

Violence against Housemaids in African Households: A Theological Point of View

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Abstract

Violence involves harm to an individual physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. This article examines domestic violence and the way it is inflicted to victims, especially intimate partners in households, children, parents and close relatives living in a particular household. The article focuses on housemaids as employees in some African households and their experiences of violence from their employers. What causes the various abuses housemaids face from their employers? What theological implication can be deduced from the abusive experiences faced by housemaids in the relationship with their employers? By the use of the culture of violence theory and the survey of accounts about the experiences of housemaids in various current researches, this article argues that the violence they face is caused by power relations within family members characterized by retaliations and claim to regain power. The concept of creation imago Dei is used to reflect hermeneutically on the kind of relationship set by God through Jesus Christ in the life of humanity.

Keywords: housemaids, domestic violence, *Cretio imago Dei*, human Relationship

1.0 Introduction

Housemaids are mostly girls, hired by people in order to do house assignments. These are girls usually from less educated families and are themselves less educated. Being less educated

and coming from less educated families, the employment they get to work to more affluent families becomes a means for them to earn a living and support their families and relatives. Housemaids are highly needed by house owners due to tight schedules they have and the amount of work they are required to do at home (Namuggala, 2015: 563). Namuggala (2015: 574) quotes one of the housemaids she interviewed during her research narrating her daily routine:

I do everything! I wake up around 5am and make breakfast for everyone, I prepare the kids who go to school so that when aunt wakes up they have already had breakfast and [are] ready to go. They leave home at around 7am. When they leave, I start cleaning up the house just in case any visitor comes to find it clean. I then wash the clothes and as they dry I start the lunch preparation so that when the little boy comes back home at 1 pm, food is ready. I then resort to the dishes, the compound and ironing.

The above-listed chores make the housemaid fully engaged in the whole day; a thing that could hardly be possible for the woman with another work (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 181–182; Oyaide, 2000; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2013 & 2014). The above quotation indicates that housemaids are the most overworked house workers, mostly exploited by their employers, underpaid and even vehemently abused.

Though not trained, housemaids are expected to perform various house chores: cooking, managing the house, putting everything be in order, child caring and entertaining guests who visit the home as just indicated by the foregoing quotation.

Hence, this trend of more educated or established sisters/women in towns using their fellow less educated young sisters from rural areas indicates the power difference between them, mostly in terms of economic well-being, which creates a gap between them even wider than the gap they have with their own husbands. However, the relationship between maids and their employers is built on the guise of ‘hidden transcripts’ on both sides. Nyamnjoh reports:

Throughout the world, the relationship between maids and their employers is marked by tensions, frustrations and complaints, with very rare moments of satisfaction, as both strive for what they perceive to be their rights or entitlements. In this context, it is as commonplace for employers to glorify their generosity as it is for maids to celebrate victimhood. While the structures of inequality might lend credence to perspectives that focus too narrowly on simple dichotomies or binaries, a closer look would suggest that maids are as manipulative as they are manipulated, and that power and victimhood beyond their structural confines, may each be as much the reality of the employer as they are of the maid (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 185–186).

In most cases, the power difference is the main cause of unsatisfactory relationships between the maid and her employers which eventually leads to actions of domestic violence.

Cases of domestic violence have been reported in the world over, some being caused by the presence of housemaids in the homes and some not. Africa has not been exceptional in the

resurgence of domestic violence cases. Cases concerning the violence of men over women are the ones more frequently reported than those involving women or children over men (Ademiluka, 2018; Bolayi, 2012; Sadiqi, 2011: 50, 60). In recent times, incidences of domestic violence against men have been reported (Nwanna & Kunnuji, 2016; Obarisiagbon & Oimage, 2019; Srivastava, 2013; Thobejane & Luthada, 2019). However, men's abuse by women is highly surrounded by what Petersen (2011: 92) calls the "Disease of silence," i.e., fear of shame, fear of more abuse, and fear of loss of status and fear of false accusations that they are violent. Hence, such abuses were once rarely reported to public justice organs. Currently, such abuses are being reported as men have begun breaking their silence. For example, Lien and Lorentzen (2019: 69) report about an incident where a man faced an acute violence and false accusations from his wife in Norway:

I don't hit my wife. She often threatens me, calls the police several times. I don't hit her, but she often shouts and runs out into the street and says I'm hitting her. I call the police and ask for help. Because my wife is attacking me and causing me injuries and running out into the street shouting, and there are lots of neighbours watching and lots of neighbours don't understand of course, because they think: he's a foreigner and he's violent. I don't like it, because they see we have a crisis. She shouts and runs into the street—I don't like that.

