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Broken bodies and present ghosts: *Ubuntu* and African women's theology

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In this article, the notion of broken bodies is explored in relation to the African body and the history of colonialism in South Africa. This exploration will be rooted in a retelling of the story of the woman, Saartjie Baartman. In this retelling, the product of colonialism comes to the fore in a haunting. Jacques Derrida's use of the concept of Hauntology is employed to investigate the ethical demand the spectre makes of us. With the help of the African concept of ubuntu and African women's theologies, we then seek to find healing and restoration for the broken bodies.

Introduction

African anthropology views personhood and the body in a holistic sense. The individual is embedded in an intricate network of relationships to family (living and dead), the community, God and nature (Maimela 1991:5). No individual exists alone; each shares a horizontal connection with other members of the society and a vertical connection with ancestors and future generations (Krüger, Lubbe & Steyn 2009:58). The African understanding of the body as holistic is the antithesis to Greek and the later Cartesian view with its dualistic split between body and soul. This separation served to characterise the 'soul' and reason as inherently good and the body with its fleshy unreliability and unpredictable urges and reactions as negative.

In contrast to this dualistic view, experience within the African world view is not disembodied, but rather bodily experienced. If you break down the body, the mind or the community, you break down the person and vice versa. Frequently, discourse that reflects on the oppression of Africans downplays the embodied experience of oppression on the person as a result of a dualistic world view associated with the Greek philosophical categories or the Cartesian view as stated above. This dualistic view, which has become almost hegemonic, does not take into account the devastating effects it has: The body becomes defiled and deformed with regards to its relation to other bodies, to self, to its own intellectual production, to nature, the spiritual realm and to God.

There are various societal discourses, structures and practices that break the body, and in the African context especially the black body, down. To come to grips with the harsh reality and physicality in which bodies have been rearranged, appraised and broken down throughout history even into our own time, this article examines the devastating effect of the Colonialist gaze on the body of the African woman, Saartjie Baartman.

Colonised bodies: The case of Saartjie Baartman

From a very early stage, Europeans linked the bodies of black people to the materiality of nature. Both male and female bodies were considered uncivilised and unable to fully conform to the socioeconomic, religious and political milieu of the civilised West. 'The black body was a prime symbol of chaos, appropriate for work in the world and for pleasure' (Meiring 2014:88).

Female bodies did not escape the religious and moral scrutiny of the West and were judged as 'primitive, lascivious and repugnant' (Pinn 2010:81). The case of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoisan woman from South Africa, comes to mind. Called the 'Hottentot Venus', Baartman was taken to England in 1810 and gained popular attraction as a freak show exhibition for her 'steatopygia, or protruding buttocks, amid popular speculation of her genitalia' (Wiss 1994:2). Baartman's existence and identity was purely based on the European view of the grotesque body – wholly other to European women. To Europeans Saartjie was primitive, bestial and crudely sexual. 'Saartjie Baartman existed as the sum of the lower parts of her body which were seen as protuberant and asymmetrical, grotesque and compelling in their excessive sexuality' (Wiss 1994:2).

Baartman moved to Paris, fell into prostitution and died in poverty. After her death, the French scientist and expert on comparative anatomy George Cuvier, made a mould of her body and preserved her skeleton, genitalia and brain for display at the Museum of Mankind (*Musée de l'Homme*) in Paris until 1974 (De Saxe 2003:468). In 1994 Baartman became part of the exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay called *La Sculpture Ethnographique au XIXeme siècle, de la Venus Hottentot à la Tehura de Gauguin,* never called by her name, but rather the 'Hottentot Venus', she was 'a spectral being, someone who never existed except in the minds of other' (Crais & Scully 2009:142).

