriptures (see texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35). The misinterpretations of scriptures have caused the resurgence of domestic violence against women, of which the church has remained silent as if they do not happen. Through its misinterpretation of scriptures, the Church has in its history silenced Christians from speech through censorship, speaking on behalf of those who are supposed to be heard for themselves, and overwhelming the incipient voices within it. Censorship prohibits individuals from speech, speaking on behalf deprives individuals from communicating their real unique experiences, while overwhelming incipient voices by using huge volumes of words while denying hearing from such incipient voices, i.e., speaking without leaving spaces for other voices to be heard. All of them are forms of silencing which the Church has mostly adopted in history instead of teaching about the power of silence of those who are silenced as Jesus did to the Pharisees and Scribes (McGraw 2015:52–53).

It is therefore on this ground that the church is called upon to confession and repentance of the guilt of silencing and the wrong silence it has exercised upon the various issues of the marginalized, neglecting the power they portray through their silence. I agree with McGraw (2015:77) who sums up thus: “The church is called to be a means by which heaven begins to be realized presently on earth, emulating the non-coercive power of God that hears the communication of every person’s silence and speech. Thus, the church must prioritize the process of interpreting other’s silences and speech to prevent the silencing of others, instead creating new communities built around the possibility of communication and connection of individuals” (McGraw 2015:77).

## **6. Conclusion**

The sole concern of this paper was to examine the power of silence in the text of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1–11 and the role of the church towards the life of its members in relation to marriage issues. The narrative of marital life was used as a bridge towards entering into a proper reflection of the phenomenon of silence. The theory of the spiral of silence was used to guide the interpretation of the text contextualizing it in the Bena context of Tanzania. The reflection on the text above has indicated that silence has two dimensions: silence as resistance and silence due to

silencing. Jesus, the Jews (the Pharisees, the Scribes and the “people”), and the woman caught in adultery are the main characters in the story. The interaction of characters in this story is characterized by different implications of silence. On the one hand, the Pharisees and Scribes silence the woman by the use of existing conventions (the Mosaic Law) making the silence of the woman an imposed silence, not the one coming from her own free will. On the other hand, the silence of Jesus and his writing on the ground are acts of resistance. They come from the inner decision of Jesus himself, with a particular intention towards the public sphere. Through Jesus’ silence and writing on the ground, the dehumanizing public sphere is undermined, and the woman is restored to speech.

Since the church belongs to Jesus Christ, it has an obligation to follow the silence of Jesus in its mission. However, the church has in most cases done the contrary in its history. It has silenced the marginalized and overwhelmed the incipient voiced emerging through its huge volumes of words. In this case, the church is called towards confessing and repenting of its weaknesses and prioritizing the needs of its members in order to bring heaven on earth instead of making the marginalized acquire an imposed silence.

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