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Mary-Anne Plaatjies-van Huffel: Trailblazing journey off the patriarchal beaten track[1]

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Abstract

There's no doubt that Mary-Ann Plaatjies-van Huffel is amongst the women who "have moved into the academy, assumed religious leadership, and claimed their religious agency and heritage". However, as a woman of colour Plaatjies-van Huffel's life and work reveal that she had to navigate her leadership and exercise her agency along a well-beaten patriarchal beaten track. In this article I foreground some "first woman to…" milestones on Plaatjies-van Huffel's trailblazing journey through the ecclesial ranks of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), highlighting that her academic research and community engagement reflect the social, economic, and political realities of racism and sexism, and its complex ramifications in post-apartheid South Africa. The main argument I make in this article is that, while women may no longer be excluded from leadership positions, it is second-generation gender bias that maintains the patriarchal beaten track in "the church". Thus, I call for the debunking of second-generation gender bias which, I argue, will require a virtue of unctuousness.

Keywords

Mary-Anne Plaatjies-van Huffel; debunk; second-generation gender bias; patriarchy; church; virtue of unctuousness

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Introductory remarks: celebrate, commemorate, commiserate

This paper was presented at the Fourth Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel Memorial Lecture held at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University on 11 August 2023. I was asked to focus on Plaatjies-van Huffel's leadership legacy in "the church".[3] Much has already been written about Plaatjies-van Huffel's leadership in the church and the academy[4] – particularly in response to her death on 19 May 2020. Many colleagues with whom she served in the academy and the church reflect on her leadership a as "visionary, participative and transformative".[5]

In preparing to also add my voice to celebrating and commemorating Plaatjies-van Huffel's leadership legacy, I was reminded that her work, like that of many other South African theologians exhibit a social justice framing that grapple with the socio-cultural-political-economic realities in racist and sexist contexts. It is particularly the complex socio-economic ramifications of patriarchal normativity in post-apartheid South Africa that were cause for great concern, frustration, and disappointment for Plaatjies-van Huffel. This observation is made by Nel (2021:2) who says that Plaatjies-van Huffel "wrestled with the moments of deep disappointment and the ongoing trauma experienced through structures and ecclesial cultures that remained deeply patriarchal – deeply insensitive and violent".

Thus, in calling to remembrance Plaatjies-van Huffel's leadership amongst communities who work the vineyards and those who own the vineyards (literally and figurative speaking) – from Robertson and Scottsdene to Stellenbosch; from Prieska to Priesthood; from classrooms to boardrooms; from Wellington to the World Council of Churches, one can sense the

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3 I use "the church" here, with an understanding of the "variety of manifestation of 'church'". See for example Dirkie Smit (1996:119–129); cf. Pillay (2008:172).

4 See for example Landman (2021); Kgatla (2021); Zeze (2021); Nel (2021); Baloi (2022); Flaendorp (2014).

5 For example, in a statement following Plaatjies van Huffel's death, the World Council of Churches notes that Plaatjies-van Huffel was known as a transformative church leader in sub-Saharan Africa. Her significance was not only rooted in her leadership positions, her many theological publications, and her lecturing status, but could also be found in her active participation in processes to transform society. [Online]. Available: https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-mourns-passing-of-rev-prof-dr-mary-anne-plaatjies-van-huffel [Accessed: 31 July 2023].

tension between celebration and commiseration. This is particularly the case for me as the *memorial lecture* took place on 11 August 2023. In South Africa, August is celebrated as *Women's Month* in commemoration of the agency of women who marched against South Africa's apartheid laws on 9 August 1956.[6] But sadly, almost seven decades later, and almost thirty years into democracy, South African women continue to march with placards conveying despair #AmINext; frustration #EnoughIsEnough; hope #IAmNotNext; and solidarity (if not courage) #MeToo.[7]

