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Healing Beyond Theory: SIL Ethiopia's Journey from Trauma to Hope through Contextual Theology

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Abstract

This study examines how the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) Ethiopia applies trauma-healing and contextual theology to address the Ethiopian context. In Ethiopia, which faces many sources of trauma, faith-based organisations are required to play an important role in responding to the community wounds.

The study combines two approaches: a review of existing literature and direct participant observation of trauma-healing sessions facilitated by SIL. It explores the barriers that hinder the accessibility and long-term effectiveness of trauma-healing initiatives offered to survivors. The results show that contextual theology and a theology of hope offer tools for trauma-healing, yet their implementation is often hindered by limited resources, cultural misconceptions about suffering, and skepticism from academic and church circles.

SIL Ethiopia's healing initiatives indicate the effectiveness of trauma-healing that recognises spiritual aspects, community values, and local stories of hope. This study offers insights for faith-based organisations working on trauma-care and for policymakers to be inclusive. It urges theology and trauma-healing practitioners to listen while survivors reclaim their lives and to be present to strengthen resilience by acknowledging cultural and spiritual practices.

Introduction

Ethiopian communities are experiencing trauma from political instability, ethnic tensions, and natural disasters. Recent studies show that between 19.4% to 67.5% of the population have experienced severe trauma leading to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[1] The impact is especially heavy in war-affected areas, increasing to 48.42% of the population, with women and children being the most vulnerable.[2] These figures indicate the urgent need for effective healing strategies, especially from faith-based organisations (FBOs).

Beyond the statistics, the pain became clear during a trauma-healing session led by Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) Ethiopia and Mekane Yesus Seminary (MYS). I saw people whispering, crying, praying, and starting to reclaim their stories. This experience revealed that there is a gap between academic work and lived suffering, which this study seeks to bridge.

Despite the significance of trauma and faith-based healing, little empirical work has examined how organisations such as SIL Ethiopia put theological frameworks into practices in ways that are culturally sensitive and sustainable. Existing scholars often question whether trauma-healing approaches are effective and practical, but few have studied their actual impact in Ethiopian contexts.

This study aims to address the gap by exploring how contextual theology can support trauma-healing initiatives, using SIL Ethiopiaas a case study. This study provides insights for FBOs and policymakers by combining theory with practice, working for recovery that honours faith, culture, and community. As a participant, I bring an observer-perspective to examine theological frameworks and the experiences of trauma-healing in Ethiopia.

We should distinguish Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD). Judith Herman proposed this distinction in her book, *Trauma and Recovery*:

[1] Anbesaw et al, 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder'; Makango, et al, "Prevalence and Factors", 81; Melkam, et al, 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder'.
[2] Tinsae et al, 'Post-traumatic Stress Disorder'.

> The syndrome that follows upon prolonged, repeated trauma needs its own name. I propose to call it 'complex post-traumatic stress disorder.' The responses to trauma are best understood as a spectrum of conditions rather than as a single disorder. They range from a brief stress reaction that gets better by itself and never qualifies for a diagnosis, to classic or simple post-traumatic stress disorder, to the complex syndrome of prolonged, repeated trauma.[3]

Research Questions

- What are the challenges and opportunities faith-based organisations, particularly SIL Ethiopia, encounter when implementing theologically-sound trauma-healing initiatives in Ethiopia?

- How do cultural contexts influence trauma-healing practices?

- How is contextual theology translated into practical trauma-healing within SIL Ethiopia's programming?

- How do communal African practices shape trauma recovery, as observed in SIL Ethiopia sessions?

Methodology

This study uses two methods: a qualitative literature review and participant observation. A systematic review is employed for literature, organisational reports, and frameworks in order to establish a foundation for trauma-healing and contextual theology. The review was then analysed thematically to identify challenges and opportunities in trauma-healing, focusing on the intersection of theology and mental health in Ethiopia. The research also draws from the researcher's own experience in SIL Ethiopia-led healing sessions. This study explores how theology can be put into practice. The combination of academia and lived experience provides a deeper understanding of both theory and practice.

[3] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 138.

Purpose of the Research

By using SIL Ethiopia as a case study, this research explores how faith-based organisations in Ethiopia use theological concepts in trauma-healing. It draws on a literature review combined with participant observation to identify barriers to accessibility and effectiveness. It looks for ways to bridge the gap between theory and practice by giving practical insights for FBOs and policy makers. It also advocates for trauma-recovery approaches that recognise faith, culture, and community.

Scopes and Limitations

This study focuses on the Ethiopian context by comparing it with pan-African theology and selected global trauma studies. To bridge the African context with wider Christian trauma conversation, it engages with contextual theology, trauma-informed care, and indigenous practices.

