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# **Women in Religio-Cultural History: A Reflection on their Representation in Hugo Hinfelaar's Scholarly Work in Zambia, 1960s to 1990s**

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*Although Catholic missionary historians have contributed to the writing of Zambia's many histories, the attempt at documenting women's place in religio-cultural history in the country has been overshadowed by the prominence of masculine histories. Using the example of Hugo Hinfelaar who captures women's histories in his scholarly work, this article explores the representation of the place of women in the religio-cultural history of Zambia in order to highlight Hinfelaar's contributions to the study of women and to Zambia's religio-cultural history. Informed by African feminist theory, it draws on a historical study which utilises document review and analyses the data through 'restorying' of purposively selected themes in Hinfelaar's work. The article shows that Hinfelaar represents women as pillars in the growth of the church and active players in religio-cultural heritage, as seen from their religious vocations and reactions to missionary subordination of indigenous knowledge. The article advances that Hinfelaar's representation of women ignites discourses which affirm that although unrecognised, women do play important roles in religio-cultural history. It also provides insights for the study of women's history in ways that reveal the historian's favouring of the minority in the wider web of history often grounded in patriarchy.*

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## **Keywords:**

Women, religio-cultural history, Hugo Hinfelaar, representation, African feminism, Zambia.

## **Introduction**

This article addresses the following research question: How is the place of women in the religio-cultural history of Zambia represented in Hugo Hinfelaar's scholarly work? The research question purposively focuses on Hugo Hinfelaar (henceforth Hinfelaar) owing to the nature of his scholarly contributions to Zambian church history. For example, as opposed to upholding the tone of missionary scholarship of his time, often preoccupied with historicising the growth of religious orders and other aspects of the Catholic Church in the country, Hinfelaar's work has a unique focus on women. For example, Coyne (1970), Lane (1991) and Murphy (2003) researched the history of the Jesuits

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in the country, while Cumming *et al* (2003) and O'Sullivan (2014) focused on Francis Mazziari (Conventual Franciscan) and the history of the Capuchins in Zambia, respectively. O'Shea (1986) traced the growth of the Catholic Church in Zambia with reference to the Copperbelt region, whereas others, such as Carmody (1992; 2002), have provided a rich history of Catholic education and its contributions to the country. Thus, Hinfelaar's work stands out for its interest in women in a context whose history has been overshadowed by masculine histories.

The article is also driven by gaps in existing scholarship on religion and gender in Zambia and in Zambian religious history. Thus, while Hinfelaar's work remains a key point of reference in studies of religion and gender in the Zambian context, there has been little in-depth analysis of Hinfelaar's account of women's contributions to religious and cultural life in Zambia. Studies have related to Hinfelaar's work without sufficiently delving into his contributions to the study of women. For example, Ipenburg (1991), Kaunda and Nadar (2012), Sendapu (2016) and Hackett (2017) draw on Hinfelaar's narrative of the Lumpa Church, while Kangwa (2011), Kaunda and Nadar (2012), Kaunda (2013) and Kaunda and Kaunda (2016), among others, refer to Hinfelaar's descriptions of the roles of Bemba women in Bemba religion. But as this article will show, there are other aspects of Hinfelaar's writing on women that have not been substantially explored.

Additionally, although Hinfelaar has contributed tremendously to African history through theology and religious cultural studies in Zambia, his work has not been the subject of inquiry. For instance, Marja Hinfelaar (2003) affirms that one of Hinfelaar (Hugo)'s contributions to Sub-Saharan African history was through his efforts in setting up the White Fathers Archive in Zambia. Despite this, his contributions have hardly been a subject of study in Zambian scholarship. Thus, while other Catholic missionaries in the history of the Church have been remembered in scholarship, Hinfelaar's contributions have yet to be given due attention in Zambian church history scholarship<sup>1</sup>. This article makes a step in that direction by exploring the representations of women's contributions to the religio-cultural history of Zambia in Hinfelaar's scholarly work.

By purposively focusing on Hinfelaar and his representations of women's place in the religio-cultural history of the country, the article seeks to provide an example of how the religio-cultural history of women in Zambia has continually been constructed. This is deemed significant for providing insights for the study of women's history in ways that reveal the historian's favouring of the minority in the wider web of history often grounded in patriarchy. The article should thus be of interest to scholars of church history, African Indigenous Religion and general women's studies. The discussion unfolds by describing the setting

in which Hinfelaar's representation of women in the religio-cultural history of Zambia is situated, the theoretical framework, and the research design and methods. Thereafter, the article discusses Hinfelaar's portrayal of women in his scholarly work before drawing the conclusion.