Thus, while we pause to celebrate and commemorate the leadership legacy of Plaatjies-van Huffel we are also called commiserate – to lament and ask: How many more trailblazing women leaders will it take for gender justice to be taken seriously in ecclesial and academic spaces? Second, there's need to commiserate the fact that the general, if not natural expectation, is that women who are "allowed" into leadership positions, are expected to lead on a patriarchal beaten track. In other words, women's trailblazing accomplishments are lauded as long as they do not break the barriers which keep women in their stereotypical gendered lane. Third, there is a need to commiserate the fact that trailblazing women are burdened over and over again, generation after generation with the ongoing task of clearing weeds that cushion the patriarchal beaten track of male privilege. To commiserate, to lament in the context of celebration and commemoration, is to give us the liberty to ask with a hermeneutic of suspicion: What is it about the leadership of women like Plaatjies-van Huffel that we ought to celebrate? What are the "real" celebratory milestones? Or are they millstone adornments to keep women on the patriarchal normative track? What might it take for trailblazing women leaders to set previously male dominated ecclesial and academic spaces ablaze to erase the weed-cushioned patriarchal beaten track?

With these questions in mind, I will explore the *virtue of unctuousness* as intervention against the subtle, pervasive, less obvious, sometimes patronizing and often times justified patriarchal normative culture of "the

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6 See https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/1956-womens-march-pretoria-9-august. [Accessed:1 August 2023].

7 See Wilma Jakobson and Miranda Pillay (2022:6)

church". First, I foreground some of Plaatjies-van Huffel's "first woman to …" accolades with a hermeneutic of suspicion.[8]

On navigating leadership as a woman of colour in "previously" male-dominated spaces

There's no doubt that Plaatjies-van Huffel is amongst the women who, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, "have moved into the academy, assumed religious leadership, and claimed their religious agency and heritage" (2011:4). However, as a woman of colour Plaatjies-van Huffel had to navigate her leadership and exercise her agency along a patriarchal beaten track where somewhat faded white privilege signposts still remain. This observation is made on the bases of Plaatjies van Huffel's lived experiences as taken up in her academic writings and community engagement.[9] For example, much of her research is framed within the social, economic, and political realities of racism and sexism in South Africa in general, and its complex ramifications in post-apartheid South Africa, in particular.[10]

Second, while Plaatjies-van Huffel's publications exhibit how the intersections of race, class, gender, and ability continue to impact the lives and livelihood of different people differently in a democratic South Africa, it is with reflexivity and an awareness that, what she knows about the experiences of "othered" persons and communities is not everything there is to know. Employing a post-structural feminist discourse to deconstruct dualisms operative in western epistemologies Plaatjies-van Huffel's work emphasises the fact that such dualisms not only serve to justify and maintain gender binaries, but they also function as justification for

8 A term coined by Paul Ricoeur which, according to Felski, he notes is a commitment to "unmasking the lies and illusions of consciousness" (2011:1), Schüssler Fiorenza identifies a *feminist hermeneutic of suspicion* as an approach that questions androcentrism and male privilege exhibited explicitly and implicitly in texts. However, like many feminist theologians, it is my view that uncovering the oppression justified and maintained by patriarchal realities and readings of texts is an important move towards discovering possible liberative potential of texts in efforts to recover the full humanity of women, men and also those who do not identify with the stereo typical gender binaries.

9 Her research and writing reflect her lived experiences as a woman of colour "born, raised and educated during the hight of apartheid". See Selaelo Thias Kgatla (2021)

10 See for example Plaatjies-van Huffel (2011:3).

domination on the basis of class, race, and ethnicity (Plaatjies-van Huffel 2008:94; 2011a:110–113 Graff 1995:26;). Thus, she calls for a "move away from a dualistic, hierarchical, anthropocentric, androcentric, patriarchal framework of thinking" (2011b:8).