Reliance on secondary sources for wider contextual analysis, particular attention to Psalms and Lamentations, and limited access to rural data might be considered limitations of the study. Participant observation adds to the dialogue but may not fully apply to non-Ethiopian contexts. In addition, the recommendations are mainly for FBOs rather than secular non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Ethiopia's Trauma Landscape

Ethiopia's many ethnic groups, languages, and traditions have created complex social and cultural relationships that affect community life and responses to trauma. Ethnic identities shape representation, governance, and social interactions.[4] Ethnic federalism, adopted in 1991, institutionalised fragmentation and fuelled mistrust, generating inter-communal trauma that complicates reconciliation.[5] *The Healing of Memories*[6], which offers an exploration of how African Christians respond to politically-induced trauma,

[4] Tesfaye, 'Challenges and Boons'.
[5] Selassie, 'Ethnic Federalism'; Mengistu, 'Ethnic Federalism'; Moreda, 'Imperial Regimes'.
[6] Girma ed., *The Healing of Memories*.

has a particular relevance to Ethiopia's complex historical and socio-political realities.

Historical episodes such as the Derg regime's Red Terror created intergenerational trauma,[7] while recent reforms (2018-2021) including the release of political prisoners, expansion of civic freedoms and peace initiatives with Eritrea[8] together with subsequent inter-communal conflicts in Tigray intensified mass displacement, famine-related trauma, and widespread CPTSD.[9] Amsalu K. Addis examines the ethnic cleansing of the Amhara people, emphasising the historical roots of ethnic tensions and calling for urgent dialogue and reconciliation.[10] Scholars such as Theodros Teklu and Addis highlight how violence generates collective victimhood narratives. They further show how cycles of fear reflect the suffering of marginalised groups and emphasise the pervasive trauma landscape.[11]

Ethiopia also contends with natural disasters, including floods, earthquakes, landslides, and volcanos, resulting in food insecurity, displacement, and environmental trauma where loss of livelihood and forced migration erode resilience and deepen vulnerability. The destruction of churches and mosques erodes cultural heritage, producing spiritual trauma through the loss of sacred spaces and identity markers.[12]

The combined impact of natural disasters and conflicts have led communities to internally displace, often now living in crowded camps that lack adequate water, sanitation, and healthcare, which exacerbates PTSD and depression. As Emmanuel Katongole reflects, violence 'shatters the foundations of human and social existence' and produces 'inexpressible grief and suffering.'[13] Amidst these increasing challenges, faith-based organisations have emerged as vital actors of hope and resilience.

[7] Teklu, 'Mirror of Memory'.
[8] SOAS, *Forced Displacement and Social Cohesion,* 14-15.
[9] Amnesty International, 'We will erase you'.
[10] Addis, 'Ethnic Tensions'.
[11] Teklu, 'Mirror of Memory'; Addis, 'Ethnic Tensions'..
[12] Motsi and Masango, 'Redefining Trauma'.
[13] Katongole, *Born from Lament*, 31-32.

Role of Faith-Based Organisations in Ethiopia

Addressing Ethiopia's crises requires contextual, inclusive, and sustainable solutions. FBOs can serve as mediators, leveraging moral authority and extensive grassroots networks to foster dialogue among conflicting ethnic groups.

The Deputy Head of the Addis Ababa Peace and Security Bureau stated, 'Though Ethiopia is a secular state, the collaboration between the government and religious leaders is vital to the nation's stability and development.'[14] The deputy's call emphasises the unique collaboration between religious institutions and faith-based organisations in Ethiopia's peace-building efforts.

Religious institutions, including the Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia (IRCE) and Catholic, Orthodox, Islamic and Protestant bodies collaborate with local FBOs and international organisations, such as World Vision Ethiopia, the World Council of Churches, and Caritas Internationalis to strengthen contextualised peace-building capacity.[15] Programs like Faith Leaders Trauma Training in Northern Ethiopia and IRCE's reconciliation workshops provide collective healing through interfaith dialogue.[16]

These efforts draw on community-based healing frameworks, providing psychosocial support, counselling, and trauma-informed spiritual care, which are important for reconciliation and social cohesion.[17]

Trauma-healing Initiatives, SIL Ethiopia

SIL Ethiopia, with over fifty years of local experience, has expanded from a language development organisation to trauma-healing, Scripture engagement, and Bible storytelling. SIL Ethiopia offers participants opportunities to process wounds caused by war, violence, poverty and disasters.

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[14] Girma, 'Ethiopia: National Dialogue'.

[15] 'World Vision Launches €2 Million Peace Building Project'; World Council of Churches, 'WCC's Peace-Building Work'; Caritas Internationalis, 'Peacebuilding'.

