

Osuka, Monika ; Maseno, Loreen

## Anne Kubai Weaving the Tapestry of Religion and Post-Conflict Social Construction for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

In:

Maseno, Loreen; Mombo, Esther; Muke, Nagaju; u. a. (Hrsg.), Queen of Sheba : East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation (Circle Jubilee Volume 2), Bamberg : University of Bamberg Press, p. 103-115. 2024. DOI: 10.20378/irb-92896

### Bookpart - Published Version

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-94423

Date of Publication: 28.03.2024

### Legal Notice:

This work is protected by copyright and/or the indication of a licence. You are free to use this work in any way permitted by the copyright and/or the licence that applies to your usage. For other uses, you must obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).

This document is made available under the **Creative Commons License CC BY**.



This licence information is available online:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

## 6 | **Anne Kubai Weaving the Tapestry of Religion and Post-Conflict Social Construction for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians**

*Monika Osuka & Loreen Maseno*

### **Introduction**

Anne Kubai considered one of the Matriarchs of the Circle of concerned African Women Theologians in Africa. She is a Kenyan by origin and has contributed to the scholarly journey of the circle over the years. This chapter sets out to examine her select works with the aim of understanding the contexts that motivated her work. It shall also highlight the sources she used to generate her theological ideas. Further, the essay shall discuss how she weaves specific features of her theology and their purpose for Christendom in East Africa. Weaving any tapestry in life involves a journey, and not all journeys are similar. Some tapestries present challenges and pain, while others indicate victory and flourishing. Some tapestries by Kubai are in the midst of genocide, while others are in social action in vulnerable communities. By placing a sharp focus on her context, this chapter in essence highlights her engagements in different spheres and the kinds of interpretations of liberation she generates. It shall point out the sources that she uses, the theology she generates and the kind of ecclesiology/s she proposes for African women theologians of the present and the future. Further, it also points to the impact of her theological, community action and communicative ideas that she generates. In all this chapter also firms how her faith has been able to impact the academic spaces. In conclusion, Kubai's theology shall be exposed by reason of how she addresses multiple themes such as patriarchy and infertility, Genocide and reconstruction, Community engagement, forgiveness and other social factors.

## Kenya and the Religious Demographics

Kenya is a country in East Africa. It received its independence in 1963, having once been a British protectorate. Kenya is known for its beautiful coastline on the Indian Ocean. It also boasts of tropical climate and encompasses savannah, lakelands, the dramatic Great Rift Valley and mountain highlands. The wildlife in Kenya is well appreciated all over, having lions, elephants and rhinos. Currently, Kenya is East Africa's largest and most important business, financial, and transportation hub. Kenya has several minerals and has begun oil exploration in the Turkana areas. The capital city of Kenya is Nairobi. Kenya also has the largest, most diversified economy and boasts the second largest population in East Africa. Most of the population comprises young people with averagely high levels of education. The currency of Kenya is the Kenya Shilling. Kenya hosts the largest refugee camp in the world and has been home to many refugees from war torn areas of East and central Africa.

Kenya religiosity cannot be referenced in the absence of the key religions practiced, namely Islam and Christianity which remain the two major religions in the region. According to the US department of state, Religious demographics indicates in midyear 2021, that out of 52 Million Kenyans, approximately 85.5 percent of the total population is Christian and 11 percent Muslim. Meanwhile, other religious groups include the Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is, and those adhering to various traditional religious beliefs. Within the Christian fraternity, it is estimated that Non-evangelical Protestants account for 33 percent of the population, Roman Catholics 21 percent, and other Christian denominations, including evangelical Protestants, African Instituted Churches and Orthodox churches, 32 percent (US Department of State website).

### Anne Kubai

Anne Kubai was born in Kenya. She is associate professor of World Christianity and Interreligious Studies. Currently, she is a researcher at the School of Historical and Contemporary Studies at Södertörn University, Sweden. She is affiliated Research Fellow at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Kubai is Professor Extraordinarius, Institute of Gender Studies, University of South Africa.

Her career has seen move across several universities and organizations in Kenya and Rwanda. She has ably stated on her profile that she worked as Research Director for Life & Peace Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, and has also worked as Senior Social Scientist at the Division of Global Health (IHCAR), at Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden. Until recently she was a researcher at the Centre for Multidisciplinary Research on Racism (CEMFOR) at the Department of Theology, Uppsala University (see Kubai Profile 2023).

Her research interests are varied and have morphed over the years. These include interests in African women, genocide, mass atrocities, religion, Pastoralist communities in East Africa, peacebuilding, conflict, migrants in Scandinavia, sexual and gender-based violence, transitional justice, international migration and human trafficking, human security and psychosocial studies. She also has a keen interest in the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus. She has over the years published numerous peer reviewed journal articles, contributions to anthologies, co-edited anthologies, research reports, popular science articles.

