



Un-silencing “Conversion therapies” of LGBTIQ+ people in Africa: Exploring the doctrine of the Trinity towards inclusive families

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Abstract

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and plus all other (LGBTIQ+) people often are being “corrected” by families through religious and cultural beliefs because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) that destabilises stable constructs of heteronormativity. For these belief systems, LGBTIQ+ people threaten the concept of family and associated values that inform the so-called social fabric and cohesion of sexuality and gender norms. In recent years, LGBTIQ+ people, human rights defenders, and academics have shed light on the practices of “conversion therapies” on the African continent in various forms as practised by religious and cultural communities. “Conversion therapy” is also called “reparative therapy” or “gay cure” interchangeably to describe different practices that are out to change, suppress or dissuade LGBTIQ+ people’s sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. This article will use short narrative audio video interviews conducted by *openDemocracy* to give voice to survivors of “conversion therapy” on the African continent. In these videos, survivors speak about the intersectional reality of family relations, mental health and religion’s impact on their well-being. Over the last few years, there has been a reappraisal of the doctrine of the Trinity. Bisexual Latin-American theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid views the Trinity as a critique of heteronormative binaries. Therefore, this article explores whether Althaus-Reid’s Trinitarian theology offers a counter theological narrative against “conversion practices” as advocated by families based on religion.

Keywords

LGBTIQ+; *conversion therapy*; *Trinity*; *family*

1. Opposed, contested and denounced?

The Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and plus all other¹ (LGBTIQ+) people on the African continent are “opposed, contested and denounced”² for political gain of those in power to counter the “so-called” destruction of “African traditions and heterosexual ‘family’ values”.³ Exploring the political realities around LGBTIQ+ bodies Zambian theologian Kapya Kooma refers to this political action as “protective homophobia”⁴ that “exploits anxieties around the social change and foreign interference”.⁵ Therefore in Africa political leaders use, “criminalisation ... to preserve society’s moral fabric”.⁶ Political backlash is not the only sphere within society that contests LGBTIQ+ people SOGIESC.

Sexuality and gender are “constructed, nurtured and regulated by faith communities and sustained by culture”⁷ through the normativity of heterosexuality.⁸ In Africa sexuality “is a multifaceted domain, deeply material (visceral, embodied, and politicised), and, like gender, informed by interlocking political, social, class, religious, cultural, and economic interests”.⁹ These interests of political powers are advanced through multiple forms of systemic and structural opposition, contestation and

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- 1 The plus at the end of the acronym signifies gender and sexuality on the spectrum that letters and words cannot describe at this point in time.
 - 2 Thabo Msibi, “The lies we have been told: On (homo) sexuality in Africa,” *Africa Today* 58, no. 1 (2011): 55.
 - 3 Msibi, “The lies we have been told: On (homo)sexuality in Africa,” 55.
 - 4 Kapya Kaoma, *Christianity, globalization, and protective homophobia: democratic contestation of sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa* (Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 1.
 - 5 John Marnell, *Seeking Sanctuary: Stories of Sexuality, Faith and Migration* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2021), 17.
 - 6 Marnell, *Seeking Sanctuary*, 14.
 - 7 Hanzline R. Davids, Abongile Matyila, Sizwe Sithole, and Charlene van der Walt, *Stabanisation: A discussion paper about disrupting backlash by reclaiming LGBTI voices in the African church landscape* (Johannesburg: The Other Foundation, 2019), 16.
 - 8 Hanzline R. Davids and Chris Jones, “Theological-ethical contours for the full inclusion of LGBTIQ+ bodies in the church,” in Chris Jones (ed.), *Justice-based ethics: Challenging South African perspectives* (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2018), 89–90.
 - 9 Zethu Matebeni, Suraya Monro and Vasu Reddy, *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism*. (London: Routledge, 2018), 171–184.

denouncement that provide the protection and advancement of the heteronormative matrix that excludes, dehumanises, and traumatised LGBTIQ+ people in the name of heterosexual family values.

