



# African Women's Liberating Philosophies, Theologies, and Ethics

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*Edited by*  
Beatrice Okyere-Manu ·  
Léocadie Lushombo

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*“This book is dedicated to Katie Geneva Cannon (1950-2018)  
A founding member of the Circle of Concerned African Women  
Theologians  
And a beloved sister in the diaspora”*

## FOREWORD

This volume *African Women's Liberating Philosophies, Theologies, and Ethics* is a welcome contribution to the academic discipline of philosophy, theology, and ethics. What makes it especially unique is the fact that whilst the contributions of African women in philosophy, theology, and ethics have not received adequate attention, this volume seeks to address this scholarly lacuna by focusing on the wells of wisdom produced by African women in this academic discipline. Steeped in the work of selected (fifteen) African women theologians, the volume takes us through an engaging and interesting journey of the formation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle). The authors reflect on the foundational resources bequeathed to us by the Matriarchs of the Circle. They also interact with some of the works of the second generation of the Circle.

Informed by the post-colonial motif, contributors to this volume unearth the various forms of exclusion, domination, and unequal treatment which continues to be experienced by countless African women in the post-independence era. Race, class, and gender are identified as the three-pronged layers, forming an unholy alliance to enmesh African women in the doldrums of marginalization and exclusion. Furthermore, the contributors also critique the entrenched tripartite patriarchal silos, i.e., the patriarchy of the African traditional religions and cultures, the patriarchy of Islam, and Western Christianity, as well as the inherent patriarchy in the women's families and society. Against this backdrop, they proffer ways in which African philosophy, theology, and ethics can be tapped into as fodder for liberating all those who are yoked to the oppression and the marginalization wrought by patriarchy.

In our contemporary context, where religion and culture collude to perpetrate patriarchal injustices by making women the vanguards and interlocutors of harmful and oppressive patriarchal traditions, the volume offers fresh insights on how to develop ethics, philosophies, and theologies of resistance, liberation, and redemption. The contributors envision a transformed world where we draw from the wellsprings of our rich African philosophical and ethical tenets, oozing with peace, unity, justice, solidarity, communality, interrelatedness, interconnectedness, complementarity, and relationality.

Acknowledging the far-reaching repercussions of the global ecological crisis, global economic inequalities, and political polarization, the volume raises a clarion call for digging deeper into the oasis of our African life-affirming theological, ethical, eco-political, and social resources for our own good and for posterity.

In closing, this is an invaluable resource, birthed in the hearth of the founding matriarchs of the Circle, brewed and served in the earthen dishes by the editors and contributors of this volume, it ricochets the ongoing important discourses on African philosophy and ethics. Long live African ethicists and philosophers! May your stars continue to colour Mother Earth!

Essex, UK

Sophia Chirongoma

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# Introduction: Ethics and Philosophy, African Women's Perspective

*Beatrice Okyere-Manu and Léocadie Lushombo*

This manuscript interrogates, problematizes, and systematizes the ethics and philosophies of matriarchs of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. The matriarchs are African women philosophers, theologians, and ethicists whose works connect the Christian faith to women's experiences in different ways, with various existential questions, concerns, and philosophical and theological orientations. The Circle of African Women Theologians is a pan-African, academic, interreligious and ecumenical organization, seeking to support scholarly research conducted by African women theologians. A group of African women theologians

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founded it under Mercy Amba Oduyoye's leadership in 1989.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly referred to as "the Circle." Through the Circle, African feminist theologians intentionally set out to generate women-focused theologies of liberation.

This book offers a critical reflection on the Ethics and Philosophies of the works of some of the pioneering members of the Circle of African Women Theologians, popularly referred to as the "Circle." The Circle was launched with a clarion call for African women from every country, religion, and culture to produce theological treatises that liberate and empower women from all forms of oppression within their communities and the academic environment. In addition to being a reminder of the history of the great work of the Circle, this volume is a reflection on the foundations of the ethics and philosophies and the achievements of notable matriarchs of the movement.

Thirty-four years since its foundation, the authors of this book critically assess the works of some of the notable matriarchs of this movement. The aim here is not to rewrite these ethics and philosophies, but to look back and expand on them while *putting their discourses in conversation with each other*. The volume explores the history of the Circle, highlights the gaps in its literature, and suggests relevant possible future paths it may take.

