Kirk VanGilder

Making Sadza With Deaf Zimbabwean Women

A Missiological Reorientation of Practical Theological Method

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Part I: The Need for a Theological Sadza

Chapter One: The Practical Theologian in a Missiological Setting

The emergence of the global South as an influence on world Christianity presents the field of practical theology with a challenge to develop methodological approaches that incorporate the complexities of cross-cultural practical theological research. Missiology has long been familiar with the "three self" methods of mission developed by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, which seek to develop new churches that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating (Bosch: 1991, 331 – 2). More recently, missiologists have advocated for a "fourth self" that would constitute a self-theologizing church (Bosch: 1991, 451 – 2). The emergence of self-theologizing in the global South brings a specific goal to theology that focuses the task of theology on the empowerment of faith communities to determine their own questions, approaches, and conclusions. The field of practical theology can benefit from a re-examination of its methodologies with an eye toward this aim of empowering faith communities to become self-theologizing in an increasingly global Christian context.

The legacy of colonialism in the non-Western world includes the silencing and marginalization of human expression and experience in the global South. Postcolonial theorists refer to communities on the margins of society with an underdeveloped sense of unity and class consciousness as *subaltern* communities (Keller, Nausser, Rivera: 2004, 212 – 13). These communities are continually under the pressure of hegemonic social forces which silence their contributions to larger social discourses (Ladd: 2003, 81 – 2). The observations of theologians from the global South and those who have researched subaltern communities suggest that there is a disconnection between the theological work being done in relation to these communities and the lived experiences of communities of faith. In Africa, the emergence of a plethora of theologies developed by Africans provides a diverse and rich patina of how African contexts shape theological thinking. However, Laurenti Magesa's study, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa,* shows that much of the innovation presented and produced by indigenous African theologians has yet to gain a foothold in the theological imagination of most of Africa's mainline denominational congregations (Magesa: 2004). Among African Independent Churches, M. L. Daneel's study, *Fambidzano:*

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Ecumenical Movement of Zimbabwe's Independent Churches, shows a marked desire among African Southern Shona Independent Churches for more sophisticated theological reflection. This desire resulted in the establishment of a program of theological education designed not only to provide skilled leadership training to these churches, but also to foster the development of indigenous theologizing (Daneel: 1989). In Africa, the historical disenfranchisement and deprivation of communities, including the churches, results in significant barriers to the development of a self-theologizing church. Practical theology's concern with rooting theological inquiry and construction in the practices of actual communities so that they might address the questions confronting them seems well suited for addressing these barriers.

The emerging Deaf[1] community in Zimbabwe presents a specific context for exploring how practical theological method can be reoriented toward the task of engendering self-theologizing participation among subaltern communities in the global Christian community. My own encounter with the practical theological questions raised by the women of this community left me questioning the appropriateness of a wide variety of theological methodologies. While every methodology I considered has its benefits, I have yet to find a methodology that combines the elements necessary to be sensitive to all the factors involved with my encounter with Deaf Zimbabwean women. In some regard, my search for a methodology leads me to the realization that every context may require its own unique combination of elements in order to be effective in engendering self-theologizing agency. If that is the case, then perhaps the field of practical theology needs to consider new methodological strategies which reorient its task toward engendering self-theologizing agency among subaltern people.

As a historically overlooked and underserved population, Deaf Zimbabweans in the town of Mutare have struggled to form communal bonds that allow them to begin to advocate for participation in larger societal structures in Zimbabwe. One of their earliest spheres of involvement has been The United Methodist Church. Through a series of short term mission trips, continued correspondence, and financial support of the goals of Deaf Zimbabweans, Deaf and hearing United Methodists in the U.S. have been partners in seeing this community begin to come together and articulate its desires and beliefs. This study aims to examine the preparedness of current practical theological methodologies to engage in the development of self-theologizing agency among subaltern communities. Ultimately, this study seeks to work toward a practical theological methodological approach, informed by Deaf Studies, missiological approaches, and theologians from the global South, that enables outsider researchers to assist in engendering subaltern groups with self-

1 The capitalization of the term "Deaf" here is a usage from the field of Deaf Studies which signifies a socio-cultural understanding of the existential state of being "Deaf" rather than merely the absence of the ability to hear.

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theologizing agency allowing them to break through the hegemonic forces that silence them from participation in larger social discourse.

A Recipe for Theological Sadza

As this study seeks to evaluate existing theological methods with the aim of creating a methodology in response to a specific context, it will be guided by specific attention to a particular community and context. The context that will guide this project is my own missional experience as a white male Deaf theologian in conversation with the women of an emerging community of Deaf Zimbabweans. Sustained attention to this community offers a unique opportunity to examine a subaltern community coming into contact with outsiders and outside sources as they begin to articulate questions about their being in the world as women of faith.

During four separate trips between 2000 and 2006, I deepened my relationship in working with Deaf people in Zimbabwe and their own relationships with hearing members of The United Methodist Church in establishing a Deaf ministry, a Deaf club, and a Deaf work project in the Sakubva area of Mutare, Zimbabwe. In their group discussions in meetings and casual discussions over meals or during breaks in their daily routine, Deaf women often express concerns over their struggles in child rearing practices. A large majority of these Deaf women have hearing children. Upon childbirth, they find themselves confronted with fears and misunderstandings from extended family members about their ability to raise their hearing children. Often these Deaf women have been denied the advantages of clear communication with their own hearing parents as their parents lacked opportunities and resources to learn signed language or other means of communicating with their Deaf daughters. Thus, when their daughter becomes a mother, there are often misunderstandings and miscommunications that arise around their Deaf daughter's understanding and ability to raise her child. The pressures brought by poverty and disruption of traditional extended family life by urbanization faced by all mothers in Zimbabwe further complicate this situation. These factors often result in the hearing children of Deaf women being taken and raised by their grandparents from infancy to the age of six or seven when the child is ready to enter school.

