

# JOURNAL

## of Theology for Southern Africa



**176**  
**2023**

## *The Contemporary Theological Project*

# The African Value of Communal and Community in Virtual Spaces:

## A Comparative Study of Presbyterian Church of East Africa and Nomiya Churches in Nairobi County, Kenya

Telesia K. Musili, Fancy Cheronoh & Linda Ochola

### ABSTRACT

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Scholars distinguish between real and virtual communities, raising debatable concerns on whether strong intimate ties are possible online. Are virtual communities “real” communities? What are the constitutive elements of a virtual community? How does a virtual community affect a “real-life” community? These questions, among others, form the debates on communalism considered in this article. Jenny Preece’s theory of sociability and usability was employed to thread together the debates on the African value of communalism and community in virtual spaces. It is therefore argued that indigeneity in African worldviews cement identity and can traverse both physical and virtual spaces.

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### Introduction

In African indigenous societies the community is the essence of life. An individual’s life derives meaning and significance from the community of other human beings. A person “does not and cannot exist alone, only corporately.”<sup>1</sup> To Africans, the community gives definition and value to an individual. The values of communalism, collective existence, and solidarity, among others which

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1 This article draws from an ethnographic comparative study on the African value of communalism and religious experiences in virtual spaces amidst Covid-19: A comparative study of three churches in Kenya. The study was funded by John Templeton Foundation through Nagel Institute, Calvin College. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 108.

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# A Healing Ritual in the Sunday Service: A Contextualised Liturgical Development in the Malagasy Lutheran Church?

Hans Austnaberg

## ABSTRACT

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This article investigates the inclusion of a healing ritual into the Sunday service liturgy in the Malagasy Lutheran Church and discusses its theological significance. It rests on qualitative research material with in-depth interviews and participatory observation and makes use of a hermeneutical approach by applying four tasks of practical theological interpretation. The discussion of its theological significance revolves around the biblical foundation of the ritual, its relation to the Holy Communion, to the context of the church in Madagascar, and to the people attending the ritual.

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## Introduction

This article describes the inclusion of a healing ritual in the Sunday service of the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC) and discusses its theological significance. I do so by applying four tasks of practical theological interpretation, as explained by Richard R. Osmer and John Swinton and Harriet Mowat.<sup>1</sup>

When I came to Madagascar in 1983 as a Norwegian missionary, I felt familiar with the Sunday service liturgy. Although I did not understand the language then, I could recall the flow of the liturgy and some of the melodies. They were rather like the liturgy in my home church in Norway before the liturgy reform in 1977. In her doctoral dissertation, focusing on the years 1866-1903, Karina H. Skeie writes about a discussion among the Norwegian missionaries about how “Norwegian” or “Malagasy” the church in Madagascar ought to be. The Norwegian Lutheran liturgy was from the very beginning translated into Malagasy and used in the “Norwegian” churches in Madagascar,<sup>2</sup> she asserts, which to most missionaries

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1 Richard Robert Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008); John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2016).

2 “Norwegian” churches refer to churches founded by Norwegian missionaries, in contrast to the churches founded by other missions. Karina Hestad Skeie, *Building God’s Kingdom in Highland Madagascar: Norwegian Lutheran Missionaries in Vakinankaratra and Betsileo 1866-1903*, vol. nr 241 (Oslo: Det Humanistiske Fakultet, Universitetet i Oslo, 2005), 144-145.

# The Language of Hope: Towards Decolonial Theological Methods of Reflection on ‘White Talk’ in South Africa<sup>1</sup>

David Elliott

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## ABSTRACT

In the post-colonial, post-apartheid South African context, language has formed part of and also resisted various forms of violence. One form of violence that language both participates in and resists in this context is systemic racism. In this article I explore tentative methodological suggestions for naming and subverting ‘white talk’, language used in defence and support of Whiteness and racism, as it is conceptualised by Melissa Steyn. I establish my discourse within a South African Black theological frame, drawing particularly from its presently emerging decolonial fourth phase. I bring this fourth phase into dialogue with South African Whiteness Studies, particularly noting Steyn’s work on analysing white talk, to produce introductory ideas for decolonial theological methods potentially useful for subverting white talk.

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## Introduction

In 2022 South Africa, and the rest of the world, lived in the midst and wake of many forms of violence. Forms particular to South Africa are acutely shaped by, and visible in, COVID-19 and its enduring consequences, police brutality, civil unrest, and a dramatic economic downturn. Visible amongst these ‘violences’ of the last few years is systemic racism which continues to be an enduring thorn in South Africa’s side. Systemic racism is not new to the South African context and it has deep roots, and is apparent, in South African history. This article seeks to participate in attempts to answer enduring questions of what new steps can be taken to subvert systemic racism as it is found in the post-colonial, post-apartheid South African context. In particular, the guiding question of this article is how might the language and rhetoric that assists in constituting and supporting systemic racism

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an edited version of an article of the same title presented at the Theological Society for Southern Africa’s 2022 Conference titled *Hope Beyond the Pandemic, Pandemonium and Pandora: Emerging Horizons for Doing Theology in Africa*.

