

**The parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge (Lk
18:1-8): The significance and relevance of the
parable for the experiences of widows in
Independent Zimbabwe**

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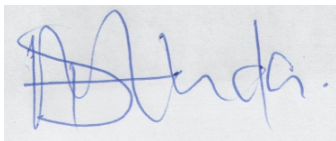
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I want to emphatically attach importance to the value of the advice, stimuluses, and backing from friends, family, associates and the academia, the people without whom the exploration would not have seen the day in its existing structure. Space may not give a *carte blanche* to all of you precisely with the advice you give away, but the insight gotten is incomparable.

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May God bless you all.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to all widows in Zimbabwe and beyond who constantly face harassment, violations, and deprivations of their inheritance rights. To some of you, joy and tranquillity were yours, the blessings of the land was your part, but greedy and wickedness denied you peace and the dignity of life. You moist your pillows day and night with tears as you envisage what life had formulated for you and your spouse. Your plight motivated me to seek a voice for your emancipation. *Aluta continua* (the struggle continues) as we grapple for sustainable solutions.

List of abbreviations

AU	African Union
ABH	African Biblical Hermeneutics.
ANE	Ancient Near East
ARIPO	African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation
BBWEE	Broad-Based Women's Economic Empowerment Framework
CBS	Contextual Bible study
CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IYWD	Institute for Young Women's Development
LAMA	Legal Age Majority
MWADGC	Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development
NGP	National Gender Policy
RAU	Research and Advocacy Unit
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
WAG	Women's Action Group
WCoZ	Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe
WOZA	Women of Zimbabwe Arise
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZIPO	Zimbabwe Intellectual Property Office
ZWRCN	Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network

Summary

The violation of widows' property or inheritance rights are a common phenomenon in pre- and post-independent Zimbabwe, Africa and worldwide. These violations disregard the dignity of the persona, *Ubuntu*, and heed not to the *vox Populi or the vox Dei*. The traditional cultural, patrilineal systems and belief of women harbour these violations. Traditional society perceives women as perpetual minors who cannot make independent informed decisions. The disinheriting of widows continues unabated despite Zimbabwe being a signatory to several statutory instruments locally, regionally, and internationally that safeguard women's inheritance or property rights. However, suffering continues to rise and now the stories are all over media houses and are now topical issues in workshops, conferences, and seminars. The legal reactions to halt this inhuman cultural monster has yielded no significant result. The violations have left thousands of widows emotionally traumatised, wounded, and in abject poverty.

This study seeks an avenue out to relieve the suffering of widows through the search of a voice or role model. The study explored the status of women in Zimbabwe's traditional setups when missionaries came and post-independence. The goal is to understand the predicament of widows in different epochs. The study documented the disenfranchised widows and the root cause of the suffering. As I lay bare the root cause of injustice and violations, the thesis proposed ways of stopping the wheels of injustice. The failure to stop the wheels of injustice hinges on the cultural "male masculinity" where men is *de facto* heads of households and women are commodities to inherit and keep because men pay the *lobola*. Marriage lobola transfers a woman's rights, reproduction rights, identity, and ownership of the property to the husband and takes them away at the death of the husband. The death of the husband removes the acquired marriage privileges. As such, stories of women's suffering bombard the print and electronic media.

The study proposes an anthropological study of honour and shame and African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) as interpretational tools to Biblical narratives in search of role models. The experiences of the ordinary people, nameless and vulnerable

such as the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-8) become the rallying point. The widow's persistence is foundational in challenging the subjugating culture and the violations. The thesis interpreted the parable through the eyes of the ordinary person and her experience. The strength to resist injustice comes from emulating role models who subverted the culture of impunity that has commodified and subjugated women. I propose that, unless widows produce their own culture and shape their destiny justice can be hard to come by, they will continue to suffer.

The persistent widow was a victor as she challenged the status quo, the community belief of a poor widow who needs help from the male companion- the father when young, the husband when married and the son when old. The widow stood up against social injustice, the push to bribe the judge by her constant presence until the soliloquy of the judge, *"Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"*

For how long will the widow's untapped character or talent remain hidden within dejected widows? Whose responsibility is it to unleash the power in women? The way forward is for women to understand that they do have rights. It is up to them to be courageous and knowledgeable about the legal system that governs them. Even if corruption, patriarchy, and injustice have prejudiced them, destiny is with them. They are a solution to their problems.

Table of contents

Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication	v
List of abbreviations	vi
Summary	vii
Table of contents.....	ix

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the study

1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	9
1.2.1 Zimbabwe	9
1.2.2 Property rights	10
1.2.3 Tenacity	11
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	12
1.3.1 The social effect	14
1.3.2 The economic effect	17
1.3.3 The Christian religious effect	18
1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY.....	19
1.5 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY	21
1.6 RESEARCH GAP	22
1.7 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	25
1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	25

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical perspectives

2.1 INTRODUCTION	27
2.2 HONOUR AND SHAME.....	27
2.2.1 Honour-shame worldview	28
2.2.2 Honour	30
2.3 HONOUR OPERATIONAL PLATFORM.....	31
2.3.1 Honour in the blood	31
2.3.2 Honour as a group value	31
2.3.3 Honour as a gender value	32

2.3.4 Significant other	34
2.4 GRECO-ROMAN WORLD	34
2.5 HONOUR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT	35
2.6 HONOUR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	36
2.7 JESUS AND HONOUR	37
2.8 PAUL AND HONOUR	38
2.9 SOURCES OF HONOUR	40
2.9.1 Ascribed honour	40
2.9.2 Acquired/achieved honour	41
2.9.3 Perceived honour	41
2.10 SHAME	43
2.10.1 Shame in the Old Testament	43
2.10.2 Shame in the New Testament	44
2.11 POSITIVE SHAME	44
2.12 NEGATIVE SHAME	45
2.13 STRENGTH OF HONOUR-SHAME	45
2.14 WEAKNESS OF HONOUR-SHAME	46
2.15 APPLICATION OF HONOUR-SHAME	46
2.16 AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH (ABH)	47
2.16.1 Introduction	47
2.16.2 African Biblical Hermeneutics	48
2.16.3 Strengths of the African Biblical Hermeneutical approach	53
2.16.4 The weakness of the African Biblical Hermeneutical approach	54
2.16.5 Application of the African Biblical Hermeneutical approach	54
2.17 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	56
2.17.1 Introduction	56
2.17.2 Advantages of comparative analysis	57
2.17.3 Strength of comparative analysis	58
2.17.4 Weaknesses of comparative analysis	59
2.17.5 Application of comparative analysis	60
2.18 CONCLUSION	61

CHAPTER 3

Analysis and exploration of the political-economic and traditional position of women/widows in pre and post-colonial Zimbabwe