The book charts a new terrain by presenting the works of a large number of African advocates (women and men) seeking gender equality, making this book an important contribution to the ongoing discussions and debates on this essential topic. Space will not allow for the reflections of the works of all the matriarchs in one book. Those engaged here include Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Ghana), Musa Wenkosi Dube (Botswana), Anne Nasimiyu Wasike (Uganda), Puleng LenkaBula (South Africa), Bernadette Mbuy-Beya (Democratic Republic of Congo), Rosemary Edet (Nigeria), Nyambura Njoroge (Kenya), Peggy Mulambya-Kabonde (Zambia), Katie Geneva Cannon (USA), Madipoane Masenya (South Africa), Musimbi Kanyoro (Kenya), Elna Mouton (South Africa), and Hannah Kinoti (Kenya).

What makes this book significant is that it is not the product of colonial coercion, but rather it is an African-driven postcolonial project where scholars, both women and men, from Africa are reflecting and evaluating

<sup>1</sup>Fiedler, RN & Hofmeyr, JW. 2011, "The birth and growth of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Malawi 1989-2011," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, vol. 37, no. 2, 191-206.

the works of the African matriarch pioneers and their interlocutors. The contributors to this unique book are African scholars from Central, Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa and the diaspora. They are composed of academic scholars from Stellenbosch University in South Africa, University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, Jesuit School of Theology/Santa Clara University, Catholic University of the Congo, Theological College of Northern Nigeria, University of Zimbabwe, Evangelical University of Ndola Zambia, Pwani University in Kenya, Ajayi Crowther University Oyo, Nigeria, University of Nairobi, National University of Lesotho, University of Botswana, Boston College of the USA, and Yonsei University, South Korea.

The contributors consider the intersection of ethics, theologies, and philosophies of the matriarchs with social categories, such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and environmental issues that have challenged and continue to challenge their communities. Their works cover a range of disciplines, including religion, politics, gender, ecology, economy, liberation ethics, and philosophy from different perspectives, using the scholarship and experiences of the matriarchs above cited over the last three decades. The contributors examine African feminist theologians' agenda in propagating theologies of liberation since 1989. Thus, the contributors assess the different theologies, as practiced by the Circle of women theologians: their achievements and challenges. They also explore practical ways the Circle's ethical theories, models, and frameworks could be used for the ongoing works of justice and liberation of women in Africa and beyond.

Before presenting the actual contributions of the authors, the next sections briefly expose the unequal context of the African woman within which the Circle was formed and that it strives to address, as well as provide a brief historical account of the Circle.

### THE REALITY OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN THEIR CULTURAL SETTING

The African woman has and continues to experience exclusion, domination, and unequal treatment in her community in the post-independence era. African women in various regions and countries continue to struggle against various forms of oppression such as poverty, corruption, pandemics, and global marginalization. Prominent among them is patriarchy: a

context whereby more privileges are given to men as opposed to women at all levels. Isabel Apawo Phiri defines patriarchy as “a father ruled structure where all power and authority rests in the hands of the male head of the family.”<sup>2</sup> As a result, women held limited power in the family and were ignored in decision-making processes, including decisions around issues that affected them. In most cultural settings their voices were not heard on important issues. Most scholars in the field believe that African women have suffered from three setbacks: colonialism, tradition or culture, and their race. However, in her significant book, *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*, Molaria Ogundipe<sup>3</sup> extends these obstacles to six which, in her opinion, are the causes of African women’s predicament. Using a metaphor that comes from Mao Tse-Tung’s China, she identifies and calls these obstacles the “six mountains on the back of African woman.” These six “mountains” come together and weigh women down. They include foreign intrusion, harmful traditions, a conception of “backwardness,” and roles surrounding race, class, and gender. In terms of the first mountain, she argues that colonialism and neo-colonialism have impacted African women and explains that Africans had a way of doing things before colonialism which was discarded as new forms were introduced. She gave an example of how during the period of colonialism women’s role in the process of production was replaced by commercial farming. This deprived women of their contribution to their societies. In addition, female political structures in society were replaced with male structures and positions. Colonialism affected legal structures, as well as religious and artistic cultures in African societies, relegating women into subordinate positions.

She calls the second mountain the “heritage of tradition.” To Ogundipe, the African traditional society embraces patriarchy, as the idea that men are superior to women in all areas of life. Patriarchy in traditional communities promoted the attitude of negative discrimination against women contributing to an ideology of colonialism that supports women’s inferior status. This heritage has continued to contribute to the challenges African women face today. She describes the third mountain as the “backwardness of the African woman” and attributes it to colonization and

<sup>2</sup> Isabel Apawo Phiri. 1997. *Women. Presbyterianism and Patriarchy: Religious experiences of Chewa Women in Central Malawi*, Zomba: Kachere, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Molaria Ogundipe. 1994. *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*. Africa World Press Inc.: Trenton.

neo-colonialism. She believes that the result of backwardness is what has contributed to women's poverty and ignorance which is manifested in African society today.

