

**Towards an African Women's Liberation Theology of Human
Dignity: A Reflection on Women Domestic Work in Malawi**

Goodwin Lyson Dan Zainga

211555217

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Theology (Gender, Religion and Health) in the School of
Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg**

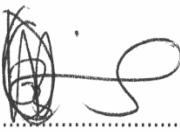
Supervisor: Dr. Clint Le Bruyns

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DECLARATION

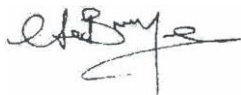
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Goodwin Lyson Dan Zainga

Pietermaritzburg

November 2013


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Dr. Clint Le Bruyns

Supervisor

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my honour and privilege to have completed this work with the help of God Almighty and many people who encouraged me in both my spiritual and academic journey. My companion and soul mate, Gloria Piyo offered me support in times of despair.

My supervisor, Dr. Clint Le Bruyns is to be saluted once again for his guidance and assistance from the initial stages of the study to its completion. The world of study for me would not be such a wonderful, challenging and exciting place without you, Sir.

I would like to thank members of Scottsville Presbyterian Church (SPC) for the spiritual support. The pastoral care I received from Rev Dr. Roderick Hewitt and the entire membership of SPC is greatly appreciated.

The financial support from the Council for World Mission (CWM), Churches of Christ in Malawi (CCM), Church of Sweden and the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards this study is acknowledged and appreciated as without that financial assistance I could not have been able to complete this dissertation.

My work is dedicated to my wife, Gloria and my children: Pemphero Jennifer, Mwai Hazel, Lonjezo Naomi and Tadala Gracious whose companionship and prayers provided me with the energy in order for me to complete this dissertation. And of course to my late mother Mary Zakariya Zainga for providing me with the best advice and insights on how to live in this world.

ABSTRACT

The concept of human dignity is a contested term but it is also vital in the world where there are many forms of violations that challenge human beings. The concept of human dignity is crucial in that it affects all spheres of life such as religion, employment, economics, politics and so on. The world of work is another area where several forms of oppression and exploitation are manifested and in the process the human dignity of workers is greatly compromised. As the world of work is a vast subject to be discussed in one dissertation, a specific area needs to be explored in order to understand violations of human dignity. In this regard, experiences of women in paid domestic work in Malawi provide an opportunity of understanding the violations of human dignity and ways in which theology can assist in promoting the concept of human dignity.

The aim of this research project is to establish how the concept of human dignity can be promoted in women domestic work in Malawi. This dissertation is developed through the works of African women theology which is grouped within the family of liberation theologies. This research study uses theological underpinnings of African women theologians who belong to the Circle of Concerned Women African Theologians (hereinafter, the Circle). The prominent members of the Circle such as Musimbi Kanyoro, Mercy Oduyoye, Denise Ackerman, Isabel Phiri and Fulata Moyo just to mention a few, present theological insights that encompass a theoretical focus of human dignity. This concept of human dignity is needed both in the church and society. The study is based on the broad framework of African women theology with a special focus on the following concepts: feminist cultural hermeneutics, gender analysis, narrative theological discourses, partnership and prophetic witness. It is also appreciated that African women theologians do not isolate themselves from global feminism; as a result, works of Rebecca Chopp will also be used in this dissertation.

In many cases forms of oppression that are manifested in women domestic service such as sexual violence and humiliation, economic exploitation and powerlessness are a result of violations of human dignity. Such violations have adverse effects on the life and general health of women who work in domestic service in Malawi. It is then suggested that a clear understanding and application of the concept of human dignity in African women theology serves as a tool for social transformation in women domestic service, that is, making workplaces for women domestic work to be favourable for women in Malawi and beyond in the 21st century.

Key Words:

African women theology, human dignity, humiliation, domestic work, feminist cultural hermeneutics, prophetic discourse, agency, hidden resistance.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ATR:	African Traditional Religions
BUILD:	Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development
DWA:	Decent Work Agenda
EATWOT:	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
GOM:	Government of Malawi
GOSA:	Government of South Africa
FPRW:	Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
HRW:	Human Rights Watch
ILO:	International Labour Organisation
IOM:	International Organization for Migration
ITUC:	International Trade Union Confederation
MHRC:	Malawi Human Rights Commission
MDGs:	United Nations Millennium Development Goals
NGO:	Non-governmental Organisation
NSO:	National Statistics Office
OHCHR:	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
STI:	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UDHR:	United Declaration of Human Rights

UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
USA:	United States of America
The Circle:	The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
WCRC:	World Communion of Reformed Churches
WHO:	World Health Organisation
WLSA:	Women and Law in Southern Africa

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

African women theologians have written extensively on challenges encountered by women in the church especially in areas of decision making and women's ordination (Oduyoye 1995b: 482; Kanyoro 1997a: 149; Rakoczy 2011: 53). Feminist theologians in this context and beyond have also expounded on some of the reasons for women's subjugation in the life of the church and community as a whole, such as the concept of patriarchy – rule of the father (Ruether 1983: 23; Oduyoye 1995a: 214; Clifford 2002: 18; Longwe 2012: xiii). Suppression of women is not only visible in church or religious circles, but it also permeates other spheres of life, including women domestic service. This phenomenon is motivated by the fact that those who practice and promote 'male domination' in the church are also employers of women domestic services. Arguably, the study of women domestic work has not been fully explored academically in the African context.

African women theologians have indeed addressed the challenge of women's ordination, but they have also called for an exploration of themes of liberation and empowerment in the society at large (Oduyoye 1995a: *passim*; Kasomo and Maseno 2011: 158) which includes women domestic service. Hinga (2002: 85) accentuates that the theology of African women advances "a more just and humane global society". However, it is not enough to only suggest that the society needs to be just and transformed in favour of women by exploring themes of liberation and empowerment. Notably, women play a greater role in the global economy, "they do two-thirds of the world's work, paid and unpaid. Yet, women earn between 5 and 10 percent of the world's wages and own only 1 percent of the world's property" (Jones 2000: 80; Clifford 2002: 14; Moyo 2012: 255). In most cases women in the informal sector such as domestic work are vulnerable to many injustices and abuses as their

workplaces are found in both “gender-segregated and unregulated sector of the economy” according to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (UNFPA 2005). As women subordination in the church has been extensively covered by African women theologians, this study concentrates on violations of human dignity of women in the society, in the world of work to be specific. Bearing in mind that subjugation of women in the world of work is a vast subject, this study focuses on violations of human dignity encountered by women in domestic work in Malawi.

1.2 Motivation for the research study

In a recent study of paid and unpaid work of Indian Christian women, Rowanne Marie argues that a gendered theology of work is significant “to address the experiences of workers” (Marie 2012: 192). Therefore, a gendered theology of work is a tool for social transformation in the contemporary world of work. In her study, Marie (2012) focuses on forms of experiences in paid and unpaid work of Indian Christian women in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The present study; however, focuses on challenges faced by women in paid domestic service in Malawi.

It is significant to spell out that women domestic work is a form of work that is common in many countries. In Europe migrant female domestic workers are referred to as the “new maids of Europe” (Lutz 2011: 2). Anderson argues similarly that there is an increase of migrant domestic workers in Europe as the population is ‘caught by’ the phenomenon of ‘old age’ that needs to be supported by other forms employment (Cited in King 2007: 48). Literature also shows that domestic service is common in the African continent as a whole (cf. Okemwa 2008; Mkandawire-Valhmu, Rodriguez, Ammar and Nemoto 2009; IOM 2010). Okemwa (2008: 32) expresses the need to promote “the dignity of female domestic workers” in the Kenyan context. Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* (2009: 783) point out that “domestic work is a common type of informal employment undertaken by third world women due to limited employment opportunities”. In the Malawian context women domestic work seems to be

suitable to many girls and young women due to “their limited education” (Mkandawire-Valhmu, Kalipeni and Rodriguez 2009: 79). Lutz (2011: 7) adds that domestic work involves several household tasks such as, “cooking, washing, cleaning, laundry”. Mbilizi and Semu (2009: 18) emphasise that young women and in most circumstances girls “work as domestic workers in houses of middle income families” where they encounter life-threatening “forms of physical, psychological and sexual abuse” especially in the area of sexual and reproduction health. The significance of domestic work and various encounters of abuse faced by female domestic workers evidently enlighten this study. It is noted that feminist theology has two important tasks: “to uncover the theologies and institutional practices” that are harmful to women” and “to create a liberated and liberating theology” (Grey 2007: 107). The study uses African women theology as a branch of liberation theology (Mashau and Fredericks 2008: 119-120).

In carrying out their work, women in domestic service suffer enormously from humiliation as the result of the violence meted upon them. Margalit provides an in-depth meaning of the concept of humiliation as “any sort of behaviour or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider his or her self-respect injured” (Cited in Neuhäuser 2011: 22). On the same note, Siegrist (2010: 272) accentuates that employment is important in safeguarding one’s fundamental needs for “self-respect, self-efficacy and self-esteem”. Women in domestic work encounter violations of their human rights, human dignity, sexual and reproductive health rights due to three categories of humiliation, namely, verbal, physical and sexual (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 792). It is imperative to state that such forms of humiliation have adverse effects on the health of domestic workers and other cases are recorded which portray considered views of “committing suicide” (Mkandawire-Valhmu 2010: 116). Consequently; experiences of humiliation and powerlessness which are encountered by women domestic workers in Malawi, adversely affect their “dignity and humanity” (Kaufmann, Kuch, Neuhäuser and Webster 2011: vi). These “lived experiences” of humiliation encountered by women domestic workers motivated the focus of this study.

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to establish whether African women's liberation theology nurtures human dignity in women domestic work, a discussion which is not adequately addressed in the theological discourses in Malawi and beyond.

On the same note of nurturing dignity in the world of work, it is also remarkable that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) seeks to safeguard the dignity of workers in two ways; that is, through constituting laws against forms of labour exploitation and "promoting acceptable labour conditions under the Decent Work Agenda" (Shields 2011: 176). In addition, the ILO has significantly extended the concept of decent work to meet the needs and aspirations of domestic workers. This is evidenced through the 2010 ILO report entitled *Decent Work for Domestic Workers* (ILO 2010). It is also imperative to note that the ILO's Decent Work Agenda is in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) number 3, which seeks to "promote gender equality and empower women" in the world today (MDGs Report 2013). The Decent Work Agenda of ILO aims at promoting human dignity, health, safety and well-being of employees in all types of work.

There is a correlation between the ideals of ILO in the workplace and the aspirations of feminist theologians in Africa and beyond. For example, Fulkerson (2003: 109) argues that despite the fact that feminist theologies are diverse, such as African women theology, womanist, and *mujerista* theologies, they "have one thing in common: they make the liberation of women central to the theological task". Fulkerson further posits that although feminisms have different frames for defining women's oppression and liberation: to some degree each assumes the "emancipatory thrust" for women's liberation (1997: 101). Arguably, discourses of feminist theology engage in emancipatory transformation through the "inclusion of multiple strategies, provoking multiple images of human flourishing and images of difference... solidarity and transformation" (Chopp 1992: 18). To this effect, theories of feminist cultural hermeneutics (Oduyoye 2001; Kanyoro 2001), gender analysis (Kanyoro 2001) and social constructionism (Chopp 1996) are important tools that promote 'flourishing of women' including women in domestic work. The underlining factor is that

among many cases of oppression, liberation theology aims at challenging “sexual oppression: discrimination against women” (Boff and Boff 1987: 20; 29).

1.3 Research problem and aim of the study

This study examines the following research question: *To what extent does African women's theology promote human dignity in ways that are relevant to women domestic work in Malawi?* In order to answer this question, the following sub-questions were formulated: First, what are the forms of human dignity violations in paid ‘women domestic work’ in Malawi? Second, what are the factors behind violations of human dignity in paid ‘women domestic work’ in Malawi? Third, what is the relationship between African women's theology and the concept of human dignity? Finally, what is the African women's liberation theology of dignity that is necessary for paid ‘women domestic work’ in Malawi?

These questions determine the objectives of this dissertation which are as follows: The first objective is to describe the violations of human dignity in paid ‘women domestic work’ in Malawi. The second is to explain the factors behind the violations of human dignity in paid ‘women domestic work’ in Malawi. The third is to elucidate the relationship between African women's theology and the concept of human dignity. The final objective is to formulate an African women's liberation theology of dignity that is relevant for paid ‘women domestic work’ in Malawi.

1.4 Theoretical framework of the study

The study will clarify concepts to be used in the study such as women domestic work, human dignity, human rights and health rights. A framework of African women's theology as articulated by women theologians in Africa will be used. In particular, a conceptual framework of feminist cultural hermeneutics (Oduyoye 2001; Kanyoro 2001) will be used in this study. The concept of feminist cultural hermeneutics will assist in understanding that Malawian and African religious and cultural practices are ambivalent in that: on the one

hand, they promote women emancipation: and yet on the other hand, they are oppressive to women (Oduyoye 2001; Kanyoro 2001; 2002, Phiri and Nadar 2010). Feminist cultural hermeneutics helps to understand factors that perpetuate sexual violence and humiliation experienced by women in domestic work which compromises their human dignity.

A gender analysis as articulated by Kanyoro (2001) will also be used in this study. Kanyoro (2001: 162) emphasises that gender analysis aims at unmasking “harm and injustices that are in society” - women domestic service, in this particular case. This concept assists in appreciating other forms of injustices that occur in domestic work, such as economic exploitation, food deprivation and long working hours. Kanyoro further claims that “societal correction is warranted” through gender analysis (2001: 162). The concept of “five faces of oppression” as developed by Iris Young and quoted by Serene Jones will be used as a tool for social analysis in women domestic work in Malawi (Jones 2000: 69-93). Another concept of humiliation as articulated by Neuhäuser (2011) will assist in understanding the experiences of women domestic workers in Malawi.

The study will also use a socialist constructionism concept as articulated by Chopp. This theory “maintains that knowledge is itself always historical, always related to power and interests, and is open to change and transformation” (Chopp1996: 120). In the social constructionist version of feminist epistemology, knowledge is constructed from three primary sources or places: “tradition and texts; experience; and participation in social movements” (Chopp 1996: 120). In this theory, Chopp (1996:120) accentuates that “feminists expand canon of tradition, finding texts written by women” that contribute to women liberation. Therefore, African women’s theology as articulated by members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) which was officially inaugurated in September 1989 at Accra, Ghana (Oduyoye 2002: 34; Amanze 2010: 352) is considered to be a canon of theological tradition. This is the case as women theologians of the Circle speak “loudly and clearly against various manifestations of violence in the

contemporary African context, particularly violence against women” (Hinga 2002: 82) both in church and society.

