

Abuse, power and discourse in the public trial of Timothy Omotoso

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Dates:

Received: 21 Apr. 2021

Accepted: 09 Feb. 2022

Published: 17 May 2022

How to cite this article:

Kgatle, M.S. & Frahm-Arp, M., 2022, 'Abuse, power and discourse in the public trial of Timothy Omotoso', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), a2270. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2270>

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Exposure of gender-based violence (GBV) has recently received attention from both scholars and the public. However, GBV within Christian discourse, and specifically as it occurs among pastors of the new Prophetic Pentecostal Churches (PPC), is yet to be explored in detail. This article begins to address this research gap by highlighting the difficulty of proving sexual and spiritual abuse in a secular court of law, as shown in the public trial of Timothy Omotoso. The study uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the methodology to examine aspects of the trial and the social media discourse commenting on the trial. In doing so, the article highlights three different discourses surrounding the Zondi trial, namely the discourse of GBV in Pentecostalism; the secular legal discourse and how it reshapes faith, spirituality and the abuse of believers; and the public trial victims endure on social media if they chose to come forward to testify against a church leader. By examining these discourses, the study shows how each of these need to be taken seriously and should inform pastoral care given to victims who experienced GBV by Christian leaders. Using the findings from Zondi's testimony, this article proposes a framework of pastoral care that can support people who experience GBV within a Christian context and consider bringing their abusers to trial.

Interdisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article is an interface between GBV and Pentecostalism in a public trial of Timothy Omotoso through CDA. The article proposes a pastoral care as a remedy for those undergoing trauma of abuse.

Keywords: abuse; power; Timothy Omotoso; Cheryl Zondi, critical discourse analysis; Pentecostalism.

Introduction

On 20 April 2017, at Port Elizabeth International Airport, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation known as HAWKS arrested Timothy Omotoso on charges of rape and human trafficking. At the time, Omotoso was a Nigerian pastor working in South Africa and the leader of the Jesus Dominion International (JDI). Before his arrest, he was well-known in South African Pentecostal circles and regarded as a role model by his congregation. On 08 October 2018, Omotoso was brought to trial, and Cheryl Zondi was a key witness claiming that he had repeatedly forced her to have sexual intercourse with him when she was a 14-year-old minor and member of JDI. During 2018, Omotoso and his two co-accused also faced several counts of racketeering, rape and sexual harassment, including the sexual grooming of about 30 other young women and girls. The state trial brought against Omotoso, broadcast live on national television (TV) in the interest of public information, was held in the Port Elizabeth high court. Much has been written about this trial by scholars (see Banda 2020; Kobo 2019; Ramantswana 2019), and it was extensively analysed by journalists in print media (Maphanga 2019; Qukula 2018). While the trial was taking place, frenzied debates over every aspect of the trial were taking place on social media, creating a double trial – the legal trial, taking place in the courtroom and the public trial, taking place on social media.

This article focuses on two extracts from the trial in which Zondi testified against Omotoso. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), the article highlights three different discourses and the power dynamics of these discourses that surrounded the Omotoso trial. Firstly, it was the discourse of gender-based violence (GBV) in Pentecostalism focusing on the role of the good Christian women and what behaviour is deemed to be acceptable for a pastor in Prophetic Pentecostal Churches (PPC). The second was the secular legal discourse in the courtroom. Within this discourse how the advocate used rhetorical power to re-shape ignored faith, spirituality and the abuse of believers; how Zondi exercised power in using this secular legal discourse to expose the physical, spiritual and emotional abuse of a church leader within a particular church; and how the legal process empowers attorneys to attack people's characters;

ask intimate questions that required them to relive a trauma; and raise suspicions about people's memories, psychological state and motives. Thirdly, it was the public trial on social media where some people supported Zondi and others villainised her as they often held her accountable to a different standard of faith or belief in the church and the pastor, not set by the legal system.