[16] Live Global, 'Faith Leaders Trauma Training'; Inter-Religious Council of Ethiopia, 'Conflict Management'.

[17] Grindall, 'Local Ethiopian Languages'.

Bible-based sessions employ group consultations for victims of traumatic events and training of trainers, supported by the manual *Healing the Wounds of Trauma,* which has been translated into over 150 languages.[18] Storytelling, music, art, and paired listening enable participants to express pain and emotions creatively. These diverse approaches resonate with the trauma-informed care principles that emphasise narrative reconstruction, creative expression, and communal validation in fostering resilience.[19]

A notable example is the December 2024 seminar at MYS, facilitated by SIL and the Norwegian Mission Society. With approximately 130 participants, each day included devotions, trauma-related scripture readings, and structured sessions. Activities included paired-listening exercises, artistic reflection through drawing and poetry, lamentation letters, and symbolic acts of bringing hurts to the cross. Participants reported greater openness in sharing grief, deeper awareness of listening practices, and renewed capacity of forgiveness. Facilitators noted improved group cohesion and willingness to discuss experiences of displacement and violence. The session concluded with certification for participants to continue trauma-healing work within their communities.

While SIL's documentation and immediate participant feedback provide valuable insights into the psychosocial impact of trauma-healing, systematic outcome measurements remain limited. Nevertheless, initiatives such as the MYS seminar illustrate how FBOs can operationalise community-based healing frameworks and trauma-informed care principles, contributing to reconciliation and social cohesion in post-conflict Ethiopia.

Theological Frameworks

Contextual Theology for Trauma-healing

Contextual theology considers the context in which faith is lived, engaging with the social, cultural, political, and economic realities shaping human experiences. Effective Christian counselling speaks biblical truth in language

[18] SIL International, 'Supporting Survivors of Violent Conflict'.
[19] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 45.

and cultural idioms familiar to the community.[20] African theologians have led in developing contextual theology, emphasising how African history, cultures, and struggles inform Christian faith and practice.

Contextual theology in Africa is a dynamic and continuing conversation among the community. It refuses to accept theology as fixed or universal but sees it as something that must be continually reinterpreted in light of changing contexts. Contextual theology urges theologians to listen to the voices of marginalised people and to engage with the realities of trauma.

African Theology and Contextualisation

African theologians have argued that African Christianity must be understood in light of African history, culture, and everyday struggles. Emmanuel Katongole argues that African theology cannot be separated from the continent's history of violence, colonialism, and ongoing struggles for justice. He asks, 'How can one even begin to think about hope and what hope would look like in the context of Africa's ongoing realities of war, violence and social disruptions?'[21] For Katongole, theology must listen to the stories of suffering and hope, rooting reflection in lived realities rather than abstract theory.

Other African theologians contribute by exploring how cultural values, storytelling, and community life deepen Christian faith, countering Western theological frameworks that may not fit African contexts. Kwame Bediako argues that Christianity in Africa must be expressed through African cultural lenses rather than imported Western individualism. His work has helped to shape the understanding of African theology as a genuine expression of faith within African experiences.[22] John Mbiti's work on African traditional religions and philosophies provides a foundation for Christian theology and African perceptions of God.[23] Adrian Hastings adds that local contexts influence the development of African church history.[24]

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[20] Gingrich and Gingrich, eds., *Treating Trauma*, 12.
[21] Katongole, *Born from Lament,* 22.
[22] Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*.
[23] Mbiti, *African Religions*.
[24] Hastings, *The Church in Africa*.

Community Healing and Trauma-healing

Communal practices are a crucial feature of contextual theology in Africa, expressed through storytelling, cultural values, and shared rituals, deepening Christian faith and values. These communal practices are not only theological and therapeutic, they are also a significant part of African life. These practices help communities integrate trauma-healing into faith and daily life.

Katongole's reflections on reconciliation and peace-building show how theology can help communities envision life after trauma.[25] Bediako and Mbiti recognise the role of cultural idioms and African religious worldviews in shaping healing experiences. These assertions suggest that healing communities and trauma-related initiatives are inseparable. Contextual theology can offer practical tools for reconciliation and strengthening social cohesion in post-conflict African contexts.

A Theology of Hope for Trauma-healing

A theology of hope and contextual theology are closely related in Africa where hope becomes a gateway to reconciliation and the restoration of social cohesion in times of suffering. Hope in an African Christian understanding depends on God's covenantal faithfulness; it is not naive optimism, but a courageous stance confirmed by God's promise of restoration and re-creation.