The scientific scrutiny Baartman's body was subjected to and the notion of the 'Hottentot Venus' featured widely in 19th- and 20th-century debates on evolution, race and female sexuality. Cuvier's dissection of Baartman influenced the thinkers, writers, artists and naturalists of the time, and according to Crais and Scully (2009:145), even Charles Darwin's ideas of human diversity and sexuality were shaped by Cuvier's findings. European scientists, in an attempt to classify and understand the world and our origins as humans, believed upon seeing Baartman, that the Hottentot Venus was more ape than human and that she represented a fifth category of human, namely *Homo sapiens monstrous* (Crais & Scully 2009:2):

> The Hottentot Venus's greatest notoriety came with the spectacular proliferation of scientific racism in the second half of the nineteenth century. All of the most prominent writers on the supposed inferiority of non-Caucasoid races knew of the Hottentot Venus and very often explicitly discussed the Hottentot in elaborating their ideas on race and on the dangers of racial mixing. (p. 145)

Decades later, after major fighting and politicking, Baartman was brought back to South Africa and buried on Women's Day, 09 August 2002. At her funeral, President Thabo Mbeki delivered a speech wherein he critiqued the history of European colonialism, racism and science – especially the French scientists, calling them the real 'monsters':

> It was not the abused human being who was monstrous but those who abused her. It was not the lonely African woman in Europe, alienated from her identity and her motherland who was the barbarian, but those who treated her with barbaric brutality. (Mbeki 2002:Online)

Standing at the gravesite of Baartman, at the Gamtoos River, the President calls out for the restoration of Baartman's dignity, the Khoi-San's and the 'millions of African's who have known centuries of wretchedness' (Mbeki 2002:Online).

All notions of the restoration of Baartman's dignity are tinged with tragedy and absence. She was not buried in her ancestral homeland. In death Baartman is not whole:

> Today, however, one final element can be added to what Ge´rard Badou calls 'the enigma of the Hottentot', that is the enigma of her remains. For what is being returned is not a body but rather merely her remains, those 'items' listed in the legal document: a plaster cast, preserved organs, a skeleton and waxed moulds of genital parts. Her burial and grave therefore memorialise a mix of 'real' body parts and 'copies' of the original body (plaster and wax). The grave itself is half-cenotaph, a memorial site dedicated precisely to a body that is partly absent. (Moudileno 2009:209)

When one goes to Baartman's gravesite today, you will find it surrounded by palisades, to ward off vandals and ill doers. Not even in death can Baartman escape the zoo-like bars and the curious lookers-on who wish to catch a glimpse of the notorious Hottentot Venus.

The discussion of Saartjie Baartman served to illustrate the physicality of the colonialist gaze, which, in Baartman's case literally, dissects, weighs, names and displays. The anthropology underlying European contact with Baartman illustrates a distorted view on African lives and bodies. The anthropology espoused by the men who took Baartman, who sold her, who showcased her and ultimately dissected her, is one that thought of her as racially inferior, something closer to an animal that needed to be understood and explained in order to maintain and justify the superiority of the European. Issues of gender, sexuality, class, culture, race, science and colonialism all intersected on the body of Saartjie Baartman so that all that was left were pieces of her in jars and a plaster likeness of her body. The distorted and monstrous anthropology of Colonialism can only make monsters, half people, and keep body parts in jars; in other words, phantoms, spectres and ghosts.

Baartman's body was not the only one appraised, sold, used, abused and dissected. It is the same view of the value of African lives and bodies that facilitated dispossession, abuse and forced labour throughout Dutch colonialism, English imperialism and Apartheid. Labour, no matter how it is configured, for sexual pleasure or manual labour, is inextricably tied to the body. The story and case of Baartman thus illustrates the question of bodies colonised and encapsulates the anthropological distortions associated with the colonialism. How then does this play out today? The next section deals with this question.

The spectre of the body

In South Africa, the racial response of the European and later the Afrikaner became institutionalised and the black body was continually being signified by its lack of whiteness, worth, morality, Christianity, intelligence, wealth and health. The encounter to the black body took on different guises under Colonialism and later Apartheid, but the anthropology that undergirded both was not dissimilar. Whether it is during Colonialism or Apartheid, the anthropology employed was a distorted vision of the indigenous person, one that reconfigured, rearranged, weighed, appraised and utilised the black body to suit the needs of the *Baas.*

The painful experience of dislocation and reconfiguration caused by the destructive systems of Colonialism and Apartheid has a physicality that cannot be underestimated: it is *present.*

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida questions and critiques the dominant Western metaphysics:

> which exercises a hierarchical preference for the one over the many, identity over difference, spirit over matter, eternity over time, immediacy over deferment, the same over the other – and perhaps most significant for Derrida's analytic purpose, speech over writing. (Kearney 1984:124)

In Derrida's notion of metaphysics of presence, he maintains the idea that meaning can be made 'via an anchoring to a body' (Fisher 2013:43), not by some wordless and timeless source of knowledge.