The purpose of this study was to offer a framework for pastoral care of victims of sexual abuse by Christian leaders. The Zondi testimony highlights the need for pastoral care to be provided to victims to help them cope with the trauma of legally prosecuting their perpetrators, which in the contemporary context means dealing both with the social media fall-out they may encounter and with the brutal legal system. The harrowing nature of a legal trial is one of the reasons why very few people who are sexually abused in a society at large or by leaders in Pentecostal churches report the abuse they suffer.

This article begins with an overview of the key elements of the trial and the JDI church. It then provides an overview of CDA as the methodology used in this article. Critical discourse analysis as outlined by Van Dijk (1993) and Fairclough and Wodak (1997) is used in this article to analyse a section of Zondi's testimony. Discourse analysis is focused on the role of language to shape institutions, power and ideology, thereby influencing how people live in and understand their social situatedness (Parker 1992). Critical discourse analysis explores language used in a social context focusing on the message of those who have the power, opportunity and means to use it (Van Dijk 1993). As such, CDA is understood as language that has a 'social practice' (Fairclough & Wodak 1997:258). Halliday 'extends the scope of CDA to cover the effects of power in discourse produced in the overall context of language use' (Halliday in Hamrita 2016:7).

Critical discourse analysis is focused on examining short pieces of spoken text analysing the words, silences and phrasing used to establish power, deconstruct power or perpetuate power. Although much of the research using CDA is about showing how people with power use language to establish, perpetuate and solidify their power, this article argues that Zondi uses language to establish her own power within this trial and not position herself as a helpless victim.

The rest of the article is divided into four sections. It first looks at as the discourse on women and GBV in PPC churches, and how women and GBV are understood in these churches and society. The second is the legal discourse and how it re-shapes faith, spirituality and the abuse of believers. The third is the discourse about PPC churches and faith, in general, in the social media. The final section of the article examines what framework of pastoral care needs to be established in churches in order to support people who experience GBV within a Christian context and consider bringing their abusers to trial.

The Omotoso trial and Jesus Dominion International Church

The first witness in the trial of Omotoso, Cheryl Zondi, now 22 years old, took the stand at the Eastern Cape High Court in October 2018 and testified that she was sexually abused by Omotoso when she was 14 years old (Qukula 2018:1). The statistics on GBV in South Africa are shocking, about 53 293 sexual offences were reported to police between 2019 and 2020. This means that about 146 women are abused daily, with an average of 116 instances of rape occurring daily. In the same reporting year, it was discovered that about 2695 women were murdered, which means that one woman was murdered every three hours (Mail & Guardian 2020). For over 20 years, South Africa has annually had one of the highest incidence rates of GBV in the world (Mail & Guardian 2020). However, few women bring their perpetrators to trial largely because the legal system is not victim centred and does not offer victims a safe space to present the abuse they endured (Chinnian & Petersen 2020). Zondi testified that she was abused by Omotoso during a trip when they attended a church meeting in Umhlanga, KwaZulu-Natal. According to her testimony, she was invited to stay at his Umhlanga home, where between 20 and 30 other girls lived (Qukula 2018:1). Zondi was also willing to continue to testify even when the judge presiding over her case recused himself, citing that the guest house accommodating the witnesses belonged to his wife, which meant he may have had access to the witnesses outside the courtroom. The change of judge meant that Cheryl would have to start all over again in her testimony; yet, she is adamant that she will go through the pain of a second trial (Maphanga 2019:1).

Jesus Dominion International is part of the growing number of new PPC in Africa. These churches are different from various other streams of Pentecostalism such as Classical Pentecostalism, African Initiated Churches and the Charismatic movement. In Africa PPCs are known for their new form of prophetism; embracing prophetic titles, use of prophetic objects in healing and deliverance, prophetic consultations and prophetic miracles (see Kgatle 2021). There are other forms of abuses in these churches other than the abuse of women. These churches are referred to as cults by several scholars because they often include spiritual and psychological manipulation of the congregation by the leaders, known as 'Men of God' whose words and deeds cannot be questioned (Kobo 2019).