Third, Plaatjies-van Huffel's lived-experience reveals the relentless task it is for women of colour to confront racial and gender biases. Moreover, when pushback against such confrontations is justified by the expectation that women leaders are required to stay on the paternalistic, androcentric paths of the patriarchal beaten track, the task is not only taxing, but also frustrating in the South African context where gender discrimination is unconstitutional. In light of this observation, Plaatjies-van Huffel laments:

> Despite the enacted legislation, ratification of international and regional instruments and formulation of numerous gender policies, the engendering of society has not advanced at the desired rate. The dominant discourses which imprisoned women and men remain the same. Essentially, nothing has changed. No major paradigm shifts with regard to gendered objects have come to pass. Only a few modifications of the human image have taken place (2011:6).

In her presentation on the First Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel Memorial Lecture in 2020 Landman gives some insight into the "prejudiced background" against which Plaatjies-van Huffel had to navigate her studies, ecclesial ministry, and academic career as a "brown Afrikaans-speaking" woman (2021:4).

My understanding of Plaatjies-van Huffel's concerns for racial and gender justice is shaped by my own social location as a Christian South African woman of colour who, like her, was born during apartheid in the 1950s; a despondent, yet feisty teenager during the 70s; a hopeful yet suspicious young adult during the 80s. Though inspired by the promise of democracy in the 90's through to the 2000s, I am now at a point of being "gatvol". [11] In July 2020, I was part of a group of lay and ordained women from the Anglican Church of Southern Africa who published a statement titled,

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11 While "gatvol" is an Afrikaans word which literally means "full to the brim" and "fed-up", it is also defined as a South African English adjective meaning "very upset or extremely unhappy" (https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/gatvol [Accessed: 8 August 2023].

Gatvol yet Hopeful! Women call the Anglican Church of Southern Africa to Action.[12] Following the release of this statement the "Gatvol Women" (as we've come to be known) were invited to a public conversation with the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba.[13] In a counter-statement, a group of women clergy expressed the view that the use of the Afrikaans word "gatvol" is a sign of vulgarity and its use unbecoming in Christian discourse.[14] I deliberately use the word "gatvol" here as a virtue of unctuousness – the main argument in this article to which I shall return later.

Why am I *gatvol*? I am *gatvol* that women have to march over and over; year after year; August after August in protest against the violence perpetrated against them just because they are women.[15] I am *gatvol* that women's agency is ignored in patriarchal contexts that portray women as powerless, weak, and needy.[16] I am *gatvol* that women are "allowed" to be leaders in male dominated ecclesial spaces and then given a hamster wheel to be "baanbrekers".[17]

Yet, I am hopeful because of a new generation of academics – women and men – who are emboldened to push forward against patriarchal pushback.[18] Standing on the legendary shoulders of women leaders like Plaatjies-van Huffel, some younger scholars have the advantage of range and perspective

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12 See https://volmoedyouth.org.za/gatvol-yet-hopeful-women-call-the-anglican-church-of-southern-africa-to-action/ for the full statement.

13 See video on "Gatvol: ACSA Women in conversation with The Most Revd Dr Thabo Makgoba, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4LIOOVkhSI [Accessed: 1 August 2023]. See the statement https://volmoedyouth.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/final-acsa-call-to-action-1.pdf. The statement highlighted the lack of action, representation, and transformation despite numerous ACSA resolutions, statements, and interventions over the years.

14 See Wilma Jacobson and Miranda Pillay (2022:8).

15 August 2019 proved to be a month of commiseration more than commemoration and celebration as it turned out to be the bloodiest month for women who suffered violence and death at the hands of men.

16 Women leaders do inhabit positions of power and privilege and participate in the production of knowledge and public opinion which ought to dispel the simplistic view of women as powerless which, in turn, uphold patriarchal power. A feminist consciousness would suggest reflexive use of power in a network of relative power relations. See Dottolo and Tillery (2015).

17 "Baanbrekers" is an Afrikaans word meaning "trailblazers". See Pillay (2020).

