2 Centering Survivors

"The Work Is Not Finished"[1]

Lisa Oakley, Yehudis Fletcher, Gerald West, Sithembiso Zwane/Barbara Thiede with Johanna Stiebert

Introduction

By the 1990s, survivor voices had joined the academic conversation about sexual violence in biblical literature and religious settings. *Centering* survivors and survivor experience was a later development, pioneered in the first decade of the 21st century. Since then, a growing number of academics, activists, and theologians have recognized their stake in the study of sexual violence, rape culture, religion, and the Bible. Centering survivors helps remind each constituency how these issues intersect.

This first chapter features interviews with scholars and activists whose hands-on work with survivors of sexual violence is foundational to their academic work. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) at the Ujamaa Centre in Pietermaritzburg, as Gerald West and Sithembiso Zwane explain, creates a way to re-read the Bible so ancient, marginalized voices are brought into dialogue with the lives of contemporary marginalized communities in South Africa. Lived experience is central to CBS; apprehending embodied realities and establishing what communities need come first. Only then do scholar-activists choose biblical texts for shared study and exploration. CBS permits trauma-informed reading and helps communities to establish pathways to justice and safety. CBS facilitates confrontation both with the harm biblical literature and religious authorities who weaponize it have caused and also with empowered discovery of how study of the Bible can liberate and aid in individual and communal recovery.

In their work, based in the North of England, Lisa Oakley and Yehudis Fletcher likewise seek to center and empower survivors and their communities to name what has happened and to identify the injury that has been done to them. Biblical texts of trauma serve, in their setting, to uncover, reveal, name, empower, and generate needed change in religious cultures and their institutions.

Lisa Oakley is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Chester. Her research focuses on faith, safeguarding, and abuse. Her published work includes *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse* (2013), co-authored

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with Kathryn Kinmond, and *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating Healthy Christian Culture* (2019), co-authored with Justin Humphreys. Oakley is also the Chair of the British Psychological Society Safeguarding Advisory Group and the former Chair of the Church of England Task and Finish Group on Spiritual Abuse. She was a core contributor to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA). She has worked with survivors of trauma for decades.

Yehudis Fletcher is the author of *Chutzpah! A Memoir of Faith, Sexuality and Daring to Stay* (2025). In 2015, her testimony helped convict Jewish scholar Todros Grynhaus of pedophilia. Fletcher is an independent sexual violence adviser and the co-founder of the think-tank Nahamu. Nahamu's primary aim is to advocate with victims of harm in high-control Jewish communities. She has particular interests in agency, personal autonomy, and gender-based violence. Her research focuses primarily on Charedi communities in the UK, with a special interest in forced marriage, so-called honor-based abuse, and human rights. Fletcher is currently completing her Master's degree in Religion and Theology at the University of Manchester.

Barbara Thiede: Thank you both for being here and for speaking about the kind of work you do—work that changes lives. We're going to get started with one question: What does the term *rape culture* mean to you?

Yehudis Fletcher: Rape culture for me is when attitudes and practices that include violent sexual assault are present in the threads of what is normal and expected. The rape culture I encounter in my community is possibly more material than what is usually imagined when hearing that term. I see it, for example, in the public defense of why we shouldn't have sex education in schools and [why] we should have universal early marriage so that when girls get engaged they don't know that getting married involves consummation and that consummation has to take place on the night of the wedding, and there will be a phone call the next morning to check that it's happened. That's rape culture baked into religious practice. For me, in the Charedi[2] community, that's rape culture. It is observable in the material cultural artefacts of our community.

Lisa Oakley: There are so many layers of what's happening in communities and cultures that allow something that is horrific to become normalized. Our research shows that people who experience abuse can be

made to feel that they are responsible for what has happened to them and therefore may engage in self-blame. These things can become normalized.

Yehudis Fletcher: Lisa, when you mentioned self-blame, I immediately thought of the way it's not even self-blame, but external blame. This is demonstrated in the way in which Hasidic[3] girls are expected to be covered from the age of three, to "protect men" from looking at their bodies. The blame is codified and taught explicitly.[4] So Charedi girls are more likely than boys to receive secular education because Charedi girls are expected to navigate the world on behalf of the men. But if men can't go out into the world and little girls from the age of three need to wear tights and be covered from collarbone to their toes, that casts men as some kind of uncontrollable animal. I don't think it's any truer picture of how men actually are than how little girls are.

