

Lotta Gammelin, 'We are In-Between.' Health-Seeking, Gender and Authority in a Charismatic Church in Mbeya, Tanzania. Lund: Lund University 2023.

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The work of Lotta Gammelin is a result of research conducted at the International Church for Healing and Glory (ICHG) between 2012 and 2014. In the *First and Second Chapters*, the author assumed that women experienced multiple illnesses resulting from natural causes, colonial neoliberalism and cultural systems informed by patriarch and indecisive Christian Charismatic ideals (pp. 42-53). The failure of medical treatment and traditional medicine makes people, especially women, powerless, and they seek alternative faith-healing to preachers like Samson Mkondo (pp. 54-56).

The *Third and Fourth Chapters* unveil the theological thinking of Prophet Samson Mkondo, whose career is influenced by traditional beliefs and Roman Catholic and Pentecostal practices. Mkondo has edified his theology of “*the word of the prophet*”, repeatedly confessing to having received it from God (pp. 70-71). With this authority, Mkondo prays and launches spiritual warfare to destroy spirit-possessed and poverty-ridden, the majority being women who come to his place [a hospital] (pp. 70-80). These people failed to find lasting

solutions from biomedicine, traditional medicine, pastoral care and services provided by mainstream churches. Therefore, those seeking healing services are found to be in between denial of biomedical and traditional cures and faith healing, and they are ambivalently appealing to both practices (p. 92).

Because of competition, as described in Chapter Five, the self-made prophet maintains his authority by sarcastically degrading the services of established churches, the Roman Catholic, Moravian, Lutheran, Anglican and Pentecostal Churches, despite being baptised Catholic and born-again Pentecostal. He becomes angry when his family members do not recognise his authority, when sick people object to his prayers and service or when people gossip about his immorality (pp. 96-98). He makes fun of the gossip and emphasises his given power through rings embodying his sonship to God, his word recognised by God, his rule over many disciples, his kingship, and priesthood authorities (pp. 107-121). In his mandate, Mkondo is a patron of everything; his actions are divinely installed, and his pastoral care for the afflicted is God's given for the service of all who come to his place [hospital] (p.121).

In *Chapter Six*, Gammelín tries to disclose the embodiment of gender in the becoming ill Mkondo's clients and their healing. Stories from participants about infertility and loss of life are considered to be caused by close kin-witches and evil spirits [from the underworld] that occupy their wombs, disturb marriages, and take away their power/energy to act (pp. 127-129). Mkondo

takes the role of a life-giver by praying for fertility like traditional religious priests/kings who did this in a pre-Christian context (pp. 129-136).

Lack of agency is caused by falling ill (failed motherhood – spirit-occupied wombs) and being possessed by the spirits of laziness, drunkards, exploitation of the underworld, and being used for the profit of someone else in economic production (pp. 136-142). The prayers and sermons at ICHG aim to deliver these yawning souls from the yokes of the evil spirits, creatures in the underworld, and the witches who exploit these souls (p. 143). In restoring moral agency, wrongdoing and misfortune (in a competitive neo-liberalized world) are first scapegoated to the embodiment of spirit possession and avoidance of personal confession of sins (pp. 143-145). Thus, ICHG becomes an attractive space against established churches, which emphasise repentance and introspective consciousness, and against other Pentecostal Churches, which emphasise good morality from born-again Christians.

In *Chapter Seven*, the author discovered how deliverance ministry through prayers and preaching at ICHG shaped “gendered values.” In the ICHG, the prayers and sermons pointed out towards emancipating a woman from the (evil) spirit-possessed body to ideals of motherhood, an urban working woman who beautifies herself and cares for her husband and family (p. 155). However, unlike ideals propagated by traditional Pentecostal Churches on positive moral values of a born-again man, Mkondo seems to allow “men... to be pleased

by their wives, having extra-marital relationships with young and beautiful women, paying for sex, having the freedom to spend their income in bars instead of taking it to their wives to feed the family...” (p. 159). Women are looked upon as objects of men, who are allowed to have extramarital relations, while women are bound to submit and serve men’s desires.

However, this study shows that despite the stigma of infertility and lack of motherhood-caring traits imposed on women by Mkondo, they still seek healing at ICHG (pp. 159-161). By being publicly unruly and fighting against the spirit posing them and against the suffering and agony by crying and falling into a trance, the prayers and the prophet's word make them find calmness, integrity, and purity (pp. 163-167).

In *Chapter Eight*, the author gives a summative conclusion of the book (pp. 168-173). The in-between situation of healing seekers, especially women at the ICHG, is that they find deliverance through prayers and sermons and regain their agency through unruly actions of trance, falling, and crying. However, the same context inculcates in them a sense of rejuvenating “gendered [negative] values” when the same woman is still expected to maintain submissive behaviour to a man.

This book has excellently exhibited another side of African Self-Initiated Charismatic Churches. The author has discovered that churches like ICHG create a space of hope to make women violently come to public space and fight against their claimed spirit-possessed bodies to attain their human dignity and well-being. This space is

not provided by established churches where a Christian is asked to repent of sins and hence continue in a pessimistic and depressing life. It is plausible in this study that members from mainstream churches, especially women would remain prey to the manipulation of these self-made churches if these churches do not address the needs of the majority of women living in oppression and depression because of the systems that leave them and men socially and economically disadvantaged. The ideals of Christianity in such a context have to be reviewed and checked to resonate with the decolonising projects of Christianity. However, this study alone cannot represent a broader picture of complicated experiences of life threatening contexts by African Christians who live in hopelessness in the context of gendered economic and religious exploitation in the liberalized world. More studies like this need to be conducted to contribute to the solution of this problem.