3.1 INTRODUCTION	62
3.2 STATUS AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN PRE-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE	62
3.3 WOMEN IN THE COLONIAL ERA	65
3.3.1 Political-economic era and the changes	68
3.3.2 The impact on women	70
3.3.3 Effect of colonial innovations	70
3.4 WOMEN DURING THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE	71

3.5 WOMEN DURING THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT	79
3.6 WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT ZIMBABWE	81
3.7 THE BETRAYAL OF WOMEN AFTER INDEPENDENCE	86
3.7.1 Access to the means of production	86
3.7.2 Property rights	87
3.7.3 Were women empowered?.....	90
3.7.4 Outstanding issues on women empowerment.....	92
3.7.5 Has anything changed?	94
3.8 CONCLUSION	94

CHAPTER 4

The situation of widows in ancient Israel and first-century Palestine and the current situation of widows in Zimbabwe

4.1 INTRODUCTION	96
4.2 WIDOW/WIDOWHOOD.....	96
4.3 WIDOWS IN ANCIENT NEAR EAST.....	99
4.3.1 King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE).....	100
4.3.2 The Code of Ur Namma	101
4.3.3 Egyptian King Meri-Kare.....	101
4.3.4 The Ugarit texts	102
4.3.5 King Keret.....	102
4.4 WIDOWS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE.....	103
4.4.1 The Almana widow	104
4.4.2 The Issa-Almana widow	106
4.4.3 The Esset-Hammet widow.....	106
4.4.4 Poetical books	108
4.4.5 Prophetic writings	109
4.5 WIDOWS IN THE APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS.....	110
4.6 WIDOWS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	112
4.6.1 The gospels	112
4.6.2 Acts.....	113
4.6.3 The letters.....	115
4.6.4 Revelations.....	116
4.7 Widows put next to orphans	116
4.8 THE SYMBOLIC USE OF THE TERM WIDOW	118
4.9 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANE, BIBLICAL TIMES AND WIDOWS IN INDEPENDENT ZIMBABWE.....	118
4.9.1 Traditional and cultural systems	119
4.9.2 Legal and social systems	124
4.9 CONCLUSION	124

CHAPTER 5

An investigation and articulation of some real-life stories of widows in independent Zimbabwe

5.1 INTRODUCTION	126
5.2 DRIVES THAT DISENFRANCHISE WIDOWS.....	126
5.2.1 Enemies in the backyard: Stepchildren and the voice of surviving family	126
5.2.2 Enemies in the backyard: Deceased’s relatives	133
5.3 ENEMIES IN THE BACKYARD: CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL SACRED COWS DEVOID OF UBUNTU	139
5.4 ENEMIES IN THE BACKYARD: MITIGATING FACTORS	144
5.5 IMPACT OF PROPERTY GRABBING.....	146
5.5.1 Psychological impact.....	146
5.5.2 Economic impact	147
5.5.3 Sociological impact.....	147
5.5.4 Religious impact	148
5.5.5 Social and ethical impact.....	149
5.6 Constraints to widows’ resistance.....	149
5.7 CONCLUSION.....	151

CHAPTER 6

The essence, significance, and function of the parable of the Persistent Widow in historical context and its implications for contemporary communities

6.1 INTRODUCTION	153
6.2 JESUS’ USE OF PARABLES	153
6.3 WHAT ARE PARABLES?.....	154
6.3.1 Parables in the Old Testament.....	155
6.3.2 Parables in the New Testament	155
6.4 TYPES OF PARABLES	156
6.4.1 Parables as metaphors.....	156
6.4.2 Parables as allegories	156
6.5 HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF PARABLES	158
6.5.1 The early Church (up to 540 CE).....	158
6.5.2 The Middle Ages (ca. 540-1500 CE)	163
6.5.3 The Reformation and post-Reformation (1583-1888).....	166
6.5.4 Modern interpretations.....	170
6.6 PURPOSE OF PARABLES	174
6.7 INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE (LUKE 18:1-8).....	177
6.7.1 The gospel of Luke	177
6.7.2 External evidence	177
6.7.3 Internal evidence	178

6.7.4 Luke's audience.....	179
6.7.5 The parable urging continuous prayer.....	181
6.7.6 The parable placed at the end of the eschatological discourse.....	182
6.8 THE DISCIPLES.....	184
6.9 THE PERSISTENT WIDOW.....	184
6.10 THE WIDOW'S REQUEST.....	185
6.11 THE WIDOW'S CHARACTER.....	185
6.12 THE CHARACTER OF THE UNJUST JUDGE.....	187
6.13 THE JUDGE'S RESPONSE.....	189
6.14 The significance of the parable to the contemporary Zimbabwean widows	191
6.14.1 Persistence as the weapon against culture.....	191
6.14.2 Perseverance as the weapon against social injustice.....	194
6.14.3 Persistence against gender injustice.....	197
6.14.4 Persistence as a weapon against economic depravity.....	198
6.15 CONCLUSION.....	200

Chapter 7

Recommendations and response to the continued exploitation of widows

7.1 INTRODUCTION.....	201
7.2 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY.....	201
7.3 POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF THE STUDY.....	205
7.4 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	208
WORKS CONSULTED.....	201

Chapter 1

Introduction to the study

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The quest for gender justice, equality and gender parity in Zimbabwe is still the quagmire the nation finds itself enmeshed in (Ministry of Women Affairs 2017). According to the report by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (2017), the quest for gender equity "has evolved from advocacy, negotiation and consensus building, awareness raising on the importance of gender equity, to a point where gender considerations are an obligation in development, programming and implementation". The gender considerations and obligations should go beyond programming and implementation to empowering individuals in their plight and unleashing their potential to challenge inequalities.

Since independence, Zimbabwe has made significant strides in enhancing gender equity, consensus building and awareness on gender equality. However, that development seems insignificant; violations of women's rights, dignity, denial of property rights and destitution remain firmly entrenched. The stories of the violations inundate the electronic and print media reports, traditional local courts, human rights advocacy, academia, and international conferences which have been bedrocks of championing sustainable solutions.

During its colonial and post-colonial periods, Zimbabwe strived to reach and achieve gender equality. The nation has ratified and subscribed to several, regional, and international instruments, declarations, protocols, or policy frameworks to promote women's rights. These include the 1965 *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD), the 1979 United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (African Charter)¹ Protocol to the African Charter on

¹ This charter came into force in October of 1986. Signed appended signature to this charter in April 1986. The charter states in article 19 that, "All peoples shall be equal; they shall enjoy the same respect and shall have the same rights. Nothing shall justify the domination of a people by another."

Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa², the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development with its addendum on the Prevention and the Eradication of Violence against Women and Children; the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development as well as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women and many others.