Lisa Oakley: In the disclosure research that we did, one of the things that came out was about what's talked about and what isn't. If you are in a community or a culture where you don't teach people about parts of the body, you don't talk about sex, then when people experience these things, there's no language to talk about it. There's no way to understand what has happened to you, and there's no format in which you can disclose the abuse that you've experienced. There are so many layers that work against identifying experiences as abusive. Disclosing or speaking out is seen as something that you're just not allowed to do. So, there's so much that contributes to creating and maintaining a rape culture.

Barbara Thiede: Can you speak to the intersection between biblical literature and rape culture?

Lisa Oakley: I started my work looking at highly systematic patterns of coercive control in religious contexts and with a religious rationale, listening to the voices of victim survivors. For many people the use of scripture was part of that coercion and control. Take a biblical message of unity. Most people going to churches would have heard messages about unity, and in and of itself, that's not a negative thing. That's about looking after each other, being part

of a community, etc. But one of the first people who ever spoke to me said: "I was told to keep my mouth shut and my head down, to look on it as a case of keeping unity." That teaching about unity was then misused and abused to silence people. You will have heard those messages repeatedly and seen them—as they often are—as positive messages. When they are used to control and coerce, it is really, really difficult to identify this is a misuse or abuse of that teaching.

I spent an afternoon at a theological college with a really helpful theologian, and he said to me that if you believe the Bible is the word of God, then everything in it has massive power.

Yehudis Fletcher: We have the Torah, which is considered the absolute word of God. You also have the Mishnah and the Talmud, which you're meant to believe are divinely inspired. Then we also have a third set of texts, which codify *halacha*.[5] All these texts are used as proof texts to build what I like to call the halachic matrix, where people decide which pieces of information to include and which pieces not to include to come up with a practice that is then expected of people.

An example of this is Maimonides' law on Mesira (מסירה). You're not allowed to report somebody from Jewish communities to non-Jewish authorities. That has real-life implications. For me, the interaction between texts is not just what people might preach, or what people might draw on, and what expectations might be set, but the rigid, literal rules that dictate to people what they will and will not do in their own homes [because] there's a teaching that God is always watching. The texts interact with people's lives in my community on a minute-by-minute basis.

Lisa Oakley: I was just reminded about one of the images from the disclosure project,[6] a picture that a participant chose that represented why it was difficult for them to disclose their experience of abuse. It was a Bible open on a dinner plate. They called it "Eat the words." When they talked about it, they said that they felt they were force-fed scripture.

A Bible passage is circled [that reads] "love keeps no record of wrongs."

It's not just about what's preached on. It's not just about what's taught. It's what's embedded within from an early age.

Our research study into domestic abuse asked people what passages or teachings were used to support—even if unintentionally—domestic abuse. What did perpetrators use? Passages on submission of women and headship of men. Interestingly, those who'd experienced domestic abuse as men were saying those passages were equally unhelpful to them because they were invisible in that experience.

Barbara Thiede: Can you tell us how you came to this work?

Yehudis Fletcher: I was living in Stamford Hill, pushing a double buggy, not able to drive. And a friend really, really pushed me to do a course at the London School of Jewish Studies. It was outside the Haredi community, in a modern Orthodox Jewish environment, that I first encountered women studying Torah. In that context, I first encountered Maureen Kendler. One of the first things we did with her was the *pilegesh*[7] [of] Judges 19. I realized that this wasn't even Talmud; this is Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), and it had been censored deliberately. The will to confront violent texts was life-changing for me. Being Charedi, I encountered a lot of really-not-nice behavior to me on the back of my community's values. I suffered a lot. The normal response to that is to say either "suck it up" or "leave." Maureen Kendler said, "I'm not threatening to leave. I'm threatening to stay." I've taken that as my own motto.

Lisa Oakley: Church for me was a very safe place when I was growing up. I found a real source of solace, and so I felt valued. When I was about 16, like many people, I decided that I didn't want to go anymore. When I was 18, I decided to go again, to somewhere that *I* wanted to go to. If I'm going to do this, I'm going to do it for myself.