1.5 Research design and methodology

This study is a textual analysis being conducted within the paradigm of liberation theology and feminist liberation theology specifically. Therefore, it will adopt a method used in Liberation theology that is, See-Judge-Act as in *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Boff and Boff 1987). According to Boff and Boff (1987: 41), the first part, ‘See’, is the “socio-analytical mediation” which helps in making an analysis of experiences of individuals in a given context. This part will be done using peer reviewed theses and books that are relevant to the experiences of women domestic workers in Malawi. Boff and Boff (1987: 41) describe the second part, ‘Judge’, as the “hermeneutical mediation” which involves conducting a liberative theological reflection. It is the aim of liberation theology to challenge various forms of oppression including ‘sexual oppression and discrimination of women’ (Boff and Boff 1987: 29) for social transformation. This part will involve analysing discourses of feminist theologians, such as Kanyoro and others from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, as well as Chopp and others in understanding the concept of dignity in women domestic service. As Boff and Boff (1987: 42) illustrate, the last part, ‘Act’, is known as ‘practical mediation’. This section is about formulation of a feminist liberation theology of work that nurtures human dignity in women domestic work in Malawi.

1.6 Limitations of the study

It is acknowledged that this type of study arguably requires empirical analysis; however, this textual analysis provides a good base for a future detailed empirical study in women domestic work. It is also noted that in academic research, “textual analyses test, reject or validate existing analyses and interpretations” (Mouton 2004: 167). Therefore, the method of the study is a non-empirical, conceptual analysis, and will use data from already existing sources (Mouton 2004: 175-180). The study involves collecting and organizing written

information found in published and unpublished materials such as books, journals and other credible, scientific and peer-reviewed internet resources. The study will serve as a reliable conceptual framework for beginning to explore the situated challenges of women in Malawi, especially those that are currently working in the domestic service. In this regard, this dissertation is a basic building block based on the work of scholars in the field that would serve well as a starting point for creative contextual exploration of challenges that women face in the world of work.

1.7 The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured as follows: chapter one will state the background of the research problem. It will give a statement of the problem, the research question, sub-questions and objectives, limitation of the study and the structure of the study. In chapter two the study will define key concepts of the study. It will also paint a picture of violations of human dignity and factors behind violations of women domestic work in Malawi.

Chapter three will explore the relationship of African women's theology and the concept of human dignity. Theological insights of Oduyoye, Kanyoro and other members of the Circle from the African context will provide the base of the third chapter. Additionally, Chopp and other global feminist theologians will also be used in this chapter of the study. In chapter four the study will formulate an African women's liberative theology of human dignity that seeks to nurture human dignity in women domestic work in Malawi. Finally, chapter five will list key findings of the study, recommendations of the study, and areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN DIGNITY VIOLATIONS IN WOMEN DOMESTIC WORK IN MALAWI

2.1 Introduction

In the opening chapter, it was mentioned that there are various challenges that compromise the human dignity of women in domestic work in Malawi. The human dignity violations have a negative impact on several dimensions of human rights including social, economic, sexual and reproductive rights of women working in domestic work. The second chapter forms the 'See' part or 'socio-analytical mediation' of the 'See-Judge-Act' methodology that has been adopted for this study (Boff and Boff 1987). Boff and Boff (1987: 24) state that a "social-analytical mediation operates in the sphere of the world of the oppressed. It tries to find out why the oppressed are oppressed". In a like manner, Rakoczy (2004: 7) asserts that 'socio-analytic mediation' is vital because it examines the "nature of oppression and its causes". As a matter of fact, this chapter is important because it forms the base of the study. It specifically provides a social analysis in the context of women working in domestic service in Malawi.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to define the nature of women's domestic work and the concept of human dignity, to exhibit violations of human dignity and factors behind such infringements in the context of women's domestic work in Malawi. This chapter uses two concepts in describing human dignity violations. The concepts of 'humiliation' as articulated by Neuhäuser (2011) and 'oppression' which is explained by Iris Young in Jones (2000) will be significant in presenting challenges that are experienced by women domestic workers in Malawi. The chapter begins by providing the location of the study. Next, it will define the key term of the study – domestic work. The chapter will then describe the background of the concept of human dignity, problematising the concept and demonstrating the relevance of the concept in women domestic service. Then the chapter will also display the violations of

human dignity that women domestic workers encounter within their workplaces. Finally, the chapter will elucidate the factors behind violations of human dignity in women's domestic service in Malawi.

2.2 Geographical location of the study

Malawi is one of the sub-Saharan African countries sharing boundaries with Zambia to the Northwest, Tanzania to the North and Northeast, and Mozambique to the East, South and Southwest. It has an area of 118,484 square kilometres of which 94,276 square kilometres are land and a population of about 13.1 million (NSO 2008; White 2010: 1). In Malawi, employment opportunities in both formal and informal sectors are very limited. Equally, Hunter (2011: 32) claims that the unemployment rate in Malawi is about 90% which is very high in the whole of the sub-Saharan region. It is also significant to note that where employment opportunities exist, such opportunities are mostly available to men rather than women despite the fact that women comprise "51 per cent of the total population" (Mercer 2010: 9; White 2010: 1). In the Malawian society, women are perceived to be workers in the home; as a result, a large percentage of women are not employed outside the home. By the same token, Wermuth and Monges (2002: 14) stress that in Malawi "women remain responsible for all household tasks". Under those circumstances, women are rarely found in paid employment. This is the case due to several factors that are cultural, social and economic in nature which will be discussed later on in this chapter. And this also sheds more light on the plight of girls and women in Malawi.

Nevertheless, a number of women work as domestic workers in urban centres, as a "common form of employment for low-income third world women is domestic work" (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 783). This study focuses on women's domestic work in urban centres of Malawi (cf. Pendame 2006, Mkandawire-Valhmu 2010; Mercer 2010; IOM. 2010). The urban and commercial centres attract women from rural areas to work away from home in domestic work. It is the nature of their work that they leave their homes and stay at

the place of work in cities (Mkandawire-Valhmu 2010: 112). Mkandawire-Valhmu (2010: 112) emphasizes that the delineation of “work place and home” in the world of work of female domestic workers in Malawi is difficult to detect; inevitably, women experience human dignity violations due to their working and accommodation conditions.

2.3 Definition of domestic work

The key concept of domestic work cannot be best described without understanding the meaning of “work” as a guiding term. The term “work” in African societies including Malawi is described as an activity that “provides enough money to satisfy the needs” of the workers (Carr, MacLachlan, Kachedwa, and Kanyangale 1997: 901). The limitation with this explanation of “work” is that it takes into account only the satisfaction of economic needs at the expense of other needs which are social, spiritual, cultural, healthy, and religious. In fact, a more comprehensive description of “work” that goes beyond monetary gains is provided by Volf (1991: 10) who states that “work is honest, purposeful, and methodologically specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals or co-creatures”. Certainly, Volf offers a holistic approach to the concept of “work” that takes into consideration other needs which ought to be met when one is working both in formal as well as informal employment, such as social, political, cultural, ecological and healthy needs. This description of the concept of work helps in understanding the meaning of domestic work.

Mkandawire-Vahlmu and Stevens (2007: 279) explain what domestic work entails in the Malawian context:

Domestic work consists of every aspect of childcare from waking the children up to putting them to bed; washing by hands and ironing the household’s dirty clothes; cooking the meals—if there is no stove, this would involve cooking over an open fire; dusting the furniture, and sweeping and mopping cement floors daily.

A study of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Southern Africa that covers three countries (South Africa, Mozambique and Malawi), classifies a domestic worker

as “... any worker or independent contractor who performs domestic work in a private household and who receives, or is entitled to receive pay” (IOM 2010: 6). In the Labour Act No. 16 of 1996 of the Government of Malawi (GOM), an employee is described as “a person who offers his or her services under an oral or written contract of employment, whether express or implied” (GOM 1996: 5). In view of this definition, women domestic workers are employed by owners of houses where they offer their services for pay and in most cases there are no written contracts but oral agreements.

In addition to the descriptions of a domestic worker cited above, one important characteristic of this informal work is its impromptu nature — in women’s domestic work, individuals are always expected to do any work that is assigned to them from time to time. For instance, if the employer owns a farm, shop, maize mill and so on, a domestic worker is anticipated to work in such places, as well as in the house. Certainly, women domestic work can be both monotonous and ‘elastic’ – making the lives of women involved in this type of service vulnerable to all sorts of violations that compromise their human dignity, human rights and health rights that include sexual and reproductive health. In this regard, ILO (2010) recognises different descriptions of the term “domestic work” by different organisations and governments.

However, ILO (2010: 385) provides a general definition of “domestic work” that refers to the “work performed in and for a household, and include housekeeping, childcare and other personal care”. This description corresponds to the work that is done by women working in domestic work in Malawi. Undoubtedly, domestic work ought to be held in high esteem as is the case with other forms of formal employment. In order to make sure that domestic work is respected, different ILO instruments such as the “Decent work for domestic workers” stipulate a number of recommendations for member states to follow. One of the recommendations clearly states the importance of domestic work as follows: “Each Member should take measures to ensure that domestic workers, like all wage earners, enjoy fair terms of employment as well as decent working conditions and, where applicable, decent

living conditions respecting the worker's privacy" (ILO 2010: 418). When a country such as Malawi adopts fully ILO's recommendations of domestic work, it could not only make domestic work to be attractive but also to ensure protection of the workers. On the contrary, many nations leave a lot to be desired in implementing such vital labour conditions, Malawi, is a case in point (Pendame 2006). There are several human rights violations that occur in workplaces of female domestic workers that force people to consider domestic service as unpleasant work. Some of the human rights violations in this type of work will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

2.4 A background of the concept of human dignity

The concept of human dignity is one of the contested notions in the world; however, it is important in as far as women domestic service is concerned. In order to understand the concept of human dignity, a brief description of the background of this concept is ideal before looking at its relation with domestic work. Stoecker (2011: 8) contends that the concept of human dignity is derived from four historical roots: the Greco-Roman era, the biblical texts, Kant's philosophy and developments after the second world-war. In ancient Rome "*dignitas*" was a term that was associated with a certain individual's role which attracted payment of some duty (Stoecker 2011: 8). The biblical texts emphasise a very 'high value' on an individual not only as God's creature but also by the very nature that a person was made in the image of God (Stoecker 2011: 8). Stoecker (2011: 8-9) maintains that Kant's philosophy postulates that it is only a human being who has dignity that cannot be replaced with any price. After World War II, the concept of human dignity became noticeable as various legal instruments and global conventions advanced calls to uphold human dignity such as the United Nations Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Stoecker 2011: 8-9). In a like manner, Villa-Vicencio (1992: 119) states that the United Nations Charter was established in 1945 in order to "reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". Furthermore,

Villa-Vicencio (1992: 120) argues that after the establishment of the United Nations Charter, in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was formed as there was a “need for harmony between individual and political freedoms (the freedom of speech, religion, assembly and dissent) and socio-economic well-being (the right to work, housing, health-care and education)”. Notably, the UN Charter and the UDHR are part of a number of universal legal instruments that seek to promote human dignity and human rights of all people in all spheres of life including the world of work. Notwithstanding the eminence that these documents accord to the concept of human dignity, they remain remarkably silent about its content; as a consequence, the concept of human dignity remains a contested subject.

2.5 Problematising the concept of human dignity

As already alluded to earlier the concept of human dignity attracts several contestations. In the first instance, Stoecker (2011: 9) claims that one of the challenges of this concept is that “human dignity is merely stated without any hint of how it should be construed or what particular role it is supposed to play (i.e. whether it is meant to be a human right itself or even the very basis of all human rights)”. On the same note, Hays-Mitchell (2003: 111) argues that even several decades after the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights pronounced that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, the freedom, equality, dignity and rights of much of the world’s population continues to be compromised by law, custom or deed”. Owing to this fact, the ‘yard-sticks’ to measure what human dignity constitutes are non-available and even if they are available, contexts are too different to apply the same rules. The other problem is that this concept seems to be “genuinely unclear, polemical and philosophically useless” (Stoecker 2011: 10). To argue it differently, the concept of dignity not only seems to be fluid, but also lacks meaning. Additionally, Davis argues that “the concept of human dignity does not give us enough guidance ... it has different senses and often points us in opposite directions” (Cited in

Donnelly 2009: 81). In this regard, the concept of human dignity can be viewed as a contested phenomenon.

In the same way, the concept of human dignity might also be problematic in domestic work because this type of work is categorized as a precarious work. Mantouvalou (2012: 2) articulates that there is a “special type of precariousness caused by legislation” in domestic work - referred to as ‘legislative precariousness’. Moreover, Mantouvalou (2012: 2) describes this as the “special vulnerability created by the explicit exclusion or lower degree of protection of certain categories of workers from protective laws”. In view of the precarious nature of domestic work, it is difficult to observe human dignity in this particular world of work.

2.6 Relevance of the concept of human dignity in domestic service

First, the concept of human dignity is important in domestic service because this concept is inherent in each person. According to Falconer (1986: 278), “human dignity is the inherent worth or value of a human person from which no one or nothing may detract... and belongs to every age and culture”. Hence, it is imperative to understand that human dignity is of paramount importance in all sectors of work, including the domestic service. Likewise, Metteer (2001: 160) agrees with the notion that human dignity is inherent and asserts that “although not all work appears to have dignity, there is an inherent dignity associated with all workers” including women domestic workers. In addition, Metteer (2001: 160) stresses that “human dignity, however, is not derived from work... is based rather on the scriptural understanding that God created human beings to reflect the divine image and that Christ suffered, died, and rose for them”. Notably, Metteer shares the same notions that the concept of human dignity is indeed rooted in the biblical texts. In other words, it must be noted that before any ‘labels’ are attached to workers in all sectors, they are ‘special in the eyes’ of the creator. In that case, attributes of human dignity are to be adhered to in all workplaces including the domestic service.

Second, it is a fact that the concept of human dignity is the foundation of many other concepts including human rights understanding and application. As Falconer (1986: 279) postulates, “an appeal to human dignity provides the basic premise for the contemporary understanding of human rights” and the need to uphold constitutional rights by the legal frameworks of countries, such as Malawi. Donnelly (2009: 13) puts the relationship of human dignity and human rights more succinctly: “Human rights...are both a roadmap and a set of practices for constructing a life of dignity in the conditions of the contemporary world” and that includes the conditions of domestic work in Malawi.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines ‘human rights’ as “rights that every human being has by virtue of his or her human dignity” (OHCHR 2005: 1). It is also significant to note that the subject of ‘human rights’ is quite extensive as it covers three major categories: “civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights and collective rights” (OHCHR 2005: 1). In this regard, human rights in workplaces such as domestic work fall within the area of “economic, social and cultural rights”. Specifically, the human rights within this category are concerned with “rights to work, to just and favourable conditions of work, to form and join trade unions, to social security, protection of the family, to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, to health and right to education” (OHCHR 2005: 2). Therefore, an absence of these rights within the domestic service constitutes violations of human dignity of employees in the workplace.