Ogundipe sees the fourth mountain, which is "race," as key to African women's vulnerability. To her, race affects all aspects of life, including economies and politics. Using the example of the situations in South Africa, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe, she explains that although race affects both women and men, African women suffer more from the mountain of race.

She sees patriarchy as the fifth obstacle to African women's development because of its promotion of male domination over females. Many African societies favor men over women and the root cause is patriarchy that promotes male superiority. To her, this can be eliminated if women first combat their social disabilities. This will enable them to fight against the evils of patriarchy and their subordination without waiting for the day that men would want to share their powers and privileges with them.

The sixth mountain, according to Ogundipe, is women themselves. To her, this is where women have entertained a negative self-image that has become a hindrance to their own development. This has resulted in fear, dependency complexes, and the attitude to please people, instead of caring for themselves.<sup>4</sup>

A closer look at the six mountains reveals an indication of institutions and structures deeply entrenched in the African society that ignore the realities that negatively affect women. It is within this context that Mercy Oduyoye and the Matriarchs grew up as young Christian women and eventually entered the male-dominated academic space and, with time, inspired them to form the Circle.

## THE AFRICAN WOMAN IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

As noted from the preceding discussions, most of the African communities are characterized by patriarchal tendencies. Specifically, within the Christian church, patriarchy exists. Though recently the situation has somewhat improved, in most denominations, women have been and continue to be marginalized, particularly when it comes to positions of power and leadership. As Shirley Lees rightly puts it, "not all Christian traditions believe that women should be allowed... to hold positions of leadership,

<sup>4</sup>Molara Ogundipe, *Re-Creating Ourselves*, 36.

teach or become ordained ministers.”<sup>5</sup> Most of the Christian churches base their belief on scripture, something Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel has also noted within the Bible. She argues that, “through its patriarchal nature, the Bible has been used to keep women under control.”<sup>6</sup> One such scripture that has been used to support patriarchy is 1 Timothy 2:12, where Paul states, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.” Another biblical text, often cited as evidence that women should not hold power or be in leadership positions in most churches, is found in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35:

Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Grace Wamue-Ngare affirms that the Christian church has excluded women from leadership roles because it has used “twisted, religious doctrines” against women, and these principles have maintained women as silent participants in the church.<sup>7</sup> This form of oppression is an infringement of women’s rights. Not only were women oppressed in the church, but they were also oppressed in the workplace. This was evident in the anecdotes and experiences shared by Oduyoye of her time in a theological department with ten male colleagues. In recounting one of her experiences that challenged her to start to question the role of women, she writes:

For me the Circle appeared when I found myself sitting at a table with ten male colleagues at a departmental meeting and was asked to go and bring tea for all. We had the tea—but it was not I who brought it! I went home and mulled over this experience, asking myself how many African women were in this predicament of being the sole woman among men theologians.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Shirley Lees. 1984. *The role of woman* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Moltmann-Wendel, E 1987. *The women around Jesus* (London: SCM Press) (9).

<sup>7</sup> Grace Wamue-Ngare. 1997. *The ministry of women in the church: Some reflections*, In Chilver, A M (ed), *Women’s ministry in the church: An African perspective*. Nairobi: TCEC. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Oduyoye A.M. 2001. *Introducing African Women’s Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 97.

This and many other experiences made her conceive and give birth to the idea of the Circle to write and publish theological literature on women's stories and experiences, as well as their theologies of redemption.

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE CIRCLE OF AFRICAN WOMEN THEOLOGIANs

Since the birth of the Circle, there has been substantive research conducted on the movement by members as well as other scholars both women and men (see Fiedler & Hofmeyr, 2011,<sup>9</sup> Oduyoye 1997,<sup>10</sup> Nyambura Njoroge, and Musa W. Dube 2001,<sup>11</sup> Mtshiselwa and Masenya 2016,<sup>12</sup> Phiri and Nadar 2006,<sup>13</sup> Oredein 2017<sup>14</sup>). The current section has no intention of repeating the work already done. However, and in order to situate this book in a proper context, there is the need to briefly highlight the history of the circle.

