

African Pentecostal mission of liberation and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development

An intersectional-decolonial perspective¹

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Abstract

Intersectional relationships mark global responses to sustainable development issues. Thus, an intersectionality of religion, race, gender, sexuality class, and colonialism often marks Christian mission activities for sustainable development issues in Africa. Although the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015 aimed at addressing sustainable development issues for the rest of society, this intersectionality has a greater influence on the understanding of the Christian mission as liberation in this continent. This study used the intersectionality-decolonial theory as a lens to explore the African Pentecostal mission as a liberation considering the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 of the 2030 Agenda. The secondary research approach was used to investigate this phenomenon to contribute to the body of knowledge that addresses African Pentecostal mission praxis in the light of liberation, decoloniality, and SDGs within African Pentecostal praxis and experience. The study found, amongst other things, that gender inequalities and discrimination continue to be barriers to the African Pentecostal mission of liberation that responds to sustainable development issues. It further argued that the narrative is entrenched in the missionary-colonial project that serves as a barrier to achieving the 2030 Agenda within these spaces. Therefore, a call was made for the narrative's problematisation by applying decoloniality and transforming the status quo within African Pentecostal mission activities.

Key words: 2030 Agenda; African Pentecostal mission; decoloniality; intersectionality; liberation; Sustainable Development Goal 16

1. Introduction

Intersectional relationships mark Global responses to sustainable development issues (Basedau et al., 2017; Tarusarira, 2020:87). These relationships are often

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governed by the colonality of power, what Foucault (1982:783) calls “pastoral power.” This power manifests in oppressive and discriminatory elements, and it foregrounds the non-dialectical relationship between the colonised and the coloniser. This is what Maldonado-Torres (2016:16) calls “the relation between the zone of humanity and the zone of sub-humanity.” Although the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda, henceforth) that was adopted by the United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015 aims at addressing sustainable development issues for the rest of society (UN, 2015), the intersectionality of religion, race, gender, sexuality class, and colonialism has a more significant influence on the understanding of Christian mission as liberation in Africa. This intersectionality influences the positionality, privileges, advantages, and disadvantages of certain groups and categories in society (Yee, 2020). Lamentably, the same intersectionality also exacerbates the oppression and discrimination of certain groups, such as black women and persons identifying with non-normative genders and sexualities within the African Pentecostal circles. However, this has dire repercussions for the African Pentecostal mission as liberation when viewed through the lenses of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 of the 2030 Agenda.

This study explores the African Pentecostal mission of liberation considering SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda. This goal seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development by providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable, and inclusive *secular and religious (emphasis are mine)* institutions at all levels (UN, 2015). The study further demonstrates that the same intersectionality plays a critical role in positioning black African women and individuals identifying with non-normative genders and sexualities to the disadvantaged peripheries. Therefore, the study argues that gender inequalities and discriminatory tendencies can be barriers to the African Pentecostal mission of liberation if it must respond to SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda. Again, the current discriminatory and gender disparity narrative within African Pentecostal Christianity is entrenched in the colonial project that hinders the achievement of developmental goals.

The study first presents the methodological considerations and theoretical framework. It then briefly discusses SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda. This is followed by a discussion on the African Pentecostal mission of liberation and SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda, identifying and analysing the problem. Then, the move to problematise, transform, and decolonise the narrative is presented. Finally, the notion of the African ethic of *Ubuntu* is presented as an impetus for this call for transformation.

2. Methodological consideration

The study was conducted through secondary research to contribute to the body of knowledge that addresses decoloniality and the SDGs within African Pentecostal prax-

is and experience. This means that data were collected from “technical publications such as manuals, handbooks, data sheets, standards, books, and journals, official publications of the Central government, state governments, local bodies, private data services, and computer data” (Pandey & Pandey, 2021:69). These sources were then analysed through the theoretical lenses of intersectionality and decoloniality.