There are at least seventeen national policy frameworks that the government publicized, domesticating the requirements of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women since independence. These include policies such as the *Legal Age Majority Act (LAMA) of 1982*, the *Labour Relations Act of 1985*, *National Gender Policy (NGP 2004)*, the *Matrimonial Causes Act (1985)*, the *Deceased Persons Family Maintenance Act of 1987*, the *Maintenance Act (1999)*, the *Administration of Estate Act (1997)*, *Administration of Estates Amendment Act Chapter 6:07 of 1997*, the *Sexual Discrimination Removal Act*, the *Sexual Offences Act (2001)*, the *Education Act (2004)*, the *Labour Act (Chapter 28)*, the *Criminal Law Act (2006)* and the *Domestic Violence Act (2007)*. In 1995, the Government of Zimbabwe created the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (MWADGC) to oversee and coordinate all national gender programmes and to ease gender mainstreaming in all sector ministries. The *National Gender Policy* targeted to eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development (Ministry of Women Affairs 2017:11). The NGP policy has put in place gender focal points in all ministries and parastatals. In 2012, dialogue started to set up a Gender Commission (Ministry of Women Affairs 2017:2).

On the economic front, the nation instituted several affirmative action programmes to empower women economically. As part of its ongoing commitment to empower women, the Government launched the Broad-Based Women's Economic Empowerment Framework (BBWEE) in 2012. This was a developmental plan whose principal goal was gender equality and women empowerment in all sectors of the

² On the rights of widows, the charter on Article 20 mandates "States Parties to take appropriate legal measures to ensure that widows enjoy all human rights through the implementation of the following provisions: First that widows are not subjected to inhuman, humiliating or degrading treatment and secondly that a widow shall automatically become the guardian and custodian of her children, after the death of her husband, unless this is contrary to the interests and the welfare of the children."

economy. The framework outlined key strategic areas on how to fully integrate women in the entire value chain of the economic sectors consistent with the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act and other regional and international gender mainstreaming instruments such as the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development as well as CEDAW. In this, the policy makers aimed at ensuring successful implementation of frameworks at all levels and in all parts of the country.

From a legislative perspective, the nation did so much to redress gender imbalances, yet many widows in Zimbabwe remain overburdened. Some pervasive elements of inequality and abuse still exist and even the Government, the church and civil society concur that there is still a lot to do for the total emancipation of women. It appears that “protective measures have not been fully implemented to guarantee widows’ security, even where laws exist preventing the abuse of widows. There has been ignorance of the law or cultural habits which inhibit efforts to prosecute culprits” (Nyangweso 2017:375). This research investigates the reasons for the prevalence of injustice and violations and supply possible sustainable solutions addressing the plight of widows and/or the marginalised people. The study also uses the Bible and propose how widows can find the liberating voice and action in their dilemma. This background gives the impetus to the study of the parable of the Widow and Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-8).

The use of the Bible in Africa dates to the early centuries through the Coptic and Ethiopian communities. In Zimbabwe, the use of the Bible dates to the arrival of European missionaries in the 17th century. Ever since the missionaries’ arrival, the Bible has become so commonly used. Several Christian organisations and churches have popularised the availability of the bible in the community in different indigenous languages. Every home, hotel, school, and most lodges have Bibles in their rooms. Mbiti (2005:234-248) concluded that Bible reading in Africa has become a mass movement such that when people read the bible, as Togarasei (2003:19) intimated, the reading is ethical, seeking to transform life and enrich spiritual life. This is because the Bible holds guidelines to life and ideal for personal faith, empowerment, and transformation. As a result, the reading of the Bible invited different exegetical methodologies seeking to make the book relevant to the indigenous people. The exegetical methodologies gave birth to liberation theologies with their different forms

such as womanist, feminist, Black theologies, African theologies, and African Biblical hermeneutics. The intention was to allow “The Book” to speak to different communities with different classes of people and liberate them against violations, social injustice, poverty, or any other unfortunate human induced circumstance. As Gutiérrez (1977: 92), argued to be the father of liberation theology said, “to believe is... to be united with the poor and exploited of this world from within the very heart of the social confrontations and the popular struggle for liberation”.

Recent African scholarship has concluded that the Bible is the “primary book in the South of Sahara,” widely used, most read and appealed to, in ethical guidance. Machingura (2012:220), asserts that “the Bible has socially occupied an uncontested place in the hearts and minds of many Zimbabweans (African Christian in general); making Zimbabwe a *de facto* Christian state.” Gunda (2010:21), who is an Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Research Fellow at Otto-Friedrich-University, Bamberg, Germany, calls the Bible “the last court of appeal.” West (1995:447) observed that “Christian faith continues to grow in Africa, particularly among the poor and marginalized,” meaning any solutions to their plight must of necessity include their manual of hope, that is, the Bible.” The Bible is a sacred book which one can use or appeal to, even without opening it. Chitando (2013:10) supports this position on the Bible:

The Bible is one of Zimbabwe’s most popular texts. Its value is in how some people swear by it in ordinary conversations; “*Bhaibheri kudai!*” (I swear by the Bible!). The people regard the Bible as a repository of sacred truth and its invocation finalises arguments.

Further Chitando (2013:10) states that the “Bible is not an ordinary text: its reading fortifies new houses and protects those embarking on journeys. When the Bible speaks, Zimbabwean Christians listen intently. It will not matter that it will speak in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways: The Bible would have spoken!”

The Bible is the book for the poor, marginalised and the oppressed. The biblical message of salvation has the liberation aspect in the deliverance of the captives, enslaved and the oppressed from degrading servitude. West (2013) noted that in both the Old and the New Testaments, there are several passages where the plight of the poor is central. Of note is Exodus 3:7,8.

I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So, I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land.

Yahweh endeavoured to liberate his people from the yoke of slavery in Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria. Yahweh's concern for the oppressed is the Bible's central theme. The concern is to save people from the spiritual, physical, political, or religious bondages. As such, the ministry of the kings and prophets culminated or found fulfilment in the ministry of Jesus in Luke 4:18, "good news to the poor." Jesus' ministry was committed to the poor, the vulnerable, the weak and the marginalised. The plight of the people informed Jesus' value systems and the appalling condition of the people informed His ministry. Thus, Leonardo Boff wrote in 1974, that "Jesus is seen and loved as the liberator". He has power to liberate from diverse types of slavery afflicted to the poor on the continent, to give direction to this liberation and to inspire believers to be its active agents.

The passage of the Emmaus experience (Lk 24:13-35) reflects the value systems of Jesus ministry to the poor, the social outcasts, or the misfits. The two disciples were travelling back to Emmaus after the failed expedition, after the gruesome death of Jesus. Jesus' gruesome death was the demise of the one they "had hoped.... was the one who was going to redeem Israel (Lk 24:21b). The crucifixion and death of Jesus doomed and shattered the dreams of the disciples such that they needed to restart and refocus. The passage above gives the conclusion that God is *par excellence*, the God of the oppressed and the hopeless. The concern of the Liberation theology is:

The culture of silence, which surrounds these disciples and so many of the poor, then shifts to the role of Jesus who draws near, walks together with the poor, listens to their perspectives, asks questions, establishes trust, equalises power relations, and enters dialogical process of 'speaking with' (West 2013:159).