18 See for example Ashwin Afrikanus Thyssen and Sheurl Davis (2021).

to survey the patriarchal beaten track. For example, Megan Robertson says that it is "thanks to Black women scholars of religion in South Africa that she has felt that there is a place for her thoughts and voice in the South African academy". However, Robertson "has also seen some of these same mentors and godmothers in tears because of the micro-aggressions of White people and men in the academy" (Nadar and Robertson 2021:11–14).

Women's leadership trail: on debunking second-generation gender bias

There is no doubt that Plaatjies-van Huffel's leadership took her on paths that opened up the way for many other women. I say this with a mindfulness that, using "women" as a category in a way that means "all women", is an exclusionary and discriminatory way of constructing "an alleged universality of women" (Kappeler 1995:21). The fact that "women", as a category, does not represent a homogeneous group is particularly true of the South African context where some women benefit from white privilege, while women of colour (black, coloured, Indian) continue to carry a double and triple burden of having to "carve out more and more spaces for themselves and others to come" (Nadar and Robertson 2021:11). Thyssen and Davis (2021:2) highlight the point that Plaatjies-Van Huffel was hailed as "the first of firsts".

Plaatjies-van Huffel's trailblazing journey through the ecclesial ranks of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA) [19] is registered, amongst others, by Charles Flaendorp in 2014 and by Selaelo Kgatla and Willie Zeze respectively, in 2021. Flaendorp, who wrote about Plaatjies-van Huffel before her death in May 2020, concludes that her ecclesial advancement was one of merit and not "tokenism". While the obvious intension is to illuminate Plaatjies-van Huffel's leadership capabilities it may also, in my view at least, be seen as an attempt to defend the credibility of the institutions concerned.[20]In a more recent publication, *Thin space:*

19 On 14 April 1994, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) was established through the union of the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (Zeze 2021:1).

20 Though, I also agree with Thyssen and Davis (2021:2) who see the value of Flaendorp's contribution in drawing "together various foci present in Plaatjies-Van Huffel's work"

tussen hemel en harde grond, compiled by Elna Mouton, Frederick Marais (2023:134) also recounts some of Plaatjies-van Huffel's "first woman to …" achievements noting that, "she was the first female pastor to be ordained in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA)".

In his account of events, Kgatla (2021) also registers the frustration and despair Plaatjies-van Huffel encountered as a woman leader in the church – much of which Plaatjies-van Huffel herself boldly declares, almost a decade earlier.[21] For the purpose of the argument made in this article, mentioning some on these achievements and frustrations seems appropriate. As pointed out by Kgatla, it was only "after a long wait" that Plaatjies-van Huffel was "allowed" into the ordained ministry and appointed to the leadership of URCSA where she became the first woman minister of the Word in URCSA (2021:1–8). Plaatjies-van Huffel, herself, laments the fact her first experience as ordained minister was one of rejection as she was "not allowed" to perform her ministerial functions as pastor (Plaatjies-van Huffel 2011; cf. Kgatla 2021). Her presence, as a woman leader in that particular male dominated ecclesial space was not recognised as legitimate by many congregants who not only refused her services, but left to join another congregation "headed by a male minister" (Plaatjies-van Huffel 2011). Plaatjies-van Huffel was also the first woman Moderator of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa when she was elected in 2012. However, as noted by Kgatla, the fact that Plaatjies-van Huffel was not elected for a second term was a "humiliating experience" for her (2021:1–8). Another milestone on Plaatjies-van Huffel's trailblazing journey is that she was the first woman to serve as Actuarius of URCSA Cape Synod.[22]

While the four male authors mentioned above set out to honour and acknowledge Plaatjies-van Huffel's "first woman to …" achievements which implicitly praise her courage and resilience, they do so without the

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which range from her "role as minister and church leader to being an iconic figure in the ecumenical world" (2021:2).

21 In "Mary-Anne Elizabeth Plaatjies-Van Huffel: A First Voice on Gender Equity in South Africa", Landman (2021) also indicates that Plaatjies-van Huffel's journey was marked with frustration and disappointment.