This leads us to the question: what meaning can be made if the body is broken – a mere ghost? The black body so inhumanely and violently manhandled during colonialism and the subsequent Apartheid era had been broken, taken apart and rearranged so that what remains are ghosts which disrupt, disjoint and demand our attention and response to its haunting presence. The distorted anthropology that underlies the brutal practices of Colonialism and Apartheid can only produce ghosts or spectres. This is what needs to be further examined, especially after the demise of Apartheid, a point to which we now turn.

Hauntology and the Spectre

South Africa is not the only country trying to do deal with its colonial past. In European countries like France:

> postcolonial scholars have adopted terms such as 'haunting' to account for the process through which spectres of the colonial past – understood in terms of an unresolved history – have returned to force a re-examination of the present. (Moudileno 2009:201)

The ghosts of our past rupture and break into our present. The French, one of the greatest colonial powers in the world, can testify to this:

> Twentieth-century social issues such as the 'veil affair', the treatment of the *sans-papiers* (people without official residence or work permits), or the more recent violence in the French *banlieues* (deprived suburbs) stem from and signal a failed 'politics of forgetting' concerning colonial violence. The idea of a 'return of the repressed' serves to explain how in spite of selective cultural amnesia, colonial memories nevertheless find their way back into the postcolonial quotidian in the form of symptomatic moments of crisis. In the past twenty years or so, France has indeed had to deal with a number of such 'returning' histories. These have mainly focused on the issue of slavery and Algerian decolonisation. (p. 201)

Similarly, Derrida refers to this, the discourse on ghosts, spectres, spirits, phantoms and *revenants*, and all manner of apparitions, as *hauntology* (a play on 'ontology'). Hauntology looks at that which haunts – what is absent, but yet uncomfortably and 'unsettlingly present, to all being' (Taylor 2011:31).

The concept of hauntology, which first appeared in Derrida's *Spectre of Marx* (1994), is a kind of:

restatement of the deconstructive claim that 'being' is not equivalent to presence. Since there is no point of pure origin, only the time of the 'always-already', then haunting is the state proper to being as such. (Fisher 2013:44)

Mark Lewis Taylor argues that this turn to spectral theory should not be seen as a purely Western turn. Spectrality is especially useful for African, Asian and any other colonised peoples 'whose legacies of political and cultural repression, and often genocide, have spawned memories … of ancestors, ghosts, and haunting presences' (Taylor 2011:31). Our past is a 'seething presence' and weighs heavy on our present (Taylor 2011:31). The African American novelist Toni Morrison writes in *Beloved* 'You know as well as I do that people who die bad don't stay in the ground' (Morrison 2007:221).

Taylor describes spectrality and haunting by stating that the ghostly and the spectral are what the poststructuralists trace as the 'fault lines, fissures, infiltrations' that operate in the coloniser's 'cultural and political apparatus' (2011):

> To trace them is to find the vestiges of the vanquished, often to highlight and strengthen long-colonized peoples, aiming to eviscerate the strength of colonizing and imperial projects. (p. 33)

Conceptually, this is in line with the idea of the ghost as something between life and death, present and absent, on the border between becoming and forgetting. Derrida calls it an 'opening' from where 'this other origin, this one that I cannot re-appropriate, from this infinitely other place, I am watched' (Derrida & Stiegler 2013 [2002]:42). The spectre, or spectral thought, takes on the form of 'border thinking', between the cracks (openings) between colonisers and colonised (Taylor 2011:33). The spectre intrudes and disrupts our world and demands simultaneously our remembrance and action (Taylor 2011:24):

> The spectre is haunting congealed into a portentous promise or threat, one that carries and suggests an accountability, a demand upon the present to remember, often to effect a liberation for the effaced ones. (p. 35)