The phenomenon of children being raised by extended family members is not necessarily unusual in Zimbabwean society. However the Deaf women I have met have shared a variety of painful stories that seem to indicate that they may be experiencing additional marginalization from the decision making processes about the rearing of their own children as a result of the breach of communication with their hearing family members. Also, the practice of hearing relatives becoming the primary child rearing agents disrupts hearing children from being able to communicate with their mother when they return

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to their birth home. Such disruption causes additional stigma to the experiences of Deaf women as a mother and woman. As being a mother is perhaps one of the most critical aspects of being a woman in traditional Zimbabwean culture, the emotional and social impact of these disruptions is significant. Each Deaf woman's story is unique and has various social, economic, and cultural factors that lead to different results. Therefore, every Deaf woman copes with their situation differently and articulates it in her own way. As these women become aware of The United Methodist Church as a both a social resource and community of faith, they have begun to inquire as to "what can be done to help us and what can we do to help?"

When this question raised by Deaf Zimbabwean women is posed as a question for practical theological research, their community presents itself as a subaltern community seeking to discover its practical theological agency in relation to the pressing problems of their lives. However, Deaf Zimbabwean women often face a complex set of significant barriers to developing their self-theologizing agency. Lacking adequate communication access to formal education, worship and church activities, familial conversation and means of social support only compounds the problems faced by every Zimbabwean woman. As they attempt to understand and employ theological resources that might assist them in developing their self-theologizing agency, these women struggle to define and articulate themselves on their own terms. Although they are well aware that their marginalization as mothers and women is unjust, they lack the resources to explore and explain how it is unjust and what alternative actions could be taken to provide what is best for their children without minimizing their involvement in child rearing decisions and practices.

In working with these women, I face a complex set of cross-cultural dynamics as a white North American Deaf male researcher. This disclosure of my social location reveals my radical difference and relative position of power in relation to Deaf Zimbabwean women. I am very much an outsider to the privilege of knowledge about the practices of Zimbabwean women. However, as a Deaf practical theologian who has worked with Deaf Zimbabwean women,[2] I have a unique social relationship to these women that hearing practical theologians do not. The challenges I face in relating to these women are not entirely unique. Much of the theological work done with communities in the global South is marked by the disparities of power, education, and social location between researchers and faith communities. Yet theological works

2 I have participated in four mission trips to Zimbabwe in 2000, 2004, and 2006. These mission trips were generally two weeks long and involved intensive immersion in Deaf life and ministry in the city of Mutare. Visits to schools, churches, and emerging Deaf communities in Harare, Masvingo (Morgenster mission), Mutambara, and Nidyere were also included in these trips. Although these trips were of a short nature, they were preceded and followed by a great deal of communication and preparation to maximize the impact of our time there. As a result, a lasting bond has been created between Deaf people and their hearing allies in Zimbabwe and those who have participated in these mission trips.

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engaging in missional contexts are also marked by moments of profound connection and solidarity. This study will examine a variety of theological methodologies that have relevance to practical theological research or theology done in cross-cultural settings with subaltern people. The selection of these theological methodologies reflects a desire to bring together a variety of theological approaches that are relevant to this community of Deaf Zimbabwean women to explore what arises from a conversation between the contributions of these theologians. While this study is driven by my need for a practical theological approach in relation to a specific contextual community, I believe it will reveal concerns and strategies that have wider application for practical theologians seeking to work with subaltern communities of faith.

Therefore, this study consists of a variety of interacting layers of theologizing. The layer functioning as the catalyst is the struggle of Deaf Zimbabwean women to develop their own self-theologizing agency. The dilemma these women face as marginalized mothers to their own hearing children has led to them discussing their problems with one another. Yet their struggle to understand and move beyond their current circumstances indicates a need for further development of their self-theologizing agency. This study must recognize this dilemma as the core problem that drives my inquiry into practical theological methodology. A second layer of this study is my own involvement this community of Deaf Zimbabwean women as an outsider. The missional context of my visits provides a framework for understanding my own motivations in engaging with the dilemma these women face. It is my own dilemma of finding an appropriate methodological approach for this engagement is the primary focus of this study. The wider dialogue about and between practical theological methodology, mission theology, and Deaf studies forms a third layer. This third layer provides an academic discourse that attempts to examine the wider contribution of this study to practical theological methodology.