### **Themes from Kubai's writings and their significance for African women's theology in East and Central Africa**

Kubai employs of a combination of several pedagogical and research designs in her theological enterprise. These include but are not limited to ethnography, qualitative design, participatory action research, event based, direct approach and inquiry method. These are seen in her several pieces of writing. She touches upon several themes, which are significant for theology in East and Central Africa. In the sections that follow, a treatment of these themes is made in conversation with other women theologians and male theologians from the region.

#### **Bareness and infertility**

In one of her articles, Christian Couples coping with childlessness: Narratives from Machame, Kilimanjaro, Kubai addresses the issues of patriarchy, violence in a family set up, (Kubai 2011). This is a theme which

has been well addressed by Oduyoye and Nasimiyu. According to Nasimiyu, the status of a woman in African culture depends on the number of children she bears and her entire life is centred on children. A childless marriage is calamitous for the couple and the clan. It follows that a marriage cannot be sealed without children. This leaves the women involved vulnerable (Nasimiyu 1999).

John Mbiti takes this a notch further and asserts that in African practices and popular beliefs, procreation remains at the center of marriage, a childless marriage can become a most painful and embarrassing situation...traditional attitudes and philosophy of marriage make it extremely hard for a childless man to be successful and happy (Mbiti 1987:43). He further notes that through marriage and procreation a person becomes immortalized. But Oduyoye takes a turn and in identifying herself as childless, states that she an African woman reading Mbiti's assessment, and that she is a lay Christian, born into a doubly matrilineal and monogamous home, a spouse, but not a mother (Oduyoye 1993:345). Oduyoye laments that in African societies female sexuality has no autonomous value outside of marriage and motherhood. It is assumed that a woman must be married (Oduyoye 1992:15). Woman, marriage and motherhood constitute an unbroken continuum (Oduyoye 1992:22).

In most African societies, by begetting a great number of children, a woman is meant to increase the man's wealth. It was important not only to have children but male children, for the purpose of family inheritance. However, though childbearing and nurture is the responsibility of the women in most communities, husbands have almost absolute right over the children. In these patriarchal societies, the father can command his daughters to marry men of his own choice and can even select wives for his sons without any consultation (Nasimiyu 1999:154-155).

In conversation with these African theologians, Kubai is able to point out that barrenness is a challenge that is gendered. This is because once a man and a woman get married, it is expected that the woman will conceive and give birth to children. But immediately this does not materialize, the woman is blamed. This is due to the prime value that African communities place on children. Kubai notes that children are viewed as a source of financial security, labor force as well as sources of respect to an individual in the community. She further states that if a

couple does not have children, they are not considered as adults hence they will not be able to make decisions, decisions regarding family and communal matters. Not having children is considered deviant behavior, a curse abnormal and immoral, she reiterates (Kubai 2011).

In her studies among the Chagga, barrenness and having female children only were qualifications for divorce among the Chagga people of Tanzania. Therefore, only male children were counted, having female children was equated to not having children at all. It is important to note that before the divorce was initiated, other mediums such as offering several sacrifices to the ancestors were explored to give solutions to the childlessness state (Kubai 2011).

In her contribution to African women's theology, Kubai sums up that infertility is one of the Sexual and Reproductive, Health and Rights issues on the African continent that has not been addressed, mainly because barrenness is not primary concern for national health policy. It appears that the main agenda is limiting fertility and teaching family planning and not helping the childless despite that fact that children are highly regarded in the African culture.

But more than twelve years after Kubai authored her work on the theme, there is no change. Barren women are still faced with the same challenges. There is urgent need to further interrogate the various cultural beliefs and practices that surround family, having children using scientific methods and favorable policies to be enacted.

## **Genocide and Reconstruction**

Kubai has waded into the waters of war and genocide in Africa. Her focus has been on the Rwandan Genocide. According to Banyanga, Rwanda experienced a genocide in 1994, in which approximately 1,000,000 people died. Many others suffered rape, were widowed, witnessed murder of their own children over a period of 100 days (Banyanga 2008, 2017). It is in the public domain that the genocide was planned, prepared, and then executed from 7 April 1994, right after the plane crash in which president Habyarimana Juvenal died. The genocide lasted to 15 July, making it about 100 days in which members of the Tutsi minority ethnic group, as

well as moderate Hutu and Twa, who opposed to the massacre were killed by armed Hutu militias.