Gender-based violence in Pentecostal churches

What is striking in this trial is the lack of reference to spiritual powers and Zondi uses a very different discourse to deal with her sexual abuse than most victims of GBV in Pentecostal type churches. What has been observed in various PPCs and other Pentecostal type churches is women coming forward

and framing the GBV they endured as acts of witchcraft and the work of Satan. The work of Van de Kamp (2016) examining PPC in Mozambique, and Van Wyk (2014) and Badstuebner (2003) in South Africa shows that women often use the rhetoric of witchcraft and deliverance from witchcraft to reframe their experiences of sexual abuse. Many young black women in South Africa, who make up the most vulnerable and disempowered group in the country, use the discourse of witchcraft possession and deliverance to speak about sexual abuse in such a way that they reframe themselves as witches who are making men perform violent sexual acts. Badstuebner (2003) showed how in church services young black women who have been sexually abused both in church contexts and outside of churches tell how they became witches and used witchcraft to bring about destruction and mayhem in the lives of people. They reframe their abuse as being something they had control over because they were witches causing this socially destructive behaviour. Rather than understanding themselves as victims who were completely vulnerable and powerless, they reframe themselves as being witches who were possessed by evil spirits and they made men perform evil acts. This frames the women as being in power and not powerless, it also exonerates men, as they were being controlled by the evil spirits of the women, rather than that they need to take responsibility for what they have performed. The research of Badstuebner (2003) showed that women speak of themselves as having been possessed and then confess to their witchcraft and are delivered from this possession, usually by prophets in a different church to the one they had been involved in while they were possessed.

In a somewhat different vein, the research carried out by Frahm-Arp (2015) into women in Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCC) and the Zionist Christian Church in South Africa found that when women spoke of abuse that they experienced at the hands of husbands, fathers or boyfriends they were told by other women that they had to pray for the evil spirit to leave these men. The men themselves were not at fault. The reason why men were abusing women was because the devil had taken hold of them, usually through some form of witchcraft, and the 'good Christian woman' prayed the evil of anger, drugs, alcohol or violence out of their abusers. In this discourse, women are made to feel that it was their fault that they were being abused (Frahm-Arp 2015). If they had more faith and prayed better the evil would be exorcised out of their abusers. However, at the same time, this discourse provides women the power to do something about their abuse, because through prayer they have the power to drive out evil.

The third aspect in this wider Pentecostal Christian discourse on GBV is the contradictory rhetoric on gender in many of the PPC. On the one hand, these churches embrace gender inclusivity (Blasco 2012:3), as most of them in South Africa believed in the participation of women in liturgy and allowed women to occupy positions of leadership in the church (Drogus 2018:55). But, within this paradigm men are

always in authority over women because the leaders of these churches are all men who are very often referred to as Daddy. Daddy has a double meaning – both from Jesus referring to God as Abba often translated as Daddy and the more sexualised meaning of Daddy as in Sugar-Daddy. In reference to the trial, Nentolozo in ENCA's (2018) YouTube video wrote 'that's where the problem starts when call a man that u just redomlyknw with the words #DADDY#'. Many PCC are at the forefront of women abuse in the form of sexual harassment and rape cases, especially in Africa (Agazue 2016; Kgatle 2019, 2021). According to Agazue (2016:10), pastors touch women inappropriately to convince 'the female victims that the sex acts will save them from being possessed by an evil spirit or simply enable them to fulfil the will of God'. Thus, women including those who are married, engage in sexual intercourse with their pastors in the hope that the will of God will be done in their lives. The women place enormous trust in these men of God and believe they are infallible, and as such, they undress in front of their pastors and allow their pastors to touch them inappropriately, in the name of prayer or getting help (Maluleke 2015:35). Although this is sexual harassment and a violation of human rights and degradation of the value and status of women in a society, many women who have gone through this are afraid to come out because they view their pastors as 'men of God'. Many people fear what the 'men of God' will do to them, how the church community will reject them and how they will not be good Christians. In these churches, women who face challenges in their marriages and families believe that whatever the pastor does in faith will bring positive change in their lives (Kgatle 2019:121). A third reason why women fail to accuse their abusers publicly is because of the scorn they fear from people outside the churches. Mangi highlighted this sentiment of scorn on the social media chat stream when he said, 'Just don't get why these girls take themselves to these pastors and suddenly believe they are dealing with a holy man' (see ENCA 2018). Statements like this blame the victims for being 'stupid' enough to go to these churches and believe in these '[m]en of God'. If the victims were less gullible, they would not put themselves in these positions and so it is actually the fault of the women that they are abused.