After his experience of World War II, the German Catholic theologian Johan Baptist Metz describes something called dangerous memory:

> [T]here are dangerous memories, memories which make demands on us. There are memories in which earlier experiences break through to the centre-point of our lives and reveal new and dangerous insights for the present … They break through the canon of the prevailing structures of plausibility and have certain subversive features. Such memories are like dangerous and incalculable visitations from the past. They are memories that we have to take into account, memories, as it were, with a future content. (Metz 1980:109–110)

These memories, like hauntings, force us to acknowledge the presence of that which we wish to hide and leave buried. This memory, or visitation, as Metz terms it, refuses to be ignored. In an interview with Bernard Stiegler, Derrida calls

this ethical response to the appearance of the ghost (almost a Levinasian Other), a 'spectral oath':

> To link this statement up with that of spectrality, let's say that our relation to another origin of the world or to another gaze, to the gaze of the other, implies some a kind of spectrality. Respect for the alterity of the other dictates respect for the ghost (*les revenant*) and, therefore, for the non-living, for what it's possible is not alive. Not dead, but not living … There is no respect and, therefore, no justice possible without this relation of fidelity or of promise, as it were, to what is no longer living or not living yet, to what is not simply present. There would be no urgent demand for justice, or for responsibility, without this spectral oath. And there would be no oath, period. (Derrida & Stiegler 2013:42–43)

Both Metz's and Derrida's views indicate the ethical demand (or as Derrida terms it 'the Spectral Oath') the dangerous memory or spectre makes on the observer. There have been various ethical responses to the ghost. Increasingly Hauntology is used in postcolonial literature. The Belgian born author, Besorra's *53 cm*, is one such example.

Using the concepts of hauntology as a methodology could, for example, with the creative use of literature give voice (or even life for a fleeting moment) or indicate the presence of ghosts in our midst. The description of Saartjie Baartman's life and death is also a haunting. In France, Bessora's short story *53 cm* brought the forgotten figure of Baartman forward, in a process of critique of colonial France. In the narrative process, 'the dismembered, exiled colonial ghost of the Hottentot Venus is re-historicised, re-named and re-patriated into a collective imaginary' (Moudileno 2009:202, 206):

> 53 cm also attempts to recover 'lost bodies' from the colonial past, especially bodies which were not buried with dignity, and in the case of Lumumba never even recovered. The act of giving a textual or poetic burial or sepulture to the lost bodies of the colonial era is familiar to the literature and arts of the Diaspora. (p. 207)

Bessora, herself a student of anthropology, gives life to Baartman in recalling her in her work. Bessora has respect for the ghost, and in her response, in her recognition of the presence of the spectre, she restores the body of Baartman, if only for a moment.

Baartman's ghost and the phantoms produced during the ages have great importance to theological anthropology today. In talking about the hegemonic power exercised by the empire, *Pax Americana,* M. Shawn Copeland (2010) writes in her book *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race and Being*:

> The United States attempts to manage and regulate the relations and interactions of bodies at every socioeconomic level, extract concrete human actions from history, and recreate the very world it inhabits. Given the location and conditions of bodies in empire, the virulent global persistence of racism, xenophobic reactions to 'illegal' or undocumented *anti-bodies* within the body of empire, the bodies maimed and slaughtered in wars mounted by clients of empire, the bodies done to death by AIDS and hunger and abuse, and above all, that body broken and resurrected for us, theological anthropology can never cease speaking of bodies. (p. 57)

These bodies, never quite erased, haunt us. They come up in our stories, incomplete memories, our family photographs of people missing and unmarked graves. The dead, maimed and broken haunt our presence – it disjoints, jars, shocks and disrupts.

The spectre of the broken body is an accusation. It accuses and brings attention to those life-taking or life-killing societal structures and arrangements, whether it be colonialism, Apartheid or racial capitalism, which disfigure, deform and reduce people to phantoms. The ghost is indicative of the absence of wholeness and life and it brings attention to death-dealing forces.