Similar cases are found in many African countries but surrounded by the "disease of silence" as Petersen pinpointed above. Since it is easy for people to believe that the woman is

humiliated by the husband, men face double humiliation when a false accusation is made; they face psychological humiliation from their wives, and shame from their neighbors.

In Tanzania, for example, one recent touching incident of domestic violence is that of the killing of the housemaid (Salome Zakaria Hoya) in Arusha Tanzania in March 2020 as reported in public by media. The maid was hit till death by her madam (the female spouse in the household) (Mkami Shirima) simply for the allegation of having stolen TZS. 50,000/ (Ca. \$22). Despite the fact that the perpetrator of the killing was caught and put under custody for further legal procedures, yet some questions can be raised from this event: Which is valuable, the TZS. 50,000/= or the life of the maid? How many maids face such kind of harassment and violence from their employers without being reported? How many housemaids face torments and tortures from their employers and neighbors without being visibly seen by other members of society and without someone speaking for them? Was the hitting of Salome caused by the TZS. 50,000/- or a retaliation from the anger of Mkami's experiences of violence from her husband?

The main issue of concern in this article is the abusive working situation of housemaids in the homes of their employers irrespective of their rights as human beings. The above-example of Salome is a typical life relationship of most housemaids with their employers. What causes such abusive relationships between housemaids with their employers and how can it be understood theologically? This Article surveys various researches already done in order to ascertain the relationship between spouses in marital relationships and the

violence of housemaids employed under their custody. The Article uses the “Culture of violence” theory to defend the position that most of the violence caused by women to their employed housemaids are retaliations from the physical, emotional or psychological violence they face from their husbands or other people superior to them. At the end, the Article discusses the theological implications of the relationship between housemaids and their employers.

1.1 The Culture of Violence Theory

As mentioned in the above paragraph, this article uses the Culture of Violence theory. The culture of violence theory purports that there is a habit among people to transfer their own internalized sufferings they face from their superiors to people inferior to them in future generations. Africans, for example, link violence from what they faced during the colonial times. The coercive treatment they faced from their superior colonial masters is retaliated upon future inferior generations. A good example of how the culture of violence theory works is seen in the current South African context. Despite the attainment of democracy in South Africa, yet there are rampant xenophobic attacks done by South Africans against their fellow Africans. Xenophobic attacks, rape cases, and domestic violence mostly directed to women are taken as solutions for their long internalized violence experienced during the apartheid regime. This internalized violence is perpetuated to inferior Africans from other African states entering South Africa and even within South Africa itself (Wandera, 2009: 243). Hence, violence becomes a culture enshrined in people’s thinking and actions. Bowman (2003: 857) states:

Some observers attribute part of the blame for domestic violence and violence against women in general, to an alleged 'Culture of violence' in modern Africa, within which violence is accepted as a way to resolve disputes, and link this to the colonial heritage, when Africans were treated coercively and violently by their colonizers. Lengthy civil wars and the repressive practices of many post-colonial regimes continue this culture of violence. This is particularly apparent in South Africa, where there has been a dramatic post-Apartheid increase in violence specifically directed at women, including both rape and domestic violence.

Hence, in such persisting culture of violence, people live in fear of one another in their own land. In the context of domestic violence, it is agreed among scholars that women in marital relationships are highly facing domestic abuses from their marriage partners as compared to men which mostly lead them to retaliating to people with lower power than theirs. As Chisale notes it, "African women theologians agree that patriarchy, unequal gender roles, culture and biased biblical interpretations expose women to domestic violence in their marriages" (Chisale, 2018: p.1). Taking from Mwaura, Chilsale (2018: 1) "perceives domestic violence as an act that is motivated by the power disparity between men and women, usually victimising women physically, psychologically, culturally, economically and sexually because of their gender. Some women experience all forms of domestic violence in their homes, while others just experience particular forms" (see also Adeyemo & Bamidele, 2016; Ross, 2012; Vyas & Mbwambo, 2017). In this context, retaliation to people with lower power is

highly anticipated aiming at regaining power lost in their relation with their superiors. Moreover, Petersen (2006: 54) reports the words of one of her research informants saying:

Because what is happening is that you see yourself as being dominant and then because of human nature or your upbringing, when anybody challenges your status or your position as being dominant, as a man, now you start to feel that you need to defend your position. And the only way that we know how to defend our position is to fight for it.