### **The Context of Hugo Hinfelaar's Representation of Women's Place in the Religio-Cultural History of Zambia**

Although the historical period on which Hinfelaar's scholarly work focuses stretches back to the 1890s, this article is situated in Zambia's post-independence context. It particularly covers the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, a time characterised by numerous trends that directly and indirectly shaped the place of women in the country's religio-cultural history.

Politically, the country won its independence from Britain in 1964. Taylor (2006) observes that independence brought new opportunities and challenges. For example, whereas colonial rule was an oppressive system of governance that could enforce compliance and cooperation, the new government had to find a way to unite Zambia's 73 different ethnolinguistic groups into one nation by non-coercive means (Taylor, 2006). Since 1964, the country has gone through an era of multi-party democracy (1964–1972) and one-party rule (1972–1990) before reverting to multi-party democracy in 1991. The 1990s were characterised by winds of political change that saw the birth of democratic governance.

Economically, the country has been dependent on the copper mining industry. However, the output of copper fell to a record low of 228,000 metric tons in 1998 after a 30-year decline owing to lack of investment, low copper prices and uncertainty over privatisation (Hampwaye and Mweemba, 2006, 105). As a result, the socio-economic conditions of the majority of Zambians deteriorated in the 1990s. Additionally, HIV and AIDS cases began to accelerate markedly in Zambia, as they did throughout Africa, creating massive social dislocation and a national crisis in human resources, healthcare and the economy (Taylor, 2006).

Religio-culturally, Zambia is a plural environment that is dominated by Christianity, while other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Bahai, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, and Zambian indigenous religion account for smaller percentages in terms of following. At independence, it was estimated that almost 20 percent of the population were Catholic, with the majority coming from the Bemba speaking areas (Hinfelaar, 1994, 159). Before the arrival of Christianity and other religions, Zambians practiced a range of indigenous religions and adhered to an array of religious beliefs. In the post-independence era, Christianity remains the dominant religion, as it has been since the early twentieth century when missionary activity proliferated alongside the establishment of colonial control over the territory.

Christianity's dominance in the religious landscape has been characterised by trends of its own. Besides the country being declared "a Christian nation" in 1991, the country's Christian context has continued to be characterised by transformation evidenced in the contemporary growth of Pentecostalism. This is an aspect that is well captured in Udelhoven's (2010) and Cheyeka *et al's* (2014) work on "the changing face of Christianity in Zambia" and in other studies that have dealt with Pentecostalism in Zambia (Kaunda, 2016; Mwale and Chita, 2016; 2018). Despite these trends, Taylor (2006) observes that the majority of Zambian communities continued to adhere to traditional practices alongside their new Christian faiths, and these practices continue to influence behaviour and cultural norms.

In this context, gender relations are characterised by a series of contradictions. For example, while women found a presence in public life in post-independent Zambia, considerable obstacles persisted and made it difficult for them to attain equality with men. As affirmed in the Zambia National Gender policy (2014), even in the 2010s women continued to lag behind their male counterparts in all spheres of national development. Accordingly, calls for the advancement of women through their active participation in all spheres of public and private life remain topical in discourses of gender in the country.

Hinfelaar's scholarly work was thus situated in a changing landscape, additionally confronted with the arrival of mission Christianity, its establishment, impact, and people's reaction to it. It is therefore worthwhile to explore how a Catholic missionary engaged with women's place in the making of Zambia's religio-cultural history in a context and period preoccupied with masculine histories.

### **Theoretical framework**

The article draws on the feminist tradition, which deals with the position of women in society, culture, religion, production, and other spheres. Feminism has a myriad of theoretical perspectives emanating from the complexities and specifics of the different material conditions and identities of women, and informed by the many diverse and creative ways in which women contest power in private and public lives (Ahikire, 2014, 9). Aware of the numerous strands of feminist theory, the article is closely aligned with the broader principles of African feminist theory.

African feminist theory is concerned with "Africa's history following colonisation and the present struggles under neocolonialism, neoliberalism, and globalization" (Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, 2006, 4). According to Wane (2011, 7), African feminism is part and parcel of African women's lived experiences and builds on African indigenous ways of knowing.