> Without God re-creation is impossible, since both 'creation' and 're-creation' points to God and God's ongoing work of 'reconciling all things', which offers the gift of 'new creation', not simply as a future promise but as a present reality.[26]

Building on Briere and Scott, hope functions as a sign of recovery, helping survivors to look beyond pain.[27] In Ethiopia this forward movement is expressed through lament, which refuses silence amidst suffering while proclaiming God's redemptive work.[28] The Psalms model this pattern as raw cries of distress are followed by declarations that God will turn our 'mourning into dancing' (Ps. 30:11, NIV). This type of lament invites churches to express

[25] Katongole, *Born from Lament*.
[26] Katongole, 33-34.
[27] Briere and Scott, *Principles of Trauma Therapy*, 23.
[28] Teklu, 'Mirror of Memory', 119-122.

themes of hope, joy, and the transformation of sorrow into unending happiness in God.

Judith Herman reminds us that recovery requires narration in which survivors regain agency and meaning.[29] Social healing as described by John Paul Lederach and Angela Jill Lederach, is the 'reconstruction of communal relations after mass violence… through initiatives that re-humanise broken relationships, rebuild trust, normalise daily life and restore hope.'[30] Katongole elaborates this notion by defining re-humanising as 'rebuilding the shattered foundations of social and human existence in the wake of violence.'[31] He then asks how re-humanisation occurs and through what practices it can be sustained.

African theologians such as Motsi and Masango argue that hope is inherently communal, sustained through worship, storytelling, and mutual care,[32] which support the re-humanisation process. This challenges individualistic models and calls churches to be agents of hope, providing safe spaces for restoration, solidarity, and empowerment, by acknowledging pain.

In Africa, suffering often generates hope, a refusal to accept despair as final. Hope inspires action and resilience by encouraging communities to pursue transformation.[33] Katongole's theology of hope links hope with forgiveness and rebuilding relationships after conflict.[34] It challenges fatalism, affirming God's promises for a joyful future even amid hardship and calling Christians to act as salt and light (Matt 5:13-16). Contextual theology and a theology of hope are thus intertwined, reflecting a living faith responsive to African realities.

SIL Ethiopia operationalises hope through practices such as writing lamentation letters, symbolic acts of naming and bringing hurt to the cross, and reading narratives from Job and Lamentations. The daily devotions, scripture readings, and shared prayers reinforce hope as a collective stance.

[29] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 45.
[30] Lederach and Lederach, *When Blood and Bones Cry Out*, 7.
[31] Katongole, 33.
[32] Motsi and Masango, 'Redefining Trauma'.
[33] Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 23-29.
[34] Katongole, *A Future for Africa*, 55-60.

The creative expressions such as arts, music, and paired listening allow participants to express pain and envision transformation, fostering resilience and joy.

Spirituality and Trauma-healing

Trauma in Ethiopia is communal, historical and spiritual, shaped by ethnic violence, displacement, and spiritual disorientation. Faith is integrated into everyday life; trauma-healing that ignores spirituality overlooks the importance of community. Contextual theology rooted in lived faith addresses trauma not only psychologically but spiritually, asking how God speaks into community suffering. Healing must engage both soul and story.

In *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining,* Shelley Rambo does not rush to redemption but rather dwells in the 'middle Saturday' where suffering lingers and healing is slow, challenging triumphalist healing narratives.[35]

> There is a Spirit of witness that persists after death and before resurrection. This Saturday Spirit does not erase the sting of death. This Spirit is, rather the breath on which any Easter proclamations must be carried.[36]

Rambo's pneumatology, based on the Gospel of John, presents the Holy Spirit not as a revolutionary force but as a quiet presence who remains with the wounded. Rather than offering closure, the Spirit represents divine love through silence and solidarity.[37] 'Trauma shatters the frameworks by which persons and communities have oriented themselves in the world.'[38] Her pneumatology echoes deeply with Ethiopia's ongoing trauma where resolution is often abstract, leading to a slow communal and spiritual healing.

Building on Rambo's emphasis on presence and solidarity with survivors, SIL's trauma healing sessions represent these practices through rituals of lament, shared silence, and prayer, embodying the Spirit's solidarity with the wounded and offering accompaniment rather than quick-fix solutions. In this way, SIL's

[35] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 8.
[36] Rambo, 'Saturday in New Orleans', 229-240.
[37] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 12-15.
[38] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 8.

sessions mirror Rambo's refusal to rush past suffering, grounding hope in biblical narratives while fostering patience and solidarity.

Seren Jones similarly indicates that trauma 'ruptures the self', requiring theological frameworks that honour brokenness.[39] 'Grace is not a magic wand. It is the presence of God in the broken places.'[40] She argues that grace is not a quick fix but a divine presence in fragmented places, providing an insight significant for FBOs like SIL in combining theology with psychological care.