3. Theoretical framework

The intersectionality and decolonial theories were used to examine the connections between religion, colonialism, race, gender, sexuality, and class in issues related to the African Pentecostal mission of liberation’s unconscious response to SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda. The term “intersectionality” was initially used by African American attorney Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989). It was later unpacked as the idea that various social identities, such as sexual orientation, gender, race, and class, interact and influence one another through interconnected oppressive systems (Meer & Müller, 2017). Yee (2020:11) states, “Scholars have extended intersectionality beyond race and gender to include class, sexual orientation, nation, citizenship, immigration status, disability, and religion. They have also enlisted intersectionality to investigate the various oppressions associated with these aspects: classicism, homophobia, xenophobia, nativism, ageism, ableism, and Islamophobia.” Similarly, De Santiago et al., (2022:80) view intersectionality as a paradigm that provides one of the best analytical vantage points for understanding exclusionary, unequal, and unfair actions. This contributes to the discovery of a collection of unfair justifications for certain facets of human development (De Santiago et al., 2022:80).

On the other hand, decoloniality concerns challenging and dismantling the ideological frameworks and structures that justify and maintain colonial power relations (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). This is what Mignolo (2007) calls the act of delinking from the logic of coloniality. Although the period of colonisation is long gone, its aftereffects are still present in the oppressive structures that exist throughout Africa. Similarly, Tarusarira (2020:93) noted that even those who have suffered from colonialism might be ambivalently instrumentalised by it. Therefore, colonialism is not exclusively in the interest of the West; rather, it can be used as a weapon by the Global South nations to oppose what they see as Western meddling or, more pessimistically, as a rationalisation for ongoing violations of human rights. Therefore, intersectionality defines how colonisation operated in Africa, while decoloniality presents a solution to its impact when addressing sustainable development issues.

4. The SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda was endorsed by the worldwide community at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 (UN, 2015). The “transformation of our planet”

towards a fairer and more peaceful future is embedded in the 17 SDGs and 169 specific sub-targets (UN, 2015). While taking cognisance of the importance of all 17 SDGs, only SDG 16 was used to foreground the argument presented in this study, namely:

SDG 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels by promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development (UN, 2015).

It is against the backdrop of inclusivity and the promotion of non-discriminatory laws that Hope (2020:59) believes that SDG 16 serves as the foundation for the other 16 SDGs, all of which depend on institutions that are open, transparent, and responsible for meeting the requirements of the public. Therefore, places of worship, including churches, cannot be exempted from inclusion as public spaces. In the same vein, African Pentecostalism is also expected to ensure the provision of an environment that allows people to live freely, securely, and prosperously, which is required to show dedication to human rights, justice, accountability, and openness. This should happen because “Structural injustices, inequalities, and emerging human rights challenges are putting peaceful and inclusive societies further out of reach (UN, 2023:44). To achieve SDG Goal 16 by 2030, action is needed to restore trust and strengthen the capacity of institutions to secure justice for all and facilitate peaceful transitions to sustainable development” (UN, 2023). Against this backdrop, it is apparent that less progress has been made so far, and the need to scrutinise the impediments to implementing these SDGs is still valid.

However, these SDGs cannot be scrutinised outside of religious parameters in Africa. Mbiti (1990:1) notes that this is because “Africa is “notoriously religious,” in that religion permeates every aspect of African life. Therefore, sustainable development issues carry religious connotations. Again, although this agenda has a bearing on the diverse African religious life and Christianity in Africa, the remarkable growth and influence of African Pentecostalism in Africa (Ukah, 2020b) and the African Pentecostal praxis and experience have some elements that have a great impact on SDG 16. Consequently, these elements are dubbed “The African Pentecostal mission of liberation that responds to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in this article.