I went to this tiny little church. They preached on a Sunday morning and then on Sunday evening;

you could come with any questions. I was probably the most annoying teenager they'd ever had; I used to write down all the things I wanted to ask, the things I didn't agree with, the things I wanted to know more about, the things I wasn't sure were substantiated. This amazing minister would answer whatever questions I had and sometimes say, "I don't know; I'm going to go and find out more."

Then I went to a church where I had an experience of spiritual abuse. When I came out of that experience, I started to read. Everything I could find was from America, talking about this thing called spiritual abuse.

That's where I began thinking: I've had this really positive early experience and now have had a really negative experience. It led me to want to understand better that whole experience [and] how scripture was used.

Barbara Thiede: I'm wondering how you respond to people who are in the academy who resist personal experience. "It doesn't qualify. It actually disqualifies."

Lisa Oakley: Everybody's voice matters. The person that I am, that experienced that abuse, has a right to talk about that and it doesn't disqualify me. In many ways it *qualifies* me. When I'm talking to people about their experiences, I want to understand their experience. It's not my story. But there is something that's shared about that.

Conducting and designing research where we put people at the center isn't neat, and it shouldn't be. It certainly isn't neat if people have experienced harm. Yehudis has been a huge influence on me. I saw that it was okay to say difficult and uncomfortable and challenging things.

Yehudis Fletcher: Thank you, Lisa. And can I say that I was only able to show that level of vulnerability and create that kind of discomfort because you and others around you made it okay for me to do that? Miranda Fricker's work on epistemic justice or injustice has given me language to build on those ideas. The reason I'm interested in that is exactly because of this question that you pose. When you speak as a survivor of violence, and I call myself a "thriver," I face a kind of double silencing of my knowledge

or what I know to be true about myself, my experiences, and the patterns that I've seen between my experiences and other people's experiences. It's either dismissed as "not true" because I am not believed, or I *am* believed, and then it's dismissed as trauma rather than knowledge.

Insisting that people don't silence me is something I'm very used to. I learned to talk back and question doctrine. That's what I did when I uncovered my hair. That's what I did when I came out as a lesbian. That's what I did when I learned Talmud for the first time. It doesn't take very much to get from that to challenging doctrine within the academy!

Lisa Oakley: When I've been talking about spiritual abuse, the question has been put to me, "you're not a theologian, are you?" It's really about saying, "you can't speak about this." Somebody [even] once said to me, "can you be a Christian *and* a psychologist?" Yes!

I remember being in a meeting and challenging people about this notion of an angry survivor. I said, when people are quiet and they're trying to tell their story, nobody listens to them. Then they get cross, and then you say they're an angry survivor. So, it doesn't actually matter how you present. You're silenced.

Yehudis Fletcher: Nothing is done without survivors speaking up either. Even if you need anything, from a research study to a newspaper article, you always need survivor accounts. [We] rely on survivors producing knowledge for us. And then at the same time, when that survivor speaks, we're going to say that's not real knowledge because they're too traumatized to have any kind of insight.

Certainly, we rely on survivor testimony to underpin any kind of knowledge production. We have to recognize the value of survivor knowledge.

Lisa Oakley: There is a huge emotional cost telling your story.

Barbara Thiede: When you go into religious settings, how do you actually translate your work in those contexts and what kinds of challenges do you face?

Yehudis Fletcher: If I'm even allowed or invited, people expect me to celebrate that as the win. The bar is, like, on the floor.

I tried to tell a bit of my own story and to situate that theory and current events. That didn't go down very well. Bringing sacred texts that include violence offered an opportunity to use a lot more of a theoretical lens to have exactly the same conversation.

Lisa Oakley: If people invite you, then they're kind of on board, aren't they? There are places that want to explore and work out where things have gone wrong and even where nothing has gone wrong in their context. They want to look at how to make it safer, and I have seen some great examples of commitment to this.

There are other spaces I've been in that have been incredibly hostile. People have told me that I'm doing the devil's work for him… we shouldn't speak about this.

I've been on a learning journey with this about what's my responsibility and what isn't. It's *absolutely* my responsibility to represent well what people have shared with me. It's *absolutely* my responsibility to make sure that there's an opportunity for questions and reflection.

It isn't my responsibility to defend the church.

Yehudis Fletcher: Conversations that I have one-on-one with individual rabbis are miles apart from anything that anybody will invite me to say in public. That's really where the magic happens. Having enough knowledge of the halachic constructs to be able to ask the right questions is immensely valuable.