2. Heterosexual family values?

Thatcher argues that defining family is not easy.¹⁰ For this reason, Thatcher makes use of Lisa Cahill's definition of family which states as follows: "basically an organized network of socio-economic and reproductive interdependence and support grounded in biological kinship and marriage".¹¹ Thatcher, furthermore, elaborates various aspects of Cahill's definition as follows:

"Organized" implies social custom and domestic authority, neither of which is fixed. "Network" implies a common residence. "Socio-economic" implies the wider resources of work, social interaction and exchange, necessary for families to survive. "Reproductive" includes children as a *raison d'être* of families: "interdependence and support" implies both mutuality between members and the dependence of some on others. 'Grounded' allows for the extension of families beyond their reproductive base to include adopted and fostered children, elderly relatives, and even residing companions and friends. "Marriage" accommodates within the definition the expectation that the core of the family unit still remains the married couple.¹²

As an organised network, "the family" is still, according to Thatcher's elaboration on Cahill's definition, a space wherein socialisation takes place. According to Harvey, "family is one of the most powerful cultural sites at which heteronormativity and normative gender expression are reproduced and enforced".¹³ Connell also asserts that "[g]ender is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices

10 Adrian Thatcher, *Theology and Families* (Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 6.

11 Lisa Cahill, *Family: A Christian social perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), x–xi.

12 Thatcher, *Theology and Families*, 6.

13 Jennifer Harvey, "Disrupting the normal: Queer family life as sacred work," in Kathleen T. Talvacchia, Michael F. Pettinger, and Mark Larrimore (eds.), *Queer Christianities*:

that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes”.¹⁴ Thus, the family is a “key site for production and reproduction of gendered individuals”.¹⁵ Family through biological reproductive functions in the narrow sense uphold heteronormative values. For Steyn and van Zyl the family is the key site where heteronormativity is upheld:

Heteronormativity is the institutionalisation of exclusive heterosexuality in society. Based on the assumption that there are only two sexes and that each has predetermined gender roles, it pervades all social attitudes, but is particularly visible in “family” and “kinship” ideologies. Heteronormativity constructs oppositional binaries – for example woman/man, homosexual/heterosexual – and is embedded in discourses which create punitive rules for non-conformity to hegemonic norms of heterosexual identity.¹⁶

LGBTIQ+ people that “engage in family relationships or practices outside what is considered ‘normal’ will be labelled ‘deviant’ and immediately excluded or ‘othered’ within their communities”.¹⁷ Because of the perceived “otherness” homophobes, biphobes and transphobes claim that LGBTIQ+ people are “a threat to the institution of the family”.¹⁸ One of the biggest proponents of heterosexual family values is the International Organisation for the Family (IOF), “that unites and equips leaders worldwide to promote the natural family”.¹⁹ The IOF realise their vision through four main projects. Firstly the World Congress of Families (WCF) seeks to bring together various people, groups, and leaders “to affirm, celebrate, and defend the natural family as the only fundamental and sustainable

Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms (New York; London: New York University, 2015), 103.

- 14 Raewyn Connell, *Gender in World Perspective* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 11.
- 15 Sylvia Tamale, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (Ottawa: Daraja Press, 2000), 306.
- 16 Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl, “Introduction: The prize and the price,” in Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl (eds.), *The Prize and the price: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), 3.
- 17 Tamale, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*, 291.
- 18 Mutua, *Sexual Orientation and Human Rights*, 460.
- 19 “Mission,” International Organization for the Family.[Online]. Available: <https://www.profam.org/mission/> [Accessed: November 03, 2021].

unit of society”.²⁰ Secondly, an academic journal *The Natural Family: An International Journal of Research and Policy* (TNF) seeks to advance “the natural family as the fundamental group unit of society and to protect the sanctity and dignity of all human life.”²¹ Thirdly, *The Article 16 Initiative* (A16) work towards the global protection of “freedom, faith, and family as the natural and fundamental group unit of society consistent with Article 16 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.²² Lastly, The Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) “equips and empowers young professionals, scholars, and activists to promote marriage, and the natural family as the fundamental group unit of society”.²³ Studying the trends of the impact of North American-funded advocacy programs, Koama, asserts that anti-LGBTIQ+ movements have “also shaped public debate on homosexuality mostly through politics of disgust, identity, and cultural politics”.²⁴ As an American-based organisation with a global vision to impact policies on family, the IOF recently had a conference on African soil to advance their agenda.