Significant to this discourse is the understanding that “African feminist theory is foregrounded in the retrieval, revitalisation or restoration of the African senses of Indigeneness” (Wane, 2011, 7). African feminist theory affirms the active roles played by women in different African contexts.

Given that struggle and emancipation are fundamental to feminism, feminist theorising is grounded in resistance and agency. According to Hollander and Einwohner (2004), resistance is not only defined by resisters’ perceptions of their own behaviour, but also by the targets’ and others’ recognition of and reaction to this behaviour. Additionally, resistance reveals the central role of power, “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, 95). Resistance is also socially constructed, as resisters, their targets, and third-party observers all participate in and contribute to the construction process. Defiance is manifested when individuals or groups resist the status quo, thus it is closely linked to agency and is of concern to African feminist theory.

Agency is the capacity for autonomous action and the realising of one’s own interest in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities (Burke, 2012). Agency is useful for feminist research on women in religions that promote strict gender relationships based on male headship and women’s subordination, as the latter are understood as actors rather than as simply acted upon by male-dominated social institutions (Burke, 2012).

This article uses African feminist theory to make meaning of the representation of women in Hinfelaar’s work. We want to argue that Hinfelaar has a pro-feminist approach to church history because of his attention to women. Hinfelaar’s representation of women in church history resonates closely with African feminism’s concern that although the reclaiming and building of Africa was in equal measure done by women who fought alongside men, their efforts have been largely unacknowledged (Salo, 2001).

### **Research Design and methods**

The article’s methodological approach employs aspects of a narrative research design. Narrative research concentrates on studying one or two individuals, who gather data through the collection of their stories, report individual experiences, and chronologically order the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2003; Cassey, 1995). In this case, the focus was on Hinfelaar’s accounts and his portrayal of women in the religio-cultural history of the country as part of his Zambian church historiography.

Data was collected through document analysis of autobiographies, letters, photographs, and publications. Three key scholarly works by Hugo Hinfelaar were purposively selected for the analysis: *The History of the Catholic Church 1895 to 1995* (2004); *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia in a Century of Religious Change*

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*1892 to 1992* (1994); and *Women's Revolt, the Lumpa Church of Lenshina* (1991).

In the *Women's Revolt, the Lumpa Church of Lenshina*, Hinfelaar follows the development of the Lumpa Church and observes that the religious message of its prophetess was obscured by the political disturbances and bloodshed in which the Lumpa were involved from the beginning of the 1960s. Through an analysis of the hymns composed by Lenshina, Hinfelaar uncovers the religious message and Lenshina's view on the religious role of Bemba women. In so doing, Hinfelaar shows that Lenshina drew inspiration from Christianity and aspects of Bemba religion, her main contribution being the shift away from the backward-looking veneration of the ancestors to the forward-looking acceptance of Jesus Christ. Lenshina is depicted as restoring Bemba women's religious roles as intercessors, placed between Christ and the world, and as initiators of the Christian cult.

In *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia in a Century of Religious Change* (1994), Hinfelaar traces the religious changes that occurred among the Bemba-speaking women between 1892 and 1992. He shows that the religious tenets of the traditional domestic cult had already been undermined before the arrival of the missionaries who based their church structures on the concept of the Bemba hierarchy. Hinfelaar also describes the creative redress of the women as channelled through independent Christian movements and mission churches and argues that the genuine reactions of women could well offer material for genuine inculturation.

In the *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia* (2004), Hinfelaar traces the one hundred years of the Catholic Church in the country from its beginnings with the arrival of the French White Fathers at Mambwe Mwela in 1891. He recounts the establishment of the first mission post at Kayambi in 1895, the arrival of the Jesuits in 1905 at Chikuni and other missionary congregations such as the Franciscan Friars Minor Conventuals and Franciscan Friars Minor Capuchins, who came to Zambia in 1931. Hinfelaar also captures the arrival of the missionary congregations of sisters who came to Zambia.

The collected data were then thematically analysed. This was done through the process of restorying, in which the aim was to detail themes that arose from Hinfelaar's representations of women in his scholarly works. As Huber and Whelan (1999, 381) point out, restorying in narrative research seeks to provide a more detailed discussion of the meaning of the story. Hence, the themes that emerged in Hinfelaar's representation of women were reorganised into a general framework that consisted of gathering stories, analysing them for key elements and then rewriting the narratives to place them within a chronological sequence (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002, 329-347).