Barbara Thiede: Some scholars, particularly female scholars, have expressed a kind of exhaustion with dealing with sexual trauma and sexual violence in the literature, suggesting that everything has already been said. We're curious how the two of you respond to that kind of academic claim—that the work seems to be done and there's nothing more to say.

Yehudis Fletcher: The work is not finished, because women are still being abused and that abuse is being justified by religious texts and doctrine. Some people have access to a certain level of privilege, of freedom. [That] doesn't mean that we're all there. Clearly the problems have not been solved.

That doesn't mean that exhaustion isn't completely justified for individual people.

Barbara Thiede: Yehudis said that beautifully. You might be done with it, and that's okay. But look at the world that we are living in, which is far from done with it. Not even close.

Another question: When the two of you look back at what you've written, what you've said, is there anything you would change?

Lisa Oakley: If I went right back to the beginning, I'd like to co-design everything that I did. I'd like to be able to pay every survivor victim, survivor thriver, properly for taking part in everything. I also think I would like to have worked with people from other faith traditions earlier. The richness that has come from working with Yehudis has been important.

Yehudis Fletcher: There's loads of cringeworthy stuff out there that has my name on it. But I think it's lovely to see the path that I took to where I am now and wondering where I'm going to go next. One of the participants in our last study said: "when we know better, we do better."

I think it's been a journey of learning. We learn as we go, don't we?

Barbara Thiede: You've both spoken on so many levels and with such incredible clarity. I want to thank you both for spending this time with us and sharing your experience, your wisdom, and your knowledge. I'm really thrilled that you made the time for us. Thank you both!

Lisa Oakley: This is so important to do, even though it's a really difficult topic.

Yehudis Fletcher: Yeah, thank you so much. Thank you.

Gerald West is Senior Professor in the School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa (UKZN). West was a pivotal figure in the development of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As West himself has pointed out, CBS asks what it means to interpret the Bible *with* the poor and marginalized. West's many journal articles and book chapters have frequently focused on this question, establishing both the presence of violence, including sexual assault, in biblical texts and how those same "texts of trauma" can be used by communities in ways that liberate and transform. West has helped guide the work of the

Ujamaa Centre for over three decades. Among his major publications are *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible* (1999) and *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (2016).

Sithembiso Zwane is an ordained minister who also serves as Lecturer at UKZN in South Africa. Zwane is Director of the Ujamaa Centre, which was initiated in 1989 as part of the School of Theology at UKZN. The Ujamaa Centre focuses on building safety in both religious and civil society through theological education and the active participation of South Africans in social transformation. Zwane's activism and his scholarly work emphasize issues of gender and sexual violence in biblical texts; he is a seasoned practitioner of CBS in the service of community transformation.

Barbara Thiede: I am honored to be here with both of you. Our first question: Rape culture is a global phenomenon that looks quite different depending on where you are. What does rape culture look like in your setting?

Gerald West: Barbara, may I begin [first] just by thanking you and Johanna. As you'll hear us say over and over again, we are committed to a process of action, reflection; action, reflection. Talking to people who are outside of our context is important. We probably will end up articulating things we haven't yet articulated to each other and to our own colleagues and community. Thank you for the opportunity. It's part of the action-reflection cycle.

So let me [answer] the question in a slightly roundabout way, but an important way for us. Since the very beginning of our work thirty-five years ago, what is now the Ujamaa Centre has been committed wherever possible to working with organized groups of the poor and marginalized. An organized group has its own identity, its own voice. That's key: we get summoned rather than try to set something up. For example, a group of women survivors would invite us to come and work with the Bible because the Bible was used over and against them.

What we understand by *rape* and *rape culture* is less important than what that organized group understands by *rape* and *rape culture*. As an organized group of survivors of gender-based violence, they are already deeply informed by notions of rape and rape culture, South African legislation, and African legislation in different countries. It's

not what we bring, or our understanding of rape and *rape culture* that's important. It's what *the communities we work with* bring.

And if we didn't behave as socially engaged scholars, they'd say, "this is not working. You're dominating us" or "you're not listening to us."

Sithembiso Zwane: We don't speak *for* people. We speak *with* the people. This is a very important distinction to make that we recognize the voices of those who have been marginalized and excluded by systems of oppression in our communities. When we're talking about the culture of rape, we are talking about what communities refer to as an unholy alliance, a system of patriarchal oppressive cultural practices as well as religious systems of oppression.