Fighting for the retention of male status leads to violence against women. Since most of the violence faced by these women hardly get amicable solutions from religious institutions and civil courts, women stay with their violent husbands having scars of violence uncured and find ways to be released from these scars of psychological, physical, and emotional anguishes faced. These are, in most cases, retaliated upon people inferior to them: children, maids, or other relatives staying in their homes.

1.2 Factors that Lead Men to Commit Sexual Violence to Housemaids in Households

Researchers on violence have varied researches and focus. Some have concentrated on the reasons for child labor. For example, Oyaide (2000) did a research in Lusaka Zambia and found that the reasons for child labor include cultural gender discrimination whereby there is preference for boys as compared to girls in terms of education, parental poverty, and family dysfunction due to death or divorces, orphan-hood and

family size. Another example is from the research done by Jonathan Blagbrough (2015) in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean who found that one such major cause is poverty. Blagbrough (2015: 40) writes: “The majority of child domestic workers come from poor families, and is sent to work to supplement their family’s income or simply to lessen the financial strain at home. It remains a popular coping strategy for poor families because the job requires no education or training, and is considered useful preparation for a girl’s later life.” The poverty surrounding housemaids and the families where they come from cause them volunteer to work to whoever person providing an offer of house work irrespective of his or her behaviour.

Blagbrough (2015) found more factors for the practice as being the following: culture and traditions about the practice of maid workers in the homes and gender-related factor. Girls are more forced to child labor than boys as Jonathan Blagbrough further writes: “Child domestic workers are linked to wider patterns of exploitation and abuse, not only because they are children but because they are girls. The evidence shows that the practice is hugely gender-biased, in large part due to entrenched societal notions of domestic work as fundamentally the domain of women and girls” (p. 41). In such circumstances, gender becomes a device for a spoiled relationship between housemaids and their employers

Other researches focused on the experiences of housemaids as employees of domestic work before and after employment. Namuggala (2015), for example, examined the experiences of adolescent girls as employees of house works in Uganda. In her

interview with participants aged between 26-43 who were both working as house workers and others had left house work as housemaids for marriages or as vendors involved in other food earning activities, Namuggala found various factors for becoming housemaids. Before employment, most housemaids' decisions to become house workers were compelled by the impoverished situations in their homes which led most of them to drop from schools and look for survival. Domestic work did not demand sophisticated education and became a better option for them. The experience of living into HIV-related orphan homes and peer-pressures were reported in the research as some experiences which triggered their decision to join house works as housemaids.

Reporting on the experience of adolescent housemaids in their domestic working spaces after employments, Namuggala notes the following: first, mistreatment from their employers and poor living conditions in terms of food and bedding. Namuggala quotes one of her informants to demonstrate the two aspects: food and bedding. Her informant said: "I sleep down in the sitting room. I have a small old mattress [one inch by demonstration] and a sheet for covering myself. At times it gets so cold that the bed sheet without a blanket is not enough to keep me warm. I was told [by the employer] I would buy myself bed sheets and a blanket from my savings. I have, however, not saved yet to be able to buy them." The informant continues:

I eat a different type of dish from my boss and her children, yet it is me who makes all the dishes. Isn't that funny? Am I not a human being as well? I take

beans and posho much of the time while they take matooke [plantain] with fish and meat most of the time. I eat from the verandah [which also serves as the cooking area] as they eat from the sitting room. I then wash the dishes after they have eaten. I don't like that, I feel bad but with no choice (Namuggala, 2015: 571; cf. Harju, 2016).

Hence, the experience described above suggests for the value accorded to housemaids in most households they are employed to work. The second finding is spiritual infringement, i.e., being restricted from attending worship services in their own religions. The housemaid is not free to attend services in her own religious denomination but forced to attend to the denomination of the employer. Namuggala (2015: 571) quotes from her research participant: “We have to go to church every Sunday for a full day to the Pentecostals [locally referred to as ‘Abalokole’], but I am a Catholic. Aunt/employer does not allow me to go to the Catholic Church. She always says a lot of bad things about the Catholic faith and she wants to change [convert] me. She forces me to pray every night in a Pentecostal way.”