A fourth element of this discourse is the conviction of followers that their 'Men of God' or 'Daddy' is invincible and can do no wrong. This is most clearly expressed by followers of JDI who on hearing Zondi's testimony or convinced their leader is innocent. From H&Kids 'We love you daddy why must they say that [negative things about the pastor]' (see ENCA 2018) Others such as Mr S.M.S. Mchunu expressed their solidarity with Omotoso saying: 'My Daddy my Daddy' followed by three praying hand emojis (ENCA 2018). Perpetuating the degradation of women in PPC churches, a great supporter of Omotoso in the online chat, someone called 'African Family', wrote 'the only thing worse than patriarchy is matriarchy ... it has failed everywhere. African women need to stop mimicking the rhetoric of western women' (see ENCA 2018).

The legal trial

Zondi chose to bring her accusations of sexual abuse by Omotoso, her spiritual leader and the prophet-pastor of the JDI church to a legal court so that he could be convicted according to the secular law.

We begin our analysis of the legal aspect of this trial with an extract from the trial where Doberman (Omotoso's advocate) is trying to discredit Zondi by saying that she is lying about the number of, and nature of, sexual encounters she had with the accused. Discrediting Zondi was Doberman's key tactic, and therefore, this one example enables us to provide a rich analysis of the discourse of the trial:

Doberman: 'So why didn't you mention this to the prosecutor?' (this being the multiple times Zondi said Omotoso raped her, which she had not disclosed in her statement but then claimed in the trial).

Zondi: 'I don't remember.'

Doberman: 'So you mentioned it to the HAWKS was this when they were taking down your statement?'

Zondi: 'This is when I was engaging with them.'

Doberman: 'Did you mention it when they were taking down your statements ma'am?'

Zondi: 'No.'

Doberman: 'So how come it didn't come to mind then. It had come to mind previously when you were engaging with them?'

Zondi: 'The mind has a funny way of doing its own thing, doesn't it?'

Doberman: 'So you forgot to mention it?'

Zondi: 'I am saying it didn't come to mind.'

Doberman: 'Isn't that the same thing?'

Zondi: 'You can interpret it as you see fit, Sir.'

Doberman: 'I want to put it to you that the reason why you didn't mention it is that it never happened that is why you never mentioned it.'

Zondi: 'Well as this case proceeds we will see about that.'

Zondi goes to great lengths, as in the above-mentioned extract, to present herself as a logical, rational intelligent woman. The above extract is a typical engagement between Zondi and Doberman. One of the most striking aspects of this trial was how Zondi exercises a high degree of power by remaining calm and rational and continuously reframing Doberman's, at times veiled, and at times very blatant accusations. For example, in the sentence 'You can interpret it as you see fit, Sir', she does not concede to his views but throws back at the advocate the uncertainty of why she did not disclose episodes of sexual abuse in her statement to the police and only revealed them in court. When Doberman accuses her of lying and thereby discrediting her and the case at large, she answers confidently '[w]ell as this case proceeds, we will see about that'. She does not give in to his view but holds her own and ends the encounter with a challenge to him and his view.

'The mind has a funny way of doing its own thing, doesn't it' is an example of her overall claim that she was psychologically manipulated and her mind did 'funny' things. She expresses this not as her own weakness but as the fault of Omotoso and uses it to strengthen her own case. She uses this repeatedly to drive home her point that her actions must be seen as someone who was being psychologically manipulated. In doing so, she exercises power because she reframes all her actions during her time with Omotoso as being the result of his manipulation and accuses him not only of raping her but also incapacitating her through psychological manipulation.