Is there any way to transcend this accusation? To overcome or restore wholeness to these ghosts which haunt us? This question is ontological, metaphysical, epistemological and even about the concrete bodily experiences of people living in South Africa today. If indeed the anthropological implications of colonial and Apartheid views of the humanity of the other haunt us and have become a spectre that accuses us, it makes sense then to examine other views on anthropology, the anthropological perspectives of Africans themselves.

Ubuntu: Existence-in-relation

The body can be the site of disciplines and unmentionable pain and trauma. But it can also be the site of remembrance, hope, love and belonging. The bodies of the lost and buried in unmarked graves form part of a connected community of people. As the *Ubuntu* maxim goes, *I am a person through other persons*. It is to say that my humanity is tied up with your humanity. That means the other person – the whole embodied person – is linked to me, and I to them. This is part of the African idea of life and practice that is characterised by wholeness (Pato 1997:55). Unlike the dichotomous notion of religious life versus secular life, the African world view holds that they are not separate – *all* life is religious and sacred:

> Wholeness is the regulative principle here since what is asserted is that the single individual is incomplete without the other. It is both understood as being humane, respectful and polite towards other human beings which constitutes the core or central meaning of the aphorism; *motho ke motho ka batho.* (Ramose 2015:70)

True humanity lies in the network of mutual interdependent relationships between individuals, families and the community (which also includes people *outside* of your immediate community [see Gathogo 2008]): it is to belong and participate positively in activities that make being truly human possible for others as well. It is a dynamic relationship of existence-in-relation (Pato 1997:56).

In an attempt to counter the dominant western conception of the self as self-governing subject, Pato (1997:55) writes that the African theologian John Mbiti, in response to the Cartesian dictum 'I think therefore I am', imagines an African alternative in relation to *Ubuntu*: 'I belong therefore I am'. Thusly,

personhood is constituted in your relation to the people around you. No individual exists by him or herself alone and we need one another to be fully human (Pato 1997:55). In Archbishop Desmond Tutu's conceptualisation of *ubuntu* within his theology, the focus on community and relationality does not denigrate the individual:

> No real human being … can be absolutely self-sufficient. Such a person would be subhuman. We belong therefore in a network of delicate relationships of interdependence. It is marvellous to know that one who has been nurtured in a living, affirming, accepting family tends to be loving, affirming and accepting of others in his or her turn. We do need other people and they help to form us in a profound way. (Tutu in Battle 1997:42)

This in turn highlights the ethical dimension of *Ubuntu*. In their research, Cornell and Van Marle (2015) further expounds upon ethical notion:

> Ubuntu is a philosophy on how human beings are intertwined in a world of ethical relations from the moment they are born. Fundamentally, this inscription is part of our finitude. We are born into a language, a kinship group, a tribe, a nation, and a family. We come into a world obligated to others, and those others are obligated to us. We are mutually obligated to support each other on our respective paths to becoming unique and singular persons. (p. 2)

Ubuntu offers a positive conception of the human being as existence-in-relation which counters the destructive and evil practices of the Apartheid government and the Euro-centric anthropology that supported it. Mark Lewis Taylor's idea of a weighted world that is borne by both sides of the departed flesh – by black people and white people alike, ties in with the concept existence-in-relation. My humanity suffers when others are treated inhumanely:

> As an ethical as well as a politico-ideological concept, and one that encompasses categories that are often called ontology and epistemology, ubuntu always entails a social bond. But, one that is always in the course of being shaped and reshaped by the heavy ethical demands it puts on all its participants. (Cornell & Van Marle 2015:3)

According to Cornell and Van Marle, *Ubuntu* is an ontology that relates to how human beings are intertwined: 'about the *being* of the human': this *being* 'also constitutes how we see the world: for this intertwinement is inherently ethical' (Cornell & Van Marle 2015):

> When we see or grasp the world, we epistemologically understand it through an inherent ethicality that inheres in our human being with inescapable obligations. Furthermore, since it is an ethical one, this social bond is always demanding the rethinking of what the ethical, and therefore, what the politico-ideological demand. Ubuntu in this sense encapsulates how we know the world, as well as how we are in it through the moral obligations as human beings who must live together. (p. 3)

Ubuntu in this sense also then carries an ethical obligation towards the haunting presence of the spectre: those who have been disfigured, broken and now crave wholeness. Reconciliation, as thoughtful, caring and loving existence-in-relation, has a cosmic scope and touches all kinds of relationships – social, economic, political and spiritual. Humanity has to be reconciled with God and each other (Thesnaar 2010:99).

