

Exploring gender relations in Paul's use of salutations to house churches and the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko*

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Received: 29 Mar. 2022

Accepted: 10 Aug. 2022

Published: 18 Oct. 2022

How to cite this article:Mzondi, A.M.M., 2022, 'Exploring gender relations in Paul's use of salutations to house churches and the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko*', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(2), a7573. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i2.7573>**Copyright:**© 2022. The Author.
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Paul usually ends his letters with salutations to believers who meet in someone else's house. Far from being individualistic, these greetings also include people from different house churches. Considered from a functional angle, these greetings cement relationships between house churches. Within an *ubuntu* worldview, the oral praxis of *sereto* (Sepedi) or *isiduko* (IsiXhosa) (praise-poetry) establishes and confirms relationships between members of the same community (family, clan or tribe). The question is how such praxes affect women who belong to such communities.

Contribution: This article is a comparative analysis of how some of the salutations used at the end of some of Paul's epistles touch on gender relations in the same way as the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* touches on gender relations among members of a community (family, clan or tribe).

Keywords: *ubuntu*; *sereto*; *isiduko*; women and men; house churches; community; gender relations.

Introduction

It is appropriate to begin this article by mentioning that African spirituality and activities existed prior to and after the Greco-Roman era. Oden (2007:65) explains that '[t]here is an enduring pre-Christian traditional African religious past in north Africa during the first Christian millennium: Pharaonic, proto-Nubian, Libyan and Capsian and Ghanian reaching far back into Africa prehistory'.

Firstly, the above explanation enables one to look at gender relations underlying Paul's salutations in some of his letters and the *ubuntu* oral praxis¹ of *sereto* or *isiduko* with a full understanding that Africans were an intrinsic part of the pre- and post-ancient Mediterranean world. *Sereto* or *isiduko* is a combination of two South African words, *sereto* (Northern Sotho and Setswana languages) and *isiduko* (isiNguni languages), which refer to the practice of reciting one's lineage. Secondly, it further links this praxis among the first inhabitants of Southern Africa, the Khoisan. Seeing the Khoisan male praise-singer on national television during the opening of the South African parliament on 06 June 2019 assists in positioning the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* as an ancient African practice existing among the Bantu-speaking and Khoisan communities. This article focuses on the South African Sesotho-Setswana and Isinguni and the first-century non-Jewish house church contexts.

Schultze (1928) coined the term Khoisan after clustering the San (Bushmen) and Khoekhoe (Hottentots) languages into one (cf. Brown & Deumert 2017:2). These groups speak various languages with heavy clicks (Barnard 1992). Their presence and interaction with the Bantu-speaking communities in Southern Africa span centuries. Archaeological discoveries show evidence of some pottery and animal remains dating 2000 years ago and link these remains to those discovered in Eastern African communities dating 4000 years ago (Barbieri et al. 2014:1). The first archaeological evidence of 2000 years ago covers the related to the period of the early gentile house churches that Paul salutes in some of his epistles. Accordingly, the *ubuntu* praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* identified among the Khoisan and the Bantu-speaking communities (specifically the South African context) can be placed alongside some of Paul's salutations to gentile house

1.Oral praxis refers to the practice of reciting.

Note: Special Collection: Women Theologies, sub-edited by Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale (Midlands State University, Zimbabwe) and Tanya van Wyk (University of Pretoria).

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churches in the early church to explore gender relations. The main question is how the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and Paul's salutations to non-Jewish house churches affect women in these communities.

Research method

To answer the main question, the article uses African women theology as a theoretical framework and social constructivism as a research method to cover two processes. Firstly, it explores the social strata of the Mediterranean world and that within the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko*. Secondly, it explores the muting praxis and the appraisal of women in the two different contexts.

African women's theology encapsulates African cultural hermeneutics (Kanyoro 2002), aims at transforming African customs and praxes that inhibit African women (Oduyoye 1995:167; Phiri 1996:161) and is applied to engage the *ubuntu* worldview. Social constructivism looks at the intersection of culture and context in constructing knowledge (Ernest 1999; McMahon 1997) and is applied to explore and to compare the first-century non-Jewish church contexts with the *ubuntu sereto* or *isiduko* context.