Katongole's emphasis on lament, memory, and community as pathways to healing mirrors Ethiopian communal traditions of mourning and storytelling. His perspectives complements critiques off Western individualistic models by highlighting the communal and theological dimensions of healing, this approach is reflected in SIL Ethiopia's healing sessions.

Katongole's insists healing should include lament, memory and community.[41] This perspective resonates with Ethiopian mourning practices, where grief is expressed through storytelling and collective remembrance. In practice, SIL Ethiopia's healing workshops integrate these key aspects with Ethiopia's rich community traditions of healing and grieving into their programs.

Ethiopian theologian, Reverend Gudina Tumsa emphasised a theology of wholeness encompassing body, soul and society.[42] His vision challenges FBOs to address trauma spiritually and structurally, confronting injustice while fostering reconciliation. Together, these voices affirm that spirituality is indispensable to trauma-healing in Ethiopia, offering frameworks of presence, lament, grace, and wholeness that empower communities to move toward restoration.

Communal Spirituality in Trauma-healing

Ubuntu, which Desmond Tutu defines as 'A person is a person through other persons',[43] grounds reconciliation in shared humanity and divine image.

[39] Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 31.
[40] Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 45.
[41] Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 102-105.
[42] Tumsa, 'Theology of Wholeness', 45-60.
[43] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 29.

Mogobe Ramose expands *Ubuntu* to a 'philosophy of being-becoming', emphasising rationality and justice.[44] This communal ethic aligns with trauma-healing practices such as group lament, storytelling circles, and reconciliation workshops.

Similarly, the indigenous Oromo philosophy of *Namummaa* — translated as humanness, personhood and rationality — emphasises being fully human in the community as necessary for wellbeing.[45] In trauma-healing, it means restoring the individual through sustaining relationships.[46] *Ubuntu's* 'I am because we are' communal concept echoes the same, providing a framework for collective healing and reconciliation.[47] Together, *Ubuntu* and *Namummaa* reflect values of shared humanity, dignity, and interdependence, offering rich resources for collective healing. These values align with the theological understandings of the body of Christ and the interdependence of believers that supports the notion that healing is communal and spiritual.

Lament plays a central role in African spirituality. It is not merely an emotional outpouring but also a theological act of naming the suffering persons experience before God and community. Katongole describes lament as 'a refusal to forget', holding memory and hope together.[48] In Ethiopian communities, lament is expressed through song, prayer, and ritual, creating sacred spaces for communal trauma. SIL Ethiopia embodies these communal values through group sessions, communal lament services and storytelling circles, where survivors form new bonds, a community of healing and resilience.

A critical tension arises when the survivors' original communities are the sources of trauma and when survivors are marginalised, silenced, or re-traumatised by these social structures. Healing in such environments needs redefinition. Community healing does not mean returning to the same environment. Instead, *Ubuntu* and *Namummaa* enable the formation of new

[44] Ramose, *African Philosophy*, 35-40.
[45] Tolessa, *Oromo Indigenous Philosophy*, 54-67.
[46] Gerbi, 'Theorizing Namummaa'.
[47] Battle, *Ubuntu*.
[48] Katongole, *Born From Lament*, 4.

and safe 'communities of memory and hope',[49] sanctuaries where survivors make new connections and reclaim dignity and solidarity. These communities are not bound by geography, but by grace, trust, shared resilience, and support.

Obse Mekonnen explores the complex dual role of faith; it can inspire acts of compassion and solidarity and yet, when politicised, can justify division and conflict.[50] The challenge is to redirect faith toward healing, encouraging narratives that unify rather than divide. Trauma-healing groups thus become places of lived practice of restoration, embodying *Ubuntu* and *Namummaa* as frameworks sustaining community bonds and resilience.

Conceptual Models for Trauma-healing Initiatives

Motsi and Masango argue that trauma in Africa contexts is inherently communal, challenging Western models that isolate the individual while neglecting the community.[51] This suggests the need for contextualised, culturally-sensitive approaches that reflect African values such as *Ubuntu* and *Namummaa*.

SIL Ethiopia's trauma-healing initiatives have adopted story-based, Bible-centred sessions and training materials from trauma-healing institutes based in America. Yet questions arise whether this adoption has been contextualised and tailored for Ethiopia's diverse religious and communal settings.

Kobe Campbell's research on personal narratives shows that people make sense of suffering by embedding their experiences into larger cultural communal stories. Churches can facilitate this process through offering spaces for collective testimony.[52] Girma similarly noted that responses to politically-induced trauma must engage communal memory, ritual, and symbols which enable communities to name their losses and reimagine the future.[53]

[49] Katongole, *Born From Lament*, 10-11.
[50] Mekonnen, 'Political Pentecostalism and Violence'.
[51] Motsi and Masango, 'Redefining Trauma,' 1-2.
[52] Campbell, *Why Am I Like This?*, 57.
[53] Girma, 119–122.