For instance, in a traditional Zulu context, once women are married, their bodies are owned by their husbands. I raise the issue that if your wife says to you, "I'm not willing to have sexual intercourse with you today" and you continue, despite the fact that she says no, you will be raping your wife. Most of these men frown upon that statement and say, "how dare you? How can I rape my wife?" Patriarchy teaches them that they own bodies of women once they have married them. You see here a system of patriarchy that is embedded in cultural systems of oppression. Also, they use the religious narrative and say, "I'm the head of the family and therefore the head of my wife. My wife is accountable to me and reports to me. I have a right to do as I please with the body of my wife."

We work with organized group formations of survivors of rape. They constantly live in fear of being violated sexually by the people they trust, in their own communities. The rape culture is a system that needs to be challenged by communities themselves. What Ujamaa does is to journey alongside communities challenging these systems of oppression.

There's another challenge of secondary victimization when they go to court [and] are requested to relive memories of rape. Our legal system makes them feel guilty as survivors of rape. These are things that we try and challenge, try to build

capacity [to] not be afraid to speak against systems of oppression.

Barbara Thiede: Can you explain how Contextual Bible Study (CBS) has succeeded in confronting rape culture?

Sithembiso Zwane: We don't begin with a Contextual Bible Study. We begin analyzing the lived and embodied reality of rape culture where survivors of rape are narrating their own stories.

CBS becomes a tool of critical reflection on lived and embodied reality of the survivors of rape. Then we move into disrupting the dominant narrative of rape culture in our communities. Using biblical and theological resources, we create redemptive spaces of liberation for survivors of rape, which lead into pragmatic action that challenges the status quo.

We have seen an increase in reported cases of rape to the police. The survivors are breaking the silence because they have developed resilience that facilitates resistance.

Gerald West: We did this work for the first time in 1996. The Ujamaa Centre was formed in the struggle against apartheid; the early work we did was all in the area of race and class. But gradually women started saying, "what about us? How are you going to work with us around women's issues?" They decided what women's issues were.

We did the first workshop in 1996. It was a three- or four-day workshop, and on the second or third day, the focus was on violence against women. We'd never done a CBS on violence against women before, so we were challenged to ask what we could offer these women as a resource. We turned to Phyllis Trible's work on 2 Samuel 13, and the first response by the women was [that] this text is not in our Bibles.

We had to say, let's find it. That itself was a breakthrough. And the women said, if this is in the Bible we will not be silent. We discovered something from the women who invited us. They wanted to do Bible study around issues of violence against women *as well as* on leadership and cultural issues. Secondly, here was a text that resonated with them.

That's the amazing thing about the work we do. We get summoned and guided by the communities we work with. They see certain realities that they live with, and they summon us then to address those realities.

We then got asked to deal with masculinities. In the literature in South Africa on rape culture, the terrain has shifted towards issues of masculinity in the context of race and class and, of course, colonialism.

Women now said to us, "thank you. This is a really important Bible study for us, and we will continue using it and we will continue speaking. But what about our men?"

The community says, "this is what we want you to deal with." Then we engage with them through the CBS process.

Barbara Thiede: Could you give me other biblical texts that you feel have been fundamentally important to your work?

Sithembiso Zwane: 2 Samuel 11. It's a text that we've also used about abuse of power in terms of gender relations. David is someone in a position of authority, using his power to take someone's wife. It has resonated with some of the communities that we work with who say abuse of power has become institutionalized, both in the cultural and in the religious sector. We have also referred to Genesis 34, for instance, the story of Dinah.

Gerald West: We've used a number of texts to deal with the issue of male rape. I can remember a workshop we did in Kenya in 2005, and there was someone from the Methodist hospital who came to [speak] on issues of violence. She told the story of a young man who'd been raped. And this caused consternation in the room, because the focus was on violence against women. But she pleaded with us and pleaded with folks in the room to hear this because it was so hard for men to admit to and acknowledge and deal with their own violations. We [were] drawn, again, summoned, to do work around this. The advantage of doing the Sodom [narrative] is you turn what is seen as a story about homosexuality into a story of male rape. We addressed this text

as rape by heterosexuals (not homosexuals). It is a heterosexual story.