Consequently, the three main sections of the article are as follows: focus on the social strata among the first-century non-Jewish house churches and the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko*; the silent (muted) female voices behind the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and the first-century gentile house churches; and appraising the role of women in the two contexts. First to be discussed is the comparison of the social strata, second is comparing the silent (muted) female voices behind the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and the first-century non-Jewish house churches. The comparison of the appraisal of women in the first-century non-Jewish house churches and in *ubuntu* worldview is discussed last.

Comparing the social strata within the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and the first-century non-Jewish house churches

This section of the article provides a comparison of the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and the first-century non-Jewish house churches.

The *ubuntu sereto* or *isiduko* context

Typically, one finds a husband, a wife (wives), children and other members related by blood in both ancient and modern African households (*lapa* or *umuzi*). This is observed by Motzafi-Haller (1998:522), who carried out research fieldwork among the Batswana in Botswana. Within the South(ern) African context, people who meet for the first time check each other through the oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* (cf. Makgopa, Mapaya & Thobejane 2012:126). A mere mention of a clan name or reciting one's *sereto* or *isiduko* is enough to

validate one's relation with the other person. This praxis helps to establish familial links, tribe and clan relations, and it places the community at the centre. It is also common for family members to use animals, birds and reptiles as a totem. Once confirmed, they call each other by these names when meeting, during conversations and when departing. This oral praxis is performed during wedding ceremonies, funerals, and cultural gatherings where family members provide a platform for the recitation of *sereto* or *isiduko* and one's lineage. This provides unquestionable oral authentication of one's belonging to the family or clan or tribe. Music is also used to achieve this objective; examples are cultural songs among the Sesotho-speaking and isiZulu-speaking (*Maskandi*) nations (cf. Makgopa et al. 2012:126). Below is an example of a *sereto* in Sepedi (one of the official South African languages). Masoga (2006:9–10) states:

Ngwana Mahlomotja a Moloto
Wa leru lehomotja pele Magolo mang a saetl
Ke wa bokganya wa boRamaredi
Ba ba reng Kganya ga a ke a dumediša moeng
Ke moeng a re go Kganya dumela
Ke wa bo Sekatudi sa Mosibidi wa Moloto
Ke motho wa bo Mmasetla le Makiti a Hlagala
... tseke la go ja makhura la tla la duma la tlola
La bo Raisibe a malala meetse malala a keteka Sethakga sa diphoofolo
Ke ba ga Mphahlele a di lesa tsa masomane ke batho ba ba lehututu le lla thabeng
Ba re bahweditse noka e tletše bafihla baratha meratha
Ke batho ba bo Kgoroši a masogana a reng nka bogoroša bja tsena gae
Serogole sa Moloto –
Ke tšhaba baditi!!!

The English equivalent is:

the daughter of Mahlomotja of Moloto
the comforting clouds ...
of Kganya and Ramaredi
as they maintain: Kganya does not greet a visitor (a stranger in this case)
instead a visitor greets
of the Sekatudis of Mosibidi of Moloto
of the Mmasetlales Makiti of Hlagala
the thundering one ...
of the Raisibes water that beat Sethakga of wild animals
of the Mphahleles ...
they found a river full of water and stopped to eat
of the Kgorosis ...
of the Serogoles of Moloto
Ke tšhaba baditi (common phrase to end praise poetry)

Although the mentioning of one's gender is done when reciting *sereto* or *isiduko*, this is not the focus of this practice. Instead, the focus is on authenticating one's familial relations.

The excitement and fulfilment which accompany these practices are valuable and shared by all members of the family or tribe or clan. This feeling echoes the centrality of the community, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (you are because of others) (Sebidi 1998:62–67). For this reason, conforming to norms and standards of the community was and is paramount (Sebidi 1998:62–67). Sustaining the good and harmony within the community comes first (Anderson 2000:29–30). Honour and shame are the underlying determinants in past and modern African communities. One's actions and behaviour are judged by one's display of *ubuntu/botho*, a belief captured in the following phrase: *batho batla re eng?* This is Sesotho/Setswana for, 'What would people say?' Consequently, a family or clan or tribe would always associate the actions and behaviour of its members with certain moral attributes (Sebidi 1998:62–67).