In case of a Muslim housemaid, Namuggala (2015: 572) quotes her words: “As a Muslim, I don't eat pork, leave alone seeing or even touching it. They know that I am a Muslim but they buy it and I am supposed to prepare and cook it for them. At times it's the only sauce available so I go without food. I am only waiting for a chance to get another job and then I leave. It is too much for me. I would handle anything but this is too much!” Apart from the above findings, Namuggala also reports sexual harassment, lack of documentation of their employments, and

confinement and restrictions of movement for housemaids. They are required to be at home most of the time for house chores.

Other researchers examined the whole idea of child abuse, especially the exploitation of maids in the homes. For example, Angela Mathias did research in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to examine the reasons for the trafficking of girls. She found out that the trafficking of girls is mostly caused by rural poverty, low income among people, the decline of the agricultural sector which most people rely on for their daily living, sickness of caregivers, parental death, orphan-hood, family conflicts, parental marital separations, polygamous marriages and family conflicts. Mathias avers that the longing for better life, education and employment in town are some of the reasons of girls to move to Dar es Salaam or to be trafficked to other cities in search for better life (Mathias, 2011). Magesa (2015:15) reports on the living condition of housemaids in the Tanzanian context:

Despite the fact that in Tanzania, housemaids as domestic workers have the same rights as other workers, those rights are frequently being disregarded. They are mistreated, overworked, underpaid and sometimes they experience misunderstanding with their employers/mother houses and with employers' children. Housemaids are whipped, kicked and sometimes locked in employers' houses and forbidden to walk out. Housemaids are not given chance to go for leave and even a room to talk to their relatives or parents. All these issues make the working

environment to be intolerable to them and hence deciding to change the employers and some fleeing back to their parents/guardians or transported back by their employers unreasonably.

What is the consequence for this mistreatment of housemaids to people with lower power than them? The consequence of all the mistreatment which housemaids receive from their employers is their retaliation to people with lower power than them—children and relatives in the households they are employed. Some of such retaliations include buttering of children for minor mistakes they do, speaking hush languages to children, leaving them without food for long times, providing to children the food they were not supposed to be provided, or not attending to their sanitary requirements. In such situations, a chain of retaliations becomes vivid: while the wives retaliate for their anger due to humiliations from their husbands upon housemaids, housemaids also retaliate for the mistreatment they get from their employer's wives upon children in the absence of their parents.

Oyaide conducted research in Lusaka Zambia to determine the living conditions of house workers in relation to their employers. One of the findings concerned about sexual immorality. Oyaide (2009: 55–56) reports some of his findings:

The very bad cases were recorded in case studies 3, 5 and 8. The girl in case study 3 was found being taken advantage sexually by the man who helped her to find a job in Lusaka. In case study 5, a 13 year-old girl who we met during the enumeration as a maid but had been converted to a

wife by the 34 year-old employer by the time we conducted the 55 survey. The girl in case study 8 complained of being abused sexually by the younger brother of the employer. Any time he wanted her he simply threatened to lie against her that she was playing while they were at work. Since she was afraid of being thrown out of work, she would subject herself to him. Some other girls confessed to being molested by the son of the house while some spoke about other men in the neighbourhood coming to take advantage of them when the employer was not at home with promises of marriage and gifts. [A]n 18 year-old prostitute said in a radio 2 interview, that she took to prostitution because she was tired of the long years of sexual abuse that she suffered from her employers when she was a child domestic.

What does the above-expressed situation tell us about housemaids and their life of uncertainty and mistreatment from both within and outside the households they are employed? This question is responded in the theological implication of the life and situation of housemaids as creatures of God.

Moreover, in his research Magesa (2015) found out that some housemaids receive unduly severe punishments for the slightest of errors. And then there is also the potential problem of sexual abuse: housemaids refusing sexual relations with the husbands of their heir madams risk being dismissed. This also creates tension to their madams, who do not usually trust housemaids as they suspect them of colluding with their husbands. In situations like these, housemaids are doubly mistreated in households (Magesa, 2015: 10; cf. Blagbrough, 2008: 21).