# Christian Theological Insights on Interethnic Conflict Prevention and Resolution

Pharis Murangai

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## ABSTRACT

The author has explored Christian insights on love, compassion, and unity and discussed their significance in preventing and resolving interethnic conflicts. The three virtues that form the theological argument in the article emerged from respondents in a field study of a doctoral thesis titled “Christian Based Interventions to Mitigate the Effects of Interethnic Conflicts in Njoro Sub-County, Kenya, 1992-2012.” The article acknowledges nuances of implied ambivalence to conflict in the bible while bringing out the teachings of positive theology derived from the three virtues and their contributions to peace and interethnic conflict resolution.

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## Introduction

Ethnic groups are becoming increasingly entangled in conflicts more often than nation-states, a phenomenon attributed to certain segments of the population perceiving ethnic identity as an alternate means to pursue political power and access national resources.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly evident where national identities and cultural life are deemed to be under threat, leading some members of these groups to resort to ethnic-based violence.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally ethnic identities are invoked to secure representation in political structures, civil service positions, and even the corporate sector, which can exacerbate tensions among different ethnic communities. Occupying such positions can trigger feelings of ownership over the community, a strong sense of loyalty, adherence to tradition, and a deep sense of social belonging, especially in the African context.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, some aspects

- 1 M. Emmanuel Katangole, “Identity, Community and the Gospel of Reconciliation; Christian Resources in the Face of Tribalism”, Duke Center for Reconciliation, 18. <<https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cfr/identity-and-reconciliation.pdf>> (Accessed on June 2, 2022).
- 2 Miroslav Volf, “Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation”, Abingdon, 1996, 2. <<https://www.lauriegreen.org/onewebmedia/General%20Theology/VOLF%20-%20Exclusion%20&%20Embrace.pdf>> (Accessed on June 2, 2022).
- 3 Tarimo, Aquiline. “Competing Identities, Loyalties, and Interests” in Tarimo, Aquiline and Manwelo, P., *Ethnicity Conflict and the Future of African States* (Nairobi: Paulines Publishers Africa, 2009), 23.

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## Book Reviews

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Mbuvi, Andrew M. *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies*.

New York: T & T Clark, 2023. ISBN: 978-0-567707-71-0. Hardback. Includes Table of Contents, Biblical Index and Subject Index. 243 pp.

Andrew M. Mbuvi's *African Biblical Studies* reads like a *magnum opus*. Insights this fine book enshrine, warn readers not to settle on its ruminations as final. There is more to come, and our African "living-dead" ancestors" (John S. Mbiti, Charles Nyamiti, John S. Pobee, and David T. Adamo) (x) are smiling and gazing at the torch they passed. *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism* is a daring noble task Mbuvi masterfully engages in three major parts: The Bible, Colonialism, and Biblical Studies (1-57); The Bible, Colonial Encounters, and Unexpected Outcomes (59-100); and African Biblical Studies: Setting a Postcolonial Agenda (101-201). These three parts are densely woven into fourteen well written chapters, a striking conclusion, and excellent footnotes and selected bibliography. He meticulously guides his readers through a précis "of the various methodological approaches represented in African biblical scholarship" and elucidates "how African biblical scholarship exposes and rebuffs the ingrained colonial and racist underpinnings that have, from its inception, shaped and continue to shape western Biblical Studies" (x). Bold and engaging, Mbuvi is attentive to the racist lethal brutality that snuffed life out of black bodies from Trayvon Martin to George Floyd resulting in "the rise of Black Lives Matter" and the public resurgence of the "racialized nature of western Christianity" endorsed by many White evangelicals who elected the overtly racist 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America (x-xi). Hateful and racist attitudes against people of African descent are strategic theological construal of enslaving, colonial, and imperial Europe.

In Part I (1-57), Mbuvi sees "no coincidence" between the birth of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1880 and the Berlin Conference in 1884-5. Arguing that Biblical Studies, an Enlightenment construct, shaped European self-definition and positioned White people as an epistemologically superior race, a divinely chosen harbinger of salvation/civilization, and guardian of, and disseminator of God's truth to the rest of humanity. Readers will appreciate his profound insights into the strategies and shrewd ways Europeans interpreted the Bible while plundering raw materials and human resources from the continent under the pretense of de-heathenizing Africans (20-34). Praising Albert Schweitzer for his humanitarian

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