

Women Fighting Religious Fundamentalism in Zimbabwe

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World March of Women militant in Zimbabwe gives an overview of the impacts of religious fundamentalism in everyday life



Religious fundamentalism is the approach of those religious groups that look for the literal interpretation of original texts or books — as the Bible, the Koran, the Torah — believing that teachings obtained from this kind of reading must be used in all social, economic and political aspects of life. Most of the followers of such religions are told to strictly adhere to the doctrine. In Africa, the mushrooming of new religious groupings led by so-called men of God has exacerbated the fundamentalist beliefs and generated into culticism. Where I come from, the population is more than 80% Christian. Be that as it may, we have got a small minority of the population that belong to other religions, such as African traditional religions, or do not have any religion. When we look at the political context of this population, we see that women constitute the biggest number in our churches, that are the most patriarchal institution than anything else.

Going to church is not being a fundamentalist, these are two different things. Going to church is an act of going to meet with other congregants of the same denomination with you on a Sunday Pray, for example, do other activities there and go back to your different places hoping to meet again on the next week. Fundamentalism is to adhere to what the holy book says without fail. More education and campaigns are needed to speak about religious fundamentalism as a bad practice.

We have seen colonialism arise in different denominations. We were colonized by the British and also by the Americans when Zimbabwe was Rhodesia. These were the first missionaries who came in here and told us to follow the Bible. We threw away all our traditional practices and started following their beliefs. Only after our independence, we saw the rising of indigenous religions. It's not bad to have indigenous churches, but they are now used as a political structure within the ruling party or used by politicians to garner support. It ceases to be a church, a religious movement, and becomes an addendum of a political party. During elections, all politicians ran to mostly indigenous churches to garner full support or to campaign for positions. These churches are not regulated, and there are some church leaders who can even be paid to mobilize, organize, and to say that everyone who comes to their church is supposed to vote for a particular party. Besides, the religious fundamentalist societies can be heavily financed by outside organizations. Local religious non-profit organizations make money by carrying out economic empowerment projects especially for women and youths. They have access to bank loans through small group livelihood programs. In these spaces, women and girls are manipulated. This is a colonialist strategy too.

Africa as a whole, not leaving out Zimbabwe, are riddled with the problem of child marriages. Men who lead these churches endorse child marriages, by saying that they have been sent by the holy spirit. So you find young girls being married off to old men. Besides, there's the issue of polygamous marriages and incest on behalf of a so-called spirituality supported by a cult culture. Bringing it closer to home, to Zimbabwe, a Christian priest has told his congregants, mainly women, that if they don't allow their husbands to have polygamous marriages, they are not holy. He was arrested when many other stories came out about the abuse, raping and even murder of women and young girls by religious leaders.

In February 2024, in Kenya, there was a case of a religious leader that said to his followers to fast, so that they could see Jesus. More than 400 bodies were exhumed and identified, most of them being women and children. The Kenyan government is still working on that. Religious fundamentalism is a scourge. And if it's not nipped in the bud, we'll have a serious crisis, politically, economically, and socially.

Be it your sister, your mother, your cousin, when they are caught, it's like they are hypnotized. Women remove themselves away from the people who do not subscribe to their beliefs. Now we have got young women who have joined another bandwagon of the young prophets. Our feminist struggle in the whole discourse is how do we make women who are living under such conditions to be able to get free. Feminism has been viewed as a radical approach pushed by women who have failed in life, as if they were seeking relevance in society. We need to deconstruct that narrative and re-interpret the meaning of feminism.

We target the women leaders in these churches. Give them more information and we can also create safe spaces for them. A lot of advocacy is needed by identifying key people or influential women in these churches. Invite them to community meetings. We also have to be patient with them because of the way they have been indoctrinated. The approach should be friendly and not attacking as we seek to understand how they operate and collect inside information.

Most of these women go to church in search of some comfort for very difficult situations with economic and social problems. At times, at a greater length, women who have nothing are promised riches, or even medical treatment and access to different resources. When women are disempowered and poor, they will run for anybody who dangles a carrot. Not even looking at the conditions of how you are being given this money. So we need to bring the young women and share the feminist ideology, especially about feminist economy. Feminist economy for young women is achievable if we create spaces where they are able to tap into any possible opportunities. These include social, economic and political freedom. We should safeguard on exploitation and work towards social justice and commit to preserve the environment. We should encourage self-reliance so that we build confidence and build resilience.

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P.-S.

- Capire. 24/07/2024 :
<https://capiremov.org/en/analysis/women-fighting-religious-fundamentalism-in-zimbabwe/>

- This article was written by a militant of the World March of Women Zimbabwe that will not be

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