For Kubai, the Rwandan Genocide happened at a time when she was pursuing her doctoral studies. She stated that she had an opportunity watch these events through television, the importance of science and technology cannot be over emphasized. She later went to Rwanda to carry out a study. The event that took place thirty-one years ago continue to shape the present Rwanda. In an article titled 'It was the work of Satan,' (Kubai 2013), Rwanda has been characterized in many ways. For instance: some see it as a success story of a country that has been reconstructed from the ashes of genocide (Muke 2016), with a growth rate per with other African countries, building many new roads, schools and health facilities, three and a half million refugees had been repatriated and resettled by 2003, this number has continued to rise since the repatriation is still on going, Rwanda stands out as the country with the highest number of women in parliament, which at some point stood at 56% and for this achievement the government has earned admiration from several quarters.

This has served to liberate women from political bondage which is normally male dominated. Women in the political space can now make decisions that affect their fellow women, themselves, the country, and world at large. Kubai points to the success story that has come out of Rwanda after their steady reconstruction (Kubai 2014). In many ways the country is changed and peace prevails. However, Kubai also takes note of the way a number of perpetrators, when apprehended used religious terms to describe their actions and passing the buck to Satan whom they claimed led them down that path. Kubai also explores in a skilled way ethnicity and gender violence in Rwanda from cultural and historical perspectives, which she links to the encounters between cultural beliefs and practices. She is supportive of the new gender equality policy and home-grown programs in Rwanda that pay particular attention to the health of women (Kubai 2014).

## Forgiveness and Confession

This is a theme that ties neatly with the genocide theme, since many victims and perpetrators had to get into the space of forgiveness. There was the Detmold confession which involved many churches across Rwanda. These Christians from Rwanda and elsewhere, gathered at Detmold-Germany from 7th-12th December 1996 at the invitation of Dr. Fulgence Rubayiza, in collaboration with the ecumenical community of Hiddesen. Their priority, two years after the genocide was to reflect on their common commitment to build a Rwanda where people can live and work in harmony. In this forum, there was confession by each party and forgiveness sought so that in the end there was a commitment to work together (Ntezimana 2002).

Through her diverse knowledge, ethical ideas have been borne. In an article titled 'Confession and Forgiveness as a strategy for development in post-genocide Rwanda,' (Kubai 2016), per the government of Rwanda reconciliation is believed to be the only moral alternative to post-genocide challenges. Communities must be mobilized and reshaped for social, political, and economic reconstruction (NURC). This is believed to create a delicate situation. Consequently, among other strategies, the state has turned to the concepts of confession and forgiveness which have deep religious roots and systemized them at the individual and community or state level to bring about reconciliation, justice, social cohesion, and ultimately economic development. In this perspective there are key concerns that have been raised and Kubai ponders on some of these such as the question if forgiveness restores victims and empowers them to heal their communities? What empirical evidence exists that religiously inspired justice and reconciliation process after mass political violence?

These are fundamental questions when turning to religion for such long-term practical challenges. Confession and forgiveness are tools that can be employed in the daily lives of people at the individual and community level in pursuit for reconciliation and social justice.



## African's and Church in Diaspora

In the article 'Singing the Lords Song in a strange land: African Churches in Sweden between segregation and integration found,' (Kubai 2013), she sought to investigate on the migrant churches and Christian communities that were established by the African churches in Sweden.

It has been shown by scholars the way migration and movements involve various dynamic. For example, according to Adogame, in 1990 there was estimated to be 30 million voluntary international migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, about three and a half percent of the total population. Prior to this time, African migration to Europe had followed the historical and linguistic trails of colonialism with Great Britain and France as preferred destinations of migrants. However, it has been shown in more recent times, that African migration assumed a more diffused dimension with noticeable numbers of immigrants from several African countries flocking to countries with which they had no colonial ties, mainly in Western Europe, North America, and the Arab world (Adogame 2013:496-498).

Kubai has lived for many years in Sweden and has also worked in this context. She is alive to the fact that migration and living in diaspora are no mean feats. Many African's in diaspora face different hurdles and to be able to go through such, they have learnt to work with each other, to support each other with child rearing and other chores. Important spaces for these migrants include the churches where they find support, can express themselves in their local dialects and there is some form of community. Similarly Adogame states that many Africans who undergo complex forms of migration often carried traits of their religious and cultural identity with them. As they sojourn in new geo-cultural contexts, these migrants are made to identify, organize, and reconstruct "their religion" both for themselves and their host societies. Further to this, within the last three decades there has been a rapid proliferation of African Christian communities in diaspora, thus resulting in the remapping of old religious landscapes (Adogame 2013:496-498).