22 See Landman (2021:6). Plaatjies van Huffel was also the first black woman to be promoted to full professor at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University; cf. Landman (2021:3)

necessary "reflexive practice" regarding their male-privilege, compliance and complicity within ecclesial and academic patriarchal institutional cultures.[23] By ignoring reflexive practice, they aggravate the "inequalities of the tridimensional phenomenon of race/class/gender oppression" (Cannon 1988:39).

For example, Zeze's article, "What does Mary-Anne Elizabeth Plaatjies-van Huffel Have to say to Silent Partners of the Reformed World?" has many verbatim quotations from Plaatjies-van Huffel's publications which he uses together with posts from her personal Facebook Page, without reflexivity on his own positionality. He concludes with "conviction" that, "… though she [Plaatjies-van Huffel] is deceased, she is still speaking to Reformed women in the Reformed world" (Zeze 2021:10). [24] He writes about women and questions their "silence" oblivious to the fact that women are explicitly and implicitly silenced by the patriarchal normative institutional culture of the church. To be oblivious to the lived-reality of women in patriarchal normative paces and spaces is to be compliant with the upholding the systemic and structural institutional culture of patriarchal normativity. To frame "women's experiences" outside of culturally- and politically mediated stratification of race, class and gender is to ignore the fact that women's agency is continually shaped "within a system of power and difference" (Graham 2003:27).

I have, on many previous occasions, pointed out that patriarchal power and privilege, so deeply entrenched in the psyche of women and men, continue to be justified and reinscribed in ecclesial spaces and places. Therefore, despite the presence of women leaders in previously male dominated ecclesial spaces, "patriarchy continually raises its chauvinistic head".[25] Thus, it is what some feminists refer to as second-generation gender bias

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23 What is lacking here is a reflexive use of power in a network of relative power relations. As Dottolo and Tillery argue, "A more careful understanding of systems of power, institutional privilege and marginalization, and the social symbols that communicate status and hierarchy, are necessary in order to situate oneself within political structures in order to disclose one's subject position in the context of research" (2015:124).

24 Here Zeze cites Hebrews 11:4 as a source suggesting that, "even though she is dead" Plaatjies van Huffel has something to say to her silent partners – whom he identifies as the "women of the Reformed world" (2021:10).

25 See for example, Pillay (2013:56; 2015:68–69; 2021:80). Moreover, it is disturbing that 'newly liberated' voices of women of colour continue to be silenced by 'newly liberated'

that ought to be exposed and debunked by both women and men in leadership. Already pointed out by Plaatjies-van Huffel, "Despite having a *constitution* that entrenches equal rights, discriminatory practices, structural inequalities, cultural factors, prejudices, patriarchy and sexism are still prevalent in South Africa", she calls for "the deconstruction of the sexist and racist bias of our society" (2011b:6).

Second-generation gender bias is the "more subtle, less visible, oftentimes unintentional" and sometimes patronizing forms of discrimination. [26] It includes what Nadar (2009) calls "palatable patriarchy". Second-generation gender bias is often regarded and defended as unconscious, normal behaviour. Moreover, as already pointed out, the mere presence of women in leadership positions, previously reserved for men, does not automatically transform the patriarchal normative culture of ecclesial and academic spaces. Elsewhere, I've pointed out that "representation ≠ equal transformation".[27] In similar vein Plaatjies van Huffel, with reference to Schüssler Fiorenza's argument on the "dehumanizing effects of patriarchal structures" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1993:230), argues that "the presence of women in the ecclesial and societal structures is not an indicator of transformation" (2011b:7).

In her use of "discipleship of equals" as a theoretical framing in the book with the same title, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that "an impetus to overcome the death-dealing powers of patriarchy" derives from the recognition of the struggle that the dehumanizing effects of patriarchal structures have on women's lives as well as well as a "systemic analysis of dehumanizing patriarchal structures" (1993:211–231).[28] Thus, we have to take seriously

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voices of men of colour, as these men remain beholden "to the supremacist ideas when it comes to gender relations" (Maluleke 2009:33; cf. Pillay 2015:70).