Zondi shares her experience of abuse of the spiritual and mystical powers that dominate the Pentecostal discourse on GBV. She also strips Omotoso of any recourse to claiming he was overcome by evil and using witchcraft or the devil as an excuse for his behaviour. Zondi came out and testified against a man who had been her pastor when many people discouraged her from standing up in fear of insulting the man of God. Zondi's move to seek legal retribution shows how she not only overcame all the fear and trauma women normally associated with laying a charge against their abusers but also overcame the religious discourse in which she had grown up. The testimony of Cheryl Zondi in the Omotoso trial makes it clear that pastorally victims of GBV in churches need counselling and guidance to let go of the discourses of evil and witchcraft prevalent in some Pentecostal churches before they can begin to think about bringing their perpetrators to justice in the legal system.

While Zondi does not enter a discourse of evil and Satanism ensuring that Omotoso's actions cannot be considered as possession by spiritual and mystical powers, the role of faith and belief is central to this case. There were several injustices towards the victims in the trial of Omotoso. Two injustices that are most pertinent to this discussion are, firstly, the trial did not take place in a Sexual Offences Court. This is because the Sexual Offences Court was disbanded and now victims of sexual offences have to provide testimonies in a normal court, which is problematic because it does not provide a safe space or victim-centred approach to the legal system (Chinnian & Petersen 2020). The second injustice is that the legal system makes no provision for spiritual abuse as a legal offense, even when it is spiritual abuse that lies at the heart of Zondi's traumatic experience.

Doberman, exercising his position of power as the defence attorney, tries to get Zondi to admit that in fact she wanted sexual relations with Omotoso. He does this by showing that Zondi took a long time to escape and never actually asked Omotoso to stop abusing her, thereby consenting to the sexual encounters, which cannot be regarded as instances of rape. Throughout the trial, Doberman tried to put Zondi on trial by trying to establish her as a liar, who was not raped but willingly had sexual relations with Omotoso and now regrets her actions. Zondi does not let him overwhelm her but states that Doberman clearly has

no understanding of the psychological impact of trauma, shown in the given extract and she did not have the means to escape, which is why she did not leave Omotoso and the house earlier. Zondi explained how Omotoso spoke to her and why she allowed him to sexually abuse her, as shown in the given extract from the trial. Here, Zondi recalls a conversation with Omotoso:

‘Cheryl you know the things you need to do to me. You know what you must do for me. And you’re not doing that. God is not going to be pleased with you and I told you before, you’re 19 now, your punishment is going to be double. Do you want to walk the streets and take your clothes off? Do you want to lose your mind? That’s exactly what’s gonna happen.’

This kind of assertion is informed by how men such as Omotoso present themselves as powerful men of God. He is presenting himself as untouchable. In his sermons he is known for quoting the text ‘touch not the anointed’ (Psalm 105:15), telling members not to question him. In addition, as an older man speaking to a young lady, he is also patriarchal and ageist. We also need to understand Omotoso as the church founder having started the JDI and other youth groups such as Youth Empowerment Project (YEP). In addition, Omotoso used to own the Ancient of Days Broadcasting Network (ADBN) that used to broadcast his services on TV (see Kgatle 2021). Thus, men such as Omotoso have a tendency to present themselves as victors and others as victims because of which they are in their churches, what they own on a personal level and taking advantage of systemic imbalances in a society. All these point to the high degree of power Omotoso exercised over his followers, including Zondi, while she was a member of his church.

The legal discourse has the power to break, invade and manipulate witnesses. In a courtroom, the attorneys, advocates and judge speak from a position of power, defendants and witnesses are by the nature of the court system always vulnerable and largely powerless. Within this system, the ‘currency’ is provable facts. The problem with rhetoric, what people say and how they say it, is that while psychology and analytical methods like CDA and discourse analysis show the impact and power of words to control, manipulate and create hegemonic systems of power, these are extremely hard to prove as evidence. As pointed out by Kobo (2019), Omotoso was a cult leader and Zondi, like so many other women, fell into his hegemonic discourse of sexuality and sexual relationships to spiritual growth, closeness to God and miracles. In the given extract, we see how Zondi tries to explain the power Omotoso had over her. During the trial, Zondi tries to frame Omotoso as a manipulative man who used the vulnerability and naivety of a young girl to manipulate her knowingly and willingly. In her trial, she actively stays away from the patriarchal Christian discourse that exonerates so many abusers by claiming they are possessed by evil. Zondi does not claim that Omotoso was possessed by evil, and therefore, he was fully aware and conscious of what he is doing. In fact, as in the given statement, Zondi shows that Omotoso used religion and faith to manipulate his followers.