Little had been known about African Churches in Sweden, so Kubai took upon herself the challenge to shed some light on the proliferation of African Christian communities and examine its role in the integration of

African immigration into the Swedish society. In this study, she made use of ethnographic methods in religious spaces whereby she interrogated 27 church groups and fellowship, three churches: Immanuel International Fellowship at Immanuel Church, Smryna International Church, and Grace Connection Church.

This is an implication that Africans are notoriously religious, even in diaspora they still hold onto their faith, and they wish to integrate with the natives of the foreign land as well as their theological interpretation in a different social set up. This results into social cohesion at the internal and external level.

## **Ethnicity and Gender Based Violence**

For this section, we consider Kubai's writing, 'Making and unmaking techniques in the Rwandan context: Implication for Gender Based Violence, Health and Wellbeing of Women,' (Kubai 2013). The author sets out to examine ethnicity and GBV in Rwanda from a cultural beliefs and practices and to find new gender equality policy and programs and the implication of the encounters to the health of women. This was carried out using community mobilization dialogs, individual interviews as well as interrogative approaches.

The study concluded that violence has continued and there is a conflict between cultural, tradition, the de-ethnicization and gender equality policies, some of the gender violence preventive programs are influenced by the ethos of the traditional norms hence unwittingly perpetuate GBV.

GBV and violence general are challenges are still ailing the society in the twenty first century, the perpetrators are still being asked to give solutions. If this still goes on, violence is here to stay.

Professor Kubai continues to write on security issues. In an article termed, 'Between Justice and Reconciliation,' the society is caught between justice and reconciliation. She notes that one of the major challenges of Rwanda today is to engender reconciliation in a deeply wounded nation and o justice to both victims and perpetrators. It is difficult to affirm the victims, punish the perpetrators and at the same time bring about reconciliation between them. There are unequivocal

claims especially from the victims, that there can be no justice without reparation and there can be no reconciliation without justice. Consequently, the Gacaca process was brought into play, it has turned out to be a source of fear for perpetrators who are desperate to bury the evidence by intimidating the survivors and the survivors who are now living in fear of their lives. Therefore, there is a rising insecurity of survivors, this has become a matter of national concern, (Kubai 2007).

## **Human trafficking and poverty**

To address ethnic poverty and violence through academia, Kubai has authored an article titled, 'Trafficking of Ethiopian Women to Europe-Making Choices, taking risks and implications,' (Kubai 2016). Ethiopian women victims of trafficking- the agency of these women in the whole trafficking process and issues of decision making- trying a chance, or just taking a risk to get out of poverty or difficult social circumstances, considering that they are lured, tricked coerced or even forced into the hands of traffickers by a wide range of circumstances and people, family, and friends. The traffickers target girls with economic, social and family challenges, the vulnerable ones. This is usually done using service agencies and human smugglers who facilitate the process of migration through several routes. Many use the desert route that begins from Sudan to North Africa then cross to Europe.

This is an effort to sensitize the public on the presence and practice of human trafficking due to poverty driven reasons. It is very crucial for communities to work towards self-sustainability. In Kenya today, girls are taken to countries such as Saudi Arabia. They face a lot of challenges including death.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter has examined Kubai's selected works and shown the way she skillfully engages religious and present phenomena from her space in Diaspora. She continues to articulate matters touching women's subordination in pastoral communities, the migrant situations in Scandinavia and provides theological possibilities for further reflection.

Her select works have also highlighted her sources and priorities in the theological enterprise. She generates useful ideas for the church, community and women in Africa. Also, her work carries along her life journey and engagement in different spheres and the kinds of interpretations of liberation she generates. It points out the sources that she uses, the theology she generates and the kind of ecclesiology/-ies she proposes for African women theologians of the present and the future.