Third, the concept of human dignity promotes actions aimed at protesting against all forms of oppression and exploitation. Falconer (1986: 279) accentuates that the concept of human dignity “has also justified opposition to injustice and dehumanization, irrespective of its source”, whether in public or private spheres. This point encourages individuals and organisation wherever they might be, always to be watchful of forces that militate against human dignity violations including in domestic service. Kaufmann, Kuch, Neuhäuser and Webster (2011: v) accentuate that the concept of human dignity is used to separate “human

beings from other creatures, notably animals". Moreover, this concept underscores the "uniqueness of human beings among all creatures, above all their free will, individual autonomy and capability of independent decision-making based on reason and free moral choice" (Kaufmann *et al.* 2011: v). In this vein, necessary steps ought to be employed in order to safeguard the dignity of all people including women in domestic work in Malawi and beyond. Violations of human dignity have dire consequences for human beings as this chapter discusses in subsequent sections. For this reason, the concept of human dignity acts as an anchor in the promotion of the common good in the world of work at large.

Fourth, the concept of human dignity also promotes the health of women domestic workers including their sexuality and reproductive health. A considerable amount of literature has been published on the meaning of health and safety in the workplace (cf. ILO 2010; ILO 2011; 2012; WHO 1999). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), health is defined as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO 1992; Connor 2008: 413). This provides an understanding of the concept of health which is holistic and challenges the perceived notions that refer to this concept to mean an absence of disease only. A health worker potentially produces quality work; conversely, an unhealthy worker lacks the potential of producing an admirable work. Consequently, health and work are related terms, and as such favourable conditions are needed for women working in domestic service through the promotion of the concept of human dignity.

As Siegrist (2010: 272) points out, "work life plays a crucial role in securing or preventing basic human needs, in particular the needs for self-respect, self-efficacy and self-esteem". Furthermore, Siegrist contends that the fulfilment and the failure to meet basic necessities, places of work and the labour environment "can directly affect human health and well-being" of the employees (2010: 272). In domestic service maintaining quality health conditions is important as failure to do so, results in oppression of the workers' health rights. It is

significant to state that health and safety in domestic workplaces is taken seriously by international bodies, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

In 2011, the ILO is recorded to have adopted the universal “labour standard” in domestic service, known as the Domestic Workers Convention (No.189) (ILO 2011). This convention appreciates and affirms “the economic and social value of domestic work... also calls for appropriate actions to overcome the exclusion of domestic workers from labour and social protection” (ILO 2011). Shields (2011: 179) reflects on the importance of term “Decent Work” as one of ILO’s bench marks in nurturing human dignity and human rights in the world of work. The ILO describes the concept of decent work as: “productive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity, in which rights are protected and adequate remuneration and social coverage are provided” (Shields 2011: 179).

Finally, the concept of human dignity is viewed as a ‘meeting point’ of several concepts. This notion is supported by Donnelly (2009: 84) who asserts that “dignity connects up with too many other concepts, and in too many ways, for it to be amenable to any simple rendering.” As observed above, dignity is connected with all that involve the maintenance of good health of workers as championed by the ILO. Furthermore, the concept of human dignity “is set both by the various foundational doctrines that participate in the overlapping consensus on human rights and by the contemporary substantive consensus on list of human rights in the Universal Declaration” (Donnelly 2009: 84) and other human rights instruments in the world. Therefore, this concept is of greater importance and indispensable in the domestic service as it connects with the concept of work that has been discussed before in this chapter. This concept is also related to the concept of oppression that will be discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter. Lastly, there is also a correlation between the concept of human dignity and descriptions of gender and power that will be covered in the subsequent chapters. After highlighting the relevance of the concept of human dignity in domestic service above, the following section will then paint a picture of human dignity and human rights violations in women domestic work in Malawi.

2.7 Women domestic workers' experiences of human dignity and human rights violations in Malawi

In domestic work, there are many challenges including the failure of provision of a favourable environment that fosters human dignity, human rights and good health. In cases whereby “work” fails to nurture human dignity, human rights and good health as shown above, this is tantamount to humiliation and oppression. This point will be explored in detail in the last section of this chapter. Arguably, Stoecker (2011: 11) claims that in order to understand human dignity, there is a need to utilise a negative approach - that is, taking into consideration “instances of violations”. According to Kanyoro (2001:162), a gender concept emphasises unmasking “harm and injustices that are in society” and that includes challenging experiences within the domain of women domestic service. Equally, Chopp (1996: 121) agrees to this notion in that the social constructionism theory also locates itself in the “diversity of experiences”. Thus, this section discusses the experiences of women domestic workers in Malawi. The challenges that women face in their course of duty are summed up as forms of oppression. Jones (2000: 70) stresses that in feminist studies a survey of the concept of oppression takes into consideration different avenues such as “economics, political science, sociology, and psychology as well as history, literature and cultural studies”. Jones (2000: 71) further asserts that “women's oppression refers to dynamic forces, both personal and social, that diminish or deny the flourishing of women”. In this regard, the following sections demonstrate forms of women's oppression in domestic service in Malawi.

2.7.1 Sexual violence and humiliation

One of the challenges that women face in domestic work is the humiliation as a result of sexual violence they encounter in the course of their work. Jones (2000: 89) interprets violence as “an unconscious, structural feature of the drive to win identity through negation”.

It is sufficient to note that sexual violence also entails humiliation. Margalit provides an in-depth meaning of the concept of humiliation as “any sort of behaviour or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider his or her self-respect injured” (Cited in Neuhäuser 2011: 22). Women in domestic work encounter sexual violations that affect them both physically and emotionally. Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* (2009: 81) claim that women in domestic service encounter sexual abuse in the form of “fondling and verbal expressions... as well as penetration”. In certain cases when women domestic workers resist sexual advances from male employers, they are subjected to both physical and verbal abuse (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 81).

As a result of the non-availability of alternative forms of employment to women working in domestic service, certain women yield to dangerous sexual intercourse, fearing the loss of employment (Okemwa 2008: 26). Because of such fears, women domestic workers easily become conduits of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including the HIV and AIDS pandemic within the household (Okemwa 2008: 26). As a matter of fact this becomes a reality when the “...owner of the house, his male relatives and spouse's male relatives, visitors to the home, sons and other employees such as guards....” use a female domestic worker as a sex object (Okemwa 2008: 25). It is common knowledge, as Horton and Vilani conclude, female domestic workers are more vulnerable to “personal abuse, including assault and sexual harassment” (Cited in Du Toit 2010: 10).

In certain cases, female employers also fuel the humiliations of their fellow female counterparts when they are in domestic service in a number of ways. Sometimes female domestic workers endure scathing attacks from female employers who feel vulnerable due to female domestic workers’ cleanliness, attractiveness and beautiful dresses (Mkandawire-Valhmu, *et al.* 2009: 796). This is exacerbated when the female employers suspect that their husbands might have illicit sexual affairs with the women domestic workers in the home (Okemwa 2008: 21). On the same note, Hansen adds that a number of Zambian female employers are afraid of female servants in the household because they might put “love

potions' into their husbands' food to attract their attention" (Cited in King 2007: 62). It must be underlined that sexual violence and humiliations have adverse effects on the health of domestic workers, such that there are cases recorded which portray women domestic workers having considered "committing suicide" (Mkandawire-Valhmu 2010: 116). This portrays a picture which is detrimental, challenging and overwhelming in the life of female domestic workers in Malawi and beyond.

2.7.2 Oppression as economic exploitation

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the exploitation of women in the world of work, globally. The literature (cf. Jones 2000; Clifford 2001; Moyo 2012) has shown enough evidence that women are exploited in the workplace. As far as women are concerned in the global economy, they contribute enormously to both paid and unpaid work; however, they only "earn between 5 and 10 percent of the world's wages and own only 1 percent of the world's property" (Jones 2000: 80; Clifford 2001: 14; Moyo 2012: 254). A case in point is that a large volume of work in the world is done by women both in paid and unpaid work, as well as in formal and informal employment -- this includes female domestic service in Malawi. Furthermore, Jones (2000: 80) claims that the meaning of exploitation is embedded in both the "Marxist and materialist feminist traditions, as both traditions employ a materialist analysis of women's oppression". Jones (2000: 80) further highlights that as a term, 'exploitation' is mainly concerned with the "distribution of labour and money, it exists where people who produce social goods do not share fully in the accumulated benefits of their labour; they work so that another group gains profit".

This economic exploitation occurs in many forms. Female domestic workers in Malawi are economically exploited in that they receive inadequate amounts of money, and in extreme cases they are not paid at all, yet their workload is always heavy (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 794). The monthly payments of domestic workers in Malawi are generally low as compared to other countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region. In Malawi a domestic worker

in the city receives a monthly minimum wage of MK 31, 328.00 which is equivalent to ZAR 783. 00 (ZAR 1= MK 40.00). While an individual who works in the same domestic service in one of the cities in South Africa receives ZAR 1,625.70 according to the South African Government Gazette (GOSA 2011).

In addition, the fact that the workplace of women domestic workers also becomes the home during employment makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. Some employers manipulate the situation because the workers eat and sleep in the “master’s” home (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 794). In that case, the place for work for female domestic workers becomes a place of experiencing many hardships including economic exploitation. The economic exploitation encountered by women domestic workers as cited above is enormous and has a bearing on their well-being; with inadequate income they can hardly support their families and even fail to attain quality medication when they become sick themselves. Not only that, with low income, they are unable to purchase enough clothing of their choice. Considering this, economic exploitation in women domestic work has adverse effects on the workers well-being.

Very often, the weekly workload for domestic workers is heavy as workers perform tasks under precarious conditions (IOM 2010: 7). In South Africa, in order to protect domestic workers from heavy workload, the government instituted the Basic Conditions Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 that was amended in 2005 (UN WOMEN 2011: 39). This act stipulates a “maximum working hours of 45 hours per week. Domestic workers who work for 5 days a week must work for a maximum of 9 hours a day, and those who work more than 5 days a week must work for 8 hours each day” (UN WOMEN 2011: 39). In the Malawian case such protective measures are absent (Pendame 2006); as a result, domestic workers work overtime without being compensated. Inevitably, the heavy workload affects the health of domestic workers.

2.7.3 Oppression as powerlessness

In domestic work, women are powerless and lack control. Jones (2000: 86) illustrates that oppression can also be viewed as 'powerlessness'. On the condition that powerlessness is oppression, Young draws attention to the fact that powerlessness restricts one from exhibiting one's capacities, and it also promotes a "lack of decision-making power in one's working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies" (Cited in Jones 2000: 86). In this form of employment, women domestic workers are compelled to follow whatever the employers command them to do; hence, denying them their creativity in the world of work. The notion of powerlessness is much evident when a domestic worker does something contrary to the expectations of the employer. In certain cases, women in domestic service are exposed to attacks that are malignant for petty reasons, like when women domestic workers fail to apportion meat correctly in a dish to the employer's expectation (Mkandawire-Valhmu 2010: 116). With this in mind, it appears that women domestic workers are always in an environment where they are powerless to defend themselves as both verbal and physical abuse become the order of the day.

As a result of being powerless, a female domestic worker may suffer verbal abuse which entails, "cursing, shouting, receiving insults and scolding" when she fails to fulfil her duties to the satisfaction of the employer, on the one hand (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 794). On the other hand, a domestic worker endures physical abuse that comprises of "deprivation of food" that is good and nutritious, "beatings", "slapping", and "social isolation" from family, peers and church. (Mkandawire-Valhmu 2010: 114-115). In this regard, Kuch (2011: 51) confirms that a slap in the face looks simple but it carries a dehumanising symbol, because a slap does not mainly aim at the body, it rather aims at a symbolic sphere: it hits the face, and thereby make's one "lose face" which is an aspect of both powerlessness as well as humiliation. The concept of human dignity in the world at large is under threat due to many violations such as "rape... slavery... hard and monotonous work... religious suppression... being prohibited from maintaining personal relations... the restriction of liberty, flagrant

injustice, disregard of privacy, instrumentalization, isolation, insult....” (Stoecker 2011: 12). In a like manner, Kaufmann *et al.* (2011: v) assert that people in all spheres of life tend to lose “their dignity and humanity” due the “experience of absolute powerlessness”. The fact that women domestic workers live in the employers’ home means; there is little they can do to assert themselves, even bargaining for suitable conditions if their work becomes difficult (ILO 2010).

It is in this vein that an African women’s liberation theology of human dignity is indispensable in order to nurture human dignity and human rights in women domestic service. For this reason, there is a need to conduct a survey in order to assess the relevance of African women’s theological underpinnings which might be resourceful in nurturing human dignity in the context of women domestic work in Malawi. Before doing that task, the final part of this chapter seeks to present a glimpse of the causes of challenges to human dignity within the workplace for women who are domestic workers. This section will explore factors beneath the humiliation and oppression in domestic work in Malawi.

2.8 Factors that cause violations of human dignity in women domestic work

There are several factors behind the humiliation and oppression that women encounter in domestic work as highlighted above. Osmer (2008: 4) underscores the prerequisite of an “interpretive task” in doing research which seeks to answer the question, “why is this going on?” First, it ought to be mentioned that feminist theology tends to critique two major challenges that compromise on the human dignity of women at large, namely, patriarchy and androcentrism (Clifford 2001: 19). The concept of patriarchy is termed as “the rule by the father or fathers” (Clifford 2001: 18; Jones 2000: 77), an ideology that supports male domination in many facets of life, such as: economic, political, cultural and religious spheres. From the perspective of feminism, patriarchy is a form of dominance that possesses a colossal challenge to the well-being of women due to the fact that it seems to have been sanctioned by the Church traditions.

Clifford (2001: 30) posits that church fathers such as Tertullian, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, all supported notions of women subjugation by men. Because pronouncements of key figures in society carry a great deal of influence, especially in church circles, they are conceived as the “only truths” and this inclination has caused suffering to many people especially women. By the same token, Kasomo (2010: 128) adds that it was Thomas Aquinas — a church father - who viewed a woman as “defective” and a “misbegotten male”. One concludes that this was assassination of women’s character assassination and being from “higher places” or the “Christian altar”. In many ways notions of patriarchy have been advanced to deny women from holding leadership and decision-making positions not only in the church but in domestic work as well. Women have been viewed as second class citizens in many spheres of life.

Akintunde (2005: 81) asserts that “subordination of women within society filtered directly into church, and thus women became victims of oppression and male discrimination”. By way of contrast, male domination is prevalent in the church as mentioned above, and this permeates all realms of society. The human dignity and human rights violations that are experienced by women in domestic work are spurred on by the fact that men that support and practice male domination in the church happen to be the employers in domestic services. To this effect, Fiorenza (1997: 2) suggests going beyond “patriarchy” as an oppressive element in society to “kyriarchy – rule of the lord/master/father/husband over those subordinate to and dependent on him”. Fiorenza (1997: 2) further describes ‘Kyriarchy’ as “a social-political and cultural system of domination that has produced dualistic asymmetric justifications of systemic exclusions and forms of exploitation”. This is in line with the dimension of economic exploitation that is ubiquitous in domestic service in Malawi as already cited above. The context of Malawi has both patriarchal and matriarchal notions, but it is patriarchy that has a last word in domestic violence which in many cases promotes sexual violence that is targeted toward women.