When theology is rooted in local idioms such as Amharic cries of lament (ዋይ *way*, ሰቆቃ *säqoqa* or የሀዘን እንጉርጉሮ *yehazän engurguro*), a theology of hope becomes a language that honours cultural identity and grief calling out for God's restoration.

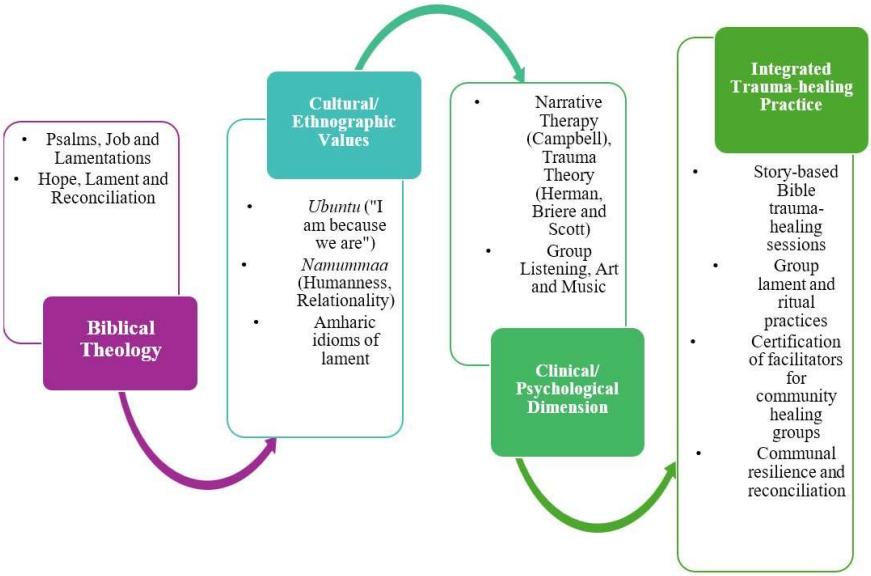
Ndung'u J. B. Ikenye's integrative Biblical-Ethnographic-Cultural-Clinical framework offers a holistic model that incorporates scripture, African ethnography, cultural practices, and clinical psychology for personal and communal restoration.[54] Complementing this, the article 'Training and Education of Pastoral Care Professionals in Africa' highlights the importance of capacity-building programs that integrate indigenous knowledge with contemporary psychological and theological frameworks, engaging local leaders and communities.[55]

These strategies recognise the holistic nature of African spiritual, cultural, and social realities. They encourage collaboration among churches, FBOs and NGOs, while empowering professionals to provide compassionate and sustainable care. Conceptual models such as those adopted by SIL Ethiopia demonstrate the necessity of contextual theology that respects African values and incorporates biblical, cultural, and clinical dimensions. Trauma-healing then becomes both an individual and communal process that deeply reflects African lived realities.

The diagram below illustrates how trauma-healing practices at SIL Ethiopia are shaped—converging to form a holistic, context-sensitive approach to trauma-healing that fosters communal resilience, reconciliation, and facilitator empowerment.

[54] Ikenye, 'African Christian Care'.
[55] Afolaranmi, Odeleye, and Ojo, 'Training and Education'.

Figure 1: Integrated Conceptual Framework for Trauma-healing in SIL Ethiopia



SIL Ethiopia: Integrating Spiritual Practices into Trauma-healing

SIL Ethiopia incorporates these theological insights into trauma-healing initiatives, often beginning with prayer, Scripture reading, and reflection to initiate the spiritual healing. Drawing from the author's participant observation of the SIL Ethiopia/MYS trauma-healing seminar, sessions were opened with devotional readings from passages such as Romans 8:35-39 and Psalms 34:18-19. These readings, which emphasise suffering as part of the Christian journey, are followed by reflection. These practices helped participants to focus on faith before moving into trauma-focused discussions.

In storytelling workshops, facilitators invite participants to share their stories in light of biblical narratives, particularly from the perspectives of lament (e.g., Job and Lamentation) and hope (e.g., the resurrection accounts). Participants wrote lamentation letters and placed them at the foot of the cross; later they

were burned as a symbolic act of release. These storytelling rituals made lament and hope tangible.

In rural areas communal lament practices provide a safe space for collective trauma naming through songs, prayer, and symbolic acts such as lighting candles or planting trees in memory of the deceased. Similarly, the seminar participants were paired in listening exercises, learning to hear pain without judgment and reflected their experiences. Later they expressed their hurt through poems, drawings or songs. These practices reflect the theological concepts of communal memory and presence found in Rambo's and Katongole's works.