### **A Brief Biographical Account of Hugo Hinfelaar**

Although Hinfelaar often takes biographical perspectives in his approach to history, very little has been written about his own life and person. However, a detailed account of his autobiography can be read elsewhere ([www.hugohinfelaarmissionarisinzambia.nl](http://www.hugohinfelaarmissionarisinzambia.nl)), in which he writes about his life in Zambia with the intent of contributing to a better understanding of countries in the South and ultimately to be in greater solidarity with them. For a brief biographical note, Hinfelaar was born in The Hague on the 3 April 1933. He came to Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia, in 1958 and worked as a White Father<sup>2</sup> missionary in the Northern and Central Provinces.

Having been in the country for over half a century, Hinfelaar recollects in the introduction of his autobiography that:

*The first six (6) years in the Chinsali district of Northern Zambia proved to be formative and made a lasting impression on me.... I have known the Catholic Church before and after the Second Vatican Council. I lived with all its subsequent tensions. I did not 'leave' or sit on the ecclesiastical fence but held out in one way or another. During these years I experienced change of status, from being sent by the parish community as a hero to being regarded as a remnant of old colonial furniture.... The people of Zambia have taught me a great deal (Hinfelaar, n.d).*

### **Hinfelaar's Representation of Women in Religio-Cultural History**

Hinfelaar's scholarly work closely studied both women religious (women in the Catholic tradition commonly known as 'sisters' or 'nuns' who perform the vocations open to women within the Church) and religious women in Zambia (lay women who are engaged in religious devotion or who belong to religious communities). While their identities could easily be drawn into these two broad categories, the women's experiences reflected a common struggle for recognition in different spheres of life, which facilitated the nature of their reaction to the growth of Christianity and consequent contributions to the country's religio-cultural history. In this section, Hinfelaar's representation of women in the selected scholarly works is categorised into two broad emerging themes. These largely revolve around women as pillars in the religio-cultural history of Zambia through their contributions to the growth of the church, and to nation building in their quest to make African Christianity.

### ***Women as Active players in Religio-Cultural History through the Growth of the Church in Zambia***

Situated in the wider narrative of the encounter between mission Christianity and indigenous religions, women are represented as pillars of the church

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through their contributions to the growth of the church and their appropriation of Christianity. With regard to the growth of Catholicism, Hinfelaar includes women's contributions to Zambian Catholic Church history by capturing the arrival of the nursing and teaching congregations of women. In addition to those who came in the pioneering stage of the growth of the Church, the groups that arrived in the 1960s constitute part of the women religious who contributed to the growth of the Catholic Church towards and after independence. These included the Canadian sisters of the Charity of Ottawa who came to the diocese of Chipata in 1962 and the Oblates Missionaries of Mary Immaculate in the Diocese of Mansa around 1962 (Hinfelaar, 2004, 175).

The women religious are portrayed as contributing to the growth of the Catholic Church not just in numbers (as the number of young women joining the religious sisterhoods grew steadily from the mid 1970s), but also in terms of the formation of local sister congregations, which included among others the Sisters of St. Francis (a congregation started by Bishop Phelim O'Shea with a small group of young women), and the Sisters of the Infant Jesus of 1969 (later changed name to Child Jesus). With reference to the latter, he observes:

*The group of Bemba speaking women were apparently ready to take a more active place in the apostolic work of the local Church. One of the aims of the group was the improvement of the status of women. They also had a sense of themselves as mothers to the people* (Hinfelaar, 1994, 177).

Most importantly, the local sister congregations were way ahead of the international societies and congregations of fathers and brothers in opening up to local vocations (Hinfelaar, 2004, 222). Thus, women religious were pace setters in opening up to local vocations. The inclusion of women in the narrative of the growth of the Catholic Church affirms that women were not passive, but active participants as can be noted through their religious vocations within the Church. Female evangelists took the initiative to open up outstations, and indigenous bible women's groups took the Gospel into many kraals, and yet, more attention was placed on the role of men in the propagation of the Gospel and the spread of Christianity (Isichei, 1995; Hastings, 1989). Hinfelaar contributes to Zambian church historiography by resisting perpetuation of the neglect of the women's narrative in the growth of the Catholic Church.