The second factor that encourages violations of women in domestic service is lack of basic education as most of the women who are employed in this field of work have limited education (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 794). In the Malawian context, there is high illiteracy level among women as compared to men due to various factors. Given that education in many ways is a key source for empowerment in all facets of life, due to lack of formal education, opportunities for formal employment are almost 'zero' on the part of those working in domestic service. This is also coupled with lack of negotiation skills that come with education, as such women are abused. In addition, women domestic workers might not be aware of organisations that might help them because of lack of knowledge.

The 2005 research report of the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) illustrates that "unless girls' education is promoted so that they realise their full potential, the status of women in Malawi will remain low, and women's rights are likely to continue to be violated" (MHRC 2010: 94). The case of women's low education is a challenge in Malawi as well as in other African countries. This problem, among other factors, is fuelled by the beliefs that it is not necessary to send a girl to school because she does not belong to the family for the rest of her life, as she leaves home the moment she gets married (Kasomo 2010: 128). This traditional notion does not help women as independent individuals who might want to work with men in the economic arena. Arguably, this might be a true reflection of all women in Malawi working in different types of formal and informal employment. The 2010 report of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) stipulates that there is a higher number of males enrolled at all levels of formal education apart from primary education which is dominated by females (ITUC 2010: 4). This means that as females go up the education ladder they fall by the wayside while males continue with their education.

The third feature that contributes to oppression in domestic service is a lack of legal framework that supports those working in this type of work. Pendame (2006: 7) stresses that there is a deficiency in the Malawian legal sphere since the country has not yet constituted "any legislation that gives a precise description of a domestic worker". In the absence of

such an important instrument in the legal framework of Malawi, it makes it hard for domestic workers to channel their grievances through the legal arena. Varia (2007: 17) also points out the defects in legal instruments that often fail to include domestic workers in strategic laws that are accessed by other groups of workers under national laws. Varia (2007: 17) further mentions that there are certain aspects of benefits that domestic workers do not have at their disposal, such as “minimum wage, overtime pay, rest days, annual leave, and fair termination of contracts, benefits, and workers’ compensation”.

Likewise, Le Bruyns (2009: 3) contends that women in informal employment, like those working in domestic service in this case, are marginalised due to the fact that they “receive little remuneration, but also lack job security and benefits such as health insurance, maternity leave and pension”. The absence of specific laws that deal with job security in women domestic work is tantamount to all sorts of abuse in this field of work. In such situations, the national legal frameworks further contribute to the violations of women and girls who are in the majority in women domestic service (Varia 2007: 17). In addition, Sikwese (2012: 7) claims that in Malawi there is no categorization of specific laws that deals with “discrimination against women”. Furthermore, Sikwese (2012: 7) stresses that all matters that concern women in the world of work are dealt with using general laws provision. The 2010 report of ITUC puts it concisely that “Sexual harassment at the workplace is not addressed in particular; however, it is prosecuted under the penal code” (ITUC 2010). Notably, most of the women working in domestic service in Malawi are not even represented by any union to challenge their oppression through the courts which uses the penal code for sexual harassment.

Religio-culture is the fourth cause of sexual violence and humiliation that women encounter in domestic service in Malawi and beyond. African women theologians “call attention to culture in religion and religion in culture” as the two can hardly be separated in the African context” (Oduyoye 1996: 113). Oduyoye (1996: 113) coins the term ‘Religio-culture’ to refer

to this inseparable relationship. King (1995: 4) stresses that “religion has not only been the matrix of cultures and civilizations” but also it is the base for whatever constitutes gender roles and all that make up life of people in a given society. Moreover, Oduyoye (1995: 482) states that in the African context there is a correlation between the “Hebrew scripture and aspects of traditional religion” that work against the aspirations of women. Oduyoye (2001: 25) further contends that “the traditional way of life is closely bound up with religion and religious beliefs in such a way that there is a mutual interdependence of religion and culture”. Culture brings ambivalent notions in the African context as it is both a source of women’s subjugation as well as an instrument of women’s emancipation (Oduyoye 2001: 28). In this section culture is treated as a tool of women’s oppression and exploitation.

As Kanyoro (1997: 178) suggests, “culture is to African women’s liberation theology what race relations are to African American womanist theologians”. Furthermore, Kanyoro (1997: 178) draws attention to the fact that in most of African cultures including Malawi, women are told to embrace “theologies of silence” both in private and public spaces and that fuels high levels of oppression. The theologies of silence disempower women when it comes to issues pertaining to the subject of sexuality in the context of Malawi and beyond. Most of the women working in domestic service in Malawi come from the rural areas as pointed out in the previous chapter. These women might not be knowledgeable of their sexual rights due to concepts of socialization that they might have undergone especially in the area of sexuality. Liwewe, Kalipeni and Matinga (2009: 62) claim that sexual education in rural areas focuses more on women “being submissive and working hard to please men... no talk of how women can enjoy sex” themselves.

In the same way, Moyo (2009: 36) faults the socialisation that women in Malawi undergo known as *chinamwali* due to “its one-sided emphasis upon preparing girls and women for sexual enjoyment of men”. Moyo (2009: 36) further observes that *chidototo* socialisation of boys and men does not instil techniques on how men could help women to enjoy sex, but only underline the conquest of women during sex. Liwewe *et al.* (2009: 69) submit that in

the Malawian rural context, it is not appropriate and expected for a “woman to suggest to a man to have sex, however, when a man wants sex, it will happen even when a woman does not want it to”. Thus, when employed in domestic work, women who are brainwashed in this school of thought are already vulnerable to sexual predatory tendencies of male employers even before they start working. In this case culture disempowers women sexually.

The disempowerment of women in being able to negotiate sex in their life is combined with certain ‘dangerous masculinities’ on the part of men. In the Malawian context there are ideologies that support sexual violence against women in all spheres including the women’s domestic domain. The following two expressions support this notion. One of the ideologies says, *Chigololo ndi mwini thako*, which is translated as “it is the fault/responsibility of a woman for a man to sleep with her” (Liwewe *et al.* 2009: 70). The other philosophy states that *Mwamuna ndi mwana* (a man is a child), “which further argues the inability of a man to control his sexual desire, thereby justifying his infidelity” (Liwewe *et al.* 2009: 70). Such ideologies seem to provide ‘licences’ for men to do whatever they want in violating women’s human dignity in all social strata including those employed in domestic service. In this case Neuhäuser (2011: 30) stresses that the cultural norms seem to suggest that a woman should always be ready to be used and does not have any control over her body and sexual desire, which is an assault on the “self-respect of women as equal human beings, and, therefore, they are seen as subhuman in this respect”. According to Sikwese (2012: 1), “... Malawi culture allows men to have more than one wife and to treat women as they would treat their children because women are part of the man’s property”. This puts women far down on the hierarchical ladder of the Malawian society.

Another phenomenon that promotes men’s sexual violence toward women in Malawi and beyond is the myth that young unmarried women are “free from HIV/AIDS, as well as the belief that sex with a virgin will cleanse them from the disease” (Mbilizi and Semu 2009: 20). This applies to women in domestic work as some of the women employed are young and virgins. In many ways, women in domestic work are isolated from relatives who might protect

them from such violent acts. Besides, some of the houses in which they work are very 'overpowering' in that they are highly fenced such that it is difficult even to cry for help in times of need (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 81).

The fifth factor that has an adverse impact on the lives of women working in domestic service is known as the "myth of female innocence" (Grey 2012: 227). Grey (2012: 227) emphasises that it is very easy for women to be "blind to their own misuse of power, and to new ways in which they are guilty of collusion in oppressive structures". This is the case with married women employers in domestic work who look down upon fellow women who work in their houses. Meleis and Bernal note that a family may seek the services of another woman when the wife or the adult female member who might be the head of the household is engaged in informal employment or is self-employed (Cited in Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 75). Female bosses can also cause problems to fellow women especially when they suspect that female domestic workers are having an affair with their husbands, as pointed out earlier in this chapter.

Finally, global capitalism also has an effect on the lives of women domestic workers. Holloway (2010: 21, 65) declares that "capitalism is composed of huge numbers of independent units which produce commodities that they sell on the market... the rule of money is the centre of a whole system of social organisation, a system of domination that we call capitalism". The impact of globalization is compounded by several myths in as far as the world of work is concerned. According to Castree, Coe, Ward and Samers (2004: 19-21), six of the myths are as follows: "cheap labour, borderless world, irresistible force that stands over and above different places and peoples, signals the demise of the national state, worker vulnerability and up scaling the workers actions in order to match the translocal forces that undermine their well-being". The globalization myth needs and is sustained by cheap labour, such as that of women domestic work. Mbilizi and Semu (2009: 23) confirm that "globalization perpetuates gender inequality in that women are the major source of cheap labour". Furthermore, women perform undesirable jobs that jeopardise their lives, yet

with low pay and no incentives (Mbilizi and Semu 2009: 23). As already alluded to earlier, most of the women in domestic work in Malawi have little or no education at all and that prevents them from bargaining about their pay and other working conditions (IOM 2010; ILO 2010). Therefore, women in domestic work would rather work within exploitative working environments as they have little or no other options for alternative forms of employment.

2.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the second chapter of the study has provided the meaning of the key term of the study – domestic work. This chapter has also described the background of the concept of human dignity and problematised the concept. The chapter has established the relevance of the concept of human dignity in women domestic service. This concept is relevant because it is inherent in each person and it is the foundation of many other concepts including human rights understanding and application. Additionally, the concept of human dignity opposes all forms of injustice and dehumanization and promotes the health of women domestic workers, including their sexuality and reproductive health. This is the case because the concept of human dignity connects perfectly with other concepts that support the flourishing of women in the contemporary world. The second chapter has also highlighted significant violations of human dignity in women domestic service which are: sexual violence and humiliation; oppression as exploitation and powerlessness.

Finally, the chapter has elucidated the factors behind violations of human dignity in women's domestic service in Malawi; namely, patriarchy, low education of women, lack of a national legal framework that protects women in domestic work, religio-cultural factors, the myth of female innocence, and global capitalism forces. In the next chapter, a survey will be conducted in order to investigate whether there is any relationship between the concept of dignity and African women's theology. This is in line with the third objective of the study.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICAN WOMEN'S THEOLOGY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the relevance of the concept human dignity to women domestic work. Of greater importance, it discussed forms of human dignity violations and their causes in terms of women domestic service. It argued that; the concept of human dignity is indispensable in the world of work. According to the methodology of "See-Judge-Act" that frames this study, chapter three is a "hermeneutical mediation" - a 'Judge' component of the study (Boff and Boff 1987: 24). Rakoczy (2004: 24) confirms that hermeneutical resources are also found in "Catholic social teachings of the last 110 years". Therefore, the works of African women's theologians will be used as hermeneutical resources in this chapter.

The study proposes that African women's theology needs to be investigated as to whether it is indeed a liberation theology that promotes the concept of human dignity. This task will be done based on the broad framework of African women's theology that embraces different concepts such as feminist cultural hermeneutics, gender analysis, narrative discourses, and prophetic witness. In addition, the chapter draws on works of other feminist theologians. This task involves carrying out an enquiry as to which particular theological tools could be employed in responding to challenges in women domestic work. For example, as Kanyoro (2002: 160) stresses, "societal correction is warranted" through gender concepts of theological analysis.

Therefore, the purpose of the third chapter is to find out to what extent African women's theology is a liberation theology that promotes the concept of human dignity. This chapter is presented into two parts. The first section will show that African women's theology is a liberation theology. The second part will elaborate that the concept of human dignity is a

theoretical focus in African women's theology. The works of members of the Circle will be mainly used in this chapter. The theology of the Circle is used in this study since it is liberative in nature and is concerned with human dignity of women in the church and society (Fiedler and Hofmeyer 2011: 45). Similarly, Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 157) contend that "African women's theology draws much from women's context and experience since they do not write theology that is remote and removed from their daily living". It is the aspect of being concerned with women's daily experiences that makes African women's theology relevant in the contemporary world.

Gill (2012: 236) contends that "for feminist theologians it is not enough to talk through what justice and peace mean; taking concrete steps to achieve and attain these principal values in lived experiences is what counts most". Thus, African women theology seeks to translate theoretical analysis from the academy to the public and ordinary life in society as it is a theology of praxis. A praxis theology "calls for solidarity and resistance to exploitative systems and ideologies" (Ackermann 2008: 272). Rakoczy (2004: 6) claims that the nature of theological praxis is "transformative action" and "intrinsic to its methodology and life". In addition, the Circle has a "chapter" in Malawi, the context of this study, whose members are active in the Circle and other theological groupings on the African continent and beyond.

3.2 African women's theology as a tool of liberation

There are several reasons that qualify African women's theology to be termed as African women's liberation theology. Phiri, Govinden and Nadar (2002: 1) argue that African women's theology is concerned with the nurturing of "justice and dignity" and women are directed by a "liberation ethic and consciousness" in all aspects of life such as religious, social, economic and political life. This understanding makes African women's theology to be a liberation theology as it advances emancipatory concepts. African women theologians have also "criticized African inculturation theologians of romanticizing 'traditional cultures' while paying little or no attention to gender justices and other forms of inequality inherent in

traditional cultures” (Mashau and Fredericks 2008: 121). Phiri and Nadar (2010) also challenge other theological discourses such as inculturation due to the fact that African inculturation theology places experiences of “African males as the norm and standard” and in the process excludes experiences of women. In order to pursue liberation of women, which is overlooked by African inculturation theologians, members of the Circle have identified themselves with fellow theologians from around the globe who challenge various manifestations of women’s oppression both in church and society.

As Parsons (2002: xiv) claims, “feminist theology has to be understood as the theology that nurtures hopes for the liberation of humanity into a just and equitable political order in which our life together as women and men, might be more happily realised”. Mashau and Fredericks (2008: 119) elaborate that the theology of the Circle has been largely influenced by African-American and Latin America theologians. On the same note, Phiri and Nadar (2010: 97) accentuate that African women theologians use works of classical Latin American liberation scholars such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Miguez Bonino and others who champion the cause of the poor and oppressed. However, Salazar (2010: 414) notes that non-feminist liberation theologians of Latin America fail to understand that “patriarchy is a political-historical system of inter-related dominations that should be denounced”.

Furthermore, Salazar (2010: 417) advocates for a Latin Feminist Theology of Liberation which is a strong “prophetic spirituality of resistance, since it emerges from the reality of exclusion, poverty and injustice that poor women live in Latin America”. Salazar (2010: 417) adds that Latin Feminist Theology of Liberation is also a “theology of ecojustice because nature and women are the ones who suffer the most from the exploitation and poverty at the hands of men”. In addition, Latin Feminist Theology of Liberation is closely linked to African women’s theology because it addresses “issues of sexuality and reproduction” which have been neglected by non-feminist Latin American Liberation Theologians (Vuola 2000: 117). Frederiks (2003: 68) claims that the effect of global feminism and liberation theology such as Latin Feminist Theology of Liberation has really affected African women theologians. This

has enabled women of the Circle to examine both “scripture and culture”; subsequently, forms of women’s exploitation and oppression have been brought to the fore, hence, the term African Feminist Liberation Theology (Frederiks 2003: 68).