The Circle of African Women Theologians is a pan-African academic, interreligious, and ecumenical organization with the aim to support scholarly research conducted by African women theologians. Generally referred to as “the Circle,” this movement was initiated/founded by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (fondly referred to as Mama Mercy), a Ghanaian woman theologian in 1988.<sup>15</sup> It was officially launched in 1989 in Accra-Ghana.

<sup>9</sup>Fiedler, RN & Hofmeyr, JW. 2011, “The birth and growth of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in Malawi 1989-2011,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, vol. 37, no. 2, 191–206.

<sup>10</sup>Oduyoye A.M. 1997. *Transforming Power: Women in the household of God*. Proceedings of the Pan-African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Sam-Woode Limited Publishers. Accra-North. Ghana.

<sup>11</sup>Njoroge N.J. and Musa W. Dube, Eds. 2001. *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications.

<sup>12</sup>Mtshiselwa, VNN & Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), M. 2016. “Gender and sexualities in African contexts and Circle theologies,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(2), a1662. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i2.1662t>

<sup>13</sup>Phiri I.A. and Nadar S. 2006. *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006.

<sup>14</sup>Oredein, O. 2017. *Word and Witness: A Theological Account of the Life and Voice of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*. An Unpublished Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology in the Divinity School of Duke University. Duke University.

<sup>15</sup>Fiedler, RN & Hofmeyr, The birth and growth of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, 191–206.



The main objectives of the Circle are to research, record, analyze, and publish challenges confronting African women from their cultural and religious backgrounds and to speak out against the African patriarchal societal injustices and the oppression/abuse of the poor, particularly women and children. One of the mandates of this movement is to see to it that each country in Africa has established a branch, with the aim of encouraging women theologians in that particular country to write their stories and experiences of cultural and theological oppression, resistance, and liberation. This mandate was also extended to sisters in the African Diaspora from the very beginning of the Circle. This mandate was paramount to Mercy Oduyoye and many African women, including Elizabeth Amoah, Musimbi Kanyoro, and Nyambura J. Njoroge. Most of these women were academics in the field of religion and culture, and also belonged to the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), and at the World Council of Churches in Geneva felt that within the field of theology, African women's voices were missing.

Oduyoye and her team contended that (African) women should not accept that African men's theology is sufficient for the entire faith community. To them, there ought to be a study of African theology, which flies with both male and female wings. Their conviction was that such a focus would be able to position both women and men as actors, agents, and thinkers.<sup>16</sup> The inference here is that the dominant contributors to African theology over the years had been men who had been speaking on behalf of all African people and as such the voices, perspectives, and experiences of their counterparts—women—have been minimal and hence denying a more comprehensive and just approach.<sup>17</sup> Writing about African women as actors, agents, and thinkers, Musimbi Kanyoro posits that African women have always been the custodians of cultural beliefs and practices. She underlines that women have guarded cultural prescriptions that were governed by their male counterparts. Breaking these cultural beliefs and practices were therefore perceived as taboos. Yet most of the beliefs and practices were androcentric in nature and even now continue to demean women, making them objects of cultural preservation. These practices, which are not uniform to all African ethnicities, include lobola (the giving

<sup>16</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Maseno, L., 2020, "African women theologies," in C. Kaunda and J. Gathogo (eds.), *African theology, philosophy, and religions: Celebrating John Samuel Mbiti's contribution*, pp. 39–51, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD.

of bride price), forced female circumcision, polygamy, and the dominantly male right to inheritance of land, just to name a few.<sup>18</sup>

The Circle was officially launched in Ghana in 1989 as mentioned above and has since had a profound influence on the discipline of theology, particularly on issues, such as dignity of the African woman, justice, and role of women in the church and in society. Oduyoye affirms that African women's theology draws much from another norm and source, which is a woman's experience. Their context and experience are critical because they do not write theology that is remote and removed from their daily lives.<sup>19</sup> Teresia Hinga also adds that the distinct history of Africans is a history that is marked by colonialism, and therefore the cultural context from which African women theologians speak is distinct and very important.<sup>20</sup> The main pillars on which the circle was built were relationality, power, and hospitality.

Thirty-five years later, in July 2024, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians seeks to return to Ghana, specifically to the Trinity Theological Seminary where the Circle was first launched. In preparation for the return to this holy ground of liberational agenda, this volume reflects on the ethics and philosophies of resistance to gender, race, ethnic and colonially based oppression, and violence confronting African women, as well as resilience in the face of and revision of ideologies, attitudes, and theologies that undergird such practices of some of the Matriarchs of this movement. In doing so, the volume seeks to map out what has been achieved so far, how it has been achieved, and the areas where future work should focus. In short, it will highlight the foundations of the works of the Matriarchs, their achievements, challenges, and relevance in feminist, womanist, and black philosophical and theological ethics, as well as offer recommendations for future works.