In 2019 the World Congress of Families (WCF) had a conference in Accra, Ghana. Human Rights Campaign reported that the WCF advocated “for adoption of public policies supporting so-called ‘conversion therapy’ and an understanding of LGBTQ people as ‘deviant’, while attacking sex education and women’s rights in Ghana”.²⁵ Two years later, in 2021, Amnesty International, in a public statement, condemned and called for a retraction of the Ghanaian Parliament’s “proposed Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill 2021 from consideration”.²⁶ The Bill, according to Amnesty International infringes on the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and deters medical professionals from

20 IOF, “Mission.”

21 IOF, “Mission.”

22 IFO, “Mission.”

23 IFO, “Mission.”

24 Kaoma, *Christianity, globalization, and protective homophobia*, 174.

25 Taylor N.T. Brown, “Anti-LGBTQ U.S. Activists Organize Conference in Ghana”. [Online]/ Available: <https://www.hrc.org/news/anti-lgbtq-us-activists-organize-conference-in-ghana> [Accessed: November 03, 2021].

26 “Ghana: Anti-LGBT Bill stirs up hatred, persecution and Discrimination, Amnesty International.” [Online]. Available: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AFR2846772021ENGLISH.pdf> [Accessed: November 03, 2021].

assisting LGBTIQ+ people. Medical professionals are urged to “realign” LGBTIQ+ people to an “appropriate binary designation”.²⁷ Thereby promoting “conversion therapies” by restricting transgender persons from accessing gender reaffirming surgeries. These professionals’ risk being criminally charged if they assist LGBTIQ+ medically.²⁸

These inhuman acts of policing and criminalisation of LGBTIQ+ peoples SOGIESC is an example of how the Christian right organises advocacy campaigns on a global level strategically and well-funded to subvert, disrupt and erase the embodiment of LGBTIQ+ peoples SOGIESC on the African continent. Natural heterosexual family values are not only promoted by religious conservatism in West Africa. In South Africa, the Family Policy Institute (FPI) is another example of how Christian conservatism operates to influence public discourse and legislation. The FPI believes that “marriage and the family is the foundation of civilisation, the seedbed of virtue, and the wellspring of society”.²⁹ Therefore, through shaping “public debate and formulate public policy that values human life and upholds the institutions of marriage and the family.”³⁰ The FPI asserts that through these actions it “promotes the Judeo-Christian worldview as the basis for a just, free, and stable society”.³¹ For this reason, the FPI “exists to stop the forces, refute the arguments, and reverse the government policies that undermine the stability and health of families”.³² The IFO and FPI not only contest the notion of LGBTIQ+ SOGIESC but purposefully undermine the formation of queer families, especially in South Africa. “Conversion therapies” are used to promote this agenda to protect, uphold and nurture the heterosexual family structure for the “good” of societies.

27 “Ghana: Anti-LGBT Bill stirs up hatred, persecution and Discrimination.”

28 “Ghana: Anti-LGBT Bill stirs up hatred, persecution and Discrimination.”

29 “About Family Policy Institute,” Family Policy Institute. [Online]. Available: <https://familypolicyinstitute.com/about/> [Accessed: November 03, 2021].

30 “About Family Policy Institute.”

31 “About Family Policy Institute.”

32 “About Family Policy Institute.”

3. What is “Conversion Therapy”?

As an umbrella term, “conversion therapies” are also called by other name for example, “reparative therapy” or even “gay cure” to describe the way a variety of practices are used to change or even suppress LGBTIQ+ people’s SOGIESC. Human Rights organisations like openDemocracy, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA), Outright Action International and the Centre for Human Rights, at the University of Pretoria, South Africa researched or are in the process of publishing research findings on the use and impact of “conversion therapies”.