Ubuntu is a rich source and can offer much to the discussion of the ethical obligation of people who are embedded in a network of relationship, to the appearance of the ghost.

Our problem today is that the notion of *Ubuntu*, healing and restoration of bodies, people and communities has to be brought about somehow. There is a difference between a ghost and a resurrected or restored body. The reconfigured and rearranged body of the African did not, with the advent of 1994, find transformation and restoration in the New South Africa. Rampant poverty, violence, failing educational systems and the rise of HIV and AIDS are the daily reality of a majority of South Africans. There is drastic disconnect between the ideals of *ubuntu* and the lived reality of millions of Africans (Eliastam 2015:3) to such a degree that one wonders whether these ideals can ever really fully take root in our present context[1] or *if* they were ever really fully present.[2] After decades of Colonialism and Apartheid, the inherited inequality based on race, class and gender is a difficult one to overcome (Kehler 2001:41), especially for the most affected of these – women and their children.

In writing about the notions of liberation in Black Theology, Ntintili writes about the Black Solidarity-Materialist Strand. Herein oppression is expounded by the accentuation of race, class and gender. Within this strand of black liberation theology, black women are considered to be the most oppressed and therefore liberation would seek to address the issues of race, class and gender (Ntintili 1996:4). For countless African women 'gender oppression is multiplied by racist dehumanization multiplied by economic exploitation multiplied by cultural colonisation multiplied by religious demonization' (Schüssler Fiorenza 1996:xxi).

African people thus have their views on the understanding of the human question, they have their own ontological and metaphysical views on the relationship of human being, nature, labour, sexuality and God to mention abut a few. More importantly, African anthropology is relational. Baartman is a woman, so, the voice of women, African women themselves, cannot be excluded in this conversation.

African women's theologies

African women's theologies strive to deal with the specific context of African women and their communities. Like Black Theology of South Africa and African theology, African women's theologies are theologies of liberation that deal with a vast array of topics. The theme of the 2001 meeting at the Talitha Qumi Centre in Ghana was 'Overcoming Violence: Women of Faith Speak'. At this event, The Circle spoke out strongly against the various, complex manifestations of

1.See Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) and Naude (2013), for a critique of *Ubuntu* in the present South African context.

2.For a critique of the historicity of *ubuntu,* see Van Binsbergen (2001).

violence in the African context and denounced such issues as 'domestic violence, witchcraft accusations, enslavement in the name of religion, and female circumcision' and showed insight into 'the historical roots and entanglement of violence with issues of poverty, racism and sexism' (Hinga 2002:82):

> African women's theologies take women's experiences as its starting point, focusing on the oppressive areas of life caused by injustices such as patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, capitalism, globalisation and sexism. (Phiri 2004:156)

The naming of the centre 'Talitha Qumi' is significant. It refers to the story of Jairus's daughter in Mark 5:41 in which Jesus says to the dead girl 'Daughter, arise'. These are powerful words symbolic of a restoration, of being made alive and visible. The act of being made visible is also what drives African women theologians' engagement with the Biblical text, to counter to the male-dominated view of making women invisible, or to present them negatively. African women theologians try to find solace and liberation in a reading of the Bible that takes seriously their context and their stories (Phiri 1997:75). An essential part of African women's theologies approach to reconstructive theology is story telling as a methodology. Shedding light on the stories of women and communities in the African context can be used for healing and reconciliation (Gathogo 2010:7).