In addition to specific attention to the dilemmas facing a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women, I employ a postcolonial stance which seeks to mitigate the dangers of overwriting the contributions of subaltern people with those of researchers and intellectuals. In an effort to de-center my own social location and privilege the experience and culture of Deaf Zimbabwean women, I employ an extended metaphor of cooking sadza as a model for discussing the practical theological process. Sadza is a staple dish of Zimbabwe as well as a cultural symbol of home and hearth. In learning to cook sadza, I was trained in a very simple fashion of being shown by one woman how to mix the cornmeal with cold water to create a paste then slowly add it to a pot of boiling water and then add more cornmeal as needed to ensure the proper consistency and texture. Yet when I made my first attempt to cook up a pot of sadza I quickly found myself the center of attention of a diverse group of Zimbabwean women eager to observe and advise this adventurous white Deaf American man who wanted to learn to cook a staple dish — traditionally the task of a woman in

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their culture. The end result of my first attempt caused much giggling and teasing as my sadza turned lumpy and was proclaimed as pimply because I did not fully understand the process and timing of adding the various elements together in the proper manner. Nevertheless, they assisted me in working with my pot of lumpy sadza until it developed into a smooth and firm warm dish to accompany the evening's stew. In this way, I was both a pupil and partner of a diverse set of women who came together to share the common goal of ensuring that the evening's sadza was good and proper for the meal at hand. While this story remains a fond memory of a moment of solidarity and bonding, it was an extremely awkward experience for me. I was charged with the task of cooking, but found myself needing to employ skills other than those I brought to the sadza pot. I see a strong model here for how I envision practical theology working to engender self-theologizing agency among subaltern people. In this model, the outsider encounters new processes and gains new skills at the hands of experienced cooks who bring their varied expertise into the process of creating something good and proper.

While the simplicity of an "add and stir" process offers one level of understanding my methodology, a deeper alchemy of flavors simmers just beneath the surface of the practical theological sadza developed in this study. Cooking is more than a mere mixing of ingredients. The use of heat or cooling can radically alter the taste of ingredients. Also, what might taste great on its own may take on an unpleasant flavor when mixed with something else. In extending this metaphor to my analysis of practical theological methodology, this cooking model captures the essence of the interdisciplinary conversation I seek between various methodologies and viewpoints. While each element of this study has its own merit, when brought into a new context or combined with other elements, one can discover new things about these methodologies that identify areas where they need to be examined more deeply. In addition, the combining of various methodologies in conversation with one another enables this interdisciplinary approach to give birth to new formulations of how to approach practical theological research. When cooking sadza, a Zimbabwean woman is careful to stir from bottom to top to ensure that the entire mixture is heated properly. What I propose in cooking a practical theological sadza is to stir from bottom to top in order to unearth that which may be hidden under the surface of our interdisciplinary dialogues that enriches our understanding of how we engage with various communities of faith.

The use of a theological model of cooking sadza will provide the overall strategy this study will employ in discussing a number of theological methodologies. I begin with the dilemma created when Deaf Zimbabwean women present me with a challenge for practical theological consideration. This causes me to reflect on the resources or ingredients I have on hand from my own theological training. The addition of other ingredients and techniques from those I am cooking alongside initiates further reflection and results.

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Finally, I note what additional elements or techniques might be required to finish the theological sadza created by mixing elements together. This process of mixing ingredients in the sadza pot seeks to explore what bubbles to the top in an interdisciplinary academic discourse on theological methodology in relation to the specific attention given to the dilemma of developing self-theologizing agency among a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women. Denise Ackermann views such interdisciplinary dialogue as a critical and necessary part of practical theology in stating that, "Encouraging both inter- and intradisciplinary exchange should lead, hopefully, to more open attitudes and the willingness to learn on the basis of mutual co-operation." (Ackermann: 1985, 32) This mutual co-operation then corrects any unidirectional exchange by replacing it with multiple avenues for influence and learning.

Overall this study seeks to be open-ended in its proposal to reorient practical theological methodology toward developing self-theologizing agency for subaltern communities. This open-endedness implies that it does not seek to construct a final and definitive methodology for myself and other researchers working with Deaf Zimbabwean women and other subaltern communities. Such a conclusive result would be premature and require far too many dangerous assumptions on my part as a white North American Deaf male practical theologian. Rather this project seeks to bring the sources in the literature review into a fruitful dialogue with reference to a community of Deaf Zimbabwean women to see what emerges as potentially inappropriate approaches and potentially positive contributions for future research. Such future projects would require more direct relationship with these women to test the proposals this study creates in its sadza pot.

For Whom Is This Written? A Vexing Issue of Audience

Initially, I desired for this study to directly address subaltern communities in a way that would enact the prioritization of self-theologizing agency in their communities of faith. However, to focus this study toward such an audience would be a premature move inasmuch as a great deal of the consideration this study engages in is necessary prior to actual engagement with subaltern communities. Thus the primary audience of this study is fellow practical theological researchers who desire to work with and among subaltern communities to further self-theologizing agency. However, I do not wish for this study to be entirely inaccessible to subaltern communities. One need not have attained specialized theological training, mastered technical vocabulary, or become an ordained leader or lay member of a faith community to engage in the practical theological inquiry. Therefore, this study will seek to remain as forthright in its presentation as possible while retaining a fidelity to the academic discourse it engages. The use of the theological model of cooking

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sadza will serve as a metaphorical means of bridging between potential audiences.

The publication of this study in written English presents a particular barrier to certain audiences as well. Deaf communities who use a variety of signed languages will be limited by the use of written English. Similarly, some of the ideas conveyed in written English were first developed in American Sign Language as I recorded my thoughts on what I was reading and how I was conversing with others as I developed this study. These ideas have gone through a translation process to arrive in written English. While, they remain as faithful to my original conceptualization, they may at times be missing some of the nuances and subtleties better expressed in a visual-spatial language. The translated nature of this study provides yet another significant aspect of my approach to practical theological methodology. The necessity for translation in order to produce this study in written English impacts every chapter. Therefore, translation will arise again as a key strategy for the re-orientation of practical theological methodology.