In the post-1994 South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, the first democratically elected president of the current political order popularised the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko*. He introduced the oral praxis of an *imbongi* (praise-singer) during his inauguration as President of the Republic of South Africa and when he opened the first post-1994 parliament. It should be remembered that he was a member of the royal family in his clan. Each time he entered parliament, the male praise-singer walked before him and recited his lineage. This praxis continues to manifest during the opening of the National Parliament, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), provincial legislatures and even in municipalities.

The current president of the 6th Parliament, Cyril Ramaphosa, made history by allowing a male praise-singer from among the nation of the first inhabitants of Southern Africa, the Khoisan (IOL 2019), during the State of the Nation Address on 20 June 2019.

The first-century non-Jewish house churches context

A typical household in the first-century Mediterranean can be compared to a Batswana African household, mentioned above. Typically, affluent households consisted of master, wife, children, slaves and freed persons and their spouses and children (Lampe 1992:1). Honour and shame pervaded the first-century Mediterranean world, even affecting interpersonal relations within the household (Esler 1994:45). Batten (2009) explains that:

Mediterranean collectivist societies were strongly ocular, people had little privacy, and sources indicate general anxiety about how one was observed in public. A person's identity depended upon how he or she was perceived by the group, and honour and shame were paramount. (p. 188)

Similarly, Christians also constituted their own households (Lampe 1992:7–8). Brown (1981:7–9) avers that during the first century, the community of believers or followers of Christ met at the houses of wealthy believers who had large rooms to accommodate 10–40 people (cf. Button & Van Rensburg 2003:12).

The following observations are made regarding house churches. The original apostles and Paul founded these churches. House churches reflected several communities, which consisted of Jews only, Jews and non-Jews and non-Jews only. Several house churches existed in big cities because they could not accommodate everyone (Lampe 1992:9). Such churches provided three important functions; namely, they were a place for a communal lifestyle among believers, a point of mission expansion and a model of the universal church (Lampe 1992:8–12; Button & Van Rensburg 2003:1).

The article focuses on non-Jewish house churches Paul and coworkers established. These house churches consisted of the house owner (women and men), women, men, children and enslaved persons, as attested by 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:28.

Two examples that demonstrate typical membership constituency in non-Jewish house churches beyond the borders of Antioch were the households of Lydia (Ac 16:15, 40) and the prison guard (Ac 16:34). In addition, Pauline epistolary salutations indicate that early Christians met in houses, as seen in his salutation to different households: Priscilla and Aquila's household (Rm 16:4–5); Aristobulus's household (Rm 16:10); Narcissus's household (Rm 16:11); Priscilla and Aquila's household (I Cor 16:19); Nympha's household (Col 4:15); Caesar's household (Phlp 4:21–22); Onesiphorus's household (2 Tm 4:19) and Apphia's household (Phlm 2).

The context of the salutations to these house churches is as follows: Paul greets the believers he knew in Rome (Rm 16:1–27) as he anticipated to meet them on his way to Spain after handing the financial gift from other local churches to help poor believers in Jerusalem (cf. McClish 1996:5). The salutation in I Corinthians 16:19 formed part of Paul's letter that addressed various issues the believers asked him to deal with (Thiselton 2011:25–27). Paul's salutation in 2 Timothy 4:19 formed part of a letter to encourage Timothy to continue the work of pastoring the church in Ephesus (Aune 2020:564). The salutation in Philippians is part of a letter that highlights moral exhortation and friendship (Fee 1995:12–14). The salutation in Philemon was part of a letter to request Onesimus to accept Philemon as a different person and a brother in Christ (Levison 2010:529).

The above-mentioned salutations to house churches demonstrate the following:

1. a custom of sending greetings from one community to the other
2. Paul's custom of greeting these communities
3. how he encouraged communal relationships among these churches
4. Paul's custom of mentioning the owners of these households by name and passing his salutations to believers who meet at their homes
5. Paul's interest in naming a wife before her husband.

Arguably, these five points further show Paul's tendency to place the community at the centre of a new society. The same view is identifiable in the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* (cf. Dube 2009; LenkaBula 2008).

Comparing silent (muted) female voices in *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and the first century house churches

The article now explores gender relations underlying the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and Paul's salutations to the above-mentioned house churches.