Additionally, women religious fostered the growth of the Catholic Church through their structural organisation, the Zambia Association of Sisterhoods of 1960. The Zambia Association of Sisterhoods was established by a total of fifteen expatriate congregations and local institutes to foster communication and co-operation between one another so as to give effective service to the Catholic Church and to the nation (Hinfelaar, 2004, 222). The organisational structures

were significant for fostering the growth of the Catholic Church, as they became the channel through which the religious sisters made their presence felt in public life, in the changing socio-economic context of the post-independence era. This was largely through the religious sisters' works of mercy in hospitals and schools:

*Sisters desired to reach out in more modern ways besides their traditional roles of nurses and teachers... to become involved in social work for the poor and needy, for those who had flocked to the urban areas and had now settled in shanty compounds. Out of this desire came the sisters' contributions through the Zambia Helpers Society and the mobile clinics that visited compounds [in Lusaka] .... There was also a women's club and class in hygiene and childcare in addition to under five clinics. They also organised open air classes for hundreds of school age children who could not find places in the Lusaka schools (Hinfelaar, 2004, 224).*

As Ngundo and Wiggins (2017, 5) observe, "teaching is one of the basic apostolates with which nearly every religious institute is involved... so that in collaboration with the governments many young people can rise and improve their lives". Similarly, sisters reach out to street children and mothers, physically and mentally challenged persons, orphaned children and single mothers based on Jesus' call for us to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to the feast in Luke 14:13 (Ngundo and Wiggins, 2017). Consequently, when African women scholars lamented that studies on religion in Africa were predominately on the role of men (both local and expatriate) and generally silent on women's involvement (Phiri, 1997), Hinfelaar's representation of women can be deemed to be contributing to making the women visible in the narrative of the growth of the church in the country through their involvement in different spheres of society. This affirms the African feminist call to recognise the contributions of women (Salo, 2001).

Women also faced struggles in trying to create and reclaim their spaces in the church. In the case of women in the Catholic Church, Hinfelaar portrays the struggles of the 'sisters' in having a presence in the male dominated Catholic Church structures and how they navigated their way:

*In 1966 they were strong enough to request a form of presence at meetings of the bishops, particularly when matters discussed were related to their work. At a plenary meeting in December, the bishops agreed to invite members of the association as observers and to send copies of their minutes to them. The number of observers was to be not more than two and they were invited to sit in for discussions on matters of mutual interest. In August 1968, the Episcopal Conference asked*

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*the Zambia Association of Sisters to appoint a sister to the staff of the Secretariat (Hinfelaar, 2004, 233).*

Besides highlighting the contributions of women religious to the religio-cultural history, Hinfelaar also includes religious women in this narrative. Hinfelaar depicts religious women as having been active players in the growth of the church through their strides to inculcate religious life within the mission churches. While women were attracted to Christianity, it affected their social and religious roles. As emphasised in African feminist theory, the suffering of women could not be detached from the legacy of colonialism and Christianity (Chisale, 2015).

The arrival of Christianity changed the religious role of women in such a way as to undermine their social position, destroying the religious foundations on which society had been built. Within the Catholic Church, the reaction of women took the form of inculcating religious life, which also translated in the growth of indigenous sisters' congregations who shaped the narrative of the Catholic Church in their various apostolates. The popularity of these young religious congregations stemmed in no small measure from the fact that slowly the traditional marital dogma and cosmic view had been woven into the substratum of their constitutions and in the mindset of the Bemba speaking women (Hinfelaar, 2004, 177).

Additionally, women are represented as pillars in making African Christianity outside the mission churches through African independent churches. With reference to the Bemba women, it was observed that the Protestant and Catholic missionaries perceived the sacred position of women as dangerous and reactionary and traditional teachings were dismissed as pagan (Hinfelaar, 1994; Sundkler and Steed, 2000).

As affirmed by ter Haar (1996), the decline of women's religious status was most acutely felt during the nationalist period which preceded independence. Women reacted to the declining status through protests. The women's protest was most creative in the sense that they found new ways of combining the old and the new tenets of life (Hinfelaar, 1991; 1994; 2004). Women as active agents in the creation of African Christianity appropriated religion by tapping into their traditional religion. This is portrayed in the narrative of Alice Mulenga Lenshina's Lumpa Church. For example, in recounting the birth of the Lumpa Church, Hinfelaar represents Lenshina as a symbol with whom women could identify.

*Lenshina showed the missionaries how by attempting to abolish the so-called pagan taboos, which were part of their traditional morality, the whole network of marital relationships collapsed. This was regarded as the cause of much misery, sickness and death within families. She insisted*

*that Christianity had to be built on a foundation of tradition and that people should return to their original beliefs in order to give Christ's Church a firm foundation* (Hinfelaar, 1994, 185).