We've also done work with David Tombs on the sexual assault of Jesus. There's no doubt that in Matthew's version of the story of the crucifixion, Jesus is sexually assaulted. People find it hard to hear that the Jesus they love, [that] their lord, was sexually assaulted. But when they do, it's a very powerful moment, powerful for men who can see Jesus now standing with them in a different kind of way.

But perhaps the most significant story has been Joseph. There are very clear indications that Joseph was a queer young man who was possibly sexually assaulted by his brothers and almost certainly sold into sexual slavery. Which is why Potiphar's wife feels she can do what she wants and is offended when he doesn't serve her "needs"—because he is a sexual slave.

Barbara Thiede: What is the most singular challenge you face?

Gerald West: It depends on which community you are working with. When we work with conservatives, they feel obligated to defend the Bible, because for them, the Bible represents God. They don't want to let the text be shaped by people in the room, be it the unemployed, the survivor of gender-based violence… They want to take control of the process.

One of the major contextual challenges for us has been what is referred to here as "corrective rape"—Lesbians, gay men, trans folk who get targeted and raped to "correct" them.

We have a workshop based on what happened to Eudy Simelane. She was a Lesbian woman, a well-known member of our national soccer team who was raped and killed [in 2008]. We had a colleague who knew the family and invited the family to come and sit with us and to teach us. We created a kind of campaign around Eudy, and that's given us a real opportunity each year to work within the queer community and more widely around issues of "corrective" rape.

Each year, the Eudy workshop takes a slightly different form, and we learn different things from that. Within the last week, one of our leading queer

activists who's Muslim, Muhsin Hendricks, was about to officiate at a lesbian wedding. He was assassinated (Ngcobo 2025).

Barbara Thiede: Oh no…

Gerald West: It was a devastating moment to realize that he'd been targeted.

Johanna Stiebert: Terrible.

Barbara Thiede: Yes [pause]. Gerald, you and Sithembiso have spoken about the continual transformation of your work, starting with gender-based violence against women to issues of male-on-male violence, to the kinds of violence the LGBTQ+ communities experience. But your method is still based on the community. What is the community asking us? Where is the community leading us?

Gerald West: We try to work with organized groups in an ongoing way, not in-and-out. The problem with in-and-out is that you do your thing and then you do your thing again and then you do your thing again. You don't change. But working with the same community, you grow. We are then forced to change because the communities we work with are changing.

We are working with issues of economics. We're working with gender-based violence. We're working with issues of ecology. We're working with issues of disability. We speak of intersecting or interlocking systems of oppression.

It's really important to work with a community intersectionally and systemically.

Sithembiso Zwane: Our intervention in the community is not an *event* but a *process*. We journey with the community reflecting and acting and reflecting, being intentional about praxis. We have seen gradual shifts and changes in the communities. They become intentional in how they interrogate the text. Now they understand the process of being patient and engaging with the details of the text.

They no longer see an economy as something that is an individual problem, but they understand it's a structural problem. They know that patriarchy is a system that manipulates and controls other people. They begin to understand the dynamics in systems of oppression because they are immersed in a process and not in an event.

The Tamar campaign on issues of rape has been taken over by different Christian councils around the continent and even the World Council of Churches. So that's a major achievement in terms of creating awareness about sexual violence in the Bible. We have offered the world a resource that they can use to talk about issues of rape culture at the global level.

Barbara Thiede: How does scholarship come up in the work that you do?

Gerald West: Scholarship has to be useful. Now, that doesn't mean we don't recognize the integrity of what scholarship is. We do. But for us, it has to be useful. I've talked to Phyllis Trible about this. She's delighted, absolutely delighted that we were able to use her work in this kind of way.

There's nothing we do that we don't reflect on. That often takes the disciplined form of writing. What happened in that workshop? What have we learned? We've been very fortunate to have found spaces that are willing to take up our reflective writings and to publish them. We can generate [what] is now a global network of resources.

Sithembiso Zwane: There is no doubt that there's been an impact from the academic work that [we have] published in creating awareness and providing a critical reflection on issues of rape culture. It is always important to ensure that the academic work that is published also reflects the voices of the people that we work with.

It is our responsibility: whatever has been published academically is translated, for instance, into local languages and is shared with people that we work with, the organized group formations. I really value that when we do academic work, it must reflect the reality of the people.