Patriarchy is a common phenomenon among African nations. According to this social system, men are always placed above women. This tendency was also identifiable in the ancient Roman Empire (Shelton 1998:19). The question is how the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and Paul's salutations to the above-mentioned house churches affect women in the South African and the first-century non-Jewish house church communities. The framework of addressing this question will be listening to silent (muted) female voices behind the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* and behind Paul's salutations to the above-mentioned house churches.

Muting African women

A critical look behind the praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* shows that although everyone was provided the same authentication, gender relations among family, clan or tribe members demonstrate a different reality. Setswana and isiZulu proverbs and wedding songs are critical to establish the silencing of female voices behind the *ubuntu* oral praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko*.

Oduyoye (2001), Moseitse (2006), Masenya (2010), Tsanga (2011) and Chisale (2016, 2018) have done extensive work in recording the daily experiences of African women within *ubuntu* customs and practices. Evident in their respective works is the dissonance between the centrality of African community and the lived experiences of African women. This resonates with the Setswana idiom *se monate se ingwaelwa*, which means 'it is better to scratch one's sore'. The following Setswana and isiZulu idioms and wedding songs reflect some intrinsic harmful and oppressive practices.

Setswana proverbs

1. *Mosadi tshwene o jewa mabogo* [a hardworking wife is admirable].
2. *Ya etelwa pele ke e tshagadi, ya wela ka lengope* [female leadership will lead to a pit or trench].
3. *Monna nku o lelela teng* [a man should endure pain more than a woman].

4. *Monna ke selepe o a adimanwa* [a man is like an axe that can be borrowed].

Setswana wedding songs

1. *Mmangwana tlogela dipitsa tseo
mong wa tsona ke yoo o e tla.*
2. *Go nyakwa kwa Molapo ke maemo.*

English translation of songs

Leave the pots, mother-in-law;
the responsible person is coming.
Marrying a son of the Molapo provides status.

isiZulu wedding songs

1. *Umakoti ngowethu. Siyavuma
Uzosiphakele asiphakele.*
2. *Ubuhle bendod' zinkomo zayo
uziphathe kahle ntombazana.*

English translation

We acquired a bride.
Yes, it so.
She will cook and serve us food.
A handsome husband is one who pays dowry. Behave, my girl.

The above proverbs and songs concretise patriarchy (Moseitse 2006:70–71) within the community by situating the South African women at the bottom of the community's social hierarchy. In it the man is the initiator of marriage, and the woman is portrayed as the property of the husband and his family because he paid *lobola* and did her a favour by marrying her (Masenya 2003:118, 121–122). Hence, she is also expected to accept and endure performing heavy household chores and to accept her husband's promiscuous behaviour (Masenya 2003:116–1170).

Muting women within non-Jewish house churches during the early church

Paul's letters sent to the house churches are critical for hearing silent (muted) female voices within non-Jewish house churches. Because it has been established that Pauline greetings mentioned female head of households, male head of households and individuals, this section will demonstrate that two views perpetuated different praxes regarding women within non-Jewish house churches. These views, which either appraised or silenced women, are identified in the letters to the house churches in Rome (Romans), Corinth (1 Corinthians), Philippi (Philippians) and to the house church(es) in Ephesus where Paul's son, Timothy (1 Tm and 2 Tm), was the leader. The second view is noticed, namely that of silencing (muting) these valued women in the above-mentioned salutations to house churches. These women, who are called saints are also told to keep silent (1 Cor 14:34–35) and learn in submission (1 Tm 2:11–12) (Keener 1992:loc 2030).

The scripture in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 addresses less educated married women (Keener 1992:82, 83) and holds that the directive was providing relevant advice to these women without belittling them. These women usually prepared meals

for the congregants and caused some disruptions during the services of small household congregations gathered for a meal fellowship (Westfall 2016:190). Phiri (2017:102) clarifies that the lifestyle and cultural values in the city of Corinth influenced the thinking and actions of the believers in Corinth.

The context of 1 Timothy 2:11–12 shows that many congregants in Ephesus were women who were susceptible to false teachings (Keener 1992:Loc 197, 2110, 2030). Keener (1992:loc 2030) observes that “silence” normally refers to a respective attention ... not to complete muzzling’ of women. The next two sections compare the appraisal of women in the first century non-Jewish churches and in the *ubuntu* worldview.