Thus, Hinfelaar not only portrays women as pillars in the making of African Christianity, but also points to the creativity associated with the manner in which women react to male domination and Christianity and make something of the situation. Hinfelaar also emphasises the need to pay attention to these creative forms of redress so as to foster the growth of the church by arguing that the genuine reactions of women could offer material for genuine inculturation.

Hinfelaar, therefore, contributes to women's studies through a departure from what Mwaura (2005) calls depicting women as helpers or totally absent in shaping African Christianity and shares in the concerns of African feminism which seek to recognise the struggles and contributions of women in their contexts. This also reflects women's agency centred on the portrayal of not passively accepting religious doctrines but rather challenging male-dominated institutions in creative ways through resistance. Hinfelaar (2004) observes that in spite of a great deal of opposition and misunderstanding and the introduction of a very patriarchal form of western Christianity, the women attained for themselves a well-established position within the Christian churches, which exerts a growing influence on the specific manner of being God's people in Zambia.

### ***Women as Pillars in Religio-Cultural history through Nation Building***

Besides being represented as active players and pillars in the growth of the Church, women were active players in nation building amid a challenging context. In this representation of women as active players in nation building, Hinfelaar takes issue with the unrecognised women's contributions. Thus, he acknowledges and celebrates the women's contributions towards independence in difficult circumstances.

As in many parts of colonial Africa, Zambia's struggle for political independence was a task undertaken by the young men. The demand for labour in the mines and the sheer attraction of western modernity caused the men to flock to the urban areas. This left the agricultural work in the villages to a disproportionately large number of women and children. The women were burdened with the task of food production as well as caring single handed for the children and the elderly (Hinfelaar, 1994, 150).

This portrayal is closely aligned with the concerns of African feminist theory, which takes issue with the untold stories of women in nation building. As observed by Gatwiri and McLaren (2016), patriarchy has male-washed the significant contributions of women in building the continent in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial times.

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Moreover, women contributed to nation building through the promotion of their own roles.

*In order to acquire a voice to promote their economic social and spiritual roles in the society, women all over the country started to come together in non-governmental organisations... it was an agonisingly slow process often hampered by internal strife, illiteracy, misunderstandings, scarcity of funds and an apparent lack of support from the churches (Hinfelaar 1994, 165).*

The critical contributions of women were situated within societal structures that disempowered them, and so women utilised their agency to empower themselves and the nation. In this regard, Hinfelaar makes the neglect of women's contributions to nation building in scholarship visible in a context where the roles of women were marginalised.

Women further sustained their cultural heritage under difficult circumstances as part of their identity. This was largely done through the appropriation of initiation ceremonies amidst the wider condemnation of these practices as pagan. Through preserving the memory of traditional religious roles, Hinfelaar depicts women as continually shaping the identity of Zambian women in the changing landscape. His work thus demonstrates the critical position of women in the religio-cultural history of the country by reconstructing the traditional religion and position of women therein.

As Hinfelaar (1994) observes, traditional Bemba religion was centred on the home shrine, which was in the custody of married women. They were the priestesses of a house religion, which put married women in the role of intermediaries between the spheres of the human and the divine. Thus, it was through women that men could gain access to the world of transcendence. In the wake of mission Christianity and the resulting loss of the religious roles of women, Hinfelaar represents women as active players in the reconstruction of their identity. This was also extended to the care for the environment:

*In the midst of change, a sizeable proportion of women continued to regard the ngulu/mashawe as belonging to the traditional cosmic sphere of the forest (mumpanga) and not as something entirely negative and irredeemable... as representatives of the calo, the land, they had been and were very sensitive to the violations of the environment, the destruction of the territorial cults and the consequent upheaval among the guardian spirits all in the name of western progress. There had been, for instance, wholesale uprooting of revered woodlands, the flooding of sacred valleys for hydro-electric power, indiscriminate fishing and hunting and the dumping of slag in hallowed groves (Hinfelaar, 1996, 170).*

Closely linked to the women's reaction to urbanisation, industrialisation and new religious world views, the representation of women as showing concern for the environment underscores the women's understanding of building a stronger and more durable foundation and structures for the nation's future. Given that the contributions of women were often a neglected aspect of African church historiography (Phiri, 1997; Murray, 1996), Hinfelaar represents women as active players in the religio-cultural narrative of the country as opposed to being passive in the face of the changing world view and their declining religious status. He stresses that women voiced their protest against the effects of religious and social change in a religious form. In this way, Hinfelaar's portrayal of women demonstrates his outstanding interest in women in the religious history of the country. Hinfelaar's representation of women's place in the religio-cultural history of Zambia is thus one closely aligned to African feminism with its concern with Africa's past history following colonisation (Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists, 2006) and as a critical aspect of African women's lived experiences (Wane, 2011).