Barbara Thiede: Is there a particular challenge in addressing trauma in faith settings?

Sithembiso Zwane: Because of the system of oppression that silences women who have been oppressed or who have been raped, the only time they get to speak about their own experiences [may be when] they come into a CBS workshop. It allows them to have a voice that

is often silenced by those who are in power. You have to try and journey with the individual that is now reliving these traumatic experiences.

I was facilitating a workshop, and an individual cried in the workshop and started talking about the cleric who had raped her and saying that since then she hated the Bible because of the gendered nature of the Bible.

When we're talking about the father, the son—the gendered nature of the Bible has created a lot of problems for women who have been raped in the church. They see God as a rapist if God is the father.

Gerald West: We have trained counselors available, [and] we've also learned to trust the communities. They will have their own resources amongst themselves, their own ways of dealing with trauma.

I've always been amazed at workshops where we're dealing with sensitive issues—it might be unemployment, or disability, or HIV. Someone starts to cry or look crestfallen or depressed. Someone will lean over and take their hand and maybe start to pray with them.

Barbara Thiede: What happens for you two?

Gerald West: It's really a depressing experience on one side but also an exposure to reality that other people are living with on a daily basis. Either way, it takes you out of your own comfort zone as a facilitator who might be privileged in coming into that space.

Sithembiso Zwane: It's also therapeutic in a way because you then begin to confront your own fears and get support from the rest of the group. There is solidarity in these groups. It's a lifelong process of learning from each other in that space.

Gerald West: You begin and end with community. And the community you begin with is not the community you end with. Community is critical and we trust that. I would not be an academic if it wasn't for this work, and I would not be a Christian. My own faith is sustained by the communities in which we work.

Much of the work we've been doing over the past thirty-five years has been shaped by people who are socially engaged biblical scholars. That is important. But for us, it's not the whole story.

Sithembiso Zwane: The people that we serve and the people that we work with in the community are the most important people in our work as an organization. The community itself shapes the work of Ujamaa and the academic work that has been produced by the Centre. Organic intellectuals in our communities have contributed immensely.

Even though we don't talk about individuals in the organization, the work that Gerald has done has opened doors for all of us. Almost each and every staff member has been given an opportunity to have a voice and to contribute to the academic work of the Centre.

It's not about individuals, it's about the collective work that has been produced over the past thirty-five years. That really is the story of the Ujamaa Centre.

Gerald West: If you read Sithembiso's Ph.D., you will see that his focus is not so much on the work of Ujamaa as a Bible-connected project, but how the Bible project relates to participatory community-based development. What he has done in his work, both in Ujamaa and in his academic work, is to journey with communities after the Bible study.

Most of our communities live in space controlled by others. What CBS does is invigorate that space, challenge that space, and disrupt—leading to the potential for communities to construct their own development, change their own contexts.

What Sithembiso has done is to say, let's foreground *that*. Let's foreground the participatory community-based development dimension of our work.

Barbara Thiede: This is such desperately needed work. I'm so glad that we will have your voices in this book. Thank you for giving us this time.

Sithembiso Zwane: Thank you so much.

Gerald West: Barbara, thank you.

Notes

1 A video with extracts from these interviews is available at https://youtu.be/YaGIT7xoDDI.

2 Yehudis Fletcher writes: "I transliterate the Hebrew name for my community as it is spoken by those who identify within it."

3 Hasidism is a Jewish religious movement that arose in the 18th century. Hasidism emphasizes God's immanence in the universe, devotional religious practices, and the spiritual nature of corporeal and everyday acts. The adherents of Hasidism are organized in independent sects. These are led by the "rebbe," whose role is hereditary. Followers of Hasidic Judaism worldwide constitute about 2% of the global Jewish population.

4 For a standard text, Fletcher suggests Pesach Eliyahu Falk's *Modesty, An Adornment for Life* (1998).

5 *Halacha* (literally, "the way to walk") is often translated "Jewish law, but is better understood as the correct way to behave. It is derived from rabbinic texts, notably the Talmud.

6 Oakley is referring to her part in a large grant funded by the United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Council. The grant has the title "Abuse in Religious Settings: Organisational Cultures, Public Policy and Survivors' Experiences." The disclosure project explored creative visual ways of disclosing abuse. Fletcher acted as specialist consultant to the same grant.

7 Hebrew for "secondary wife."

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