An appraisal of women in first-century non-Jewish house churches

The appraisal of women also features in Paul’s letters to the above-mentioned house churches. The issue at hand is whether Priscilla and Junia are among those muted women in house churches. The view is that it seems so on one hand, but it does not on the other hand. The article takes the view that Paul’s salutations to some house churches mentioned above raise the stature of all women. He does this by stating their positive roles and actual involvement in the ministry. The first woman, Priscilla, appears three times in the above-mentioned house church salutations (Rm 16:4–5; 1 Cor 16:19 and 2 Tm 4:19) (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986:424–427). She was not only a house church leader. Luke drives the point home that she taught a man, Apollos, a learned Jew from Alexandria, the ‘way of God’ (Ac 18:24–26) (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986:428).

In placing Priscilla’s name before that of Aquila (Rm 16:4–5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tm 4:19), Paul challenges gender stereotypes in a counter-cultural manner. It should also be remembered that a Jewish woman could not teach a Jewish man the scriptures. Men were taught by men, but Priscilla’s actions broke down the long-standing custom, as attested to by her threefold appearance in the Pauline greetings (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1986:429). Junia’s voice is the second. She converted to Christ before Paul. These two women contradict the silencing of female voices among gentile house churches. These unsilent voices in Paul’s above-mentioned salutations to house churches show that:

- Women and men, equally, have the gift and ministry of teaching.
- Women and men are members of the body of Christ and of house churches, and they are all saints.
- Paul has inherently placed the community at the centre among house churches. In addition, Paul has, through them, pointed the equal role of women and men teaching in these house churches.
- Paul’s greetings (Rm 16:7) challenge the muting of women in house churches. He calls one of them, Junia, an apostle, in the same manner he calls her husband. This unmutes her.

The article identifies five forms of appraisals identified from Paul’s letters associated with the above-mentioned salutations. The first appraisal shows that women were leaders and actively involved in house church activities. Such an appraisal is seen in Romans 16:1–3, 7, 12 and Philippians 4:2, 3, where Paul explains their leadership roles as a deacon (*diakonos*), an apostle and fellow workers (cf. Bailey 1994:9–14). Rust and Bartchy (2006) put it succinctly as follows:

That ‘male and female’ are included in Paul’s list leads us to the following conclusions: that he saw gender as something which should no longer divide, that the structure of patriarchy has no place in the church, and that all this stands in sharp contrast to Philo’s support for the well-defined and hostile distinctions between men and women. (p. 4)

A second appraisal is seen when Paul emphasises that members of the house church constitute a unit and uses the metaphor of a human body (1 Cor 12:12–31), women and men included. This appears in the context of addressing cooperative worship in the church (Robertson & Plummer 1911). A third appraisal is noticed where the roles of Timothy’s mother and grandmother are mentioned (2 Tm 1:5). A fourth appraisal is noticed in the use of the nouns sister (Phlm 2) and brothers (Col 4:15) to promote the view that believers are siblings (Rust & Bartchy 2006:13). The fifth and final appraisal is noticed when Paul refers to all believers in house churches as saints (Rm 16:15; Phlp 4:21–22) (Schüssler Fiorenza 1986:428).

An appraisal of women in the *ubuntu* worldview

As discussed above, this article also seeks to appraise African women within the *ubuntu* worldview. The section follows Phiri’s (1996:161) argument that African women theology takes cognisance of African cosmologies and praxis.

The community and spirituality

African societies place the community at the centre (Sebidi 1998:62–67; Shutte 2001) and, at the same time, do discriminate against women (Ampofo 2004; Chisale 2016; Kambarani 2006) due to customs and beliefs traced to the supreme being or ancestors (Viriri & Mungwini 2009:40). Phiri (1996:161) connects nature and African spirituality and further explains that African women’s struggle against patriarchy is mostly linked to the Bible (Phiri 2007:12). Dube (2009) adds that people, nature and the ancestors in the community are interconnected. Siwila (2014) adds her voice by advocating for African women’s spirituality to be traced to their foremothers. These views promote LenkaBula’s (2008:378) interconnected, communal and less hierarchical transformative approach that enables the appraisal of African women as intended.