Oyaide's (2000) and Magesa's (2015) researches indicate that most house workers, especially housemaids, are taken advantage of by male employers, bringing quarrels between spouses in the marriages, and even being changed into wives later. This collusion between housemaids and male spouses make housemaids subject to extra-harassment from the madams (the female spouses) in the households

The question regarding the sexual engagements between housemaids and husbands in the households mentioned above is this: What makes husbands turn into relationship with their employed house workers leaving their beloved wives? Thobejane and Luthada (2019) clearly state that husbands face violence from their beloved wives that make them powerless and with low esteem. They list the kind of abuses they face: "Slapping; pouring hot water when asleep or pouring hot water over an innocent man; chopping man's genitals; verbal insults; insults before children; slashing; pouring petrol over him and setting him on fire; whips; throwing chairs, benches, stools, utensils and other objects in the house at the man, especially after serious disagreements in the house" (Thobejane & Luthada, 2019: 13). The humiliations which husbands face from their wives are more likely retaliated to housemaids. Instead of looking for other women to engage with them from outside the household, husbands commit sexual violence to housemaids in order to retaliate for the humiliations they face from their wives, who now are superior to them. It is a way of re-asserting the power they lost from their wives. Therefore, sexual violence upon housemaids becomes a weapon for retaliation and power re-assertion among husbands whose wives have power over them and abuse them.

The concept of “Sexual violence” is used in this article to reflect the definition of the World Health Organization which defines it as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments and advances or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim” (WHO, 1996: 27). Similarly, Petersen (2011) calls sexual violence as “sexual battering.” According to her: “Sexual battering may include pressured sex when the victim does not want sex, coerced sex by manipulation or threat as well as physical forced sex. Victims may also be forced by the perpetrator to engage in sexual activities, which they experience, as humiliating, painful or unnatural” (Petersen, 2011: 92). Hence, according to these definitions, the sexual engagement must involve coercion and be done against the will of the one coerced—housemaids in this case.

In cases where the wives in the households (madams) humiliate housemaids, housemaids decide with their own wills, without coercion, to seduce their husbands in order to attract them sexually. They do that in order to re-assert an equal power with their female madams who humiliate them. Sharing the husband is for them claiming an equal power with their madams. Moreover, despite re-asserting power, housemaids collude with the husbands of their madams (their employers) in order to get some favors from them in some issues like money, better treatments, etc. In such situations, the quarrels emerge between the housemaid and the madam; especially when the madam notices that her husband has turned his attention towards the housemaid.

1.3 *Creatio Imago Dei*: Theological Implications on Violence against Housemaids

Having discussed the way housemaids experience abusive lives from their employers, both male and female in current researches, we now ask: How does the community view housemaids and how it ought to view them? How does God view housemaids and the community where housemaids live? Generally, the community has a negative view of housemaids and their work. Magesa (2015: 10) reports this view more succinctly when he says that “generally the community perceives a housemaid as a weak person who has no value, enslaved person and who is not recognized by the law and has no right in the community. Housemaids have been given inhuman and degrading titles or names like ‘Back three’ or ‘House girl’. Due to this perception a housemaid is undermined by the societies. Hence, looking at all what happens to housemaids as human beings, we probe the efficacy of the notion of *imago Dei* at the midst of what they face: What does it mean by being created in the image of God in the midst where housemaids face atrocities as retaliation from the bad relations of her superiors? We strive to reflect on this question in the following paragraphs.

In the Book of Genesis, the Priestly author states: “Then God said, ‘Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness’” (Gen 1:26). What does this text entail in the midst of suffering environments of housemaids by their superior employers? In the first place, we look at *imago Dei* as a concept that refers to human dignity and human personhood (Musana, 2018 & Koopman, 2010). Human dignity originates from the love of God for humanity. It is this dignifying love bestowed to us

through Jesus Christ that makes us be in the image of our Creator. Koopman (2010: 24) reflects this more clearly: “God’s dignifying love for us, his attachment to us, is expressed in us being created in his image, and in us being reconciled and saved by his Son, and in us being renewed and perfected by the Holy Spirit.” Oberdorfer (2010:232) also observes that in the New Testament, “in the N.T., Jesus Christ is specifically described as being in the ‘image of God’. Only ‘in Christ’, mediated through Christ, in communion with Christ, can other individuals be spoken of as being ‘images of God’. Therefore, lack of dignity should be equated with lack of respect for God’s dignifying love, God’s attachment to humanity despite human frailties, and God’s initiatives to reconcile humanity to oneself through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of atrocities is where human dignity is witnessed to be lacking. Africa is seen to be a continent where human dignity is highly denied despite its philosophy of ubuntu (personhood) (Koopman, 2010:241; Musana, 2018:22). Koopman 2010: 241–242) outlines the issues in Africa that enhance the abandonment of human dignity:

The violation of human dignity in Africa takes on various forms, and an analysis of the different challenges of Africa illuminates these forms. The people of Africa face major challenges, such as economic and political suffering, and many injustices and abuses. We are faced with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Africans experience alienation and injustice in the form of sexism, racism and xenophobia, as well as being subject to violence and crime, natural

disasters, abusive cultural practices. Such experiences lead to high levels of hopelessness.

The above quotation reminds us that denying one's dignity is denying one's humanity automatically, a thing hardly acceptable among creatures created in the image of God. Second, the concept of *imago Dei* is a relational concept relating to both human-human and divine-human relationships. The relational understanding of this concept is clearly echoed by Maliszewska (2019: 9):

Not only is the human being called to be in a relationship, but also we are constituted by it, having been created for a relationship. God's image, understood as the relationality of the human being, has been present in us since our very beginning, or, in fact, it is the very thing that allows us to exist at all. God calls the human being into existence, thus establishing a relationship which—due to God's faithfulness—is eternal and unaltered (Tarus, 2016: 21–22).

This quotation indicates that God is God of relationship and the author of relationship between God and humanity and the way one human being should rightly relate to another. As a human-human relational concept, it indicates the way the created human being relates to another created human being—horizontal relationships. Unfortunately, almost all the atrocities discussed in the above paragraph are concerned with the way one person badly relates to another person in normal human interaction. In such aspects, the value of the human person is neglected and inhumanity prevails. Koopman provides

examples of what happens in South Africa where, as in most African countries, the gap between the rich and the poor is high causing the dignity of the majority being denigrated; moreover, the exclusion of most African people in the processes of globalization, the abuse of refugees, the disrespect and dehumanization of people suffering from various diseases such as AIDS, malaria, Ebola, etc., the mishandling of orphans, the continent's exposure to high levels of crime and corruption, dehumanizing cultural practices, lack of access to formal education and racism are major agents of spoiling the relationship between one human being and another (Koopman, 2010, pp. 242–246). All these atrocities speak a considerable voice to the nature and source of violence which befall housemaids in African cities as issues of relationship.

All the above aspects, including the disregard and devaluation of housemaids in the course of relationship with their employers, constitute a disrespect of human *imago Dei*, which is equally provided by God to all human beings irrespective of rank, status, color or nationality. It is the succumb to the spirit of Cain who rejected the relational *imago Dei* in relation to his brother Habil despite God's efforts to restore it as Simango (2012: 644) asserts: "Cain rejects the relational aspect of 'family' with his brother. He also rejects the relational aspect of sonship to God and he shows himself to be the offspring of the devil. Cain rejects God's correction, 'If you do what is good, will you not be accepted?' (Gen 4: 7). Cain decides for himself what to do. He does not heed God's correction and he murders his brother." Therefore, the continuous humiliation of housemaids in the homes, creatures created in the image of God, is a denial of God's initiative at restoring the image of

God ruined by the fall through Jesus Christ (cf. Simango, 2012: 174–175). In other words, continuous humiliation is going against God's wills for humanity expressed through Jesus Christ.

As a divine human relational concept, *imago Dei* refers to the way God looks and relates to humanity. Otto (1992: 506) states:

Throughout the utterances of the Talmudic sages, the relationship between Creator and creature is expressed by the image of Father and son. God is regularly addressed as 'Father in heaven.' God is seen as the Father of Israel, his firstborn son (Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Isa 1:2; 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19; Mai 1:6). 'Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?' (Mai 2:10). While Israel was the firstborn son having the special privileges of covenantal relation to God its Father, the doctrine of fatherhood was not restricted to this one people but was extended to all human beings.

Otto's statement shows that human beings belong together despite their minor earthly disparities. In this case, housemaids and employers belong to God, their one Father, a Universal Father. Otto (1992: 506) depicts God's fatherhood:

The universal fatherhood of God, concretely realized in the propagation of the species by the fathering of sons—as for example Adam's fathering of Seth 'in his own likeness, after his image' (Gen 5:3)—had important ethical significance. All men and women, whatever their distinguishing features, were stamped by

God with one seal, the seal of Adam. Each man and woman had a common divine Father and a common human father. Consequently each was to act and speak as if the whole human race depended on his or her conduct. The common humanity inherent in their common relation to God and Adam formed the foundation for the most comprehensive principle of ethical conduct.