Participants reported that these spiritual practices helped them feel seen and held in ways secular approaches failed to do so. SIL Ethiopia's systematic integration of faith into trauma-healing enables it to relate with local religious values that enhances accessibility and sustainability. During the trauma-healing session, participants said that prayer and lament rituals were powerful, though some also noted the difficulty to listen without judgment and noted the risk of neglecting emotional needs when practices leaned too heavily on spiritual language.

Despite the positive outcomes, FBOs such as SIL Ethiopia are facing difficulties. Some frameworks adopted from Western models may not recognise the importance of local faith expressions. When trauma-healing is over-spiritualised, it risks neglecting the physical and emotional needs of survivors. This negligence fails to practice the wholeness theology of Reverend Gudina Tumsa. Additionally, sometimes Christian trauma initiatives are not tailored to accommodate other faith communities where careful adaptation is needed.

At the same time, there are opportunities that benefit both SIL and the community. The integration of faith into the healing practices encourages communities to stand together in difficult times, renewing identity and creating pathways for forgiveness and reconciliation. The reputation SIL Ethiopia has with the local community make them key players in addressing trauma. In order to contend with trauma, SIL has recognised and incorporated local values of wholeness, community well-being, spirituality, and culturally

relevant symbols. This recognition addresses both the spiritual and material needs of the community.

Re-Conceptualising Trauma-healing

Biblical-Theological Foundations

Motsi and Masango criticise Western psychiatric models that focused particularly on individual PTSD treatment, thus neglecting the communal nature of African societies. They argue for healing initiatives to consider the context, culture, and history in which they will be applied. [56]

The African concepts of *Ubuntu* and *Namummaa* show that effective healing involves the active participation of community. These concepts reflect the ways Lamentations and Psalms are narrated, where the Israelites cry out to God for restoration and the transformation from lament to cries of praise, noting the presence of God in the suffering.[57] These biblical narratives offer the theological ground on how initiatives should respect human dignity and communal wholeness. SIL healing programs can utilize these texts to cultivate a deeper theological understanding while creating space for lament as integral to healing and sustaining hope within the community.

Cultural-Communal Model

Motsi and Masango's emphases on cultural-sensitivity and respecting faith, rituals, and community values support biblical lament and hope.[58] Other African scholars expand this vision: Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi proposed an Adamic Christological model of pastoral healing that is Christ-centred and culturally resonant, addressing African suffering through incarnational ministry.[59]

Glenda A. Dames and Gordon E. Dames emphasise the need for contextually-grounded care models that reflect local realities.[60] Willem A. Dreyer offers a Reformed-theological approach that identifies societal wounds and the need

[56] Motsi and Masango, 'Redefining Trauma,' 3-4.
[57] Katongole, 4-6.
[58] Motsi and Masango, 'Redefining Trauma,' 6-8.
[59] Magezi and Magezi, 'Pastoral care and healing in Africa'.
[60] Dames and Dames, 'Pastoral Care and Counselling'.

for theological commitment at a national level.[61] Christoffel H. Thesnaar adds depth to the conversation by examining multi-generational trauma through a relational-theological lens, highlighting the continuing effects of historical violence on African families and communities.[62] SIL Ethiopia's trauma-healing practices reflect these cultural-communal models through group lament services, storytelling circles, and rituals, such as candle lighting and tree planting, which embody *Ubuntu*'s 'I am because we are' and *Namummaa*'s emphasis on relationality.

Clinical-Psychological Approaches

African voices also critique Western psychology's dominance. Gladys K. Mwiti criticised the dominance of Western psychology and advocates for counselling frameworks rooted in African values,[63] while Gideon Ngi Nganyu offers practical models for biblical psychotherapy in local churches.[64]

S. F. Sotobe's research reveals clergy-led grassroots strategies for healing.[65] Charles B. Manda contributes a holistic narrative model that re-authors life stories after trauma, integrating spirituality into both psychotherapy and pastoral care.[66] SIL Ethiopia incorporates these clinical-psychological insights by combining narrative therapy, paired listening, and creative exercises with biblical storytelling, ensuring that trauma-healing is both spiritually and psychologically grounded.

