



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

9th August 2021

GENDER DESK MESSAGE ON THE WOMEN'S DAY (RSA AND ZIMBABWE): 9 AUGUST 2021

"Wathinta umfazi, wathinta imbokodo" You strike a woman, you strike a rock.

- This slogan gained prominence in the struggles of women and particularly in the march by thousands of South Africa women to the Union Buildings in 1956 against the regime of the then Prime Minister Mr JG Strijdom, as women were protesting the pass laws. This slogan became central in subsequent women's struggles for justice and equality. The Gender Desk seeks to problematise the usage of the slogan, which seemingly takes away the dignity and humanity of women.

What does imbokodo mean?

A stone with no feelings, an inanimate object – with no life, which can't move, can't talk, can't think, can't defend itself, only moves when it's picked up and thrown. An object that is used to injure, to fight, to direct and for whatever reason that can suit someone's motive. Even in its usage as a grinder of mealies or medicine, imbokodo is used as an instrument and can only function when handled by someone.

The allegory of women as imbokodo raises concerns. Women are human beings with emotions and feelings. They cannot be seen or viewed as stones (imbokodo). Women have brains and should be viewed likewise; they are wise beings. They can do things they feel fit to do. Women are beings and not objects to be thrown to and from, but beings that can move when they feel like. The concept that women are imbokodo should worry us, as it is abusive in its nature. This makes people look at women as objects that can be used and that cannot think for themselves nor feel as normal human beings.

Another worrisome allegory that is used for women to characterise their courage and strength is that they hold the knife on its sharpness. This is so problematic. To begin with, why are they given the sharp and dangerous side? Who is doing that? Why are they given the side that, when handled, would clearly cause harm - a side that would cause bleeding and pain? Why try to prove how strong women are by inflicting pain and hurt to them? Why cut the hands that are there to protect, create, feed, wash and clean them? Why hurt the hands that wipe the tears that are caused by the pain from their abusers?

The Gender Desk would like to call upon all men to change their mind set and their negative perspectives about women and see them not as stones but human beings who are created in the image of God. This is a call on men and society, in general, to treat women the same way they want themselves to be treated and to stop giving the sharp side of a knife to women. Stop using them as objects for their own personal gains.

We also call upon women to stop being gate keepers for patriarchy. Women should stop pretending as if they are super strong, and as if they have no feelings. Women should stop allowing themselves to be used by men for their (men's) personal gains. They should stop allowing themselves to be referred to as imbokodo but consider themselves as human beings with feeling. They should stop receiving the sharp side of the knife just to prove how strong they are but should turn the sharp side of the knife to the handler who is bent to cause pain and harm, so that it shall be said, "Imela igobele esandleni" (the knife has hurt the one that handles it).

The UPCSA leadership and the Gender Desk took a resolve that every day of the year would be dedicated to a campaign to stop violence against women and children. The Gender Desk wishes that from now on, 365 days, every hour, and every minute, we will all respect women, love them, honour them, and treat them as human beings created in the image and likeness of God.

In the course of August, women in the UPCSA are addressing a question, "Does a single day of honouring women make a difference in gender justice?" The very fact that there should be a single day of honouring women points to the ripeness of patriarchy that continues to treat women as appendages to the human species. Women should be recognised alongside everyone as part of history makers and as contributors to the welfare of humanity and the rest of creation.

Let the joy of women be an everyday affair.

From the UPCSA's Gender Desk