The ILGA reports that there “is no one single term consistently and universally adopted to denote attempts to modify a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression”.³³ However, different “terms of art and colloquial expressions have been used in the past to refer to such attempts and, even today, these terms vary greatly across time and location”.³⁴ “Conversion therapies” were “pathologized” in the mental health sector. Heterosexuality is, therefore, the state to which people who are deemed “deviants” needed to return to for them to be “corrected” from their ways:

Under such paradigm, heterosexuality and the alignment of the sex assigned at birth with the gender identity was understood as “the biologic norm” and sexual diversity was characterised as a deviation, a perversion or a mental illness which could be cured, shifted or “converted” with specific “treatment”.³⁵

With these definitions above in mind, I will now turn to recorded interview views that were conducted by *openDemocracy*. The investigative project recorded survivors’ stories from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. In the introductory video, we hear multiple voices of survivors recounting their experiences with “conversion therapies”:

33 Curbing Deception: A world survey on legal regulation of so-called “conversion therapies” (Geneva: ILGA World, 2020), 17.

34 ILGA, “Curbing Deception,” 17.

35 ILGA, “Curbing Deception,” 17.

They used electric shocks on my ears and showed me pictures of skinny boys with ruptured annus and wounded penises. The therapist treated me for homosexuality as a mental illness and used the electric shock method during my visits. There, my mother prayed for me on the top of her voice every single night, claiming that she was casting out demons from my head. I was seeing the counsellor for depression. Instead, he introduced me to conversion therapy and gave me toxins, which he said would replace my attraction to other men with disgust. I have anxiety disorder now and my distress issue towards I have anxiety disorder now and my distress issue towards health instruction is very to the point that I could get very sick and not go and get a check-up.³⁶

Various “conversion therapies” were used on survivors consisting of psychoanalytic therapy, faith-based therapy, sexual abuse, and surgical interventions.³⁷ Survivors are living with the negative effects on their mental health, family relations and physical well-being because of “conversion therapies”. On the African continent “conversion therapies” take on various forms that are enforced by political, religious, and traditional spheres of society. Firstly, religious “conversion therapies” are practised because “[h]omosexuality is still perceived to be unreligious and ‘unAfrican’ on the African continent”³⁸ and the claim of exorcising homosexual “demons” persists. Secondly, it is “carried out for cultural reasons and through localised methods”.³⁹ These methods are “performed by traditional healers [that] claim to be able to change the sexual orientation of an LGBTQ person through potions”.⁴⁰ Thirdly, training camps are “justified as an

36 More than 50 survivors of anti-LGBT “conversion therapy” shared their experiences with openDemocracy, YouTube Video, 0:59, openDemocracy, July 09, 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsxQYh9twTk>.

37 Centre for Human Rights. Report on Current Practices in Conversion Therapy, Emerging Technology, and the Protection of LGBTIQ+ Rights in Africa. [Online]. Available: https://www.chr.up.ac.za/images/centrenews/2021/Current_practices_in_conversion_therapy_and_emerging_technology_14_May_2021.pdf [Accessed: November 03, 2021].

38 Centre for Human Rights, “Report on Current Practices in Conversion Therapy,” 11.

39 Centre for Human Rights, “Report on Current Practices in Conversion Therapy,” 12.

40 Centre for Human Rights, “Report on Current Practices in Conversion Therapy,” 12.

attempt to safeguard the family honour”⁴¹ by isolating LGBTQ+ people at camps “where they receive advice that will be able to subsequently change their sexual orientation”.⁴² Africa’s violent behaviour towards her children contributes to LGBTIQ+ people becoming migrants that seek political asylum in other countries.⁴³ These acts of violation and violence committed in the name of the “family” are often incited by those in power.