5. The African Pentecostal mission

The concept of African Pentecostalism must be brought into context to understand the liberation aspect of its praxis. The term encompasses Classical Pentecostalism, Charismatic churches, African Initiated Churches (AICs), and neo-Pentecostalism

(Kgatle, 2022). Although there are several differences within the African Pentecostal movement, there are common attributes that justify the collective classification of this movement. For instance, according to Gathogo (2022:1), “African Pentecostalism describes a variety of Christian communities that attribute their daily religio-social experiences to the workings of the Holy Spirit, and this is in keeping with the socio-cultural and historical contexts of Africa.” This has been defined by Wariboko (2017) as being pneumatic-oriented. On the other hand, Nel (2020:3) simplistically defines African Pentecostalism as “a conservative movement, illustrated by most Christians representing nearly all denominations reading and interpreting the Bible in a conservative, biblicistic and literalist fashion.” Against this backdrop, the African Pentecostal mission can be understood as the praxis and experiences that are guided by the Holy Spirit and the Bible.

There are different modalities of mission within African Pentecostalism. Bosch (2011:9) argued that “We may, therefore, never arrogate it to ourselves to delineate mission too sharply and too self-confidently. Ultimately, mission remains undefinable.” Therefore, within the pluriverse nature of mission, the concept of “mission as liberation” (Buffel, 2013:239) becomes a closer definition of another modality of African Pentecostal mission response to SDG 16.

5.1 Mission as liberation and SDG 16

The African Pentecostal mission of liberation is anchored in the emphasis on the direction of the Holy Spirit often professed in the pulpit through what Shingange (2023a:2) referred to as “The rhetoric of thus says the Lord.” This rhetoric displays the primacy of the Holy Spirit and promises the downtrodden liberation from their plight. However, the same rhetoric further gives Pentecostal pastors an advantage and monopoly over the congregation since this rhetoric cannot be humanly challenged. Therefore, the pronouncement of liberation from the pulpit is often regarded to happen under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the biblical truth. This is often understood in line with the Biblical phrase in both Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” and “the Lord has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.” Therefore, the evangelistic message of African Pentecostal Christianity often carries the imperative to declare freedom to the captives. In the same vein, Shingange (2021:28) opined that “the evangelistic message is only understood as liberating for Africans if it provides solutions for their socio-political and existential needs.” Thus, the notion of mission as liberation remains as an African Pentecostal response to the existential need for Africans and, on the other hand, can lead them to achieve SDG 16.

Although African Pentecostal Christians emphasise liberation by preaching the gospel of liberation, the race, socio-economic class, gender, and sexuality dispari-

ties that exist within these spaces hinder the accomplishment of SDG 16. These disparities manifest through the prevalence of inequality and discrimination, making it impossible to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development within African Pentecostal spaces and their surroundings. Furthermore, they hamper access to justice for all, aimed at building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. In the end, the promotion of enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development becomes impossible since African Pentecostal Christianity is unable to lead by example in this regard. This is because inequality and discrimination continue to manifest and defeat the liberation message coming from the pulpit.

6. The manifestation of inequality and discrimination

The dominant manifestations of inequalities and discrimination, such as the distinction of roles between female and male ministers and the hegemonic heteronormativity within African Pentecostal spaces, can be regarded as unconscious responses to SDG 16. The term “unconscious” is used here because whenever inequality and discrimination happen within these spaces, African Pentecostal Christians often do not see it as a deliberate promotion of inequality and discrimination; however, it is denominational biblicist and literal interpretations and application of the Bible that leads to these unconscious consequences. Although this “unconscious act” is duly acknowledged, there is a need to transform this narrative. This is because failure to transform the narrative exacerbates the tendencies of “pastoral power” (Foucault, 1982). This form of power aims to ensure individual salvation in the next world, and it cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, exploring their souls, or making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it (Foucault, 1982).

Again, pastoral power does not look at what can benefit the entire community; however, it negatively targets individuals using constructed categories to challenge and deny their existence (Foucault, 1982:783). The Foucault notion of “pastoral power” manifests within African Pentecostal spaces through the binaries of right and wrong, good and evil, and Christian and un-Christian, representing the superiority of the West and the inferiority of African worldviews. The view further claims the universality of truth (Christian truth) as the only legitimate form of truth while disqualifying the African communal and pluriverse religiosity and epistemologies.