During the colonial period of Africa, both Whites and Blacks highly regarded the Bible. For the Black people, the Bible was the source of potential power. Findings of a research done by Vengeyi concur that most Zimbabweans view the Bible as a preventive traditional charm that confers immunity against specific types of illness or protects individuals against misfortune that could be caused by *gona*" (Vengeyi

2013:78). In another passage, Vengeyi (2013:78) says, “the bible in Zimbabwe is often seen as a weapon which not only conquers the power of the devil, but any problem, be it poverty, diseases, HIV/AIDS or others.” The Bible becomes the healing medium on diseases or circumstance especially those ailments or conditions which modern medicine cannot cure, or when it is difficult to go the hospital. Kugler (2013:190) quoted the West African people who sleep with the Bible under their head or put it into the beds of small children to ward the of some harmful spirits³. Sleeping with the Bible, for Kugler (2013:190), attract sweet dreams and protect against evil or scary dreams.

Gerald West quotes Emeritus Desmond Tutu having said that when “the White man came to our country; he had the Bible, and we had the land. The White man said to us, ‘Let us pray.’ After prayer, the white man had the land, and we had the Bible” (West 2003: ix). Akper (2005:3), in this regard, says: “While the Bible served the white people as an ideological weapon of oppression, the blacks especially within African Independent Church (AICs) – claim the Bible as the source of life.”

The above assertions support the belief that the Biblical text was an indispensable tool in colonising and sacrosanct for liberating the ordinary people even in the Zimbabwean context. Bishop Desmond Tutu later said that through the Bible we “got the better deal” (West 2003: ix). The experience, the voice, and the role of any citizen even the uneducated, the poor, women and the oppressed cannot be sidelined in the true hermeneutics of liberation, thus the Bible becomes “the source of life.” What stays is to link the biblical text to the African context such that the focus of interpretation should relate to the communities that receive the text rather than the western methodologies that produced and interpreted the text. The goal of this research is to arrive at a new understanding of the biblical text informed by human experience, situation, context and interpreting the text from a socio-cultural experiential perspective.

³ Hebrews 4:12 reads: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints, and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” In other words, the Bible does not fail anyone, situation, or circumstance. It penetrates, influences, and influences all.

The constitution of Zimbabwe hallows freedom of worship and association. Article 58:1 state: “Every person has the right to freedom of assembly and association, and the right not to assemble or associate with others.” The nation allows its citizens to choose their lifestyle when it comes to religion and worship. The freedom of worship accounts for the high percentage of Zimbabweans who are Christians.

The Ancient Near East legislation, the Old and New Testament traditions, and legislations up to the post-Christian era shows utter concern for the widows, the fatherless and the strangers. The Hebrew word *almah*, widow, speaks of a woman whose husband is dead and has no means of financial support, needed special legal protection (Benjamin 1982:487). In a patriarchal society such as that of the Ancient Near East, widowhood was synonymous with helplessness, marginalisation, social and economic insecurity. Thus, the stress amongst contemporary historiographers on widows has been the poor widow. As a result, she was susceptible to exploitation and injustice. Morris (1974:263) supports the notion arguing widowhood is “a symbol of helplessness”. As such, the Bible characterises widows with weeping (Job 27:15; Ps 78:64), mourning (2 Sa 14:2) desolation (Lam 1:1), poverty (Rt 1:21; 1 Ki 17:7; Job 22:9) and indebtedness (2 Ki 4:1).

The Hebrew God endeavoured to ease the suffering of the widows. God, judges, and kings were the protectors of widows and the disadvantaged in society. God himself was the defender, the protector, and the shield of the widows: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling” (Ps 68:5). God further defended the cause of the widows: “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless” (Ex 22:22-24).

Kings were good in as much as they championed the cause of the widows, orphans and the vulnerable in the society. Even the monarch had to uphold the plight of the widow as a divine command, “the supreme measure by which a ruler in Israel was to be judged was whether such powerless ones were cared for” (Ps 72:4, 12-14).

May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and

save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight (Ps 72:12-14).

There are several other biblical references that champion the cause of widows including Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:17; 27:19, Isaiah 1:17; 10:2, Job 24:3,21, Jeremiah 22:3, and Malachi 3:5. These textual references advocated positively for the cause of widows, orphans, landless and strangers (Ex 21:22; Dt 24:17, 19, 20-21).

The widows normally would react with grief to their plight and wore a distinct garb as a sign of their status (Gn 38:14; 2 Sm 14:2). This is the case even in later times as shown in extra-biblical literature:

At home where she set up a tent for herself on the roof of her house. She put sackcloth around her waist and dressed in widow's clothing. She fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the day before the Sabbath and the Sabbath itself, the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon, and the festivals and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel (Jdt 8:5-6).

The Hebrew scriptures distinguished the widows by their appearances. This result was that "she was in an extremely vulnerable economic position; she became the prime target of exploitation" (Ndimukika 2008:5).

Preferential treatment against women and widows seems to be a universal problem. History testifies to the prevalence of the ill-treatment. According to a report released in Kathmandu, the in-laws of a lady named Rem Devi Tamang sent her off after a five-year marriage with her husband ended due to death. She had a four-year old daughter. When she gave up, she recalled when her in-laws "called me husband-eater" (Bader 2018). The story goes on to state that after he (the husband) died,

life soon became unbearable. Her in-laws gradually pushed her out of her tailoring business, beat her and called her names. Amid a country ravaged by civil war, she found herself increasingly singled out, harassed by her community, and ostracized by her own family (Bader 2018: 1).

Because of this, she had to start her life anew.

Zimbabwe is no exception to this phenomenon of ill-treatment and disfranchisement once a person is widowed. Since Zimbabwe's independence, there are several cases of prominent, ordinary, rich, and famous women who the ugly and wicked

patriarchal system left the widows homeless and destitute. They gave in due to threats, pressure and power of the late husband's male and female relatives. Despite all law enactments locally, regionally, and internationally and human rights activism the situation and dilemma have increased.

1.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Every undertaking must give meaning to the words used. Some of the key terms used in this study therefore need elaboration and clarification. The term "definition" entails the "formal statement of the meaning or significance of a word or phrase" (Random House Webster's College Dictionary 1997: 346). How are the words used in this study? Do the words keep their official meaning or assume new sense according to the context? Understanding the meaning of the words helps define the boundaries/ parameters used within the given word/s. Some words may be ambiguous in their meaning, hence the need for clarification for contextualisation.