Gender theorist Judith Butler in continuation with the work of Michel Foucault perceives power:

... as forming the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are.⁴⁴

Power has different forms that impact people negatively and positively. Negatively, power-over “is recognized as death-dealing, both for individuals and for the planet”.⁴⁵ Positively, power can be understood as power-within and power-with. Power-within refers to “the power of one’s own inner wisdom, intuition, self-esteem, even the spark of the divine”.⁴⁶ While power-with, “is the power of an individual to reach out in a manner that negates neither self nor other. It prizes mutuality over control and operates by negotiation and consensus”.⁴⁷ Heteronormativity “empowers” those who hold “power-over” LGBTIQ+ people because of biological normativity. This leads to LGBTIQ+ people being “disempowered” because of the perception that “natural family values” and the moral fabric of society are being

41 Centre for Human Rights, “Report on Current Practices in Conversion Therapy,” 12.

42 Centre for Human Rights, “Report on Current Practices in Conversion Therapy,” 12.

43 John Marnell, *Seeking Sanctuary: Stories of Sexuality, Faith and Migration* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021); Guillain Koko, Surya Monro, and Kate Smith. “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) forced migrants and asylum seekers: Multiple discriminations,” in *Queer in Africa*, 158-177.

44 Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

45 Pamela Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar: Violence against women and the church’s response* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 55.

46 Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar*, 55.

47 Cooper-White, *The Cry of Tamar*, 55.

corrupted and eroded. Heteronormative violence is the pervasive water that both the victim and perpetrator swim in that leads to the destruction and dehumanisation of all people. What is required is a “basis of the flourishing of all human families”.⁴⁸ In other words, “a Christian family ethic”⁴⁹ that protects and nurtures the SOGIESC of LGBTIQ+ people that holds power-within and power-with all people. Thatcher, therefore, argues that such a family ethic could be based on the doctrine of the Trinity.

4. Closeted Trinity coming out!

In 1980, African American singer Diana Ross famously recorded and sang “I am Coming Out”, which became one of her hit songs and iconic in LGBTIQ+ communities. Writer Nile Rodgers confirmed that the song was originally intended for the LGBTIQ+ community and was inspired after seeing drag queens dressed as Diana Ross at a New York club.⁵⁰ Part of the lyrics goes as follows:

I’m coming out
 I want the world to know
 Got to let it show
 I’m coming out
 I want the world to know
 Got to let it show.

These lyrics encapsulate the Trinitarian Renaissance coming out in the “extraordinary interest in Trinitarian theology since the second half of the twentieth century”.⁵¹ The interest in the Trinity can be summarised in six points according to Venter. Firstly, “an emphasis on the Trinity as the specific Christian identification of God.”⁵² Secondly, “a renewed

48 Thatcher, *Theology and Families*, 22.

49 Thatcher, *Theology and Families*, 22.

50 https://www.tiktok.com/@nilerodgersandchic/video/6925348748902092038?source=h5_m&_r=1

51 Riaan Venter, “Taking stock of the Trinitarian renaissance: What have we learnt?” *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019):1; Teddy C. Sakupapa, “The Trinity in African Christian theology: An overview of contemporary approaches,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2019).

52 Venter, “Taking stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance,” 2.

interest in the Eastern tradition and the Cappadocian Fathers”.⁵³ Thirdly, “an acknowledgement of the shift from substantial to more relational and communal modes of thinking”.⁵⁴ Fourthly, “an appreciation of history as a category for thinking God’s nature”.⁵⁵ Fifthly, “an exploration of the practical significance of the doctrine to address social dilemmas”.⁵⁶ Lastly, “attempts at translating the confession into theologies representing marginalised voices”.⁵⁷ This article is especially interested in the last point that Venter makes. As a marginalised group on the African continent of LGBTIQ+ people, the doctrine of the Trinity offers possible liberative theologies toward inclusive families. This point furthermore aligns with theology where the experiences of the marginalised are centralised.⁵⁸ These theologies of LGBTIQ+ people are a slow process that often ought to be facilitated in spaces that are safe and where they set the pace and agenda.⁵⁹