Thus, although the liberation mission of African Pentecostal Christianity seems to promise liberty to the oppressed, it fails to adequately respond to SDG 16. It fails to embrace individuals irrespective of their diverse genders and sexualities. Succinctly put, the prevalence of inequalities and discrimination within these spaces represents missionary-colonial tendencies. This is because racism, classism, patri-

archy, heteronormativity, and toxic masculinities dominate how black people, the poor, women, and people identifying with non-normative sexualities, are treated within these spaces (Andrew, 2023:6; Sibisi & van der Walt, 2021; Nel, 2021). For example, women still occupy lesser leadership positions, and the pulpit is still used for gay bashing. Indeed, these are missionary-colonial tendencies and are marked by inequalities and discrimination that are entrenched in the tendencies of “*othering*” (Kgatla, 2023:3) and “*thingification*” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015; Mothoagae, 2022:71). An equation by Césaire (1972:42) posits that colonisation = “*thingification*.”

6.1 Othering and thingification

According to (Kgatla, 2023:3), “*Othering* not only encompasses the many expressions of prejudice based on group identities but also provides a clarifying framework that reveals a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality.” Similarly, Powel and Manendian (2016) state that religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, skin colour, and other factors are among the many deeply contextualised aspects of “*Othering*.” On the second aspect, Mothoagae (2022:71) opines that “*thingification*” of black bodies is aimed at the subjectification and production of submissive individuals. Thus, Africans, the poor, African women, and African people expressing same-sex desires and gender identities are regarded as docile within the African social constructed hierarchies. This is demonstrated by the common overemphasis on women’s submission to men entrenched in teachings encouraging boys and men to be leaders, have authority, display independence, be strong, and show aggressiveness. In contrast, women and girls are taught to be obedient, followers, and dependent (Andrew, 2023:10-11).

Furthermore, “*othering*” and “*thingification*” are also displayed in same-sex attractions, bashing tendencies in the pulpit based on the populist notion that homosexuality is un-African, un-Christian, and unnatural (Sewapa, 2020). An example of *othering* and *thingification* within African Pentecostal spaces is that of the preaching by the visiting pastor, Bishop Dag Heward-Mills, in the Grace Bible Church, Soweto, who compared same-sex practices with animals and claiming that animals were better because they do not engage in same-sex practices (Sewapa, 2020:285). Given SDG 16, these tendencies raise the questions: Does African Pentecostal Christianity seek to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development? Does it provide access to justice for all to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels by promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development? The interrogation of the intersectionality of religion, race, class, gender, and sexuality can perhaps

shed some light in responding to these questions. Again, although some aspects of African Pentecostalism display progress in promoting the decoloniality project and other SDGs, the elements of coloniality are still taking a lead in the approach to development within these spaces.

This is what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) meant when asserting that coloniality plays disruptive, “decivilizing,” dehumanising, exploitative, racist, violent, brutal, covetous, and “thingifying” system roles that transcend European colonial rule in postcolonial Africa. Therefore, according to Shingange (2023b), the missionary-colonial project had tendencies that targeted different aspects of receptors’ lives and continue to do so within contemporary global spaces. This reality is observable in contemporary Africa, where the intersectionality of religion, race, class, gender, and sexuality are constantly used as tools and weapons for marginalising the powerless.

6.2 Religion

Religion in Africa has always been used as a ground to foster the colonial-missionary subjugation agenda (Shingange, 2023b). This agenda was anchored on the assumption that the Western form of religion (Christianity) was superior to the African belief systems. Mothoagae and Shingange (2024:3) argue that the assumption of the superiority of Christianity and the inferiority of African religions is the display of “pastoral power” within the colonial matrix of power.” This form of power is demonstrated by the disregard and demonisation of contributions that African religious systems can bring to the development agenda. Lamentably, the African Pentecostal mission of liberation follows a similar trend. Thus, the elements of African religiosity that could contribute to achieving SDG 16 are regarded as inferior to Western-centric Christianity. Hence, Nel (2020:3) pointed out that the need for Africanised epistemologies is based on the inadequacies of Western epistemologies in Africa that are established by colonial forces and supported by a Western worldview. Indeed, Western epistemologies are not adequate in addressing the aspirations of SDG 16 in Africa.