Boundaries and Borders of the Study

Any study requires limitations to remain manageable and focused. This study embodies numerous limitations in order to maintain its focus on the central question of examining the reorientation of practical theology toward the development of self-theologizing for subaltern communities. The most obvious limitation is that while this study gives specific attention to community that presents a real and pressing need from an actual community of faith, it does not aim to provide a practical theological response directly to the issues of motherhood and child rearing practices raised by Deaf women in Zimbabwe. While an extended discussion and exploration of this problem is warranted to illustrate the theological nature of the task these Deaf women face, any effort to provide specific strategies to address the problems of child rearing in Zimbabwe on my part as a white North American male Deaf theologian would be premature. Such conclusions would risk embodying the dangers of imposing my own interests and framing of theological questions this study raises about existing methodologies. Instead, this study seeks to be methodological groundwork for future research and activism with not only Deaf Zimbabwean mothers, but potentially, for other practical theologians working with subaltern communities. The dilemma this study seeks to resolve is my own lack of a suitable practical theological methodology to begin engagement with Deaf Zimbabwean women.

A second limitation is that the ecclesial setting of this community of Deaf Zimbabwean women is primarily embodied in The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. The women who attend the Sanganai Deaf Club in Mutare come from a variety of denominational backgrounds and many retain a relationship

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through their extended family or personal attendance with these churches. However, the denomination most active with the Deaf women in question is The United Methodist Church and a large majority of these women are members in local United Methodist congregations. United Methodism is also my own denominational affiliation as a clergyperson and thus provides a common and familiar ecclesial setting to limit this study. This boundary does not seek to limit the usefulness of this study to United Methodist communities of faith. This study uses sources from a variety of denominational affiliations and also examines studies of African Independent Churches. These resources provide theological inquiry of features of African Christianity that are explicit in AICs but remain under the surface, if present at all, in mainline denominations in Africa. As a result, many other historical mission denominations and even African initiated churches as well as unaffiliated scholars and practitioners of Christian faith may find elements of this study useful for their own work toward self-theologizing communities of faith.

Terminology

One of the most vexing issues for this study is to define the parameters of practical theology itself. In my selection of existing theological methods for examination in this study, I cover a wide range of approaches. While each of these methodologies can be classified in a particular genre of theological inquiry, they share a common thread of starting with the lived experiences of people. Contemporary practical theology has developed in response to dissatisfaction with a theory to practice application of systematic theology in the daily lives of believers. In shifting the starting place of theological inquiry to the lived experiences and practices of communities of faith, practical theological methodology represents a turn to the practical within theological methodology. Such concerns are not necessarily new despite the recent developments of contemporary practical theology. Mission theology has long been concerned with the issues of contextualizing Christianity and placed the starting point for theological reflection in the cultural life of communities receiving missionary presence. Liberation theologies have also framed theological inquiry with a starting point in the lived experience of the poor and marginalized.

Edward Farley recognizes that contemporary popular definitions of what constitutes theology connote academic tasks that are detached from everyday life. Instead, he proposes that theology is, “something broader than the scholarship and teaching offered by professional schools. Theology is a deliberate, focused, and self-conscious thinking that has its origin in faith’s need to interpret itself and its situation. Theology is stirred into existence as believers struggle for clarity and understanding.” (Farley: 2003, 3) Farley identifies the practice of theology as feature of faithful living akin to prayer,

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worship, and service (Farley: 2003, 3–5) Understanding theology as the continual task of encountering the traditional sources of faith and interpreting their contemporary meaning then sits at the very center of Christian tradition. In framing theology as an embodiment of the Gospel into the present age, Farley presents a deeply incarnational understanding of practical theology that values the process of becoming incarnated as much as the resultant direct action or belief that arises from this process. Farley's view of practical theology as a process occurring within communities of faith as reasoned reflection and action implies an inward looking orientation for practical theology. This orientation constructs practical theology as a task the church does primarily for its own understanding and function.

Denise Ackermann provides an alternative viewpoint to practical theology from her own context as a white South African feminist theologian. She views practical theology as being the "theological theory of Christian communicative actions." (Ackermann: 1985, 30) Thus while the reflective task of theology is vital, so is the empirical task of examining social practices that embody this reflection in action. For Ackermann, "practical theology is concerned with Christian faith in action." (Ackermann: 1985, 31) She suggests that the relationship between theory and praxis in practical theology is bipolar in nature and the tension between these two poles creates outward oriented movement by communities of faith. "Praxis in our context means actions by believers, either as individuals or as groups which further God's Kingdom, bringing about liberating and healing change." (Ackermann, 1985: 31) Ackermann therefore sees practical theology as faith in action. She employs a Christological focus in stating,

> The liberating dimension of practical theology is embodied in the paradigm of Jesus, the truth that sets us free. Practical theology needs to investigate the relevance of liberating truth in particular situations. If, for instance, the organizational forms of a congregation are investigated, it would be valid to ask whether those forms which structure relations, mirror the relation that God wants with humankind in our world (Ackermann, 1985, 32–3).