Practical Implications and Challenges

Ikenye's Biblical-Ethnographic-Cultural-Clinical framework for African Christian care adds depth to the discussion of how to respond to pain and suffering in African context.[67] Additionally, the article 'Training and Education of Pastoral Care and Counseling Professionals in Africa' suggests effective strategies to equip caregivers to meet trauma with theological depth and

[61] Dreyer, 'A Theological Response'.
[62] Thesnaar, 'Divine Discomfort'.
[63] Mwiti, 'Counseling and Psychotherapy'.
[64] Nganyu, 'Pastoral Care and Christian Psychotherapy'.
[65] Sotobe, 'The Traumatized'.
[66] Manda, *Re-Authoring Life Narratives.*
[67] Ikenye, 'African Christian Care'.

cultural sensitivity.[68] Together these voices form effective trauma-healing in Africa that honours lament, fosters hope, and restores communal wholeness.

For SIL Ethiopia, the practical applications include developing training modules that combine scripture engagement, communal rituals, and clinical techniques, ensuring that trauma-healing is sustainable and rooted in local leadership.

However, it is essential to acknowledge potential critiques, such as the risk of oversimplifying complex trauma experiences or the challenge of reconciling diverse cultural practices within a unified healing framework. Trauma-healing initiatives should not expect uniformity from participants but should be attentive to Ethiopia's diverse religious background and ensure that material needs are addressed together with spiritual practices. Gudina Tumsa's wholeness theology would serve as a ground to counter these critiques, thereby strengthening the credibility and sustainability of trauma-healing.

Conclusion

In Ethiopia Complex Post Traumatic Stress disorder (CPTSD) affects approximately forty-three percent of the population. These statistics highlight the urgent need for trauma-healing responses. This study combined literature review with participant observation to examine how SIL Ethiopia response to challenges. The frameworks of contextual theology, a theology of hope, and African communal concepts of *Ubuntu* and *Namummaa* are employed to guide the exploration.

SIL Ethiopia's practices of narration, reflection, and communal lament indicate how biblical lament can be used as a source for community restoration. These experiences affirm that trauma-healing must integrate spiritual, cultural, and relational aspects of community. Some challenges remain such as reliance on conceptual frameworks that lack contextual grounding and limited availability of trained facilitators, resources, funding and trauma healing sessions affect accessibility and sustainability. Even so, SIL Ethiopia continues to prioritise

[68] Afolaranmi, Odeleye, and Ojo, 'Training and Education'.

spiritual practices and community engagement in shaping an African model of trauma-healing.

The integration covered by Ikenye's Biblical-Ethnographic-Cultural-Clinical framework combines important aspects of human life, including scriptural grounding, cultural values, and psychological insights. Ikenye's recognition of cultural sensitivity allows African communal concepts *Ubuntu* and *Namummaa* to be incorporated into healing approaches. These concepts confirm that trauma-healing is effective when it acknowledges context.

Trauma-healing in Ethiopia must be grounded in faith practices. FBOs have theological and practical resources to lead initiatives that encourage resilience, dignity, and community unity. The findings of this study suggest insights for trauma-healing workshops, theological institutions, and interfaith collaboration. Theology rooted in context and compassion becomes a lifeline, not a trend.

During SIL Ethiopia's healing sessions, trauma-healing is not merely a theory but a lived experience that occurs in churches, hearts, and communities. In Ethiopia trauma-healing is transformative when theology engages faith, culture, and community, changing suffering into resilience and hope.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen trauma-healing within the Ethiopian context and enhance the effectiveness of faith-based organisations such as SIL Ethiopia, after a careful thematic analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Integrating theology and culture

    - Partner with local leaders to develop theological frameworks that integrate Ethiopian culture and faith into trauma-healing practices.

    - Use indigenous cultural values to enrich healing practices.

2. Community building through inclusivity and collaboration

    - Establish healing communities (communities of memory and hope) for the marginalised and trauma survivors to create a sense of belonging and shared resilience.

    - Encourage community inclusivity and engagement to promote interfaith collaboration.

    - Work in collaboration with faith-based organisations, academic institutions, and mental health professionals to strengthen trauma-healing initiatives.

3. Capacity building for trauma session facilitators

    - Organise continuous trainings in listening skills, cultural awareness, and trauma-healing practices rooted in context and hope.

    - Create awareness on various community dynamics, such as political violence, ethnic diversities, and marginalisation.

4. Trauma-healing program development and evaluation

    - Evaluate trauma-healing initiatives in order to identify best practices and strengthen future programs.

    - Develop themed guides in order to check the theological alignment with clinical approaches.

    - Conduct research on healing models that involve trauma survivors and communities in the assessment process.

5. Holistic structural approaches

    - Combine spiritual and psychological healing with efforts to address poverty, injustice, and violence.

- Support trauma-healing programs that connect recovery with social change and justice.

6. Advocating for policy influence

    - Work closely with policy makers and government agencies to include trauma-healing in national health and education plans.

    - Advocate for laws and funding that support trauma care in schools, churches, and communities.

    - Collaborate with health, education, and social services to make trauma-healing a priority in public health.

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