1.2.1 Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is a land locked country between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers surrounded by Zambia, Botswana, South Africa, and Mozambique. Zimbabwe was known as Southern Rhodesia before reaching independence in 1980. The nation got its new name, Zimbabwe after Independence in 1980 from the British Colonial rule that lasted a century. The name "Zimbabwe," though debatable, got the name after the Great Zimbabwe Masvingo, the 12th century to the 15th century stone-built capital of the *Rozvi* Shona dynasty. The name is derived from the Shona "Bantu Language" term "*dzimba dzamabwe*," meaning "houses of stones" or "*dzimba waye*" which means "esteemed houses" (Encyclopaedia, World Culture 2015).

Zimbabwe's economy is to a greater extent agro-based. According to the report released by the *Food and Agricultural Organization* (FAO) of the United Nations, the country sits on "34.141 million hectares of which 85 % is potential agricultural land" (FAO 2017:1). According to the statistics released in 2016 by World Bank, collection of development indicators, the "female percentage total in Zimbabwe was about 51.32 %". Literacy rate amongst females in Zimbabwe was about 84.6 percent in 2016.

Figure 1: Zimbabwe's population statistics

Males	Females	Total
2,481,054	2,945,541	5,426,594
45,7%	54.3 %	100%

Table 1 presents a report produced by the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) for the Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD) and Hivos on the statistics of women. According to the above statistics, the logical inference is that the more women there are, the more they can influence change.

1.2.2 Property rights

According to sociologist and researcher Will Kenton, property rights refer to the theoretical and legal ownership of specific property by individuals and the ability to figure out the use of such property (Kenton 2018). Kenton elaborates and says that there are three kinds of rights to property.

The three, accordingly, are:

1. The scarce physical resources, non-human property, and the intellectual property. The scarce physical resource for Kenton includes houses, vehicles, books, and land.
2. Non-human property includes pets such as dogs, cats, horses, and birds.
3. The intellectual property refers to the property gotten through learning and/or discoveries and carry the copyright acts. These include any form of inventions, ideas, or any word.

According to the web page on *Intellectual Property Law in Zimbabwe*, Zimbabwean law recognises several intellectual property rights that require formal registration with the Zimbabwe Intellectual Property Office (ZIPO), the African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO), or under the Madrid International Trademark System (Madrid System) before the protection and enforcement of such rights against third parties in Zimbabwe (Moyo 2019: 1).

The local Zimbabwean Newspaper, *The Herald* of September 28, 2015 carried the story: *Call to protect spouses' property rights*. Many women wanted to understand what the law stipulates with regards to ownership of property during marriage. Many

women admitted that they were under the impression that it was 50 /50 ownership of property. The conclusion of the research was that the three types of marriages in Zimbabwe are out of community of property. This means that if the spouse passes on the surviving widow is not entirely the sole owner of the property.

Most married persons are under the assumption that when they get married what belongs to the spouses automatically belongs to the other party. This is not true as the meaning of 'out of community of property' is that whatever each spouse amassed on their own before they were married is not subject to joint ownership (Tandi 2015: 3).

The statement insinuates that properties bought during the subsistence of marriage must be co-owned. The properties should have the names of both said spouses on the deed conferring ownership, the one whose name appears on the deed of title is the owner and enjoys a real right to that property. The question raised by the above assertion pertains the property that the couple buys within the subsistence of their marriage. One can compromise on the property bought before marriage. This study questions why then, the widows lose everything despite having contributed to the home thus, enhancing its values, as the in-laws do not expect them to inherit anything.

1.2.3 Tenacity

The term comes from the adjective tenacious. The word carries the thought of "holding fast characterised by keeping a firm hold" (Random House Webster's College Dictionary 1997:1325). The word evokes the spirit of not giving up but holding fast to that which one believes and opinionated upon. The disadvantaged or prejudiced are evoked by the word to constantly knock and seek entry into the space which they acknowledge as theirs. The word insinuates seeking persistently against prejudice to reach out and get what rightfully and legally belong to them. A tenacious person is known not to take no for an answer as they are strong-willed. The writer Leonard Sidney supports this when he gave an illustration looking to define tenacity. He said: "There is nothing to which men cling more tenaciously than the privileges of class" (Sidney 2018: ix)

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Widowhood elicits sympathy. The word sympathy entails “the ability to share the feeling of the other” (Random House Webster’s College Dictionary 1997:1305). Even in the era of human rights, there is the demise of sympathy and abuse continues to rise. According to the Human Rights Watch (2014:17),

Every year, in-laws evict thousands of widows from their homes and land, leaving them with no roof over their heads, no means of income, and no support networks. Others face persistent harassment from in-laws who often accuse them of handling the deaths of their husband (Msiyazvirio 2016: 2).

Mary Nyangweso further said: “In some cases the widow’s children are abducted to coerce compliance” (Nyangweso 2017:369). The same system forces the widow to do and behave as dictated by the in-laws to inherit her or force her out of the matrimonial property. These stories of widows have not been of interest to many writings and research save for the expected cultural norms. Elphas Mukonoweshure (1992:81) elaborates by asserting that:

A widow just watched whilst her deceased husband’s relatives were packing the property and never said a word. In reply to the question why she had not even protested, she answered that she had to be a *muroora*, respectful daughter-in-law. She showed this respect by letting them do as they please. This behaviour follows the Shona custom/belief that the relationship between a married woman or widow and her in-laws is that of respect mixed with fear.

These stories and experiences of widows have not invoked the compassion they deserve. The need to protect the widow’s right to property, her children and her own dignity should be central to the African sense of morality, even the preservation of holistic values (Nyangweso 2017:376). How can the treatment of another people negate the communal life which is at the core of being an African with the community as the agent of human rights? African scholars, such as Senghor (1964) and Kwesi Wiredu (1996) concur that individuals do not live alone but as a community. This African concept of the community is gender neutral. This is akin to “African golden rule,” read in the Zulu maxim which says “*Ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*,” (transl. “A person is a person through other people”). A similar African proverb, attributed to John Mbiti says that “I am because we are and because we are, I am” (Mbiti 1969:106). It simply means it is part of being human to live in relationships and to belong to each other. Nobody should be alone.

The emphasis of this ideology is on care, corporate existence, identity, dignity, and respect such that decisions made should not prejudice anyone. What has become of the call of *Ubuntu* amongst Africans today?