The given extract clearly shows how Omotoso used and shaped the Christian discourse of sexuality to please God, which is prevalent in some PPCs as shown by Maluleke (2015) and Kgatle (2019). Omotoso’s threat is that if Zondi refuses to satisfy his sexual desires, she will lose her mind and wander in the streets as a helpless, insane woman. In other words, if she does not do as he asks, God will punish her. Zondi’s case rests on this claim that Omotoso was psychologically manipulating her all the time and part of that manipulation was using spiritual threats such as God punishing her and making her insane. Kobo (2019) argued that this manipulation is part of the cult-like nature of JDI. The Zondi testimony is a stark reminder of how difficult it is to bring spirituality and religious abuses to trial in a secular court of law. When supporting the victims of GBV in churches, much pastoral attention needs to be provided to victims to help them find ways to frame their abuse in such a way that a court of law can see the evidence of that abuse. Zondi’s testimony shows how the legal system has no sympathy for spiritual abuse, which lies at the heart of the abuse suffered by victims of GBV in churches. Pastorally Christians supporting such victims need to offer a particular form of support and counselling to these victims that address the core of their abuse.

A social media trial

In this article, we have shown how harrowing the legal process was for Zondi. However, this was only one part of what she was going through. While the trial was taking place an online chat commentary was going on with supports of Zondi commenting on how brave she was, how well-spoken she was even how beautiful she looked. Many Christians derided JDI and Omotoso, claiming that he was a false prophet and not Christian. The overwhelming comment from Christians, who were not members of JDI, was that they were praying for Cheryl and supporting her in spirit. People sympathised with her and defended her, for example, Sylvia Dlamini wrote ‘she was traumatised and threatened you fool’ (see ENCA 2018). Solomon Dube on the social media chat aptly sums up this injustice by asking ‘why do we have to put our women through this? She is a victim!!!’ (ENCA 2018). This sentiment is echoed in the social media commentary and expressed by Kagiso Molimi who says, ‘[h]onestly speaking Omotoso is a Satanist, you can tell by how this young lady fears him’ (see ENCA 2018). Molimi is perpetuating the discourse of evil men being possessed by Satan or being Satan himself, rather than rational men who know what they are doing. Welcome summed up this key injustice of the trial when he wrote on the social media chat ‘it is unfortunate that this case is being dealt with physically and not spiritually, emotionally and intellectually’ (ENCA 2018).

While there was support for Zondi, there was also vicious slander against Cheryl, claiming that she was just doing it for the money, for attention, and that she was making the whole thing up. An organisation called the Christians of South Africa (COSA) issued a statement to undermine Zondi.

According to the organisation, she was not a victim of rape but rather a perpetrator herself, making false accusations against Omotoso. The organisation accused her of being a 'slay queen' and raising money in the name of being a victim of crime. Christians of South Africa adamantly maintained that the Cheryl Zondi Foundation (CZF) was started to raise funds to take care of Cheryl's lavish lifestyle (Raahil 2019:1).

On social media people accused her of just being a very good actress. Eazy-Kay Africa maintained that 'she's too well rehearsed she loving the attention definitely watches a lot of saopiesie suit's lol yes it happened but mmm she suspicious' (see ENCA 2018). Omotoso's followers lambast Zondi for this. A very vocal supporter of the prophet calling themselves 'African family' said 'the psychological hold stuff is nonsense. Women whip that good stuff on men all the time and have psychological holds. Nobody gets concerned about that' (ENCA 2018). This speaks to what Kobo (2019) calls the patriarchal celebrity status of male leaders in PPC, which whipped up support for their leader and publicly discredited Zondi.