Before I turn to how the doctrine of the Trinity can be used as a liberative theological doctrine for LGBTIQ+ people within the discourse of family a few key aspects of why the Trinity can be viewed as a “symbol” will be explored. God as a symbol, or in this case the Trinity, “represents what the community takes to be its highest good, its most profound truth, its most appealing beauty”.⁶⁰ These characteristics of goodness, truth, and beauty become an ethical and moral way of life that becomes the interpretative framework for personal and communal experiences that informs identity formation.⁶¹ The symbol of the Trinity demystifies God. Johnson points out that the Triune God is “not an isolated, absolute ruler but an

53 Venter, “Taking stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance,” 2.

54 Venter, “Taking stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance,” 2.

55 Venter, “Taking stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance,” 2.

56 Venter, “Taking stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance,” 2.

57 Venter, “Taking stock of the Trinitarian Renaissance,” 2.

58 Gerald West, Charlene van der Walt, and Kapyra Koama, “When faith does violence: Reimagining engagement between churches and LGBTI groups on homophobia in Africa,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2016): 2.

59 West, van der Walt, and Koama, “When faith does violence,” 2. Inclusive and Affirming Ministries is such an organisation that works towards inclusive and affirming faith and civil society communities.

60 Elizabeth A. Johnson, Trinity: to let the symbol sing again, *Theology Today* 54, no. 3 (1997): 300.

61 Johnson, “Trinity: to let the symbol sing again,” 300.

incomprehensible, three-fold koinonia” that calls for a “loving relationship in the community and in the world as the highest good”.⁶² Thus, the Trinity inspires positive efforts “to create a community of [family] interwoven with the whole web of earth’s life”.⁶³ Trinitarian love and relations are equal where LGBTIQ+ people’s power-within is celebrated, not a domination that leads to exclusion, marginalisation and ultimately to the practice of power-over. On the contrary, the Trinity as a symbol symbolises power-with where the Persons are extended, nurtured, and cultivated towards collective goodness. Therefore, Christians are called ethically to embody Trinitarian relations. Latin-American bisexual theologian, Marcella Althaus-Reid, in my opinion, queers the doctrine of the Trinity that opens the possibility to imagine and cultivate a notion of family that is life-affirming.

Althaus-Reid in *Queer God* writes about the closeted Trinity.⁶⁴ The Trinitarian relationality for Althaus-Reid is oppositional to stable heterosexual monogamous relationships that is often advocated by heteronormative binaries.⁶⁵ Althaus-Reid sees the Trinity as “emptying, or kenosis, of the heterosexual God of monogamy”.⁶⁶ In other words, an “omnisexual kenosis,”⁶⁷ that is “a process by which God is revealed and experienced as a gender-fluid and polyamorous being, which reflects the three-way relationship that is at the heart of the Trinity”.⁶⁸ This process of God’s kenosis opens the pathway to erase stable binaries which heteronormativity constructs identities upon for “natural family” reproductive ideologies. Althaus-Reid ascertains that uncloseted relationships of the Trinity offer more life-giving theological meaning-making than one would think. For example, Althaus-Reid perceives “one of the first ‘deaths’ occurring in this kenotic process of omnisexuality is the death of the illusion of limited relationships”.⁶⁹ In this “restricted

62 Johnson, “Trinity: to let the symbol sing again,” 300.

63 Johnson, “Trinity: to let the symbol sing again,” 300.

64 Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Queer God* (London: Routledge, 2003), 58–59.

65 Patrick Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 57.

66 Cheng, *Radical Love*, 57.

67 Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 57.

68 Cheng, *Radical Love*, 57–58.

69 Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 58.

polyfidelity” in which the “three persons of the divine triad three persons who enjoy a kinship close relationship are faithful amongst themselves”⁷⁰ have their lovers, for example, Jesus’ relationships with Mary Magdalene and Lazarus.⁷¹ Cheng summarises Althaus-Reid’s uncloseted Trinitarian theology as follows:

For Althaus-Reid, the Trinity reminds us that men and women are not limited to “dyadic” or “fixed” sexual identities, but rather “multitudes”. As such, the Trinity can be a model for individuals who are polyamorous because the Trinity deconstructs the binary relationship model of marriage and domestic partnerships.⁷²

The traditional idea of natural family values that are constituted on the relationship between one-man and one-woman need to be rethought in the Christian faith because of the doctrine of the Trinity that erases, subvert, and transgresses stable binaries. The Trinity, in my opinion, unsilenced the injustice of “conversion therapies”. The Triune of God of justice and love whose Name Christians confess as Saviour and Redeemer demand the protection of the lives of LGBTIQ+ people. In the next section, the article focuses on the Global Interfaith Network for People of All Sexes, Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions (GIN-SSOGIE) an organisation that advocates for a plural understanding of family that is constructed about love, justice, and inclusivity.