This research juxtaposed the experiences and ordeals of widows with African social, traditional, and cultural practices. Traditionally the woman is perceived incompetent on property management. She becomes limited in her consent as who inherits her and the determination on property use. If she desists, society calls her a deviant (Nyangweso 2017:369). Tradition blames the “deviant behaviour” of the widow for every misfortune that befalls the family, clan, or village after her refusal. As a result, abuse against widows become a great possibility. This normally happens soon after the burial of the spouse. One of the victims of abuse and women activists conceded to defeat saying:

‘I had all, I was an activist, access to information, the best lawyer, Beatrice Mtetwa, and a powerful position as a minister, but after the death of my husband, I woke up and had absolutely nothing,’ she said. Misihairambwi-Mushonga said that the big problem in the country was not the laws, but the culture and understanding of marriage in an African context. ‘In the African context, marriage is communal, you are married to the clan, and one is always a minor and your protection is from the husband. The moment he falls away, there is a succession,’ she said (Muzulu, January 25, 2017).

Christianity, as the major religion in Zimbabwe hinges on unconditional love, respect for all, the marginalised and the vulnerable. The unconditional love is the “greatest commandment.” One of the Pharisees had asked Jesus: “What is the greatest commandment” (Mt 22:36). Jesus answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ ‘There is no commandment greater than these’” (Mk 12:30-31)

There, however, is a missing link between the teaching of Jesus and the practices of the community of faith. If what Jesus taught and what the community of faith practise contradict, it becomes a cause for concern. Where does the problem come from? How can we address the concerns of the widows both culturally and religiously?

What are the possible corrective interventions and measures on the plight of widows? To whom can these widows run? If tradition and culture disregard and undervalues *Ubuntu*, can the Bible, with texts such as Luke 18:1-8, through its acquired authority be a workable resource to tackle and respond to the plight of widows in Zimbabwe? Can the widow in this parable be a role model and if so, in what sense and to what extent?

1.3.1 The social effect

Generally, speaking, social effect is how organizations, businesses or individuals' actions affect the surrounding community and/or individuals or a people group. It is the result of an activity, project, program, or policy. The effects can be intentional or unintentional, positive, or negative. This research investigates how society, the laws and cultural practices socially affect women and widows after the death of the husband and how that impacts on her total wellbeing.

There is stigma associated with widowhood in Zimbabwe as found in most African countries. The word stigma brings with it "a stain or reproach" (Random House Webster's College Dictionary 1997:1276) as of one's reputation. When the husband dies, tradition normally blames the widow for the husband's death even if the ailment is known. This is concurred by an African proverb among the Edo and Delta states of Nigeria which says, "no married man dies a natural death but at the hands of a bewitched wife." This means that when a man dies, the wife would have bewitched or infected him. These beliefs justify the suffering and dispossession that widows undergo. The relatives expect the wife to die eventually, so they withhold the property in anticipation of her death. In extreme cases and depending on the local customs, she may undergo rituals to prove that she has no hand in the death of her husband. Tradition expects her to cry and wail early in the morning daily, before others in the community wake up, till the end of the mourning period just to prove innocence.⁴

⁴ The widow must perform rituals to prove her innocence and to show that she is mourning her dead husband. Tradition, however, is silent on what it expects from men when the wife passes on. Women's expected rituals are discriminatory by nature. Widows in the Shona/Ndebele culture wear a complete black dress and cover their heads with black doek. Tradition limits and regulates her moves till the end of the mourning period. The mourning period in the Shona/Ndebele culture varies. The mourning period ranges from 10 to 14 months to ensure the woman was not pregnant or did not have

She cannot inherit anything because customary laws prohibit her from inheriting anything from the late husband's estate. The husband bought her when he paid *lobola*⁵ and so, the patriarchal family inherits her or decide what happens to her. When widowed young, the community expects the widow to leave the husband's clan and go back to her original home or remarry. In lenient cases, she stays with the family that married her for her to continue using and enjoy the matrimonial property. Otherwise, the family either ejects her out of the house, lose livelihood or lose all the household effects, and become destitute. Walle (2018), the Lead Economist with World Bank said:

Women often inherit nothing when a marriage ends, and official legal systems offer little recourse. Some may even lose their children to the husband's lineage. Broader patterns of gender inequality add to the heavy burden on women's shoulders. They are shut out of labour markets, have fewer productive assets, and bear greater responsibility for the care of children and the elderly."

Walle (2018) further says:

The disadvantages that widow and divorcees suffer also affect their families. Research in Mali shows that the children of widowed mothers have worse health and are less likely to enrol in school. In Zambia, in areas where customary rights do not support land inheritance for widows, married couples make fewer productive investments in their land. Where widows and divorcees suffer, society at large suffers as well."

Widows have remained aliens (*Vatorwa*) to the families they were married into, so much that inheritance rights have not been a priority. The civil courts worsen her situation as they usually look to/for the in-laws to verify the marriage – "the very people who stand to gain to confirm the marriage, thereby putting widows at the mercy of their husband's family," said a magistrate (Mhaka 2017: 1). The Government of Zimbabwe currently recognises three kinds of marriages. These are:

1. *Marriage Act Chapter 5:11* also known Civil Union,

any sexual relations with another man after the death of the husband. This is the time when *sara pavana* (stand in spouse) assumes guardianship over the children and the widow. While culture recognises *Kugara Nhaka and Sara pavana* processes, in modern times there must be an agreement between the spouses. The idea of forced marriage for the widow is slowly becoming remote. The laws are silent on the expected behaviour of man, which favours men in the patriarchal set up.

⁵ The value of the lobola paid is different in every culture depending on the family net worth, girl's educational qualifications or at times just for prestige. In the Shona/Ndebele culture, the son-law and his family pay cash, grocery goods and cattle or goats. Traditional lobola was in the form of a hoe, signalling an exchange in the labour. The payments transfer the woman's labour and reproduction rights of the woman to the husband's family.

2. The *Customary Marriage Act 5:07*
3. *Unregistered Customary Law Union (UCLU)*.

According to Tawonezvi-Moyo (2016: 14), all “of these marriages are under the matrimonial property regime of “Out of Community of Property and Out of Profit and Loss.” This means “what’s yours is yours and what’s mine is mine” (Tawonezvi-Moyo 2016: 17). The *Marriage Act Chapter 5:11* is a monogamous marriage between a man and a woman. The marriage is solemnised by a Christian marriage officer or any other government official designated. A person consenting to this marriage cannot marry another person and cannot change mind or migrate to Customary marriage Act 5:07. This marriage is different to *Marriage Act 5:07* also known as Customary Marriage Act which is potentially polygamous. This means that a man consenting to this marriage can/may marry more than one wife. This kind of marriage is only available within African cultures that allow and agree to the stipulations of the act of potentially multiple partners.