3.3. Human dignity as a theoretical focus in African women theology

It is important to note that the concept of human dignity is at the core of African women’s theology. A Malawian feminist theologian, Moyo (2005a: 134) stresses that women need to “acknowledge their own human dignity as God’s image, and decide to break the code of silence within the Church” and society. Ackermann (1991: 94) makes it clear that a “concern for humanity becomes the starting point for theology concerned with liberation” as is the case with African women’s theology. Furthermore, Ackermann (2008: 271) accentuates that theologians of the Circle “advocate a different vision of what it means to be a human being with dignity and worth”. African women theologians also welcome men who are described as ‘friends of the Circle’ who are in solidarity with African women’s theological discourses (Ackermann 2008: 271). Having underlined the focus of the concept of human dignity in African women’s theology, attention is now given to ways in which the concept of human dignity is embodied in African women’s liberation theology.

3.3.1. The background of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

It is not the intention of this study to provide a full history of the Circle; however, a cursory glance on the history of the Circle is significant as it also illustrates the relationship of African women’s theology and the concept of human dignity. Frederiks (2003: 69) states that a religious liberation movement known as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) provided a platform for African women to articulate issues pertaining to their well-being and played a vital role in the formation of the Circle. At the EATWOT meeting of 1983, a Women’s Commission was instituted in which women from different continents and cultures could share experiences and develop ideas and theologies of liberation (Frederiks 2003: 70). The Women’s Commission of EATWOT provided a birth

place for women's liberation theologies such as "Womanist, *Mujerista* (Hispanic American), Latina, African, post-colonial and liberation theologies of disability" (Grey 2012: 227). Therefore, this platform assisted women theologians from different parts of the world to develop theologies that promote dignity in their own specific contexts.

The founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is Mercy Amba Uwudziwa Oduyoye, a Ghanaian theologian (Phiri and Nadar 2005: 2; 2010: 91). In August 1988, Oduyoye gathered several African women theologians in Geneva, Switzerland at the secretariat of the World Council of Churches in order to discuss the foundation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Fiedler and Hofmeyr 2011: 40). The Circle was officially established at Trinity College, Accra Ghana in 1989 (Njoroge 2000: 124; Hinga 2002: 79; Fiedler and Hofmeyr 2011: 40). Fiedler and Hofmeyr (2011: 40) accentuate that since its inception, the Circle has a "profound influence on academic reflections in the discipline of theology, with particular reference to the dignity and role of women in the church and in society". In the same vein, Amanze (2010: 351) stresses that the Circle's "main goal has been to liberate women from the throes of male domination, subjugation and oppression and assert their dignity as human beings created in the image and likeness of God." Therefore, the chief objective in the establishment of the Circle is the assertion of dignity of African women in church and society.

Arguably, the fact that the discussions that led to the creation of the Circle were held in the global North does not make this group a western project as Pemberton (2003) seems to suggest. Pemberton (2003: 1) claims that there is too much influence of "white North American feminism" on the writings of the members of the Circle. On the contrary, Fielder and Hofmeyr (2011: 56) affirm that the Circle came into being on the premise of promoting categories of women's liberation in line with the African culture and religion both in church and society. This grouping has women theologians across the religious spectrum, namely, African Traditional Religions (ATR), Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other world religions and that, members of the Circle are "indigenous African women, African women of Asiatic

and European origins” (Amanze 2010: 352). There are several aims for the establishment of the Circle. Hinga (2002: 7-8) lists one of the objectives of the Circle which is key to this study - “to undertake research that unveils both positive and negative religio-cultural factors, beliefs, and myths that affect, influence, or hamper women's development”. In this regard, Frederiks (2003: 68) claims that “the quest for wholeness and full humanity also features prominently in African women's theology and has led to what is called an African feminist liberation theology”. This maxim encourages women who experience challenges in all spheres of life to seek ways of responding to challenges they encounter in the society at large. It is also the aim of the Circle to bring awareness of the theoretical frameworks that women use in doing theology that might be necessary in the academia as well as in the public realm. One of the theoretical frameworks is feminist cultural hermeneutics. This has been adopted for this study and is discussed in the subsequent section.

3.3.2. Feminist cultural hermeneutics

African women's theology interprets culture in order to promote human dignity as it operates within the paradigm of liberation theology. In chapter two it was noted that culture is one of the factors that fuel violence and humiliation of female domestic workers. Oduyoye provides an in-depth meaning of culture; as "a people's world view, way of life, values, philosophy of life, the psychology that governs behaviour, their sociology and social arrangements, all that they have carved and cultured ... to differentiate their style of life from other peoples" (Cited in Pui-Lan 2002: 23). Here, it is perceived that culture affects all spheres of life. For women in Africa, there are three different types of culture that impinge upon their lives, including “Western culture, indigenous culture and religious culture” (Kanyoro 2001: 161).

Oduyoye (2001: 20) claims that “the hermeneutics and fundamental principles of our interpretation of Scripture and culture are related to distinguishing the ‘good’ – that is, the liberation from the evil that is oppressive and domesticating and which puts limitations where none is necessary”. In this vein, African women theologians focus on culture as a primary

source of theology. Phiri and Nadar (2010: 94-95) argue that the term “hermeneutics” is used in biblical scholarship; however, this concept of “feminist cultural hermeneutics is a tool for analysing both the biblical practices of culture and the various cultures in Africa”. Therefore, in African women theology, the term “hermeneutics” is not restricted to biblical scholarship only but it also applies to the understanding of cultural principles and practices that are both oppressive and liberative. Similarly, Tamez (1996: 17) argues that women from different cultural backgrounds need to “re-evaluate those elements of culture which give dignity to their people and preserve it from damaging external influences”. Furthermore, Tamez (1996: 17) commends “cultural hermeneutics” theory which is developed by African women theologians.

Therefore, a framework of feminist cultural hermeneutics is used as a source of promoting human dignity in all dimensions of life as it is geared towards upholding emancipatory traits of culture and denying exploiting ones (Phiri and Nadar 2010: 95). Oduyoye (2001: 13) mentions some of the characteristics of cultural hermeneutics theory. This concept stresses that women are called upon to interpret their own culture, “engage in inter-cultural dialogue, and work towards cultural transformation” (Oduyoye 2001: 13). Feminist cultural hermeneutics enables women theologians in Africa to discuss issues pertaining to human sexuality as women pass through the rites of passage from childbirth to death practices (Phiri and Nadar 2010: 95).

Furthermore, Oduyoye (2001: 13) claims that cultural hermeneutics assists to “identify and promote what sustains and enhances life”. On the one hand, Masenya claims that some of the positive elements of culture that are needed to be reclaimed are the values of *Ubuntu* (‘I am because we are’) and family (Cited in Phiri and Nadar 2010: 95). On the other hand, certain aspects of culture that are harmful are rejected, for example, the *chinamwali* socialisation that always “teach women to serve men's sexual needs as if women have no sexual identity or needs of their own” (Moyo 2005b: 131). Kanyoro (2001: 164) adds that feminist cultural hermeneutics evaluates the “accountability of the society and church to

women” and that it emphasises the “accountability of women in taking responsibility for their lives”. The understanding is that women themselves ought to have an active role in their own liberation in all aspects of life. Oduyoye (2001: 13) concludes that cultural hermeneutics critically looks at features that are life-denying and the same time looks for “cracks that may lead to transformation”. Therefore, the concept of feminist cultural hermeneutics is a tool that always seeks to nurture the human dignity of women from different cultural backgrounds as it combines both the “hermeneutics of suspicion and that of commitment” (Oduyoye 2001: 13).

3.3.3. Gender analysis in theological discourse

The concept of gender espouses human dignity of women both in church and society. Singh (2009: 11) states that “Gender refers to socially constructed differences in attributes and opportunities associated with being female or male and to the social interactions and relationships between women and men”. On the same note, King (1995: 5) emphasises that “gender ideologies are frequently hierarchically organised and sexual inequality embedded in thought, language and social institutions”. Alice Schlegel describes gender as the “way members of the two sexes are perceived, evaluated and expected to behave (Cited in King 1995: 5)”. Here, it is significant to observe that Schlegel confirms that the concept of gender is a social/cultural construct. In this regard, gender analysis is viewed as a tool that promotes human dignity.

It must be noted that members of the Circle always “work towards the transformation of their communities and institutions for gender justice” (Amanze 2010: 352). Phiri argues that members of the Circle do their research by using the “methodology of gendered analysis” (Cited in Amanze 2010: 352). Kanyoro (2001: 162; 2002: 17) stresses that “gender analysis seeks to identify and expose injustices that are in society and are extended to Scripture and the teachings and practices of the Church through culture”. She further alludes to the fact that in present times the “web of oppression which even leads to women oppress other

women” is commonly highlighted by female scholars in Africa and beyond (Kanyoro 2001: 163). In the same manner, Sheerattan-Bisnauth (2010: 2) posits that gender justice refers to “just and right relationships, mutual respect and accountability, respect for creation and the rights of both women and men to live life in fullness”. She further mentions that it is an “important instrument in addressing gender and economic injustice, climate justice, violence, HIV and AIDS and a whole range of societal issues, which are rooted or affected by power relations between women and men” (Sheerattan-Bisnauth 2010: 2).

In the African context, African women's theologians focus much on “women's humanity and as beings also created in the image of God” (Kanyoro 2001: 162). It is also noted that women in Africa who experience challenges or who promote humiliation of fellow women or who are sympathisers are nurtured in a culture of silence. In this vein, Kanyoro (2001: 163) claims that “even women's action may be deeply rooted in the patriarchal socialization, therefore the analysis women's oppression has to be undertaken in the context of gender analysis”. Gender analysis takes into consideration several factors such as how “roles, attitudes, values and relationships are constructed” in different contexts between women and men (Kanyoro 2002:17). Of greater importance, gender analysis focuses on how power is shared between men and women as power is considered to be a tool that is used in oppressing women in societies, including in women domestic service (Kanyoro 2002: 17).

Singh (2009: 12) agrees with Kanyoro that gender analysis is an instrument that is used to determine the realities and that there are differences between women and men's worlds in any given context, including for women in domestic work. This analysis challenges the understanding that “everybody is affected by an issue in the same way regardless of their contexts”. In this regard, one appreciates that gender analysis could be viewed as an important instrument that fosters an identification and response to “women's subjugation, oppression, and exploitation... in society, and how they could work together for inclusivity and complementarity” (Singh 2009: 20). However, as already illustrated in the previous chapter, the concept of complementarity is problematic in the relationship between men and

women, as it privileges men. Singh (2009: 20) puts it more succinctly that the concept of gender analysis ought to be applied in all spheres of life where men and women work together such as political, economic, social, cultural and religious contexts. Gender analysis is a necessary apparatus in as far as the understanding of oppression, exploitation and subjugation of women in domestic services is concerned.

Gender analysis also assists in responding to sexism; that is, “discrimination against women (whether by men or other women) on the basis of their sex or gender” (Kretschmar 1991: 108). Unfortunately, sexism as a tool of oppression is not only perpetuated by men towards women. As Kretschmar (1991: 108) notes, “women employers who pay domestic workers a low wage, or who denigrate the struggle to establish non-sexist patterns in the church, are two examples of women practising sexism”. Therefore, gender analysis is an analytical tool that not only helps to unearth causes of violations of human dignity towards women but also aids in seeking ways of liberating women who are trapped in various oppressive structures. This is possible because “changing oppressive ways of thinking about the construction of women involves unpacking oppressive gendered ways of thinking about *all* reality” (Jones 2000: 8).

3.3.4. A social constructionist version of epistemology and the Circle

Members of the Circle join together with other counterparts in promoting human dignity of women. Oduyoye (1996: 114) concedes that African women theologians do not form a ‘cocoon’ but rather join a “global movement to guard and promote the humanity of women”. Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 157) strengthen this notion in claiming that African women theologians carry-out their theological discourses with academic resources furnished by western feminist sisters. Thus, members of the Circle learn concepts from fellow women across the global such as Rebecca Chopp. As Chopp (1996: 120) elaborates, as a “social constructionist version of epistemology, knowledge is constructed from three primary sources or places: tradition and texts, experience and participation in social movements”.

This version of feminist epistemology “maintains that knowledge is itself always historical, always related to power and interests, and is open to change and transformation” (Chopp1996: 120). With this notion, Chopp (1996:120) accentuates that “feminists expand canon of tradition, finding texts written by women” that contribute to women liberation. Consequently, African women theological discourses are considered to be ‘authentic canon’ for doing theology in the African context that touch on the lives of many women in Africa including women domestic workers in Malawi.

This version of social constructionist epistemology also supports notions of agency, as women are not only seen as survivors of multiple forms of oppression and humiliation as elucidated in chapter two, but they are active participants in their own liberation. Chopp (1996: 121) claims that the component of participation in social movements helps women to point out the “reality of oppression and suffering in society and attempts both to display the origin, function and relations of structures that cause such oppression and to anticipate possibilities for change....” African women’s liberation theologians encourage women in all walks of life to participate in challenging social injustices on many fronts. They acknowledge the importance of writing books and articles on theological discourses, however, for them, social transformation will only be possible when they participate in social movements with others in bringing about change in the society (Kanyoro 2001: 160).

3.3.5. Solidarity in narrative discourses

The other characteristic of African women’s theology is ‘story-telling’ which is sharing of experiences in order to challenge violations of human dignity. Story-telling is also termed as ‘theology of witness’ which “encourages others to share stories and by this sharing empowering each other to transform the society” (Frederiks 2003: 72). The act of ‘story-telling’ is viewed as a tool for transformation in the life of African women. Oduyoye (2001:16) clarifies this method of doing theology in the following words:

In their theological reflections, women of the Circle proceed from the narrating of the story to analysing it to show how the various actors in the story see themselves, how they interact

with others, and how they view their own agency in life as a whole... The next stage is to reflect on the experiences from the perspective faith – a conscious implementation of biblical and cultural hermeneutics are at work in this process.