Nel further suggests that “African Pentecostalism has not felt much need to indigenize or Africanize its theology because it has already decolonized and indigenized since its inception in Africa by using an African worldview and relating to certain aspects of ATR” (Nel, 2020:3). The need to decolonise and Africanise African Pentecostalism remains critical since mission as liberation is still defined with Western terms and conditions. This is demonstrated by the perceived superiority of whiteness over blackness and Western epistemologies over those originating from Africa. This misconception is still intact and traceable in the ways the African Pentecostal mission of liberation operates. Similarly, Shingange (2023b:108) pointed out that

“the missionary-colonial subjugation tendencies are far from over.” The superiority stance projected by Christianity over African religiosity still needs to be challenged to the core. However, this does not mean that Christianity has not contributed to the development of African life. On the contrary, the contribution of Christianity is duly acknowledged, but it is the superior position that it assumed that needs to be challenged.

6.3 Race

Although liberation is promised by the gospel message, black Africans continue to be pushed to the margins of socio-political hierarchies. Borrowing from wa Thiong’o’s (1981:6) notion of a “cultural bomb.” Indeed, the cultural bomb was set to annihilate blackness and African lives, and its effect is still at work in the minds of Africans, serving as a barrier to achieving SDG 16. This is as Wa Thiong’o (1981:6) further asserts that “the effect of a bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and themselves.” Indeed, the colonial-missionary project sought to wipe out blackness by making Africans doubt their abilities to define their developmental problems and solutions to those problems. Consequently, Africans continue to be regarded as devoid of abilities to provide reasonable solutions to their needs.

The place of marginality that Africans continue to be pushed into can be equated to “the zone of sub-humanity,” as Maldonado-Torres (2016:16) opined. Therefore, it is the existence of the black nation and the condition of blackness that leads to “*thingification*” and disregard of the contribution that black people could bring to the sustainable development agenda. Therefore, it is not the inadequacies of Africans that keep closing doors and hindering them from accessing SDGs. However, like other aspects of African lives, race determines the definition of liberation and solutions to developmental issues.

6.4 Social class

Social class within Africa and African Pentecostalism also serve as barriers to the efforts to achieve SDG 16. This is because social class is based on the notion that the poor have no place in the territories perceived to be to the rich (the church). The opulence of some Pentecostal pastors, shown in their expensive attire, luxurious cars, and use of bodyguards in the pulpit, presents a picture that the church belongs to the rich (Masenya & Masenya, 2018). Again, this notion is exacerbated by individualistic tendencies as Bullock (2014:137) opined that “Individualism reinforces understandings of class as an earned status and poverty as a reflection of personal shortcomings. Individualism emphasizes personal responsibility

for success and failure and is embedded in the understanding of human behavior as independent, freely chosen, and contingent on personal preferences.” From an African perspective, this level of individualism can be regarded as a lack of *Ubuntu* (humanness). This is because *Ubuntu* promotes communalism by emphasizing that an individual exists in co-existence with others.

The lack of *Ubuntu* has been demonstrated within African Pentecostalism with the recent cry about the commercialisation of the gospel, which is propelled by the prosperity gospel (Mokhoathi, 2023), the unusual practices happening within neo-Pentecostal churches in South Africa where people were even made to eat grass and snakes with the hope of liberation and finding solutions to their livelihood and daily problems (Kgatle, 2017). These acts can be regarded within the African communities as treating human beings as animals; thus, it can be equated to inhumane or lack of *Ubuntu*. Indeed, some African Pentecostal pastors are even accused of flaunting fancy lifestyles and demanding money from their followers (Masenya & Masenya, 2018). They do this while promising their followers liberty, wealth, healing, and solutions to their existential problems. Therefore, classism continues to stretch the gap between the rich and the poor, even within African Pentecostal spaces. Therefore, social class serves as a deterrent to achieving SDG 16 and is also interconnected to the aspect of gender and sexuality.