The *Unregistered Customary Union* considers women as minors within the Shona/Ndebele patriarchal culture. As minors, they cannot inherit anything but need some guardian or guidance in cases where the spouse dies. The patriarchal culture thus, diverts property inheritance to boys or men as they are the *de facto* permanent family heads and major members of the families in the local patriarchal culture. Culture vests the patriarchy with property rights disposals on behalf of the family. Customarily, women do not have a direct claim on the land but only through the male relatives or husband. The woman stays on the land at the pleasure of the clan related to the male. At times, even the married family, by virtue of *lobola* paid, expect them to bow, show respect to the groom’s family or else forfeit marriage privileges and rights. FAO, (2020) asserts that,

Since men pay lobola to their in-laws for their wives, they, and their families and, in some cases, even the women’s families expect subservient, loyal, and obedient service from their wives. Many women are ill-treated by their husbands or husbands’ families on the grounds that lobola was paid for them and that therefore, they should be obedient and respect their husbands and in-laws.”

The widow cannot freely walk and socialise with males who are members of the same congregation, without stigma attached. If she does, the community stigmatises

her, giving her names such as husband snatcher or a loose person. Her place of socialisation becomes confined to her home. Therefore, defending the property rights becomes an insurmountable task while mourning, thinking about financial burdens for legal representation and going through legal steps to reclaim the property. The ownership of that property and the execution of the inheritance rights are based on the customary processes, where customary marriages occur.

1.3.2 The economic effect

The economic effect considers the financial implication on the widow resources because of the response of the society and in-laws in her new assumed status. How is her livelihood affected? Would she have a decent life? What are the sustainable resources taken from her in the process? Widows' woes range from social exclusion, sexual violence, and discrimination against on inheritance rights.

Economically she becomes redundant and the quality of life deteriorates compared to her life before her husband passes on. Relatives of the deceased usually take all household effects and even the farming fields to those in rural areas. The dire circumstance forces children drop out of school or go into early marriages to remove them from the inheritance matrix and in some rare cases to help their dispossessed widow-mother. This is true of Sara a widow in Ngezi mine in Chegutu when she said:

My eldest daughter passed her Ordinary Level with flying colours, but she could not continue with school because I could not pay. She ended up getting married at 18 and I do not blame her, I could not feed her properly here. She was probably looking for a better life, I am glad her husband is a good man" (Chipoyera 2018:1).

Legal disputes with families over land, property and other household effects are normally lengthy processes full of bureaucracy and expensive court proceedings in monetary, psychological, and social costs. As such, some widows involuntarily surrender their matrimonial homes or ejected from their inheritance. One woman had to leave their matrimonial home and settle in the village to avoid conflict with the in-laws over their father's property. She felt it was unjust to leave her property, but she had no choice. She did all that in pursuance of peace.

1.3.3 The Christian religious effect

Every human being is religious in one way or the other. Writing about African religiosity, Mbiti (1969:1) says “Africans are notoriously religious.” Every action, deed, event, or mishap has a religious or a spiritual meaning, for nothing happens by chance. Considering the diversity of Africans in their different settings and their varied belief systems, it is quite challenging to produce a specific definition of religion from an African perspective. The definition of religion becomes elusive and religious phenomenologists such as Brown (1975), Schmidt (1988) and Cox (1992), have not agreed on a single definition. Religion is the belief in a god or a pantheon of gods. It is an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods. Oladipo (1998: 203) defines religious attitude as “a response to that ‘thing’ which is the ultimate reality and which, for that reason, is indestructible”. As such, Christianity values and upholds the teaching of Jesus Christ found in the Bible and no man can alter that kerygma. Further, Sanni (2016:5) says religion “provides answers to questions of ultimate meaning, questions about the nature and destiny of human beings.” When one queries the suffering of other human beings, Christianity must supply answers to the problems.

This research has singled out Christianity as the religion under study. Christianity adheres to the message of its prophets, apostles, kerygma of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit as sacred and spirit breathed and that the Holy Book is infallible. Zimbabwe celebrates constitutional freedom of worship and with high regards placed on the Bible, its effect both positively and negatively cannot escape one’s attention. Through a study of Christianity through the Bible, the research seeks to find out how the community of faith reacted to the widow and her plight.

While widows should find shelter and refuge in religion (Jas 1:27), there is huge discrimination against widows within religious communities. Some religious communities, however, use religion to justify certain abusive tendencies. This is because religion supplies the sacrosanct ideology that is yonder human intellect. The ideology “becomes an external divine agent that legitimates social action, in some cases coercing its people to carry out social dictates” (Nyangweso 2017:380).

The Bible sanctions ethical conduct. The Hebrew Bible supplies basic human rights tenets. Scripture provides that communities should treat widows with honour, protection, compassion, and mercy because they are the vulnerable members of society (Ex 22:22; Dt 10:18; Ps 68:5; Is 1:17; Zch 7:9-10).

There are also Biblical texts that support the view that widows cannot inherit property from their departed husbands, but conversely, they handle their debts. The perfect example is the widow aided by Elisha who appear not to own anything except some little food (2 Ki 4:1-7). There are some early Christians fathers who perpetuated the violations of women's rights and dignity. One of them is Tertullian in *De Cultu Feminarum* quoted by Pape, (1976:195) saying:

Do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealed of the tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him who was not valiant enough to attack: you destroyed so easily God's image, man. Because of your dessert – that is death – even the Son of God had to die.

The implications of such texts hide behind the “Biblical thoughts” to justify widows' disempowerment and alienation.

The alienations and violations prolong her mourning period. Most religious communities, not least, Christian communities, are firmly patriarchal. Hence, they directly or indirectly support the stigmatisation, discrimination, and disempowerment of widows. Further, in the case of Zimbabwe, the in-laws that are in the fore-front of property-grabbing belong to one or another of the many Christian denominations.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

This study is long overdue because it is forty long years after Zimbabwe's independence. Despite the multiple policy documents, policies, and frameworks for the empowerment of women, the perception of women in Zimbabwe remains one that views women as an extension of men and reliant on men. When it comes to widows, they become extremely vulnerable in the death of their spouses, as they lose their status, which they get by association. This situation has far reaching consequences for the individual, family, clan, community, and national level.

Zimbabwe has several women who lost their property. A popular Zimbabwean example is the quoted case of Priscilla Mushonga, who lost all that was hers to the stepsons after they produced a will which differed from hers. She later exclaimed resigning to defeat saying: “I would prefer to become another statistic of a victim of a society that unfortunately, has failed not only to protect me, but to provide a platform to a majority of widows that must face this abuse every day” (*The Standard Newspaper*, 23 May 2010).

A society characterised by disempowered women can never achieve sustainable development because where there is full recognition and acknowledgement of humanity, women contribute to sustainable development of the nations. With all the policy developments in the past few decades, the situation of widows in Zimbabwe has not meaningfully changed. Resorting to only legal responses has not yielded results as much as expected and hence, a study of this nature is key in that it seeks to invoke religious and faith resources in responding to the exclusion, rejection, discrimination or disempowerment of widows and women in general.

According to UN⁶ (2020).