To conclude, in Hugo Hinfelaar's scholarly work women are represented as pillars and active players in the growth of the church, the making of African Christianity and ultimately in shaping the religio-cultural history of the country. As Mwaura (2005) notes, a balanced historiography must integrate women's perspectives and experiences. This portrayal is closely related to the African feminist tradition that perceives women as active players through different forms of resistance and agency, and at the same time resonates with the portrayal of women by other scholars. For example, Mwaura (2005) and Sundkler and Steed (2000) argue that women are animators of the church and society not only during times of crisis, but even in times of stability. Hinfelaar and other scholars have voiced out by making known the reactions and their contributions to African church historiography (Bowie, 1993; Roberts, 2002; Njoroge, 2000; Hackett, 1995). Through this representation, Hinfelaar enriches the study of women in religion and contributes to the reconstruction of women's trajectories in the religio-cultural history of Zambia.

### **Towards an Explanation for Hinfelaar's Representations of Women in the Religio-Cultural History of Zambia in his Scholarly Work**

Hinfelaar's representation of women as pillars in the religio-cultural history of Zambia can be explained from different perspectives. To start with, Hinfelaar's representation of women as pillars and active players in the country's religio-cultural history rests on his search for Bemba women's sacred positions in the pre-missionary era and consequent reconstruction of women's religious roles in Bemba religion. These were *Chibinda wa Nganda* (Enabler of the Domestic Cult),

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*Kabumaba wa Mapepo* (Initiator of Worship) and *Na Chimbusa wa Chisungu* (Tutor of the Transcendent).

As *Chibinda wa Nganda*, the woman was the maker and priestess of the home shrine and as *Kabumba wa Mapepo*, she was tasked to take small offerings to the family shrine (*Ulufuba*) built on the edge of the village behind the home shrine to obtain health, wellbeing and life from the lineage spirits. Thus, she was a medium between the living and dead (Hinfelaar, 1994). As *Nachimbusa wa chisungu*, the woman was literally the protector of the miraculous event and the mother of the things to be handed down (Hinfelaar, 1994). While the Bemba women are portrayed as having leadership positions comparable to those of men (through these positions), it can be stated that the roles of women were also tilted towards a patriarchal orientation. This is because the initiation rites and home religious discourse had a lot of elements centred on women's responsibility of looking after a man and the satisfaction of his sexual desires. Nonetheless, Hinfelaar not only makes known the lost sacred positions of women in Bemba religion, but also reconstructs the positions of women in the face of change and ultimately makes the marginalised women visible through his representation of women as pillars and active players in the country's religio-cultural history.

The depiction of women as active participants in the making of religio-cultural history shows Hinfelaar's concern for women, especially their changing and lost status. Ter Haar (1996) also observes that in examining the reactions and changes in women's initiation rites, Hinfelaar mourns with women their lost status as the initiation ritual and the ritual objects associated with women's practices were deemed to be pagan, and in turn women lost hold of the sacredness of their objects. Hinfelaar shows that through the creative protest, redress and genuine concern of the 1950s, certain religious elements emerged and gave birth to new and more local models of religious experiences, either independently or as part of the mainline churches (Hinfelaar, 1996, 180–81).

Additionally, women are portrayed as active participants in the making of African Christianity, even though women had little access to the ample resources of church leadership. Hinfelaar's depiction cannot be detached from a concern over the marginalisation of women in church leadership and the overall unrecognised contributions of women to the church and nation: 'in the thrust forward to becoming a truly African church the women were again being marginalised to a certain extent in spite of having rendered sterling service to the church for decades' (Hinfelaar 1994, 159). By depicting women as active players in the making of African Christianity, Hinfelaar reveals women's struggles and their innovations in seeking redress:

*.... Catholic and Protestant women alike continued to take part in the day to day affairs of their church communities. On occasions they donned their*