6.5 Gender and sexuality

Most African countries vigorously oppose a wide range of resolutions on a variety of issues related to black women, sexual and reproductive health, and rights (SRHR), such as sexual rights, the rights of people to practice same-sex relationships, diverse forms of families, gender equality, the rights of women and girls, safe abortion, and comprehensive sexuality education (Gunda, 2010). Black women and people practising non-normative genders and sexualities have been located, borrowing from the Fanonian term in the zone of non-being (Fanon, 1963). Thus, they have been considered non-existent, as “the other,” and have also been *thingified*. Their “being” is thus nullified and regarded as non-existent. Thus, the African Pentecostal definition of mission as liberation neglects to address their issues.

The “*othering*” of black women and people with non-normative genders and sexualities leads to their emasculation and disempowerment, considering the achievement of SDG 16. This often happens because African black women suffer multiple oppression, i.e., they suffer because they are Africans, they suffer because they are black, they suffer because they are women, and they suffer because they are poor. Other women also suffer because they are lesbians. This web of suffering continues to modify the African womanist theory of suffering as Kobo (2018:1) maintains that “black women experience added burdens, what womanists refer to

as double, triple or multiple jeopardies.” These multiple jeopardies exacerbating the suffering of women are, however, connected to the bodily politics of black bodies and black sexualities.

Lamentably, the construction of gender and sexuality binaries and their enforcement within African Pentecostalism ensure that SDG 16 is hampered based on the constructions of the importance of femininity and masculinity. Tamale (2011:11) observed that “sexuality and gender go hand in hand; both are creatures of culture and society, and both play a central and crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies.” These power relations, including the “pastoral power,” contribute to pushing the marginalised to the peripheries. Similarly, Maldonado-Torres (2016:15-16) warns that “the categories of male and female in Western modernity are already overdetermined by a chain of significations that are created with coloniality as a background. This means that colonized males and females would be ill-advised by trying to become masculine or feminine in the way that these terms have been already defined.” Therefore, Maldonado-Torres’ assertion highlights the need to dismantle these constructions to achieve a united society that is not governed by gender and sexual limitations.

Responding to peaceful and inclusive societies is hampered within African Pentecostal spaces as people identifying with non-normative genders and sexualities often find themselves trapped by colonial impediments that are linked to inequalities and discrimination within these spaces. This happens as Herrin (2020:116) observed that “Most Pentecostals believe people in same-sex relationships must change their sexuality to be a Christian.” Therefore, liberation is defined in terms of setting them free from the bondage of sexual unconventionality. Thus, those who refuse the change are demonised and regarded as deviant within both the church and society. According to Ukah (2020b), African Pentecostals from Zambia to Zimbabwe and from Nigeria to Uganda have backed legislators in their nations to pass strict legislation outlawing same-sex relationships. This narrative needs to be transformed to present a liberating God who loves everyone irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. This can further assist in ensuring that everyone is duly recognised as being created in the image of God and, thus, deserving a better life.

7. Transforming the narrative

The need to transform the current narrative to achieve SDG 16’s aspirations cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, decolonisation becomes an important tool because it reminds us about the importance of transforming epistemologies, which means, “In the long run, we must liberate our thinking from sacralised texts, whether religious or secular; and the first task consists in learning to unlearn to relearn and to rebuild” (Mignolo, 2012:25-26). Succinctly put, African Pentecostal Christians

must set themselves free from the oppressive elements of the Bible and any other sacred texts while embracing the liberating ones. This will also entail transforming the current understanding of mission as a liberation that only focuses on spiritual bondages without addressing the issues of oppression and discrimination of the marginalised. This will also mean decolonising African Pentecostal mission theology, which, according to Omer (2020:270), “A theology becomes decolonial if it opens itself up to polydoxy, multitudes, and a pluriversality that breaks up modernist dualisms.” Omer’s assertion becomes an impetus for the clarion call to decolonise African Pentecostal perspectives, theologies, practices, and praxis to achieve the prescripts of SDG 16.