Phiri and Nadar (2010: 98) stress that narrative theology is a distinctive feature of African women theology as it employs “plentiful stories, proverbs, myths and sayings that already exist in African cultures, as sources of theologizing from a liberative perspective”. As Frederiks (2003: 72) claims, women stories in the African contexts are used as educational instruments, “to warn them, to teach them and to lend meaning to events in their lives”. Frederiks (2003: 72) explains further that the stories that are told are emotional and challenging and in the process story-telling is viewed as a useful tool as it brings healing to an individual who shares one’s challenging experiences. Njoroge puts it succinctly about the significance of telling stories; “by telling our stories and experiences we begin to break the code of silence, shame guilt, deadly secrets, stigma and discrimination by naming the things that used to keep the conspiracy of silence thriving” (Cited in Jere 2009: 42) . African women theologians assert that there is power in naming the social challenges that they encounter and seeking ways of promoting their own dignity in the process. Gill (2012: 235) reiterates that “Storytelling is a gendered way of doing theology. The uniqueness of this method is that story and experience are taken to be an integral part of – indeed, the starting point to – theologizing rather than simply an addendum to theoretical reflections”. This challenges notions that African women theology does not involve rigorous methodologies and is not academically supported. Gill (2012: 235) contends that narratives of women are not just resources for gender justice and peace but they are viewed as “data of the souls” which enrich lives of many who listen to them critically. The stories spur on fellow women to seek liberation and fight for their own human dignity. According to Kanyoro (2002: 24), the method of storytelling in liberation theologies has made theology come alive as it has brought to the fore of theological discourse the “perspective of the disadvantaged communities”. In other words, in the act of telling individual stories, women themselves become subjects who determine the course of their precious lives. This is possible, and as Kanyoro (2002: 24) asserts, “stories help to make connections between faith and action because they make use

of experience and reflection as intervals of connections". On the same note, Gustafson (1988: 269) accentuates that the act of sharing a pertinent story offers a sensitive, intelligent and insightful means of social transformation as compared to findings of painstaking and clever arguments.

3.3.6. Prophetic witness in African women's theology

The prophetic witness that is exercised by African women theologians calls for the nurturing of human dignity. Their theology enables them to "identify what enhances, transforms or promotes in such a way as to build community and make for life-giving and life-enhancing relationships" (Oduyoye 2001: 16; Phiri and Nadar 2010: 96). Phiri and Nadar (2010: 97) claim that through advocacy, "theological education for women" is at the top of the agenda, with "designed and implemented theological curricula which include feminist theology and gender studies". This advocacy also targets primarily female students and female faculty members, future leaders of the church and faith institutions which are empowered through "mainstreaming gender concerns in theological curricula" (Phiri 2010: 97). The educated faith leaders in turn strategize on empowering their communities.

In line with this feature, the Circle "between 2002 and 2007 declared HIV & AIDS to be a major priority in research and advocacy for change and empowerment" (Phiri 2010: 97). All this work was geared towards promoting human dignity. As already pointed out in chapter two, women domestic workers are vulnerable to sexual violence. Given that the prophetic witness feature of African women's theology is liberative to the marginalised, perhaps one would ask whether or not such advocacy programmes target women domestic workers and their vulnerability.

Gustafson (1988: 268) highlights four varieties of moral discourses, namely, prophetic, narrative, ethical and policy that guide theological and church institutions in responding to calls for social transformation. African women theologians' prophetic witness ruminates on Gustafson's prophetic moral discourse. Gustafson (1988: 268) states that the prophetic

discourse is one of the four moral discourses that are very important. Furthermore, Gustafson claims that a “prophetic indictment usually addresses the *roots* of moral and social waywardness... in which particular policies are judged to be inadequate or wrong” (Gustafson 1988: 269). Not only does this prophetic moral discourse challenge the ills of society, but it is also a utopian discourse. In Gustafson’s description “Utopian discourse proclaims an ideal state of future of affairs which functions as an attractive allure and can motivate communities towards its realization” (1968: 269). Isasi-Díaz (2004: 349) claims that “utopias have to do with the hopes and expectations of the poor and all the marginalised as they face the everyday reality of oppression”. Isasi-Díaz (2004: 349) further asserts that utopias enable people to see, appreciate and comprehend present challenges and find mechanisms for survival and social transformation for the future.

In this vein, theological discourses by African women theologians need to point out the inadequacy of laws and advocate for legal instruments that assist those on the margins of society such as women domestic workers in Malawi. Njoroge (2006: 70) stresses that there is the need to confront those in power in order to uphold leadership qualities and values that are life-giving in societies such as “honesty, integrity, dignity, justice, peace and wholeness of life”.

3.3.7 Communal theology as a characteristic of African women’s theology

African women’s theology has a character which is “communal” in nature; hence, the term “theology of relations” that promotes human dignity (Phiri and Nadar 2010: 97; Frederiks 2003: 73). Oduyoye (2001: 17) describes the Circle theology as a “theology of relations, replacing hierarchies with mutuality”. She further adds that the concept of relations is important as “African culture is very community-oriented” (Oduyoye 2001: 17). Okure states that the approach that has been embraced by African women theologians does not seek to elevate “women’s place in redeemed humanity, but to establish genuine cooperation and mutuality between women and men” (Cited in Kasomo and Maneno 2011: 156). Therefore,

African women theologians place liberation of both men and women at the centre of the theological discourse with the understanding that the “struggle for liberation, is liberation for all... For only when all are liberated, full humanity can blossom” (Frederiks 2003: 73). Frederiks (2003: 73) further explains that African feminist theology is “life affirming, socially sensitive and geared towards dialogue” between men and women. Phiri and Nadar (2010: 97) agree with the notion that describes African women’s theology as “theology of relation” in that it focuses on “replacing hierarchies with mutuality by being sensitive to the needs of others and the well-being of the community as a whole”. The main point is that social transformation must be inclusive and should not leave any aspect of society or persons aside, such as domestic workers.

The other manifestation of communal theology is depicted through scholarly “research, conferences and publication, by also mentoring others with less experience” (Phiri and Nadar 2010: 97). Despite promoting “theology of relations”, African women theologians are also aware that for this concept to be meaningful in the African context it has to go hand in hand with a “theology of gender justice” (Phiri and Nadar 2010: 98). This point is further strengthened by (Phiri and Nadar 2010: 98) who state that “sometimes the needs of the community are promoted at the expense of gender justice”. According to Soares (2006: 67-68), gender justice is defined as “the existence in society of the same rights, freedoms, opportunities, recognition, and respect for all women and men regardless of their position in society, race and color identity, religious persuasion, ethnic origin, and sexual orientation”. Soares (2006: 68) further asserts, “we must always begin with veneration and respect for all human beings and must provide them with equal opportunities for the actualization of their human potential, beginning with the most disadvantaged”, as is the case with women domestic workers in Malawi. Therefore, African women theology promotes solidarity with those on the margins. This notion of solidarity necessitates that African women’s theologians seek partnership with men, the church and other NGOs whose aim is for the emancipation for all.

3.4. Conclusion

The third chapter has demonstrated that African women's theology is a liberation theology that promotes the concept of human dignity. The chapter has established that the concept of human dignity was the basis for the founding of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. This section has established that human dignity is the theoretical focus in African women's theology through different dimensions. The following are some of the features that promote human dignity in African women's theology: the framework of feminist cultural hermeneutics helps in rejecting aspects of culture that are life-denying such as certain customs of *chinamwali* socialisation, while embracing emancipatory aspects of culture that enforces community solidarities. The chapter has also shown that gender analysis assists in responding to sexism in the society as sexism is overlooked by other forms of theology such as non-feminist Latin America Liberation Theology and African Inculturation Theology.

This chapter has also explained that African women's theology is linked with global feminism and social constructionist epistemology that supports notions of agency. Women are not only seen as survivors of multiple forms of oppression and humiliation, but participants of their own liberation. The chapter has also discussed that there is a solidarity narrative of engagement in African women's theology which emphasises the promotion of human dignity. This chapter has described how the prophetic witness in African women's theology assists in denouncing the ills of society and seeking new avenues of fostering a better future. Finally, African women's theology has been established as a "theology of relations" that promotes community living of both men and women. The next chapter will formulate an African women's liberation theology of human dignity that is necessary in women domestic work in Malawi. This is in line with the last objective of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

AFRICAN WOMEN'S LIBERATION THEOLOGY OF DIGNITY IN WOMEN DOMESTIC WORK IN MALAWI

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has demonstrated that African women's theology is a liberation theology that promotes the concept of human dignity. It also highlighted that the concept of human dignity is a theoretical focus in African women's theology. The relationship between African women's theology and the concept of human dignity is necessary in the world of work, especially in women's domestic service in Malawi. According to the methodology of "See-Judge-Act" that forms the structure of this study, chapter four is a "practical mediation" or an "Act" component of the study (Boff and Boff 1987: 24). According to Boff and Boff (1987: 24), "practical mediation" helps to design plans and actions that ought to be carried out in order to surmount forms of exploitation and subjugation according to God's desire. Rakoczy (2004: 7) adds that 'practical mediation' specifies that "liberation theology begins from engaged action and leads to continuing transformative action". This notion cements the idea that social transformation is an on-going process in the society.

Furthermore, transformative action can be initiated either by 'pastoral theologians' or 'professional theologians' as is the case with African women theologians (Rakoczy 2004: 7). In this regard, the relevance of African women's theology ought to be assessed against its contributions in promoting the common good in the society, including the concern that is the focus of this study - women domestic service. Ackermann (2008: 272) argues the same, that "At best, a feminist theology of praxis is directed towards women's actions for justice and the upholding and nurturing of our worth as human beings made in God's image". This suggests that African women's theology calls for justice and human dignity to be nurtured in all spheres of life and that includes the world of work. The purpose of the fourth chapter is to

establish that African women's theology promotes human dignity in women's domestic work. This chapter is presented in four sections. The first section will explain the relationship of African women's theology and women domestic work in Malawi. The second part will show ways in which the concept of partnership in African women's theology promotes dignity in women domestic work. The third section will examine prophetic witness in African women's theology that assists in responding to human dignity violations. Finally, this chapter will elucidate that the concept of agency in African women's theology is vital in nurturing human dignity in women domestic work in Malawi.

4.2 The relationship of African women's theology and women domestic work in Malawi.

Kanyoro (2001: 160) reiterates that African women's theology is not only relevant in the academia but also in other spheres of society, such as women domestic work. Chapter two has categorically painted the picture of the challenges female domestic workers face in their workplace. One takes cognisance of the fact that women domestic work is like any other work whereby a worker does a "specified social activity whose primary goal is the creation of products or states of affairs that can satisfy the needs of working individuals" (Volf 1991: 10). Thus, female domestic workers have aspirations and needs to be satisfied in the context of their work as anybody else, hence the need for a working environment that nurtures human dignity and human rights. Women domestic workers in Malawi, while belonging to the category of informal employment, have the same needs as compared to other women working in formal employment. It is imperative to note that in all forms of employment, "workers can gain great satisfaction from their jobs, but they can also be exposed to hazards that can affect their health" (Messing and Östlin 2006: v).

The differences between formal and informal employees is provided by Johnson-Welch and Strickland (2001: 90) as follows: "Formal employees are normally legally registered, permanent workers that have regular salaries or wages, are protected by labour laws, and

are counted in official labour statistics. Informal workers are not registered and thus not protected by law. They can be paid or unpaid, and can engage in temporary, part-time, or full-time work". This description of informal work corresponds with the nature of domestic service. As already pointed out by Mkandawire-Valhmu and Stevens (2007: 279), in Malawi domestic work involves different tasks such as: attending to children needs and using of hands in doing household chores. Domestic work is elastic in that there is a broad range of activities that constitutes this type of employment.

The ILO states that a domestic worker is "any person who undertakes domestic work, whether on a full-time or part-time basis, for remuneration" (ILO 2010: 386). In this regard, domestic work is recognised as part of all kinds of work in the world. At the Inception of the Decent Work agenda, the former director general of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Juan Somavia, clearly stated the primary goal of this concept. Somavia claims that "the primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity" (ILO 1999). The common denominator of African women's theology and ILO's Decent Work Agenda is that both discourses have a principal goal of creating and promoting the concept of human dignity.

In the course of doing their work, female domestic workers encounter challenges that compromise their human dignity. Some of the challenges have been cited in chapter two of this study, which are: sexual violence and humiliation, oppression as exploitation, and powerlessness. Cooper-White (2008:18) stresses that women's "oppression is both a catalyst and a theme for feminist theologies, the integrative linking of women's oppression with racial, class, sexual-orientation, and other forms of oppression". This highlights that the starting point of women's liberation is the discovery of 'oppression' as a phenomenon that hinders the blossoming of women in the society. Furthermore, Cooper-White (2008:18) argues that any meaningful theological discourse takes into account the suffering of human beings as its point of departure. Ackermann, one of the prominent matriarchs of the Circle

puts it succinctly as follows: “We can have the finest theologies in the world, the most rigorous systematic belief systems and dogmas, from here to Vatican and back. But they mean nothing if they remain in the realm of theological theory and do not translate into the practices of people of faith” (cited in Nadar 2008: 154). Therefore, African women’s theology seeks to be relevant in the day to day experiences of women in all spheres of life including those working in domestic service. Cooper-White (2008: 25) reiterates that “as long as men and women do not have commensurate options for political power, or even the same access to the *agora*, the marketplace of social dealings, we don’t have equal access to the reality-*constructing* process”. This notion is noticed in domestic service as in most cases there is an unequal power relationship between the employer and employee. One of the avenues that is needed to promote this relationship is to create an African women’s theology of not just work but decent work that takes into account aspirations, security and capabilities of domestic workers. Zwane (2012: 79) concurs with this notion in the following words: “Central to a theology of decent work in employment is the notion of decent and productive employment opportunities for men and women in conditions of security and equity in the workplace.”

4.3 The concept of partnership in African women’s theology promotes human dignity

African women’s theology highlights the necessity of working together with different partners in order to promote human dignity in all spheres of life including the world of work. This is substantiated by Oduyoye (1996: 114) who claims that in addition to being experts in theological discourses, African women theologians ought to join hands with other practitioners who work towards realisation of “women’s rights and well-being” such as “lawyers, doctors, and medical personnel” and so on. Ackermann (2008: 272) asserts that there is indeed a need for a relevant theology to contest “everything that threatens women’s dignity and worth”. African women theologians also recognise the vital role men play in

social transformation, thereby creating a conducive and healthy working relationship with men that promote the dignity of women (Oduyoye 1996: 114; Ackermann 2008: 272).

Nadar (2008:154) accentuates that both “Womanist and African women scholars have argued for an inclusive theology - one that does not exclude and marginalise men from the discussion, but one that engages with men for transformation” unlike other forms of feminism. This is important in women domestic work as a considerable number of employers are men. It is also significant to note that certain men in the African context respond indifferently to this call on the premise that African women have been induced by Western women into advocating for the promotion of their human dignity (Nadar 2008: 154). In addition, certain men do not want to be involved in women issues because they are men (Nadar 2008: 154), thus, their involvement in women issues will be interpreted as being unusual by the society. One categorises such arguments as mere excuses to justify patriarchal structures and domination in a society that privileges men only. In this case certain men would rather refrain from being involved in the liberation of women because they are ‘beneficiaries’ of patriarchal and hierarchical systems.

However, Ackermann asserts that “Women's liberation is an on-going struggle and is deeply connected to the liberation of men as well. No man can be liberated as long as women are not” (Cited in Nadar 2008: 154). Likewise, Phiri stresses that it is the desire of women all over the world “to see the end of sexism in their lives and the establishment of a more just society of men and women that seeks the well-being of the other” (Cited in Phiri and Nadar 2010: 94). This demonstrates that African women’s theology is a theology that recognises that a mutual community of men and women is responsible for social transformation regarding women in many areas, including women in domestic service in Malawi. Having explained that the concept of partnership in African women’s theology promotes human dignity of women, the attention is now given to an exploration of avenues that demonstrate ways in which this concept works in women domestic work in Malawi.