Amadiume (1997:165–166, 177, 196) mentions that African women have the control of religion or culture as one of their power bases. Phiri (2009:66–67) mentions that Oduyoye founded a network called the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, also called ‘the Circle’, to challenge

patriarchy in African societies. 'The Circle' looks like women's networks that exist among many African communities. 'The Circle' promotes the view that African women and men are not enemies but are working together in solidarity, displayed in past actions against colonialism. It can address all injustices that African women experience (Akermann 2008:272; Mama 1997). Masenya (1998:277) perceives the attitude of *ubuntu* as a means that enables all members of the community to reach the 'full humanity' God has determined. It is further observed that grandmothers and mothers play an important role in passing indigenous knowledge related to female productivity, appropriate practices and care of associated herbs (cf. Tamale 2005).

Care and contribution to the economy

Iseke and Ozduke (2011) and Nwoye (2008) posits that African woman prefer nonviolence and the ethic of care as seen in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts akin to *ubuntu* (cf. Amisi 2008:13). Chisale (2018:4–8) promotes an *ubuntu* pastoral care approach gleaned from the elderly women in KwaZulu-Natal. In addition, Amadiume (1997:102, 177, 196) mentions that African women form the backbone of the economic system and use this to influence and benefit society. Odedoyin (2021:149, 151–152) explains that the manner of raising girls among the Ikare women of Nigeria to teach them to care for the environment and people around it inculcates the women's propensity to show care. This also points to the observed tendency of women tending to lean toward care, as expressed in the Setswana idiom, '*mmangwana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng*', meaning 'a mother does all in her power to provide and care for the family'. Owusu-Ansah and Owusu-Ansah (2021) add that:

[I]n most homes in Africa, women are responsible for the sustenance of the entire household, probably not in terms of financial provision only but also in terms of providing the raw materials and cooking for the entire families. (p. 47)

Women constitute 70% of small-scale farmers in the sub-Saharan region (Owusu-Ansah & Owusu-Ansah 2021:55). They have always used their role in the subsistence economy to generate income to assist churches and their communities (Amadiume 1987:170–171). This potential is noticeable among the women of the Back to God – Assemblies of God (South Africa) and the Zimbabwean Assemblies of God, who continue to lead fundraising activities to support the two churches (Anderson 1992, 2000; Isichei 2004:221; Lephoko 2006).

In South Africa, this is evident in communal self-help schemes. The community-centred round robin saving scheme of *mogodisano* or *stokvel* and burial societies demonstrate women's economic role. *Mogodisano* or *stokvel* enables women to support each other and contribute to the economy (Matuku & Maseke 2014:1). Schulze (2016:23) mentions the existence of 24000 *stokvels* in major metropolises of South Africa, with an estimated national contribution of R200 million. *Mogodisano* or *stokvels* demonstrate that people show compassion, caring, kindness, sharing, solidarity and sacrifice through the notion

of *ubuntu* (Mnyaka & Motlhabi 2005:74). Hence, Matuku and Maseke (2014) define *stokvels* as:

[S]elf-help initiatives designed to respond to the problems of poverty and income insecurity in communities. *Stokvels* are thus a form of informal social security. (p. 17)

Conclusion

This article has compared the *ubuntu* praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko* existing among the Sesotho-Setswana context and Paul's salutations to some non-Jewish house churches. The centrality of the community features very strongly in Paul's salutations and the *ubuntu* praxis of *sereto* or *isiduko*. At face value, women and men are placed on the same (social and spiritual) level. However, the comparison showed that women experience the *sereto* or *isiduko* praxis differently. While *ubuntu's sereto* or *isiduko* practice has elevated African women, African women have also raised their concerns, noting that some African wedding songs and proverbs suppress and silence (mute) them. A similar trend is noticed among non-Jewish house churches during the early church. Paul's salutations mentioned in this article elevate women in these house churches. On the other hand, these salutations form part of Paul's letters, which silenced (muted) women in these churches. This article used Pricilla and Junia's leadership roles and involvement to suggest that Paul's salutations placed the community at the centre where women are appraised. The article discussed the prominent roles of Timothy's mother and grandmother and highlighted the metaphor of the human body mentioned in Paul's letters to show that women are an intrinsic part of the community of believers. African women theologians and other scholars also emphasise the positive role of women and thus elevate their status in the community by engaging *ubuntu* to reshape the community. The article points to the existing women's networks and that of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians to indicate how they shape the community and the role of care displayed in their contribution to the economy.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contributions

A.M.M.M. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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