Others like Bongani Nhlapo suggested the case had nothing to do with faith and that:

[T]his case is a result of a sex deal done wrong ... she doesn't want to admit it ... because it will compromise her ... and taking advantage of abusing her rights. (ENCA 2018:1)

Others such as Ousmane Barry were adamant that 'she is lying' (ENCA 2018), and Za Hla claimed that 'this girl is getting paid for this' (see ENCA 2018). Her accusations of manipulation rattled many people in the social media chat. Bele, for example, said she was just 'using trauma as an excuse' (ENCA 2018). He went on to say that 'Lol its not like he hold her hostage she went there at the 1st place she said she knew wat was gon go down!' This reaction shows how difficult it was for Zondi to convince people she was being manipulated and how many people did not accept this argument, believing that a 'Man of God' could not possibly manipulate people.

This was a harrowing trial, in which the victim had to relive every aspect of her abuse. At one stage, the defence attorney even asked her to comment on how large the defendant's genitals were and how far he had penetrated her. While going through such traumatic experience, she has to deal with the relentless social media commentary and slander. Victims of GBV in churches not only need pastoral care and counselling in coping with a court case if they lay charges against their abusers but, if the abusers are leaders in churches they need pastoral care and counselling in coping with the inevitable social media storm this will induce. This article highlights the need for a new type of pastoral care to be given to victims of GBV in churches. In the last section of this article, we begin to unpack key elements of what this care should entail.

Pastoral care for those on trial on social media

Through this trial, we learn that victims of GBV in churches need a particular type of support. From the perspective of

pastoral theology, much more work needs to be carried out to understand how we should meaningfully help victims of sexual abuse in churches come forward and lay a criminal charge against their abusers. Within the Christian tradition, in general, and Pentecostal tradition, in particular, women are still in fear of exposing their pastors or any other perpetrator of GBV. This article offers four suggestions: The first is to find ways to assure victims that their abuse was not divinely inspired, is not biblical and is not part of acceptable Christian doctrine. This will likely be a long and difficult process, and more research needs to be carried out on how pastoral carers and counsellors should do this. However, a starting point would be to request women to open to these pastoral carers and counsellors so that discourses can begin for reporting abuse.

Secondly, victims of GBV in churches need to be provided the tools to reframe their understanding of the '[m]en of God' who abused them. They need to begin to understand that these men are part of a larger heretical cult of the divine 'man of God' based on destructive patriarchal practices, in which the abuse of women is constructed as a spiritual blessing. As Zondi says in her testimony she was told that if she did not please the 'Man of God' she would be cursed by God and lose her mind finding herself walking naked in the streets. Therefore, women need to be conscientised that these 'man of God' even though they are gifted in many aspects of Christian ministry in deliverance and prophecy, this does not make them immune to become sexual offenders. In simple terms, whether 'man of God', any man can become a perpetrator of GBV. Therefore, in counselling sessions and other deliverance encounters, pastors should not be allowed to be alone with women because they can become vulnerable.

Once victims have been helped to understand the above two deeply corrupt 'theologies' practised in these cult churches they might be ready to begin contemplating taking legal action. The trial of Omotoso and the courage of Zondi are a symbol of hope. As Kamdazit in the social media chat said, '[h]opefully she will inspire more victims to come forward' (see ENCA 2018). However, this trial showed that not only will a victim have to endure legal cross-examination they will also have to present their abuse in terms of physical evidence in a legal system that gives little or no credence to spiritual abuse and manipulation. The spiritual abuse at the root of these crimes, which manipulated women into becoming victims of sexual abuse, will not be taken seriously in a court of law. The psychological impact of this is profound and victims of GBV in churches will need particular care and support to deal with this. Hence, churches are required to have their own processes of healing for victims of GBV. It is important for churches such as JDI to become part of the broader Christian community so that when challenges like GBV happen, the corporate body of Christ can bring healing and counselling.