Ackermann's view of practical theology is clearly shaped by her experiences in the Apartheid society of South Africa and her struggle as a theologian to dismantle such oppressive structures. Yet her overall orientation of theology is missiological in nature in that it aims to do theology not only for the sake of the internal religious life of a community of faith, but also for the external mission of extending liberating principles derived from Christian practical theology to wider societal practices. She proposes an outward oriented function for practical theology by conceptualizing practical theology as communicative action that makes it possible to, "join in the human struggle against all that is dehumanizing in life." (Ackermann: 1985, 33)

In this study, I will analyze a variety of theological methodologies. While some are explicit in naming themselves as practical theologies, others are

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typically seen as mission theologies or liberation theologies. I seek to cast a fairly large net in considering all of these methodologies as practical theology in some regard. This does not negate that these methodologies can also be classified in other ways. In this study, I do not seek to typify any theological genre and judge it as a whole by those methodologies that I have selected. Rather, I have selected these methodologies for their relevance to my own starting point—my dilemma to find a practical theological methodology that allows me to be in relation with Deaf Zimbabwean women in a manner that engenders their self-theologizing agency.

Any extended study will necessarily find itself employing specific terminology in a manner than may differ from common use. This study is no exception as it employs terminology from various academic disciplines in an analysis of practical theological method. Postcolonial studies are fond of using the term "voice" in countering the "silence" imposed upon subaltern communities by hegemonic social forces. As I am addressing a subaltern community that employs a signed language and non-verbal communication, I am hesitant to employ to term "voice" even in a metaphorical sense. The histories of Deaf communities are rife with attempts of hearing people to overwrite Deaf expressions of their language and culture with a view of deafness as inherently bad. This dominant hegemonic discourse, called oralism, seeks to eradicate the social effects of hearing loss on people by pressuring them to function and behave as much like hearing people as possible. Thus I am employing terminological constructions of *agency* and *expression* to avoid complicating the detrimental history of oralism with the desire for what postcolonial studies terms as "coming to one's own voice." Thus when this study refers to *self-theologizing agency* and *theological expression* it attempts to go beyond simply "speaking" one's story but also becoming an active participant in how that story is presented and what future direction it may take.

As noted above, the capitalization of the term *Deaf* is used in Deaf studies to indicate a cultural-linguistic construction of identities that have been forged by people with hearing loss who use signed languages as their primary means of communication. In a related fashion, Deaf studies will use the lowercase term of *deaf* to indicate a more general category of all those with significant hearing loss without regard to the cultural and linguistic features of their identity formation. *Deafhood* is a term proposed by Paddy Ladd to give a more complex picture of a culturally centered identity formation as a work in progress in a postcolonial scholarly framework. The adoption of the term Deafhood provides a reimaging of Deafness as an ontological state of being that one grows into akin to that of adulthood rather than a static physical state of audiological nature (Ladd: 2003, xviii). Further elaboration on Ladd's conception of Deafhood can be found later in this study. This study will employ the use of *Deaf* and *Deafhood* in quotations from Deaf studies. However, some discussion regarding the appropriateness and potential

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inappropriateness of employing *Deaf* and *Deafhood* in discussing deaf life in Zimbabwe is necessary. In Zimbabwe, the social characteristics of those with hearing loss that use signed languages as their primary means of communication and their resulting identity formation processes are in their infancy. It may come to pass that they develop in unique ways responding to unique local influences and thus may eventually alter the conceptualization of Deafhood as constructed by Ladd. Overwriting this emergence with identity concepts developed in Western societal concepts is a real danger and care must be taken to allow for fluidity in deaf and Deaf identities. Thus when reading either *Deaf* or *deaf* in this study, one should keep in mind that there is far more than an audiological condition being signified, rather a complex and emerging network of socio-cultural considerations are at play in developing a fluid ontological understanding of *Deafhood* as a state of being in the world.

Outline of the Study

The first section of this study continues with chapter two. This chapter begins with a description of the cultural context of Deaf Zimbabwean women and the dilemma they face in relation to child rearing practices. This description is preliminary in nature and should not be understood as a conclusive description. It is an interweaving of my own impressions of being in Zimbabwe and stories shared by Deaf women in public conversation with scholarly research and demographic data about Zimbabwean life. However, it should not be understood as an accurate self-expression of Deaf Zimbabwean women as much as it is a co-mixture of their stories with other information. The aim of this section is to provide a preliminary glimpse into the complexity of the lives of Deaf Zimbabwean women and how their questions in relation to child rearing practices present a practical theological question. Also in chapter two, I include a discussion of the use of postcolonial studies as a framework for guiding my study. I conclude with a discussion of theological models and the use of the extended metaphor of cooking sadza.

Section two of this study is a series of chapters comprising a literature review bringing various theological methodologies together in conversation with the context of Deaf Zimbabwean women. My selection of these nine methodologies for discussion is guided by their relationship to my encounter with Deaf Zimbabwean women and my dilemma of needing a methodology to proceed with practical theological research that engenders self-theologizing agency. My discussion of methodologies is interrupted by periodic interludes that consider how the methodologies discussed up to that point relate to the context of Deaf Zimbabwean women.