African women's theologies engage in a double hermeneutic (influenced by hermeneutics of suspicion), which states that biblical hermeneutics is continually in dialogue with cultural hermeneutics:

> Naturally, there is an overlap of cultural and biblical hermeneutics as the Bible is most frequently read from the standpoint of African culture. Life-giving principles are extracted from both sources at the same time as their domesticating and death-dealing demands are repudiates as being against God's will for humanity and the rest of creation. (Oduyoye 2001:19)

African women's theologies can also be called 'theologies of relations' that seek to replace hierarchies with mutuality. Relationality and the interdependence of women, men, humans and creation require not only sensitivity to the needs of others, 'but also the well-being of the community as a whole' and seek to eradicate injustice across the board (Oduyoye 2001:17). The dehumanising structures that oppress countless African women should not only be demolished, argues Hinga (2002:84), but also reconstructed to enhance *Ubuntu* and true humanity.

The Circle recognises the interconnectedness of life, and sees The Circle as 'a space for women from Africa to do communal theology' (Gathogo 2010:7). Mercy Oduyoye (considered to be the founder of African women's theologies and the Circle) corroborates this idea when she writes (2001):

> A Circle expands forever
>
> It covers all who wish to hold hands
>
> And its size depends on each other
>
> It is a vision of solidarity
>
> It turns outwards to interact with the outside

> And inward for self critique
>
> A circle expands forever
>
> It is a vision of accountability
>
> It grows as the other is moved to grow
>
> A circle must have a centre
>
> But a single dot does not make a Circle
>
> One tree does not make a forest
>
> A circle, a vision of cooperation, mutuality and care. (p. 97)

Relationality, mutual dependence, a focus on the narratives of women and a deep commitment to justice characterises African women's theologies. Power (often masculine power), which has so much potential to destroy the life-giving relationships African women find themselves in, is given a powerful new interpretation by Oduyoye: 'Power is for the well-being of the community' (2001b:223). This calls for a reconfiguration of power that is distributed equally in the community, for the wholeness of the community (Landman 2007:n.p). Within Oduyoye's (2001) framework, 'wholeness' refers to:

> [A]ll that makes for fullness of life, and makes people celebrate life. Well-being – *Alafia* – for most of Africa implies the possession of the powers, graces or attributes that call for the celebration of life, and demonstrates the integrity of the human body, good eye-sight, hearing and speech and the wholeness of mind and limbs … Fullness of life is defined as a state of prosperity, victory over evil and death-dealing forces. (p. 34)

By this account, wholeness refers to the holistic restoration and resurrection of the body. Oduyoye (2001) brings the resurrection of the body in line with eschatology. She writes:

> The Resurrection of the body is used as the image for dealing with African women's spirituality of hope, because with the coming of women on the theological scene, the disembodied theology that shirks real people's actual experiences has been effectively challenged. (p. 110)

African women experience hope as a lived reality. Despite the history of oppression, poverty, disease and death and the loss of African culture and concepts such as hospitality (and wholeness), women's adherence and remembrance to values such as these are 'anchored in the hope of Resurrection' (Oduyoye 2001):

> They retell again and again the story of the three women who set out to anoint the body of 'the crucified one', knowing full well that there was a colossal stone to be rolled away before they could reach the body. Not even Africa's mammoth poverty can breed despair in women even though from the outside what others see is a future of 'pain, death, the misery of watching one's children die and the death of hope itself'. The 'death of hope' is an impossible concept in African women's theology, because they believe Scripture that says, with God, they can scale walls (Ps. 30). (p. 113)

African women theologians maintain that they are no mere victims, but rather take their context to heart to try and participate in the restoration of their wholeness as moral

agents. In their approach, they imbibe principles of *Ubuntu*, liberation theology and hermeneutics of suspicion.

A positive theological anthropology would include a vision of a restored body – one that is whole in all its various relations and interdependencies. The question thus becomes: how do we restore the body if our notion of restoration of the body has been comprehensively deformed by the world that we live in?

Conclusion

In this article, we have examined the deep problem of the anthropological distortions of colonialism and the destruction it caused, and still does, to the lives and bodies of African people. This distorted anthropology seeks to break, re-arrange, re-organise and control what it deems to be disorganised and chaotic. This monstrous project can only produce spectres that haunt our present. This article showed to illustrate the negative anthropology of colonialism and in turn, with help of African concepts such as *ubuntu* and African women's theologies, sought to envision what a positive anthropology where healing and restoration would take place would look like.

Acknowledgements
Competing interests

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