## REFERENCES

- Adogame, A. 2007. African Christian Communities in Diaspora. In Ogbu Kalu (ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story*, 495-514. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Ahlberg, B.M., Maina, F., Kubai, A., Khamasi, W., Ekman, M. & Lundqvist-Persson, C. 2016. "A child, a tree": Challenges in building collaborative relations in a community research project in a Kenyan context. *Action Research* 14(3), 257-275.
- Banyanga, J.D. 2008. *Biblical Counseling for Spiritually Wounded Women Who Suffered the 1994 Genocide: A Case Study of Rwandese Women Between Ages 35-55, living in Kibuye*. Potchefstroom: North-West University.
- Banyanga, J.D. & Bjorkqvist, K. 2017. *The Dual Role of Religion Regarding the Rwandan 1994 Genocide: Both Instigator and Healer*. Vassa/Finland: Pyrex Journals.
- Kubai, A. & Ahlberg, B. 2013. Making and unmaking ethnicities in the Rwandan context: implication for gender-based violence, health, and wellbeing of women, *Ethnicity & Health*, 18:5, 469-482.  
DOI: 10.1080/13557858.2013.832012
- Kubai Profile. 2023. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/anne-kubai-27128320b/?originalSubdomain=se> [accessed on 3.4.2023].
- Kubai, A. 2006. "Religious Communities and the Struggle for Civil Space." *Journal of Henry Martyn Institute* 25(1-2), 115-127.
- Kubai, A. 2007. "Post-Genocide Rwanda: The Changing Religious Landscape." *Exchange* 36 (2), 198-214.
- Kubai, A. 1995. "The Muslim Presence and Representations of Islam among the Meru of Kenya." Doctoral Thesis, King's College, 1995.
- Kubai, A. 1999. "The Muslim View of Power." *Wajibu* 14 (3). [http://web.peacelink.it/wajibu/8\\_issue/p3.html](http://web.peacelink.it/wajibu/8_issue/p3.html) [accessed March 14, 2008].

- Kubai, A. 2004. "Christian-Muslim Relations in Kenya since Independence." Klaus Hock (ed.), *The Interface between Research and Dialogue: Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa*, 32-65. Munster/Germany: LIT Verlag.
- Kubai, A. 2007. "Walking a Tightrope: Christians and Muslims in Post-Genocide Rwanda." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 18 (2), 219-235.
- Kubai, A. 2008. "Striving in Faith: Christians and Muslims in Africa." Anne Kubai and Tarekegn Adebo (eds.), *Striving in Faith: Christians and Muslims in Africa*, 10-23. Uppsala/Sweden: Life & Peace Institute.
- Kubai, A. 2013. 'Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land': Challenges and New Frontiers for African Churches in Sweden. In: Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Andrea Fröchtling, Andreas Kunz-Lübcke (Ed.), *Babel is everywhere! Migration, Religion and Diaspora in Global Perspectives*. New York: Lang, 251-266.
- Kubai, A. 2013. Being here and there: Migrant communities in Sweden and the conflicts in the Horn of Africa. *African and Black Diaspora* 6 (2), 174-188.
- Kubai, A. 2013. It Was the Work of Satan: Perpetrators rationalize the atrocities of the Rwanda genocide. In: Kjell-Åke Nordqvist (Ed.), *Gods and Arms: On Religion and Armed Conflict*. Eugene/Oregon: Pickwick Publ., 49-68.
- Kubai, A. 2014. Reinventing 'tradition': Social reconstruction and development in post-genocide Rwanda. In: Tomas Sundnes Drønen (Ed.), *Religion and Development: Nordic Perspectives on Development in Africa*. New York: Lang.
- Kubai, A. 2015. Being here and there: Migrant communities in Sweden and the conflicts in the Horn of Africa. In: Fassil Demissie (ed.), *Africans on the Move: Migration, Diaspora and Development Nexus*. Abingdon: Routledge, 76-90.
- Kubai, A. 2016. 'Confession' and 'Forgiveness' as a strategy for development in post-genocide Rwanda. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(4), Article ID UNSP a3562.
- Mbiti, J. 1987. *Love and Marriage in Africa*. England: Longman.
- Muke, N. 2016. Ministry of Reconciliation in the Context of Ethnic Ideology and Genocide: A Theological Evaluation of the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda. Dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Missiology. Stellenbosch University. Retrieved October 18, 2022, from <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/100154>
- Nasimiyu, A. 1999. 'Moral and Ethical Aspects of African Christianity: Exploratory Essays in Moral Theology.' Mugambi, J., and W. Nasimiyu, (eds.), *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity: A challenge for African Christianity*. Nairobi: Acton Publ.
- Ntezimana, L. 2002. *Confession of Detmold*. Retrieved October 29, 2022, from Rwanda Hope: <http://www.rwandahope.com/confession.pdf>.
- NURC. 2005. *The Role of Women in Reconciliation and Peace Building in Rwanda: Ten Years After Genocide 1994-2004: Contributions, Challenges and Way Forward*. Retrieved from National Unity and Reconciliation Commission:

<https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/4786/3871.pdf;sequence=1>.

- Oduyoye, M. 1993. 'A Critique of John Mbiti's View on Love and Marriage in Africa'. Jacob K. Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang (eds.), *Religious Plurality in Africa, Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*. Berlin /ew York: De Gruyter, 341-365.
- Oduyoye, M. 1992. 'Women and Ritual in Africa'. Kanyoro, M.R., & M.A. Oduyoye, (eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. Maryknoll/NY: Orbis Books, 25-39.