I begin with critical correlative practical theological methodologies as those are the ingredients I had on hand as a result of my own theological training when meeting these Deaf Zimbabwean women. My evaluation of these

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methodologies leads to an awareness of a need for theological methodologies that explicitly engage with the issues of cross-cultural mission. This need is addressed with a discussion of two theological approaches from mission theology. I then address two theological approaches arising from Deaf studies. Finally, I add in two theological approaches from African women. Again, I want to stress that I do not view these selections as representative of these genres of theological inquiry in any way. They stand on their own as expressions of individual theological construction. All theological genres are too diverse to be represented in any fashion by the selection of a handful of examples. Yet any study needs some limitations in order to be able to discuss theological methodology at all. These methodologies were not selected to be representative of an entire genre but to present methodologies I find helpful in my search for a satisfactory methodology for engagement with Deaf Zimbabwean women.

The third section is comprised of chapters seven and eight. Chapter seven completes the "add and stir" process found in the previous section by considering what is still lacking to complete the sadza created by this interdisciplinary conversation about theological methodology. As mentioned earlier, any cook knows that sometimes a dish is more than the sum of its parts. This section stirs the mixture of the previous literature review from bottom to top in order to bring to the fore various techniques and attitudes that are required to smooth out lumps discovered when discussing existing methodologies in relation to my search for a methodology that enables me to engage with Deaf Zimbabwean women. Chapter seven identifies three of these techniques and proposes strategies that can be added to existing theological methods to assist practical theologians in their research relationships with subaltern communities and keep them oriented toward engendering self-theologizing agency.

Chapter eight seeks to summarize the findings of this study and sketch out a possible way forward for the applications of the proposed strategies in research done with Deaf Zimbabwean women. I also briefly address the third layer of this study by noting how the addition of missiological categories into practical theological methodology reorients practical theological to more missiological aims. I then conclude with some consideration of the wider applicability of the strategies proposed in chapter seven in other contexts. Although these strategies arise from a theological sadza developed for my own dilemma in engaging in practical theology with Deaf Zimbabwean women, I believe they also present general strategies that can be adapted for a variety of contexts.

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Chapter Two: Examining the Problem and Context

Deaf Life in Zimbabwe

Deaf life in Zimbabwe is largely undocumented and overlooked in literature. Dr. Maria Chiswanda's dissertation on mediated learning experiences between hearing mothers and their deaf children is the only formal study of which I am aware that examines the lives of Deaf Zimbabweans. One of the limitations of her research is that she focuses primarily on the infancy and early childhood years of deaf children. While Chiswanda's research provides valuable insights into how Shona culture perceives deafness and the challenges hearing mothers face in raising their deaf children, the limitations of her study leave unanswered questions of how these children are perceived after growing to adulthood. This examination of Deaf life in Zimbabwe relies on Chiswanda's research and supplements it with general information regarding Shona culture and child rearing practices. Also included are my own perspectives on Deaf life observed while on short-term mission trips in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this description of Deaf life in Zimbabwe is preliminary in nature as it is not a self-expression of Deaf Zimbabweans. Much more work needs to be done as Deaf Zimbabweans begin to discover and develop their agency as narrators of their own lives and experiences. This chapter seeks to provide a glimpse into the struggles Deaf Zimbabwean women face upon becoming mothers and place their struggles within the large context of Shona society. Although these struggles are the core problem that drives this study, the use of anecdotal narrative in this study based on my own experiences in Zimbabwe reflects my primary focus on the dilemma I face as a researcher in attempting to forge a working relationship with Deaf Zimbabwean women that allows them to tell their own stories.

In 2000, I traveled to Mutare, Zimbabwe with a team of seventeen Deaf and hearing people from the United States. This was the first of several short term volunteer mission trips aimed at supporting local efforts of Deaf people to organize for socialization, ministry, and mutual support. Our trips were intensive sessions of mutual learning between Zimbabweans, both Deaf and hearing, and North Americans, both Deaf and hearing. They were the culmination of much preparatory work and communication on both sides of the Atlantic which sought to meet the goals of local Zimbabwean organizers with the resources, both material and interpersonal, of our visiting teams. In the course of these mission trips, I became close with several members of the emerging Deaf community in Mutare.

This closeness reflects the transnational nature of Deaf experiences noted by Joseph Murray in his examination of continued contact between Deaf

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communities worldwide as a factor in how Deaf identities are formed and maintained. Murray recounts an 1889 presentation by Amos Draper, a Deaf American travelling through England as part of a delegation their way to the first International Congress of the Deaf in Paris, who stood before an audience of Deaf Britons and expressed this feeling of commonality by quoting Shakespeare, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." (Murray: 2008, 100) The physical "touch of nature" of audiological deafness had become a ground for similar experiences of living as people who do not hear among a wider society of hearing people. These similar experiences became the foundation creating meaning out of such lives that formed socio-culturally Deaf identities that were recognizable across various other socio-cultural factors (Murray: 2008, 106). This feeling of kinship is noted by Deaf people wherever they meet whether it be local gatherings of Deaf people who spend their work week separated in hearing environments or national and international conferences of Deaf people gathering for political strategizing, academic inquiry, mutual assistance, or sporting events.