<sup>18</sup> Kanyoro, M., 2001, "Engendered communal theology: African women's contribution to theology in the 21st century," in N. Njoroge & M. Dube (eds.), *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African women*, 158–180, Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Hinga, T., 1992a, "Jesus Christ and the liberation of women in Africa," in M. Oduyoye & K. Kanyoro (eds.), *The will to arise: Women, tradition, and the Church in Africa*, pp. 184–193, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.

## THE NEED FOR THE BOOK

Life is full of lessons and challenges that one needs to often take time to examine so that mistakes are not repeated, and achievements are hailed and recognized. In the same line of thinking, through examination, significant values can be highlighted and revisited with the aim of charting new roadmaps.

African women have been relegated to the periphery of their society by their cultures, religions, and the society at large, making them vulnerable to all forms of abuse. A number of scholars such as Ife Amadiume, Laurenti Magesa, and recently Léocadie Lushombo (2022) have shown that Precolonial African Societies were not mainly or entirely hierarchical and dualistic in their gender structures. There were flexibilities that allowed women to participate as farmers, market owners, priests/priestesses, and political leaders, who were not confined to the private space. Missionaries document that they found African women producing crops. Many others were matriarchal societies. This situation saw the birth of the Circle. Since then, members have been researching and writing the stories and theologies of African women. Thirty-four years down the line, the Circle is examining the works of some significant matriarchs, specifically their ethics and philosophies. The reason is twofold: to look back and celebrate the achievements of these matriarchs and to chart a pathway and direction for the Circle's future work in response to the gaps that will be discovered.

The writers of this book respond to questions such as: how did African women theologians re-imagine ethical paradigms? What original moral/philosophical ideas did they generate? How did their ethical frameworks shape the theologies and interpretations they developed? What purposes did their ethical/philosophical paradigm serve? How does the ethical/philosophical rendering intersect with various social categories, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, capitalism, colonialism, neo-liberal economy, environmental degradation, pandemics, and interreligious and ethnic conflicts? How do African women theologians problematize the above oppressive social structures and categories, and what liberating frameworks do they propose?

The contributors respond to the above questions by engaging major themes and concepts, such as (1) relationality, power, humanity, and justice; (2) the task of creating a uniquely African contextual theology and philosophy, including African culture, traditions, and indigenous religions or the need for a de-Westernized African theology; (3) motherhood and

its meanings in Africa; (4) universality and particularity, as well as the related questions of what is the specifically African contribution and way of getting from the highly contextual to universal experiences and values derived in a special way from distinctive African ideas and themes, like Ubuntu and Isirika; (5) the relation between academic theology and philosophy and activism as resistance to patriarchy; (6) the possibility of African women, women in the African diaspora, white women in Africa and elsewhere—and men in all these categories—being allies in the quest for more gender-just societies, pairing transformative masculinities and femininities. The contributors assess the matriarchs' calls for redemptive masculinities and femininities, suggesting philosophical, theological, and ethical paths to re-envision a liberational agenda long sought by the Circle.

(7) The authors use the original works of the matriarchs as they have engaged the Circle and interacted with other scholars in these multidisciplinary areas and themes. They consider universal manifestations of clericalism, paternalism, and patriarchy. Also, their theoretical frameworks intersect with the triple patriarchy African women have had to contend with: the patriarchy of the African traditional religions and cultures, the patriarchy of Islam, and Western Christianity with their impacts on family and society. In addition, African women's theological work is informed by its ethics of the struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, and neoliberalism and their economic exploitation and the dehumanization of the Other. African women theologians, therefore, take cognizance of the racism embedded in colonial histories and its generalities that continue to exploit and subject African people, and African women in particular, to poverty and global marginalization. The authors analyze the matriarchs' criticisms of how theology has colluded with "patriarchy and colonialism," and highlight the tools for the resistance they have suggested in their theological thinking and used in their engagements with society. (8) Finally, the authors consider how effective the Circle's ethical theories, models, and frameworks could become for the work of justice and liberation of women and the whole Earth community.