26 See Levine and D'Agostino (2022).

27 On the contrary, oftentimes women are co-opted to uphold and hold the patriarchal space (See Jacobson and Pillay 2022:9)

28 Moreover, African women theologians have, for many years, articulated their concerns about the "dehumanizing effects of patriarchy on women and men" (Pillay 2017:8; 2020:2–3). This is with particular reference to the work of the Circle of African Women Theologians. A vision and initiative of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, The Circle, as it has come to be known, was inaugurated in 1989. Conversations had already begun in 1980 at a meeting of African women theologians in Ibadan. For a brief overview of the history of The Circle, see Oduyoye (1997:1–6); cf. Pillay (2020:2).

Cannon's call to "forge "new patterns of ethical discourse that reject the pernicious impact of sexism and racism, whilst attempting to shift the balance of power towards alternative values" (1988:38–40). It is at this point that I turn to *unctuousness* as a virtue as espoused by womanist theologian Katie Cannon to push forward against second-generation gender bias.[29]

On women "talking back" and the virtue of Unctuousness

Not being "allowed to talk back "amid the brutality of white supremacy and patriarchy" is all too familiar to those who were raised, educated, and socialized during apartheid and other systems of patriarchal and paternalistic oppression. As Thyssen and Davis (2021:5) note with reference to the feminist/womanist work of bell hooks, talking back "is a courageous act – an act of risk and daring" (2015:22–29). Thus, "talking back" means speaking back to a person of authority in a way that signals defiance and resistance.

In this regard I find Katie Cannon's idea of a *virtue of unctuousness* helpful in resisting second-generation gender bias – which, as previously mentioned, is the subtle, less visible, oftentimes unintentional, and sometimes patronising, "palatable" forms of patriarchy.[30] Initially, I found Cannon's idea surprising and confusing, especially when I saw that "unctuous" has many negative connotations, such as backhanded, double-dealing, hypocritical, insincere, two-faced, fraudulent and pharisaic. How then, I thought, could such an idea be considered a virtue? But upon further investigation I saw that alternative "words related to *unctuous*" meant uninhibited, unrestrained, and disarming. [31] That's when the proverbial penny dropped.[32] It is precisely the idea of what is expected as "normal, good Christian behaviour" that has to come under scrutiny as it serves second-generation gender bias.

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29 See Cannon (1995) and Pillay (2021:74–92).

30 For the notion on "palatable patriarchy" see Nadar (2009:554).

31 See Merriam Webster, "Unctuousness." https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/unctuous; https://www.thesaurus.com/browse/unctuous

32 Much of what I write here on the subject unctuousness is published in: *The Virtue of Unctuousness? Toward the Moral Agency of Women in Patriarchal Normative Contexts* (Pillay 2021:74-92). Also see Jakobson and Pillay (2022).

Unctuousness as a virtue is the subject of chapter seven of *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black community.*[33] Reflecting on the life and writings of Zora Hurston, Cannon espouses "unctuousness as a virtue" saying that:

> In both her life and work Hurston embodied a sensitized candour in relation to the subtle, invisible ethos as well as the expressed moral values emanating from within the cultural institutions in the Black community. She maintained that Black life was more than defensive reactions to the oppressive Western system of White male patriarchy. As a Black woman artist, subjected to the violence of Whites, of male superiority, and of poverty, Zora Hurston offered an especially concrete frame of reference for understanding the Black woman as a moral agent (1995:91).

Cannon describes Hurston and her fictional counterparts as moral agents who, in their struggle "to avoid the devastating effects of structural oppression, create various coping mechanisms that free them from imposed norms and expectations." Though it must be noted that while Huston's struggle, as was the struggle against apartheid was politically ideological and structural in terms of policies and laws, second-generation gender bias is ideologically systemic. In case of the latter, Cannon highlights the fact that Hurston "fully delineates the propositions, attitudes, and behaviours that men exhibit to support their belief in the inherent inferiority of women and their right to dominate them."