In June of 2006, I was in attendance at the first nation wide call for Deaf people to meet in Zimbabwe. This conference was called by the Deaf community in Mutare, a city in the Eastern Highlands on the border with Mozambique, along with their colleagues in the capital city of Harare. Funded by both local funds and mission money raised by Deaf ministries in the United Methodist Church, this week long conference at Hilltop United Methodist Church attracted Deaf participants from as far away as the Western city of Bulawayo and from remote Northeastern rural areas in the vicinity of Nyadire. The goals of this conference were to bring disparate and desperate Deaf people together to share experiences, discuss problems, learn of solutions being tried in various areas and enjoy one another's company in an environment of spiritual care including worship, Bible study, workshops, small group discussions, shared dining, performing arts, and sporting competition. My own experience of being a participant in this conference was one of being among my own kind despite the persistent and deep differences that remained obvious and did present barriers to understanding.

This conference drew together a wide variety of Zimbabwean Deaf people who came together and recognized their struggles and gifts as a common struggle and shared gifts. Despite a diversity of levels of formal education, family life, gender, age, and social differences, the 130 Deaf Zimbabweans attending this conference presented a strong sense of oneness that permeated the event. Murray points out that this sort of commonality should not be viewed on a continuum of development narrative where some are seen as being in a state of backwardness on the way to where others already exist (Murray 2008: 107). What I observed in small group at this 2006 Deaf Zimbabwean Conference did at times include advice from Deaf people from more urbanized and formally educated backgrounds about how they had addressed similar struggles. But I also observed moments where Deaf people

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from other municipalities presented solutions that fit the political climate of their city which varied greatly from that of the host area. I also observed rural Deaf Zimbabweans raising questions and problems that were beyond the experience of their more urbanized peers and thus became discussions where they took the lead in providing and processing information as more urbanized Deaf participants confessed that they didn't know what to do in such a situation.

Of the many concerns that I was made aware of by working in relationship with Deaf Zimbabweans in Mutare on the several visits I have made, Deaf women often shared stories regarding their status as mothers within their society. These stories often expressed personal pain around the circumstances of their lives that ultimately left them separated from their children. Sometimes, these women would share these stories with me while viewing me as a pastoral figure. My involvement as a Deaf clergy person in a missionary effort to establish a Deaf ministry that would address some of their social and spiritual needs may have made me an ideal person to approach with these concerns. It seemed to me they shared their stories regarding their status as mothers in hope that perhaps something could be done about these issues as well. At times the issues of being separated from their children and feeling generally distanced from decision making agency in raising their own children were shared as an aside. In other situations, they became the theme of formal and informal small group discussions about what Deaf life in Zimbabwe was like. Some group discussions were more casual and would shift into discussing motherhood and child rearing issues as women shared upcoming travel plans or hopes for marriage and starting a family.

Nearly always, women raised these issues of family planning and child rearing. Deaf men, while aware of these struggles, rarely bought up child rearing and separation as a specific issue facing Deaf people in Zimbabwe. Men were more likely to raise issues about job access, income generation, and struggles with government or law enforcement. While Deaf men's concern with income generation relates to their fathering role as a financial provider for their family, they did not raise this concern in relationship to their direct contact with their children. In some aspects, this reflects how traditional roles of extended family relations come together to constitute child rearing in the Shona culture of this area of Zimbabwe.

Shona Child Rearing Practices

Chiswanda includes an overview of child rearing practices among the Shona peoples of Zimbabwe in her study of mediated learning experiences between hearing mothers and their deaf children. Her overview recognizes that there is little formal literature published on matters of Shona child rearing and deaf children and she supplements what she finds in researching various mis-

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sionary and anthropological studies with her own experience as a Shona woman (Chiswanda: 1997, 18). Zimbabwe is a landlocked nation in Southern Africa bordered by South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, and Botswana. With an area of 390,580 square kilometers, Zimbabwe is slightly larger than the US state of Montana. A 2002 census counted a population of 14 million with 70 % of those being of Shona ethnicity, 18 % of Ndebele ethnicity, and 12 % comprised of various other ethnic minorities of African, European, and Asian origin (Government Internet Service Provider). Zimbabwe gained independence from a white minority government in 1980 after a long guerilla war for independence. After a period of reconciliatory politics which brought much acclaim from the international community, land ownership reform issues ushered in a political crisis that has destabilized the Zimbabwean economy and pushed Zimbabwe into extreme political struggles and economic collapse (Sachikonye: 2004, 1 – 16). The Zimbabwean experience with colonization and subsequent liberation along with the continuing crisis makes this context a rapidly changing socio-economic setting where traditional practices and social relationships are constantly being adapted. Nevertheless, traditional Shona values and attitudes about child rearing still exert strong influence over how families cope with the impact social and economic pressures have on their practices.

Chiswanda posits that children are generally viewed as a benefit to the family for the increased labor and economic benefit they bring. Whether this view remains in difficult economic times where a lack of access to food leads to starvation is uncertain but most of the women I spoke with in Zimbabwe still greatly desired children despite their awareness of the difficulties they would encounter raising them. Childlessness continues to be viewed a great misfortune for women and the consequences of childlessness are a theme in Shona visual and theater arts. The birth of a child is something that an entire extended family becomes involved in celebrating. Chiswanda notes that Gelfand found that the celebration of a newborn could last up to three months and involve many visits by extend family bearing gifts of food (Chiswanda: 1997, 19). It is likely that during these celebratory visits, new mothers received advice and guidance in child rearing practices from the women of their extended family as well as practical assistance in the daily care of their newborn.