*colourful uniforms of the different organisations, they cared for the sick and aged. Whenever allowed, they took responsibility for transmitting sacred tradition, their status remained marginal and their work poorly documented, but through their movements and organisations they continued to become more articulate (Hinfelaar, 1994, 167).*

Closely in line with the concerns of African feminism, Hinfelaar's depiction can also be linked to his concern for the poor and the marginalised, not only through making known their marginalisation but also recognising their battles and sympathizing with the struggles of women. Similarly, Hinfelaar's appreciation of the distress of women and the subsequent ways of seeking redress mirror his regard for human dignity:

*The people involved in such upheavals were not just objects of study to be neatly categorised according to preconceived western systems of thought but human beings with a message, an ideology, a religious-cosmic conviction of such strength that they were ready to die for it. These religious movements must be given their due, in particular by African scholars as expressions of religious culture, the bedrock of any Christian evangelisation (Hinfelaar, 1994, 194).*

Hinfelaar's positionality as a Catholic missionary cannot be detached from the manner in which he represents women's place in the religio-cultural history of the country in ways that intersect with the concerns of African feminism. This is closely related to the observation made by Rasing (1996) that as a missionary, Hinfelaar was struck by the effect of the Christian religion on the lives of women, and yet women seemed to be almost completely excluded from the historiography of the subject. Hinfelaar's representation is thus closely tied to his positionality as a priest concerned with the growth of the church in the African soil. Simultaneously, ter Haar (1996) observes, as a priest, he is much concerned with the issue of inculturation, arguing convincingly that the church should take the cosmic view of women in Africa and their religious role seriously to its own benefit. By so doing, Hinfelaar contributes to African Christianity by making known the struggles of women and the manner in which the women actively shaped the course of African Christianity. As Hollander and Einwohner (2004) observe, resistance is socially constructed such that resisters, their targets and third-party observers all contribute to the construction process. By representing women and arguing for Christian evangelisation to be foregrounded in the religious expressions of women, Hinfelaar becomes part of the resisters, and together, Hinfelaar and women can be said to construct resistance.

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His long missionary experience in Zambia also ignited the voice he raises to represent women in the religio-cultural history of the country. Hinfelaar reminisces on how he came to share in some of women's experiences:

*As a young missionary, I had been deeply and emotionally involved in the bloody uprising of the Lumpa movement of Alice Lenshina. Why would intelligent people many of them women with babies on their backs, run into a hail of bullets rather than be instructed in the Christian faith as brought to them by the missionaries? The gospel was meant to be Good news! Why then were they so afraid of Christ on the Cross? Why did they see mission-work as an imposition rather than as a liberation? (Hinfelaar, 1996, 193).*

As Aguilar and Aguilar (1994) observe, Hinfelaar does not apologise when it comes to being the voice which cries in the wilderness, the voice for the Bemba women.

### **Conclusion**

This article sought to explore the representation of women's place in the religio-cultural history of Zambia in Hinfelaar's scholarly work. Given that Hinfelaar represents women as active players and pillars in the growth of the church and in the making of African Christianity, the article concludes that this portrayal affirms the need for recognising the important and largely unrecognised role of women in Zambian religio-cultural history. This is through his positionality as a missionary who shared in the experiences of the women and one concerned with the growth of an authentic African Christianity.

The article also concludes that through Hinfelaar's representation of women as pillars in the growth of the church and in nation building, the women's struggles and innovations are made visible in Zambian church history. This portrayal further highlights not only the women's struggles and contributions but also Hinfelaar's contributions to the making of the religio-cultural history of the country. Hinfelaar's representation of women is also closely aligned to African feminist theory, especially as he portrays women's resistance and agency expressed through their revolts and reactions to missionary subordination of indigenous knowledge. Through this representation, Hinfelaar attempts in his own way to help the marginalised women and make their neglected contributions visible in the wider narrative of African Christianity, while also contributing to reconstructing the religio-cultural heritage of Zambia.

### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> For example, Marja Hinfelaar (2003) focuses on Bishop Joseph Dupont (1890–1930), while others like Mwale and Chita (2017) trace the trajectory of Tom McGivern.
- <sup>2</sup> Hinfelaar recounts that the Missionaries of Africa, popularly called the White Fathers,

are a society founded by the French Cardinal Charles Martila Lavigerie in 1868 as the 'Missionaries of Our Lady of Africa'. The society recruited secular priests and lay brothers so as to open schools, model farms, orphanages, medical centres and homes for the elderly in Africa (Hinfelaar, 2004, 21).

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