### SHAPE AND CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The manuscript is divided into three parts: in the introductory chapter, the editors, Beatrice Okyere-Manu and Léocadie Lushombo present the argument that the ethics and philosophies, which informed the works of the matriarchs of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians have not

been adequately interrogated and offers this book as a place to begin this vital work. Space will not allow for the reflection of all the matriarchs, so this book concentrates on the works of thirteen exemplary figures, with the understanding that future research will incorporate more reflections and stories from the Circle. The chapter seeks to answer the question, what are the philosophical and ethical foundations of the matriarchs' agenda? The chapter maintains that such exploration and interrogations can inform current and future Circle work.

Part I of this anthology focuses on liberationist views within which the ethics and philosophy of the matriarchs are grounded. The authors in this section explore the theologies and philosophies of liberation from the matriarchs of the Circle, exposing the injustices and oppressions against women. They construct ethics of resistance that result from these theologies and philosophies. Powerful resources for social transformation of these realities are assessed. Finally, the authors stress that the radical change of both men and women should enhance gender justice and equality.

Chapter 2 is on Katie Canon's womanist ethics. The author, Sr. Pamela Munyekenye, explores Katie Geneva Cannon's biography. She then assesses the history of slavery and racism in the USA as key foundational events that shaped and informed her work. She further examines Cannon's theology and ethics as arising from the history of slavery and racism. Finally, she suggests what Cannon's theology and ethics mean for the African context, notably how her involvement with the African women theologians contributed to the vision of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. She concludes with how Cannon's womanist ethics challenge the Circle to move forward or could open other possibilities for the Circle's work.

Chammah Kaunda discusses Musa W. Dube's poetics of freedom in Chap. 3. He argues that Dube's poem expresses the struggles and possibilities for emancipation and liberation. The author utilizes the poetics of imagining and thinking freedom to demonstrate how Dube's poems are a critical resource for constructing theological ethics of abundant life.

Chapter 4 in this section explores the ethics and values of Mercy A. Oduyoye's theology of liberation. Nobuntu Penxa-Matholeni authors the chapter. Using the Ghanaian symbolic narrative on the Sankofa bird, which implores us to turn back to our roots to pick up the important things we have forgotten to help us move forward, Penxa-Matholeni draws on the fundamental concepts of ethics and values promulgated by Mercy Oduyoye—namely, relationality, power, and humanity—and

expands on them using the amaXhosa metaphor of “endleleni,” to empower women; and to suggest the cross social categorization of these concepts as a way forward into the future work of the Circle.

In Chap. 5, “Social Motherhood and Masculinization of the Church in Bernadette Mbuy-Beya’s Ethical and Philosophical Anthropology,” Léocadie Lushombo critically evaluates Mbuy-Beya’s ethical philosophical anthropology. The central theme of the chapter is motherhood, acknowledging its potential for abuse, while Mbuy-Beya sees it as a solution to women’s oppression. Lushombo argues that Mbuy-Beya’s philosophy is contextual ethics, rooted in knowledge and emotional wisdom. The philosophy challenges the African church, asserting that the continent cannot embrace Jesus Christ’s hope without the complete liberation of women in society and the church, addressing the “masculinization of the Church.” According to Mbuy-Beya, this liberation involves a social motherhood that extends beyond biological aspects to encompass the diverse ways women positively contribute to life and transformation on the continent. Lushombo encourages the Circle to pursue this form of liberation, emphasizing that motherhood holds distinctive African cultural meanings while being a universal concept. She suggests that “motherhood” could serve as a bridge from communal values to a more cross-cultural discourse.

Chapter 6, “Feminist Ethics of Liberation in Africa: Exploring the Contribution of Rosemary Nkoyo Edet And Peggy Mulambya-Kabonde,” is by Maureen Ahyuwa. This chapter explores the influential role of Rose Mary Nkoyo Edet from Nigeria and Peggy Mulambya-Kabonde from Zambia in the African women’s liberation movement. These visionary leaders, motivated by a profound awareness of female subjugation, dedicated themselves to dismantling oppressive systems and advocating for gender equality. Rooted in robust and contextualized Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology, their mission sought to transform dehumanizing cultural norms and uplift the marginalized, holistically influencing social change and the well-being of the planet. The chapter delves into their contributions using autobiographical and theological hermeneutics, detailing the historical context of women’s experiences and the broader African feminist liberation theology. It examines the specific impacts of Edet and Kabonde on the theological discourse surrounding feminist liberation and gender equality. The chapter concludes by critically assessing the global relevance of their ethical insights, positioning these African Matriarchs as significant voices in the global dialogue on the ethical imperative of feminist liberation and gender equality.