If God is the source of ethical conduct for both housemaids and employers, it is therefore evident that they belong together. Why then should they mistreat each other because of minor humanly differences? As a human-human relational concept the *imago Dei* entails caring for one another in our African context. Masango is overwhelmed of what would happen if caring could not be present at all. Life without caring for one another is life in chaos. It is life without order. For Africans, caring for one another makes life African (Masango, 2005). Waruta who is cited in Masango's (2005: 916) work states: "It is important to note that the sanctity of human life is based on the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Waruta makes this comment about the *imago Dei*: 'Human beings are created in God's image, and that, whenever human life is undermined or destroyed, God seeks ways of restoring it within the village'." Waruta reminds us that in the eyes of God one's own status or rank hardly matters. What really matters is his or her reflection of the image of God in him or her as seen in the relationship with others. Therefore, the way employers relate to housemaids matters on whether they reflect God's image to them. Abuses and mistreatment are contrary to human caring in an *imago Dei* portrait.

Moreover, the abuse and mistreatment of human beings in any form is against the African view of caring and Philosophy of life. Masango has clearly expressed this view when he says: “The African concept of caring involves all the members of the village or community, family, relatives, tribe and ancestors. In the African community, life is lived with others in a group, tribe or clan. There is no individualism or privacy accepted in the village.” Obviously, for employers denying respect for the well being of housemaids is denial of African caring responsibilities, a denial of their cultural well being and what it means to be human in African perspective. As noted in the literature above, very few among employers cared for housemaids as their own children, whether coming from their relatives or not. To my view, this behavior suggests for the lack of portraying the *creatio imago Dei*, which is the very virtue of humanity as differentiated from other natures created by God.

2.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

In the way housemaids are treated today, as illustrated by the hitting and killing of Salome Zakaria in Arusha Tanzania and in the various consulted researches for this article, it is hard to distinguish them from the way slaves were treated in the Graeco-Roman world. Kirchsclaeger (2016: 68) reports how slaves were conceived and treated:

Slavery was part of the “Normal” life in the Graeco-Roman world. Slaves were treated like objects; they had no rights; they did not even possess the right to life. Obviously, they were excluded from any likelihood of seeking redress for injustices. They had to follow their owners’ orders,

without any exception. Slavery found a “justification” in philosophical treatises of that time that endeavoured to prove the existence of two kinds of human beings. By incorporating ideas from Plato, Aristotle stated that some human beings were, by their nature, meant for slavery because of the lack of intellectual capacities that are essential for an autonomous life.

Kirchschlaeger (2016) reminds us about the justification of slavery in the ancient world where human right was denied and humanity being equated with commodities for business transactions. Comparatively, slaves had no power over their masters, and so are contemporary housemaids over their employers. Slaves were used as objects and physically and psychologically by their masters, and so are housemaids. Slaves had no power to claim for their rights, and so are current housemaids. Slavery found justification in the philosophy of life of the society, so is the employment of housemaids in the current African societies. Slaves were less educated or without education because of coming from poor families, and so are the current housemaids, who are mostly primary education leavers, or without primary education at all, coming from among poor families. This comparison indicates the way in which differences in status can enhance asymmetrical power relations between the powerful and the less powerful people. The comparison also shows the likeliness of retaliating one's anger to the innocent powerless housemaids of slaves as discussed in the researches using the culture of violence theory.

The situation that faced slaves in the Graeco-Roman world and contemporary housemaids has theological implications to

human beings—the perpetrator of violence and the one to whom violence is executed. Slaves, masters, housemaids and their employers are all created in the image of God. The *creatio imago Dei*, in the universal Fatherhood of God, poses some obligations upon each of the parties to respect the value and dignity of the other, establishing harmonious horizontal and vertical relationships between fellow human beings and God, and caring the other human being as caring for oneself. Therefore, it is through the clear understanding of this view of both housemaids and employers to be created *imago Dei*, as being the common meeting point for both, which will make employers stop executing violent retaliations of their angers upon the less powerful housemaids within their homes.

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