4.3.1 Response to sexual violence and humiliation in women domestic work

One particular form of oppression that indeed endangers human dignity, human rights, general health and reproductive rights of women in domestic work is sexual violence and humiliation as cited in chapter two. Sexual violence and humiliation is experienced when male employers or employer's extended family male members portray sexual advances towards female domestic workers (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 794, Okemwa 2008: 25, HRW 2008: 4). In response to this challenge, African women theologians recognize that "sex is a biological need and an integral dimension of who we are as human beings" (Okemwa 2008: 30). In addition, sex is a "holy and pleasant gift from God" (Moyo 2005a: 135) which needs to be celebrated by everyone including female domestic workers. However, the sexual needs of female domestic workers ought to be respected by both male and female employers within the workplaces. As acts of sexual harassment faced by women in domestic service do not aim at fulfilling sexual needs of women domestic workers but endangering their precious lives.

Okemwa (2008: 30) argues that information about human sexuality needs to be accessible by female domestic workers in order to protect themselves from sexual exploitation and humiliation. According to Nygren-Krug (2008: 11) the right to information stipulates that there should be "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds" and that includes information on human sexuality and reproductive health. The problem with such intervention is that it depends upon the relationship between the female domestic worker and the female or male employer. If the employers are committed to promoting dignity of their employees they would always show respect in the area of human sexuality. White (2010: 11) asserts that "there is need to engage women at community level with critical information on HIV prevention from a rights based approach such as autonomy of sexual body, the right to demand condom use...."

Men who perpetuate sexual violence against women in domestic work need to be reached as well, and African women theology seeks partnership with concerned men in promoting the dignity of women (Ackermann 2008: 272). This is crucial, as men will then become responsible in the promotion of their own dignity and the dignity of women employed in domestic service. In view of this point, both women domestic workers and their male employers need to be made aware that “offering sexual services” is not part of the conditions of service (Okemwa 2008: 30). In addition, women domestic workers ought to be allowed to attend workshops that would enable them to acquire information that is necessary for their health. However, this is also problematic as most women in domestic work are not allowed to move around freely due to the nature of their working environment. Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* (2009: 81) stresses that isolation is one of the biggest challenges in women domestic service. Women domestic workers are often advised not to be absent from their workplaces, only during agreed off duty hours, and in certain cases even their relatives are forbidden from paying them a visit at the workplace (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 81). Therefore, if they are missing from the workplace it entails heavy reprimand, severe punishment and even loss of employment as that is interpreted as an act of negligence of duty.

Another factor that might assist in the emancipation of women in domestic work from sexual harassment is sexual and human sexuality education. Moyo (2005b: 193) contends that “human sexuality should be part and parcel of theological education”. The inability to discuss issues of sex and human sexuality openly in most African cultural contexts has perpetuated violence both in church and society. There is a need to equip both male and female theologians on the need to demystify some of the taboos that are associated with sex. Furthermore, Moyo (2009: 49) argues that there is a need to “synthesize knowledge of sexual techniques that ensure mutual sexual pleasure into a framework that simultaneously encourages mutual love, respect and communion between women and men”. It is noted that sex is good and needs to be enjoyed only when it is consensual.

Socialization is another tool that is relevant in African women’s theology. Giddens (2001: 26)

defines 'socialization' as "the process by which children or other new members of their society learn the way of life of their society." He goes further to say that socialization is the "primary channel for the transmission of culture over time and generations" (Giddens 2001: 26). African women theologians use socialization as a tool because African society believes in informal learning through participation in the community, such as through the rites of passage (Oduyoye 2001: 30). Ross (1996: 104) identifies that in Malawi a girl child passes through three main rites of passage: "the rite of puberty, the rite of matrimony, and the rite of pregnancy". At puberty stage, young women from different religious background are instructed how to show respect to elders, parents and men. They are also trained in "the sanctity of the body and the respect due to it, physical implications of puberty and other feminine roles in these initiatory rites" (Ross 1996: 104). However, as highlighted by African women's theology, a gap is observed in the process of carrying out this rite of passage in traditions in relation to consensual sexual relationships between women and men. This stage could be used to inculcate values in young women on the importance of human sexuality and sex. This process could assist in equipping girls at a young age how to negotiate for safer sex and to have the ability to say 'no' to any non-consensual sex, wherever that might be the case .

4.3.2 Response to economic exploitation in women domestic work

Despite mentioning the need to partner with men and other professionals, African women's theology does not adequately show ways in which this partnership can assist in promoting human dignity as far as economic exploitation is concerned in women domestic service, as cited in chapter two. Arguably, the concept of partnership in African women's theology ought to be extended to other institutions that promote the welfare of workers both in formal and informal sectors such as women domestic service. One particular entity that challenges violations of human dignity in the world of work is the International Labour Organization (ILO) as already cited above. The ILO seeks to protect workers in two ways: legislating against

labour exploitation, and promoting “acceptable” labour conditions under the “Decent Work” agenda (Shields 2011: 176).

The ILO’s labour standards are best captured in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW) of 1998. This declaration stipulates the best labour standards as follows: “Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour... and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment” (Shields 2011: 178). The concept of “Decent Work” is also at the centre of ILO activities in promoting human dignity at work and addressing gaps within the labour standards:

Decent Work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income; provides security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men (Shields 2011: 179).

The processes of enhancing labour standards and the Decent Work Agenda has led the ILO to establish a global template for measuring decent work conditions composed of qualitative indicators for labour standards. The proposal includes the following main indicators of decent work standards: access to employment opportunities; work that should be eliminated or abolished; adequate earnings and productive work; decent hours; stability and security of work; combining work and family life; equal opportunity and treatment in employment; safe work environment; social security; social dialogue; and worker’s representation” (Shields 2011: 179).

The ILO has seriously taken into account the challenges encountered by all workers in their respective workplaces. Significantly, the ILO has extended the concept of decent work to meet the needs and aspirations of domestic workers. In the 2010 ILO report on “Decent work for domestic workers”, a number of issues are discussed with governments and employers in order to promote the human dignity and rights of those working in domestic service. The ILO

has taken this stance because of the fact that “domestic work is undervalued, invisible and mostly carried out by women – many of whom are migrants – make[s] domestic workers particularly vulnerable to basic human rights abuses and discrimination in respect of employment and working conditions” (ILO 2010: 385). This understanding is vital and forms a basis for seeking ways of promoting dignity in the world of work as very often women employees in informal work suffer from many infringements. Certainly, in the absence of suitable conditions of work and lack of adherence of human rights on the part of employers, the dignity of women in domestic work is severely compromised. It is against such challenges that African women’s theology ought to provide ways in which the concept of partnership could be exercised in order to promote the dignity of women in all spheres of society.

Ackermann, in her understanding of a feminist theology of praxis, accentuates that the church has to learn from organizations the like ILO whose ultimate goals aim to promote human rights for women both in church and society (cited in Nadar 2008: 150). Ackermann highlights an example of an organization known as the ‘Black Sash’ which has a well-defined objective: “to do justice, to affirm human rights” of women (cited in Nadar 2008: 154). It is indeed vital for African women theologians to have their theological insights felt in the lives of ordinary women such as female domestic workers in Malawi. Similarly, Snarr (2011: 77) describes a certain organization in USA known as Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) which was formed by about 40 churches and feminist researchers to address issues related to the ‘working poor’ in their locality. Snarr (2011: 77) states that this grouping “eventually developed a research team to identify the possible causes of growing working poverty in their city and possible options for action”. This demonstrates that research is important in social transformation as it enables actors of social change to understand the problems, their factors and possible avenues for transformation.

Amongst many possible actions that were identified, BUILD successfully campaigned for those working in both formal and informal employment for at least a "living wage, or a wage sufficient to lift a family of four above the federal poverty line” (Snarr 2011: 77). In Baltimore,

USA and other cities it is recorded by Snarr (2011: 78) that “Feminist organizations are also leaders, members, and endorsers of many living wage coalitions”. In this case, feminist researchers are important, because they provide such groupings with the necessary data about the actual income of the working poor, which helps in planning actions that alleviate the poverty in the society (Snarr 2011: 79). Arguably, this is an example worthy emulating by African women theologians if their work would be meaningful in the context of the working poor such as the female domestic workers in Malawi. In certain cases, women domestic workers are not paid enough money or even not paid at all as cited in chapter two. The notion of ‘living-wage’ as is advanced by the BUILD in the USA, might sound very foreign in the context of women domestic service in Malawian. According to Casetree *et al.* (2004: 259) ‘living-wage’ is defined as the money a person receives in order to meet the “family’s basic needs for social reproduction”.

A reasonable income is vital to women’s transformation in domestic service. This is echoed by Wermuth and Monges (2002:2) who contend that “women’s economic power will determine their access to other kinds of power, for example, control over their sexuality and reproduction.” With a sound and decent income, women in domestic work cannot only transform their lives, but also the lives of their families. In addition, adequate money would ensure that even their personal health is taken seriously as they could easily access medical help in the course of their work. It is also important to state that the economic power of women in domestic service could enable them to buy and prepare their own food in cases where they are deprived of food or given food that is not enough, as illustrated in chapter two. Therefore, the economic power of women is a source of promoting human dignity in women domestic work. The concept of ILO’s “Decent Work Agenda” for domestic workers’ contends that there is a need to critically look at the supply of food and accommodation for domestic workers that lodge at the workplace as is the case of women domestic workers in Malawi. The ILO’s instruments stipulate that employers need to spell out the exact amount of food and accommodation and to state categorically, “whether the provision of food and

accommodation is an in-kind payment and the implications it has on the calculation of the salary” (ILO 2010: 391). This is important even though not many written contract agreements are produced in this type of employment (ILO 2010: 391). In this regard, African women theologians need to formulate a theology of decent work that might assist in promoting the human dignity and human rights of women working in domestic service and beyond.

4.3.3. The concept of empowerment in education responds to powerlessness in women domestic work.

The concept of empowerment can also help in promoting human dignity in women’s domestic work. Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 158) describe empowerment as an enabling power to women on different levels. Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 158) argue further that African women theologians comprehend the concept of empowerment in a new way as it means “enabling power, empowerment that can be collective, can develop and increase so that all who participate in it are affirmed and strengthened”. Furthermore, Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 158) emphasises that the concept of empowerment in African women theology is totally “different from the power that is practised in a dominant, hierarchical mode where power is exercised as power over”. Janet Surrey provides an in-depth definition of the concept of empowerment as “the motivation, freedom, and capacity to act purposefully, with the mobilisation of the energies, resources, strengths and powers of each person through a mutual, relational process” (Cited in Moyo 2005b: 192). Women need empowerment in the world of work in order to detect forms of marginalisation and to seek appropriate assistance.

Although women working in formal jobs face challenges in their day to day work, they do have certain legal protection that is accessible (Johnson-Welch and Strickland 2001: 90). On the contrary, women in domestic work in Malawi do not have specific laws that protect them. The fact that women in domestic work in Malawi work and lodge at their workplace makes them powerless and vulnerable to many challenges (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 75) In

this regard, the concept of empowerment might prove to be useful as “the workplace can be a setting where gender inequalities are both manifested and sustained, with consequent impacts on health” (Messing and Östlin 2006: v). Phiri and Nadar (2010: 97) assert that one of the strengths of African women’s theology is its commitment to give precedence to young women in order for them to access theological education. Phiri and Nadar (2010: 97) stress that African women theologians empower young women through theological education who might bring social transformation in their respective areas. This notion is supported by the fact that theologically trained and competent women would be able to network with relevant bodies involved in women emancipation at all levels. As through networking with other NGOs and government departments, projects like literacy programme could be developed for women. Suffice it to say that the ability to read and write is a source of empowerment to marginalised women in the society. White (2010:11) accentuates that the Malawian chapter of Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) identifies the “adult literacy programme” as an indispensable part of its programmes as the levels of illiteracy amongst women are very high especially in rural areas. Most of the women working in domestic service come from rural areas. The work of WLSA in adult literacy programmes responds to challenges of that women who are on the fringes of society as far as the absence of legal frameworks that deal with women’s discrimination is concerned (White 2010: 11). Additionally, White (2010: 11-12) mentions that WLSA adopts a “Rights-Based Approach” to adult literacy training for women who are poor and vulnerable due to “economic and cultural norms”. Bustreo and Hunt (2013: 20) describe the term adopted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) known as “human rights-based approach” (HRBA). It is:

The process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights ... the application of a human rights-based approach alters the way that programmes are designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated.

Claiming that this approach is vital, Bustreo and Hunt (2013: 20) identify some of the key features of this approach: “it increases and strengthens the participation of the local

community; reduces vulnerabilities by focusing on the most marginalized and excluded in society and more likely to lead to sustained changes as human rights based programmes have greater impact on norms and values, structures, policy and practice”. White (2010: 12) notes that after WLSA adopted this approach, significant transformation takes place in the lives of young women who participate in the newly designed adult literacy programme. According to White (2010: 12), young women who attend the adult literacy programme are able to “understand the social, cultural, political and psychological dimensions of women’s oppression, and subordination and the role that the rule of law sometimes plays in legitimatizing women’s low status”. This is educational empowerment that is needed to be embraced by African women theologians in order to contribute to the social transformation of women in the society including female domestic workers in Malawi.

In addition, African women’s theologians ought to articulate ways in which they could encourage girl child education, something which is a challenge in many African societies. As cited already in the second chapter of this study, many women are employed in domestic service due to their low education (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 79). There are alarming cases recorded in the history of Malawi whereby girls were found pregnant in schools and were ultimately dismissed (Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* 2009: 79). Wermuth and Monges (2002: 14) claim that in Malawi, “strong traditions of male dominance and economic weakness undermine mothers’ protections over their children – especially their daughters – leaving them more vulnerable to lost education, illiteracy”.

The area of formal educational empowerment is greatly needed in Malawi; therefore, African women theologians need to explore other avenues of supporting girl child education. According to Mkandawire-Valhmu *et al.* (2009: 86), “Education is a key component to the economic independence of women and enables them to establish more equitable relationships and secure employment that is healthier and safer”. An educated woman domestic worker could be able to negotiate with her employer on many issues related to conditions of employment. It is in this vein that some of the local organisations run by women

in Malawi engage themselves in a holistic empowerment of women. Arguably, some members of the circle in Malawi and beyond also employ female domestic workers. Therefore, the onus is on them to facilitate literacy education for women domestic workers who assist them in their home, if African women's theology is indeed a liberation theology.