5. Un-silencing of “conversion therapies” towards inclusive families

LGBTIQ+ people and allies have disrupted the idea of the “natural family” as constitutive of the moral fibre of society and argued for a more inclusive understanding of family. GIN-SSOGIE convened human rights activists, academics, and religious leaders from diverse backgrounds, including African traditional religions, Islam, and Christianity, for a dialogue on Family and Traditional Values that resulted in the formulation of the Johannesburg Declaration. The Preamble to the Declaration acknowledges

70 Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 58.

71 Althaus-Reid, *Queer God*, 58.

72 Cheng, *Radical Love*, 59.

that a “whole range of families, including LGBTIQ families, have been excluded from the definition of ‘natural family’ by the extreme religious right”.⁷³ For this reason, the Declaration states the following key points on the protection of families, celebrating sexuality and reclaiming culture, interrogation of sovereignty, and reclaiming collective faith. Through these key points, the Declaration highlights alternative, and inclusive conceptualisations of the family on the African continent. The Declaration also provides the language for the Church (and other religions) to combat religious sanctioned practices of “conversion therapies” that promote homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. The Declaration defines family inclusively as:

That family has always evolved and today manifests itself in many forms such as the nuclear family, single parent (mother/father/caregiver) family, cross-generational (grandparents-grandchildren) family, same-sex (parents) family, childless family, and child-headed family. All these models of family can and must find their place in the African family and policy-making processes.⁷⁴

This definition of family does not adhere to a “fixed” idea, but rather a “multitude” of family constellations. Family, therefore, becomes fluid and open to anyone that seeks and longs for the community, “characterised by interdependence, and are constituted by mutual love, care and accountability, especially for their most vulnerable members”.⁷⁵ These characteristics resonate with a Trinitarian understanding and by which notions of family or rather families can be cultivated.

Conclusion

“Conversion therapies” denies not only LGBTIQ+ people’s life but also those who advocate and perform these inhumane acts of violence. Family,

73 Global Interfaith Network, for People of All Sexes, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identities and Expression, “Johannesburg Declaration”. [Online]. Available: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-website [Accessed: November 03, 2021].

74 GIN-SSOGIE, “Johannesburg Declaration.”

75 GIN-SSOGIE, “Johannesburg Declaration.”

in the broad sense, ought to be the space where we flourish as human beings and not be afraid to be our authentic selves. Sexuality and gender are ways through which we make sense of who we are as human beings, about God, our fellow human beings, and the earth.

LGBTIQ+ people's SOGIESC makes them vulnerable in families, faith communities and society at large that are built upon heteronormative family values. However, the same SOGIESC that causes vulnerability is the space where life-affirming theologies develop for all people. GIN-SSOGI's Johannesburg Declaration notions of families is an example of alternative language founded on justice, love and peace that advocates for human dignity and celebrating sexual and gender diversity.

Coupled with Althaus-Reid's Trinitarian theology, I am convinced it is possible to foster theological imagination to deconstruct heteronormativity's power-over LGBTIQ+ people and families. This process, however, needs start off by practicing "omnisexual kenosis" by those who advocates for a traditional understanding of family. In other words, the "omnisexual kenosis" becomes a confessional space of self-emptying from injustice and inhumanity. Ultimately finding within the uncloseted Trinity theological imagination to dream of and embody types of family constellations that fosters belonging through Trinitarian connectedness where all human beings ought to flourish.

Cultivating an inclusive theology of family on the doctrine of the Trinity ask of us all that we move away from a power-over approach to a power-within and power-with understanding of family.

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