The first three years of most infants in Zimbabwe are spent on the backs of their mother or close family female relatives being carried about in a cloth wrap that enables the mother to remain attentive to her child's needs while going about her daily activities. An infant and young child's earliest socialization occurs within the immediate and extended family as well. Rather than organized play groups with children from other families, young children will play with older siblings and nearby cousins and begin learning their duties in the family structure by assisting them with daily household chores. The supportive role of the extended family in traditional Shona child rearing

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should not be underestimated. Generally, a child's biological mother is their primary mother figure but grandmothers, aunts, and older sisters often take part in providing various mothering roles as well. Shona society sees women as the providers of food and social needs for the extended family and thus all female family members are expected to take part in the provision of such care. Chiswanda does note that urbanization has a significant impact on how extended family support takes place in contemporary times. She observes that while women's work remains largely in the home, a number of women living in urban areas seek employment outside of the home to supplement family income. These families often would hire a woman that serves the traditional role of an older female sibling in the care of their children. Whether this practice remains widespread in the current economic crisis is questionable. Instead, another common practice of young couples of sending their children to live with their grandparents for a period of time is likely to be more prevalent (Chiswanda: 1997, 19–21).

Aside from the economic pressures that make temporary grandparent child rearing an option, the role of grandmothers as a source of socialization into Shona cultural values also contributes in family decisions about child rearing. From an early age, children learn Shona social values of gratitude and respect of their familial elders. Various spoken greetings, postures, and hand-clapping gestures are used to indicate respect and deference in social settings. These values and actions are often taught to young children by family elders themselves giving grandmothers a specific role in the socialization of their grandchildren. As a result, grandmothers are often a favorite relative of young children because of the increased range of activities and careful attention they experience with them. Despite the wide number of caregivers a Shona child will have growing up, a special bond remains with their birth mother. Breast-feeding, attention to infant distress, and care for a child experiencing illness are all considered to be the domain of the birth mother alone. Chiswanda stresses the importance of these roles by stating, "Other mothers cannot replace the mother, save as a substitute, in the event of permanent separation." Infants are permitted to breast-feed when they desire, sleep on the back or lap of their mother when needed and will otherwise remain on a mat in the same room as the mother goes about her daily work. This constant state of attention is the particular focus of a child's first two years of life as they rely on breast-feeding for sustenance (Chiswanda: 1997, 22–24).

This general overview of traditional child rearing practices in Shona society therefore indicates the primacy of both birth mothers and the importance of grandmothers in the process of child rearing. Again, the actual practices of child rearing in Zimbabwe are probably much more varied as families grapple with the severe impact of economic deprivation, scarcity of access to food and health care, and in many cases, geographic distance between urbanized areas and more rural homesteads. However,

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traditional practices exert a strong influence on the varied adaptive practices, as they remain normative of what should be done in ideal circumstances.

The capacity to adapt and adjust traditional child rearing practices also relates to how Shona families and society address the birth of a deaf or disabled child. Deafness is generally viewed as a disability in Zimbabwe although Deaf Zimbabweans themselves seem to recognize some of the same sort of distinctive differences Western Deaf people note in how using a signed language to communicate differs from mobility or visual disabilities. In Shona society, the severity of the impact of a disability in the life of a child is generally gauged by how it influences their ability to carry out their expected household chores and activities. This leads to a general impression that deaf children are less severely disabled than those with cerebral palsy or other mobility restrictive conditions because deafness doesn't impede children from the usual tasks of herding livestock, working the farmland, or basic errands (Chiswanda: 1997, 25). As Chiswanda focuses her research primarily on hearing mothers with deaf children, the severity of deafness as an impediment to the usual duties of a child seem somewhat less critical. However light this severity may be in comparison to physical disabilities, it may become a more serious consideration in the view of the family when deaf children grow up and become parents themselves and are expected to have gained the knowledge and skills of parenting via means of oral transmission.

Another aspect of Shona child rearing practices that Chiswanda focuses on is the strong role of sound and orality. While Chiswanda's concern is examining ways that hearing mothers can adapt their practices to meet the needs of their deaf children, a review of some of these practices may provide a glimpse into possible reservations hearing grandmothers may have about the ability of their Deaf daughters to provide their hearing children with a normative Shona upbringing. Chiswanda notes that children are encouraged to sit up at a very early age in most sub-Saharan indigenous cultures and that this practice appears in Shona farming communities where an infant is propped up in a sand pit in a sitting position while the mother works in the fields. Children are also encouraged to begin walking as soon as possible with traditional singing rhymes and clapping rhythms aimed at assisting them in maintaining progress in their efforts (Chiswanda: 1997, 22). This information confirms my general observation while in Zimbabwe that, when not being carried or nursed, infants were encouraged to maintain a sitting position and mimic walking activities at very early stages rather than being encouraged to crawl or scoot around.

Similarly, speech and sound play an important role in the grandmother's role of socializing young children. Values and proper behavior are taught through the telling of stories, riddles, and proverbs often in the form of demonstrations and trials encouraged by adults (Chiswanda: 1997, 23). Strong significance is placed on childhood milestones related to speech as well.

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A community of Deaf Zimbabwean women struggling to develop their own agency in relation to child rearing practices is Kirk VanGilder's focus of study. He explores a variety of theological approaches from practical theology, mission oriented theologians, theology among Deaf communities, and African women's theology in relationship to the challenges presented by subaltern communities. Rather than frame a comprehensive methodology, VanGilder proposes attitudes and guideposts to reorient practical theological researchers who wish to engender self-theologizing agency in subaltern communities.

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