Achieving this goal will require a new mindset and a brave move to execute what Mignolo calls “epistemic disobedience” (Mignolo, 2009), which means “to delink from the mission of the zero-point epistemology” (Mignolo, 2009). Borrowing from Hadeer (2021:73), epistemic disobedience entails the courage to move away from a taken-for-granted way of viewing the world by straying away from the official knowledge that is constructed as neutral in each context. Therefore, to achieve SDG 16, African Pentecostal Christians must stray away from the official Western knowledge that promotes exclusion and embrace the communal African spirit of Ubuntu, which compels people to live at peace with one another, regardless of their differences.

Mashau and Kgatle (2019) called this move the development of an alternative spirituality of liberation that taps into the African philosophy of life called ‘*Ubuntu*.’ Succinctly put, *Ubuntu* becomes a weapon in a toolbox of the African Pentecostal mission of liberation aimed at achieving sustainable development. Therefore, the spirit of *Ubuntu* does not emphasise the binaries of men-women, straight-gay, black-white, rich-poor, and Christian-unchristian, etc. This implies that rather than approaching SDG 16 using dualistic lenses, there should be a desire to embrace diversity and the pluriverse nature of the African worldview. Mashau and Kgatle (2019:4) further assert that:

Although Ubuntu is expressed in different languages, there exists a common bond between all people and it is through this bond, through interaction with fellow human beings, that humanity discovers human qualities. Or as the Zulus would say *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*, which means that a person is a person through other persons. Humanity is affirmed when there is an acknowledgment of the humanity of others. It speaks of the fact that one’s humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in others.

Against the backdrop of the citation above, transforming the narrative will mean the desire to shift the intersectionality of religion, race, class, gender, and sexuality from its current negative connotations to a new inclusive, liberating, and enabling nar-

rative. This is a call to restore the humanity of blackness, women, people practising and identifying with non-normative genders and sexualities, and the poor who yearn for a sense of belonging as they strive to improve their living conditions. This can also speed up the process of achieving SDG 16 and further actualise what Munyaneza (2009:101) said, “I am human because I belong.” It is in the promotion of a sense of belonging irrespective of religion, race, class, gender, and sexuality that African Pentecostalism can contribute to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. Accordingly, this can provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive African Pentecostalism that promotes the enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

8. Conclusion

This study argued that religious and intersectional relationships often mark global responses to sustainable development issues. Therefore, SDG 16 of the 2030 Agenda, which was adopted by the UN Member States in 2015, was used to investigate the contribution of the intersectionality of religion, colonialism, race, gender, sexuality, and class in decisions regarding sustainable developmental issues within the African Pentecostal mission of liberation. The study argued that gender inequalities and discrimination continue to characterise the African Pentecostal mission of liberation aimed at responding to the Sustainable Development Agenda. Again, it was argued that the same mission was entrenched in the colonial project that still served as barriers to achieving SDG 16 within these spaces. Therefore, the study moved for the problematisation of the current narrative by applying decoloniality to transform the current status quo. Hence, decolonising epistemology was highlighted as important in helping Africans liberate their thinking from oppressive sacralised texts. This can happen by the act of decolonising the African Pentecostal mission theology, meaning that this theology should begin embracing the notions of a pluriverse mission that breaks up modernist dualisms. Achieving this goal will require a new mindset and a brave move to execute “epistemic disobedience” by delinking from the illusion of the zero-point epistemology. Thus, epistemic disobedience should be used as a courageous move away from the official knowledge originating from the West. Therefore, African Pentecostals were urged to embrace the communal African spirit of *Ubuntu*, which compels people to live in peace with one another, regardless of their differences. This can speed up the process of achieving SDG 16 and further actualise humanity, which is based on a sense of belonging. African Pentecostalism can contribute to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. Accordingly, this mission can provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive African Pentecostalism that promotes the enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

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