4.4 The prophetic witness responds to human dignity violations

African women's theology also portrays a prophetic dimension in the sense that it promotes notions of solidarity with marginalized women. Kasomo and Maneno (2011: 156) state that African women's theology is bred in a context that is "multicultural and multireligious". In this context, according to Oduyoye, African women's theology in "developing [a] cultural hermeneutic, this... boldly criticizes what is oppressive while advocating for the enhancement of what is liberative not only for women but for the whole community" (Cited in Kasomo and Maseno 2011: 156). It is noted through African women theology that economic power, formal education and human sexuality education of women, are indeed vital; however, that is not all.

The other crucial challenge is that not all women in domestic service in Malawi are represented by unions and the legal system does not have instruments to protect those working in domestic service (Pendame 2006: 7). This is supported by the findings of the International Organisation of Immigration (IOM). The sector of domestic service in Malawi "which includes many female internal migrants, is little investigated, despite many reports of abusive conditions" (IOM 2010:7). Certainly, this evidence necessitates an exploration of concepts of gender justice and the whole area of legal framework in female domestic workplaces where social injustices encountered by women are more visible. The ILO (2010: 421) emphasises that there is a need for governments to put in place instruments that protect women in domestic service, such as a model of contract of domestic work that stipulates job conditions, remuneration and other necessary entitlements.

It is indeed correct to suggest that conditions of service ought to be improved in women domestic work, but without seeking avenues that facilitate improvements in this sector, all good plans might be futile and end up on the shelves. This is where there is the need for African women's theology to suggest ways in which the prophetic message can be exercised. Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 157) note that African women theologians "have decided to portray their solidarity groupings. These are various and as important nodes of resistance for disruption of oppressive regimes such as colonial rule. From this background, African women theologians' solidarities have been structures within wider cooperative ventures with men". The term solidarity is important in African women's theology as it enables African women theologians to identify themselves with women who encounter oppression, including female domestic workers. It is then important for African women's theology to show how this concept can be applied in the lives of women domestic workers.

Gustafson's (1988: 268) conception of four varieties of moral discourses - "prophetic, narrative, ethical and policy discourse" - could assist in demonstrating solidarity. As already cited above Gustafson's prophetic discourse takes into account two possible actions, which are: prophetic pronouncements against wrongs in a given context and advocating for actions that aim at creating a better future for the oppressed individuals (Gustafson 1988: 269). The prophetic discourse might be appropriate in responding to challenges in paid women domestic work. It is indeed proper to state that a "prophetic commitment to social justice and human rights in the public sphere is accentuated in this regard for the sake of the affirmation of life" (Chung 2010: 35). If the theological debates of African women theologians are to be viewed as relevant in the lives of fellow women such as women in domestic service, they have to show total commitment towards gender justice and nurturing of human dignity. Chung (2010: 35) calls for "all human beings, both the religious and the nonreligious, to life, to the affirmation of life, and to eternal life in resistance to a barbarism of death". This entails that any theology, including African women's theology ought to take a leading role in authentic prophetic witness. Notably, Karl Barth is a prominent pastor and theologian of the

modern era who studied factory legislation and insurance (Busch 1994: 69). As a theologian, Barth was competent in challenging exploitative factory owners because he had the required knowledge. The challenge for African women theologians is to acquire knowledge on fundamental rights of female workers and engage with government institutions and other stake holders in relation to the promotion of female domestic workers' human dignity and human rights.

4.5 The Circle promotes a concept of agency in women domestic work in Malawi

As Mouton (2008: 441) asserts, African women theologians are "committed to searching for and publishing on creative alternatives to *all forms of power abuse and injustice* in African churches and societies, and gender justice in particular". This commitment entails that women in all spheres of life are equipped in challenging all manifestations of violations of human dignity and human rights. One of the means of promoting human dignity in African women's theology is the adoption of the methodology known as "preferential option for a *storytelling* approach" (Mouton 2008: 441) as cited in chapter three. Mouton (2008: 442) argues that in the act of telling their own stories and daily experiences, women in Africa discover manifestations of "power abuse which relate to their own circumstances, but also models of women who use their power creatively to empower others. In the process *the oppressed boldly and ironically become agents of their own empowerment*". It is therefore, befitting to suggest that the concept that agency promotes dignity is vital in all aspects of women's lives including those working in domestic service.

Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz (1997: 11) describe the term 'agency' as "a crucial term in feminist theory and practice" because it highlights that the "goal of feminism has repeatedly been formulated as women's self-determination; i.e. that women become actors in the world on their own". Grey (1996: 175) asserts that women who face challenges in the world are not viewed as "victims of many forms of inter-locking oppressions, in all their diversity; these women are also seen as agents of transformation, their own and that of society".

Furthermore, Grey (2012: 227) observes that to consider women as victims is always problematic as “their sheer survival requires a sense of agency and determination”. In as much as it is necessary to engage other stakeholders such as female and male employers, and government’s legal structures in promoting dignity in women domestic work, women involved in this employment have also a role to play. This agency is needed by women despite of their levels of education. The concept of agency can enable women domestic workers to demand clarity on certain aspects of their work such as “paid annual leave; daily and weekly rest; sick leave and any other personal leave; the rate of pay for overtime work” (ILO 2010: 418).

Women’s agency is also vital especially in responding to religious and cultural notions “that the woman’s body is essentially and potentially sensual and seductive” (Amoah 1996: 80). Agency in this regard means the responsibility of women in protecting themselves, and the ability to seek help when their dignity has been compromised, e.g., when they are violated sexually and paid insufficient salaries. Ackermann (1996: 142) highlights the need for women who are oppressed to ask provocative questions even when they are not sure of getting ideal responses to their questions. In addition, Ackermann (1996: 143) advocates for ‘voluntary risk’ which means “risking for the sake of justice as an act of calculated resistance” to women’s oppression. The sense of agency allows women in domestic work to resist any attempts that aim at bringing shame, humiliation and exploitation in the course of performing duties within their workplaces. De Gruchy (2003: 22) asserts that the assumption that poor people have fatalistic views when facing challenges does not arise. He goes further to explain that “poor people are always engaged in strategies and struggles for survival, adaptation and freedom” (De Gruchy 2003: 22). The concept of ‘hidden transcript’ as developed by James Scott helps in resisting forces that always oppress. Scott (1990: 198) develops three forms of domination, namely, “material, status and dialogical”. These forms of domination can be responded to differently, but one that is useful in the case of women domestic workers is the “hidden transcript” form of undisclosed resistance (Scott 1990: 198).

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the relationship of African women's theology and women in domestic work in Malawi, and the need for African women theologians to develop an African women's theology of decent work that takes into account aspirations, security and capabilities of domestic workers. Second, this chapter has also demonstrated that the concept of partnership is indispensable in African women's theology as it assists in promoting dignity in women domestic work. This could facilitate the formation of partnerships with organisations that seek to protect the rights of workers such as the ILO which advances a concept of "Decent work for domestic workers". Besides, a creation of an African women theology of decent work might assist in the promoting dignity of women working in domestic service and beyond.

The chapter has also shown that the emancipation of women in domestic work from sexual harassment is possible through their access to vital information on human sexuality and human sexuality education. It has also been noted that economic power of women is essential in transforming the lives of women domestic workers. The chapter has also revealed the need for African women theologians to equip themselves with human rights based approaches that equip women to realise that social and, economic issues are linked with legal framework of the country. Chapter four examined a prophetic witness in African women's theology that assists in responding to human dignity violations in two ways, prophetic denouncement of oppression and exploitation in women domestic work, advocating for a legal framework that promotes human dignity in women domestic work. The prophetic witness also helps in seeking alternative ways to bring about a better future.

Finally, the fourth chapter has clarified that the concept of agency in African women's theology is vital in nurturing human dignity in women domestic work in Malawi. This is possible because women domestic workers themselves become actors in demanding clear written contract agreements and other working conditions that are necessary in this type of

employment. Having concluded chapter four, attention will now be turned to chapter five which shows the findings and highlights recommendations of the study. In addition, possible areas of further research of this area of study will be stated.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study has established that the concept of human dignity is a theoretical focus in African women's theology and is relevant in all spheres of life, including women domestic work in Malawi. Having discussed the relevance of the concept of human dignity in women domestic work in Malawi, attention now is given to the conclusions and recommendations of the study. In addition, the fifth chapter will highlight areas for further study.

In this dissertation, it has been established through dialogue with African women theologians who are members of the Circle, and others, that women encounter various forms of oppression and exploitation that comprises their human dignity of women both in the church and society. As women, subordination in the church has been extensively covered by African women theologians. This study has focused on violations of human dignity of women in the society, in the world of work to be specific. Bearing in mind that subjugation of women in the world of work is a vast subject, this study was based on violations of human dignity encountered by women in domestic work in Malawi.

This study is a qualitative textual analysis conducted within the paradigm of liberation theology and it adopted a 'See-Judge-Act' methodology as articulated by Latin American liberation theologians, namely, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. On the one hand, concepts of human dignity, humiliation and oppression assist in conducting a social analysis of human dignity violations of women in domestic work. On the other hand, concepts of feminist cultural hermeneutics, gender analysis, narrative theological discourses, decent work for domestic workers, inclusive theology and agency are avenues that promote human dignity of women in domestic service in Malawi.

5.2 Conclusions of the study

In conclusion, the first chapter formed the basis of this study. This was followed by the second chapter which provided the meaning of the two key terms, domestic work and domestic worker. This chapter also described the background and problematised the concept of human dignity. The chapter established the relevance of the concept of human dignity in women domestic service as follows: it is inherent in each person, it is the foundation of many other concepts including human rights understanding and application, it opposes all forms of injustice and dehumanization and promotes the health of women domestic workers, including their sexuality and reproductive health. This is possible due to the fact that the concept of human dignity connects perfectly with other concepts that nurture the well-being of women in the contemporary world of work, including those in domestic service.

The second chapter also highlighted violations of human dignity in women domestic service. These include sexual violence and humiliation; and oppression as exploitation and powerlessness. Finally, the chapter elucidated the factors behind violations of human dignity in women's domestic service in Malawi; namely, patriarchy, low education of women, lack of a national legal framework that protects women in domestic work, religio-cultural factors, the myth of female innocence and forces of global capitalism. Patriarchy is a form of hierarchical structure that favours men over women. Low education status of women makes women vulnerable in domestic service as they do not have bargaining power in decision making processes. The absence of legal instruments acts as a disadvantage on the part of women domestic workers as opportunities of their cases to be being heard in the society. In the name of observing religious and cultural norms, women have been silenced to voice their own oppression. Women have also been exploited as generally, domestic work is looked down upon as "cheap labour".

The third chapter demonstrated that African women's theology is a liberation theology that promotes the concept of human dignity. The chapter has established that the concept of

human dignity is the basis of the founding of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. This section established that the concept of human dignity is a theoretical focus in African women's theology through different dimensions. The following are some of the features that promote human dignity in African women's theology: the framework of feminist cultural hermeneutics helps in rejecting aspects of culture that are life-denying, such as certain customs of *chinamwali* socialisation, while embracing emancipatory aspects of culture that enforce community solidarities. The chapter also showed that gender analysis assists in responding to sexism in the society as sexism is overlooked by other forms of theology such as African Inculturation Theology.

The third chapter also explained that African women's theology is linked with global feminism and that social constructionist epistemology supports notions of agency - as women are not only seen as survivors of multiple forms of oppression and humiliation, but as participants in their own liberation. The chapter has also discussed that there is a solidarity narrative of engagement in African women's theology which emphasises the promotion of human dignity. This chapter described prophetic witness in African women's theology that denounces the ills of society and seeks new avenues of fostering a better future. Finally, in this chapter, African women's theology discovered to be a "theology of relations" that promotes community living of both men and women.

The fourth chapter explained the relationship of African women's theology and women domestic work in Malawi revealing that there is a need for African women theologians to develop an African women's theology of decent work that takes into account aspirations, security and capabilities of domestic workers. The chapter demonstrated that the concept of partnership is indispensable in African women's theology as it assists in promoting dignity in women domestic work. This could facilitate the formation of partnerships with organisations that seek to protect the rights of workers, such as the ILO which advances a concept of "Decent work for domestic workers". In addition, a formulation of African women theology of

decent work might assist in the promotion of dignity of women working in domestic service and beyond.

The fourth chapter also showed that the emancipation of women in domestic work from sexual harassment is possible through access to vital information on human sexuality and human sexuality education. The chapter highlighted that economic power of women is essential in transforming the lives of women domestic workers. In this chapter, it was also discovered that there is a need for African women theologians to equip themselves with human rights based approaches that enable women who experience oppression to realise that social and economic issues are linked with legal framework of any country. Chapter four examined the prophetic witness in African women's theology that assists in responding to human dignity violations in two ways, prophetic denouncement of oppression and exploitation in women domestic work, and advocating for a legal framework that promotes human dignity in women domestic work. The prophetic witness also helps in seeking alternative ways for the better future. Finally, the fourth chapter clarified that the concept of agency in African women's theology is vital in nurturing human dignity in women domestic work in Malawi. This is possible because women domestic workers themselves become actors in demanding clear written contract agreements and other working conditions that are necessary in this type of employment. The key concept of human dignity is important as it connects all other concepts in this study. Human dignity is vital for all workers as it facilitates the improvement of working conditions, such as health environment, payments, an act of writing and signing technically sound employment contracts and so on.

5.3 Recommendations: Way forward

The following recommendations are vital to be considered in African women's theology in order for the concept of dignity to be visible in the lives of oppressed women in the world of work. First, there is a need for African women theologians to develop an African women's theology of decent work that takes into account the aspirations and security of women

workers, both in formal and informal types of employment such as in women domestic work. This takes cognisance of the fact that women in Africa as well as beyond are on the receiving end of cheap and exploitative labour practices.

Second, in as much as African women's theology is concerned with the promotion of dignity both in the church and society, it does not show exactly how this dignity can be promoted in the world of work. Therefore, it is recommended that women of the Circle need to adopt other frameworks such as human rights based approach, which is holistic in nature. As a vast number of women are not literate, including some of the women who work in domestic work, the human rights based approach to literacy education will be helpful. This approach will enable women working in domestic service to acknowledge that social, economic and religious challenges are connected to the national legal framework. This intervention is important as it leads to many forms of women empowerment at different levels of society and not only the world of work.

Third, there is a need for African women theologians to be hermeneutic competent in order to identify partnerships that will enable them to translate their theological discourse in ways in which ordinary women can benefit. This will assist to dismiss notions that African women's theology belongs to elitist African women who are in the academia. In addition, partnership with men is vital in that programmes could be developed that bring together women working in domestic work and their employers, so that a clear working relationship is established between employees and employers.

Fourth, African women's theology needs to say more on the concept of agency as this concept helps in acknowledging that disadvantaged groups always find strategies and means of survival. This phenomenon is crucial in domestic work as those working in such types of employment are vulnerable to many attacks including economic exploitation, sexual violence and humiliation. Education in human sexuality, notions of hidden resistance and training in concepts of self-defence help to protect sexually vulnerable groups.

5.4 Areas of further research

It is appropriate in future to investigate African women's theology in dialogue with public policies affecting the lives of women in the world of work.

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