According to Cannon, Hurston understood suffering imposed by dominant cultures, "not as a moral norm or as a desirable ethical quality, [as often espoused in Christian circles] but rather as a typical state of affairs" which results from the prevailing dominant ethos. In essence, *unctuousness* as a virtue is the creative tension between resistance and endurance. Perhaps this is why women of faith can publicly declare that they are "Gatvol yet

33 33 See Cannon (1995: 77-90). All quotations in this section are form chapter six in Cannon, Katie's Canon. Here, I am deliberate in my use of direct quotations and capture Cannon's own words in her analysis of Hurston's writings as she (Cannon) identifies unctuousness as a virtue in Hurston's life and work.

Hopeful" – in which case endurance is an ethical principle through which the virtue of unctuousness is embodied.[34]

Thus, as an ethical principle, endurance means that women leaders would claim their agency and risk going off the patriarchal beaten track to expose, debunk and resist second-generation gender bias. As an ethical principle of the virtue of unctuousness, endurance does not mean passive acceptance but rather it points to the intentionality necessary to resist the subtle, less visible, oftentimes unintentional, and sometimes patronising forms of what is referred to here, as second-generation gender and racial bias.

However, it is highly likely that being unctuous may be regarded as a vice and not a virtue by both, men, and women, in patriarchal normative contexts. This was, as mentioned in a previous section of this article, the case with the counter-response to the statement, *Gatvol yet Hopeful! Women call the Anglican Church of Southern Africa to Action*. Moreover, anyone who embodies unctuousness in resistance and defiance to patriarchal norms, risks being branded as a bad, insincere, false, and deviant because the value system of the dominant group is justified and understood to be beneficial to the oppressed. Second, the oppressed group could brand anyone who exercises endurance in the face of oppression as a sell-out (Pillay 2021:85). This is why Cannon says that there has to be communal "recognition that unctuousness is a virtue" so as to recognise the moral agency and legitimate presence of women leaders in "previously" male-dominated ecclesial spaces and places (Cannon 1995:91–94). If not, it is likely that women who do embody unctuousness in patriarchal normative contexts are silenced, sidelined, dismissed, ridiculed, and violated by dominant, oppressive systems operative in racist, sexist and classist societies.

Concluding remarks: Toward the legitimate presence of women leaders

As the lived experiences of women like Plaatjies-van Huffel reveal, women who are celebrated as being "the first of firsts" also carry the burden of having the legitimacy of their presence questioned in patriarchal normative

34 See Pillay and Jacobsen (2022).

communities. In reflecting on the trail left by Plaatjies-van Huffel's "first woman to …" achievements in contexts where gender discrimination is unconstitutional, the reality is that second-generation gender bias continues to thwart transformation of "previously" male dominated ecclesial spaces. Worse still, the presence of women leaders in positions previously reserved for men is, often, dismissed as being irrelevant and of no consequence in patriarchal normative institutional culture of the church.

In this article, I have argued that embodying a virtue of unctuousness means being intentional about going against norms and expectations imposed by, for example, the patriarchal institutional culture of the church. In this regard *talking back* against institutional authority is, as Cannon says, forging "new patterns of ethical discourse". Far from being discounted from our understanding of moral agency, the virtue of unctuousness goes beyond resistance to include endurance. To embody a virtue of unctuousness is to be "Gatvol! Yet Hopeful".

Plaatjies-van Huffel pushed defiantly forward against patriarchal pushback – albeit that patriarchal pushback remains camouflaged by second-generation gender bias. Thus, I echo Nadine Bowers-du Toit's words of hope that, in celebrating the life and legacy of Plaatjies-van Huffel we will in the years to come, "hold high the values that she [Plaatjies-van Huffel] embodied – of justice, freedom, equity and liberation for all".[35]

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35 See https://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=9456 [Accessed: 30 July 2023].

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