The fourth area of pastoral care needed by victims of GBV in churches is support in dealing with the social

media abuse they will endure if they lay charges against the cult leaders who abused them. The Zondi trial highlights how members of cult Pentecostal churches can go to great lengths to defend their leaders and discredit victims of GBV in churches who accuse their '[m]an of God' of wrong doing. The challenge is that even fellow women would go to great length of supporting the alleged perpetrators of GBV instead of supporting the victim. Therefore, there is a need for a pastoral care that does not only deal with GBV alone but also the suppression of women when they come out to report GBV. This calls for the availability or presence of counsellors and carers in different social media platforms where their voices can be heard against perpetrators of GBV. In other words, the society should not only hear the voices of those supporting perpetrators but the voices of victims' defenders should be heard as well. In this way, victims will feel supported and encouraged to continue to report other crimes as well.

Conclusion

This article does not comment on whether Omotoso is ultimately guilty, nor on the merits or failings of the legal system, the attorneys or the judge, nor does it engage with the discourses about the trial in the tradition media. Neither does it deal with several other debates about the Pentecostalism, Christianity, JDI or the fact that some people on the social media chat felt that God should be on trial. One of the most verbal proponents of this was NtobekoMbuyisa who wrote that the abuse Zondi suffered is proof that God is not great. Ntobeko Mbuyisa asks '[w]hat did God do about this? Tell me' (ENCA 2018). Thulane Molefe summed up the feeling of many who were 'defending' God by saying: 'what is God doing now about this? Don't you think he has given this girl strength and ability to stand' (ENCA 2018).

This study shows that besides all the normal harrowing challenges that victims of GBV face when trying to get their perpetrators convicted, women who are victims of GBV by leaders of churches face added challenges and need a particular type of pastoral care, counselling, and support. Using CDA to analyse aspects of the Omotoso trial where Zondi provided evidence and the social media commentary on this aspect of the trial, we have been able to highlight four areas of pastoral care, counselling and support needed by these victims. The first is to help victims unpack the Pentecostal discourse on GBV that emerged during the trial but which Zondi did not engage with. The power Zondi exercised in this trial was her ability to frame her abuse in the language of secular psychology and not enter the Pentecostal discourse.

In the Pentecostal GBV discourse, there are generally three tropes. The first is that men who abuse women do so because they are filled with evil spirits or the devil and the women they abused should pray the evil out of these men so that they will stop abusing them. This is sometimes

framed as the victim being responsible for their abuse because they did not pray hard enough for their abusers. The second is a trope in which young women who have experienced GBV reframe their abuse as being orchestrated by them while they were witches who made men abuse seemingly helpless girls and young women. The third trope is that of the anointed 'Man of God' who cannot do any wrong. In this discourse, sexual abuse is understood as the pastors using sexual intercourse to open women up to receive miracles, healing and blessings from God. The men are not abusing the women at all but rather blessing and helping them spiritually. By not engaging with any of these tropes, but rather dealing with her abuser in a secular court of law, Zondi trips Omotoso of power because the trial takes place in a secular setting, in which the above rhetorical tropes are not acceptable.

This article shows that victims of GBV at the hands of a church leader first need to be helped to understand the Christian heresies that lie at the heart of all three of these positions or tropes. Secondly, they need to be provided the tools to reframe their abuse for what it is – GBV in the name of spiritual blessing. Only once they have done this, they will be able to address questions of legal prosecution and justice according to a secular court of law. Cheryl Zondi shows that if victims can step out of this Pentecostal discourse on GBV, they will disempower their abusers because they can no longer hide behind false theologies that justify abuse.

The third recommendation is that victims of GBV need prolonged counselling and support to prepare for and endure the harrowing experience of testifying to GBV in a court of law. This article highlights that victims of violence by Christian leaders will have to find ways to prove their abuse in a secular legal system that does not take spiritual manipulation and abuse seriously. Therefore, victims need to be prepared to deal with the reality that their spiritual suffering will not be addressed, recognised or acknowledged. The fourth recommendation of this article is that victims of GBV at the hands of church leaders need to be provided coaching and support to deal with the social media rhetoric that will follow any legal trial of a church leader.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology for the support provided in conducting this research.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

M.S.K. contributed on Pentecostalism and M.F.-A. on the gender-based violence section.

Ethical considerations

The ethical clearance was issued by the University of South Africa, College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee. 2019-CHS-90343018-Dept. July 2019.

Funding information

This study was financially supported by the University of South Africa.

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 authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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