[t]here are an estimated 258 million widows around the world, and one in ten live in extreme poverty. But the actual number is likely to be much higher and to grow further as the coronavirus and its related effects on health continue to rage around the world. As women they have specific needs, but their voices and experiences are often absent from policies that affect their survival. Many widows have not found the voice to stand for them.

Shumbamhini (2005:6) wrote on the reason widows are marginalised. She claims that:

I wanted each widow to discover her preferred identity as a widow. Furthermore, I wanted them to develop their own preferred practices and be able to celebrate their own identities. My hope and desire were also to see them as participants of the study share in addressing cultural discourses and social practices that promote injustice or that create oppressive situations and deconstruct them.

⁶ Since 2011, the United Nations recognises 23 June every year as International Widows Day under resolution A/RES/65/189 since 2011. The purpose is to bring forth attention to the voices and experiences of widows and to stir up the unique support needed to address their plight.

Instead of searching for a voice or legal frameworks to stand for them, the widows are a voice enough to liberate themselves. This research is for the benefit of the widows who have remained numb in the face of suffering. The Bible has for the present time remained unchallenged and no one has critiqued its authority contrary to the laws, legislations and the constitution amended several times revealing inadequacies. Resolving the widow's challenges can mark the beginning of sustainable development among the vulnerable groups including widows and orphans. The situation and plight of widows is a challenge that makes sustainable development unattainable hence, this work contributes towards the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nation's SDG goal number five aims to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls seeks to "eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation."

This study will also create a firm foundation to tackle various issues affecting women in general and widows in particular. The exposure of issues such as gender-based violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and various other forms of torture that women will help many from the findings of this study.

In this context, this work will add to existing resources on women studies in Zimbabwe and on the African continent. Academics and students in the humanities will help from the findings of this study. This study will use the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-6) to motivate widows from the socio-historical perspective.

1.5 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a context "is the situation within which something exists or happens, and that can help explain it" (Cambridge Dictionary 2019:14). The everyday usage of the word "context" refers to a section of the real world in which some events or the discourse took place. It is equivalent to the Greek the *Sitz Im Leben*, the setting on which the events or discourse took place.

This research dealt with the exploitation of widows from two contexts. The first is in Zimbabwe, its social-historical and-economic, legal, and cultural setting. The

research will explore the thinking and experiences of the widows in their cultural context. This is in the view of the traditional patriarchal system that is dominant in the nation. This means an understanding and appreciation of the sociological, psychological, anthropological, political, and cultural understanding of the Zimbabweans is necessary.

The second is the Biblical context; with special emphasis on the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament, focusing on the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge (Lk 18). The parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge will form the core of this study. The research shall read the gospel of Luke, dating, purpose, and message from its context. However, to make sense of these two different periods, the research made use of contextual exegetical tools and socio-historical hermeneutic on the teaching of Jesus.

1.6 RESEARCH GAP

Research gap intimates missing pieces of information, conclusion, or convincing evidence between the explored, known or used and the underexplored or unknown and unused information. This work bridges the research gap between the pragmatic meaning of the Biblical text that are under explored to the spiritual sense which many Biblical scholars popularised. In search of practical and sustainable solutions to challenges faced by widows, the research explored, upheld, and utilised interpretations and what contemporary readers can discover and utilise.

Scholars like Kilgallen, Blomberg, and Pentecost interpreted the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge with “persistence in prayer” (Lk 18:1) as the main thrust. (Luke 18: 1b: “that they should always pray and not give up”). The story introduces its moral before the rest of the story, as Mitchel (2010: 281) said that it becomes easy as the writer left keys at the door. There are many volumes written with similar interpretations on this parable and are still on the market.

Some scholars have written to show their theological and ideological conviction. Augustine interpreted the parable with the key verses being Luke 18:7 in interpretation, “how much more.” He argues that “if the wicked judge could be swayed by persistent entreaty, how much more certain may we be that God hears

prayers” (Snodgrass 2008:454). Augustine’s thrust is to make known the mercy of God.

Other scholars interpreted the parable for preaching and hermeneutical purposes. In short, the parable has generated interest among many including seminarians, preachers, lay preachers, and pastors.

This study imports the text on to the African soil, tragedy, and human experiences. Human experiences will inform the meaning of the text. This is because the Bible is more effective when it speaks to and engages with real and lived experiences because God intervenes in our lives wherever we are.

The study recognises that the enacted policy documents and human rights laws yielded insignificant impact on the victims of abuse. The use of the Bible using African hermeneutical lenses, experiences, and ordeals to empower the disempowered community is ideal. African scholars who got engaged in this exegetical method in search of sustainable and long-lasting approaches include Gerald West, Musa Dube, Itumeleng Mosala, Grant LeMarquard and Masiwa Ragies Gunda. They developed a keen interest in the role of the bible in a country where more than 90% confess to be Christians and its socio-historical interpretation. These African scholars explored exegesis of the daily experiences such as the South African apartheid system, gender-based violence, political violence, human rights, and the general living conditions of Africans. According to Kugler (2016: 10):

issues that came to the centre of attention each time (*human experiences were analysed*)⁷ was the issue of the interpretation of Biblical texts in cases where human rights and specific biblical texts seem, on general level, seem to stand in direct conflict with each other.”

The scholars engaged in the struggle against injustice through academia. How can we address the conflict showed in the society where women continue to languish under male dominance?

West (2003: 46) argues in this regard:

⁷ The emphasis is mine. The quest was to juxtapose human experience and Biblical exegesis.

Socially engaged biblical scholars have always accepted the parameters of the contextual Bible study process: that the Bible must be read together with the poor and the marginalised, that Bible reading is related to social transformation, and, significantly, that the Bible must be read critically.

The voice advocated by feminists such as Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza argues that solutions begin from the people's daily experiences into the bible world to seek sustainable solutions. The gap that social contextual hermeneutics closes is the critical analysis of the poor, marginalised and the downtrodden. West (2003:49) says: "[T]he emerging modes of reading within biblical scholarship offer formidable resources for recovering forgotten, neglected and absent voices ... to probe boundaries, gaps and cracks of the Bible".

The experiences of widows in Zimbabwe require an inquiry and a new mode of Biblical reading such as the liberation ideological approach and/or honour and shame. The cultural values of honour and shame help in understanding why a certain behavioural pattern is prevalent among dejected widows. Biblical texts are the products of a specific time. Itumeleng Mosala (1989:20), in this regard, argues that the texts of the New Testament are "products, records and sites of social, historical, cultural, gender, racial and ideological struggles and that they radically and indelibly bear the marks of their origins and history." Mosala further states that the point of departure need not be the Biblical world and the accepted interpretations only, but the experience and struggles of the people. The understanding that the Bible is a series of class struggles informs Mosala's understanding.

Zimbabwe widows' suffering, plight, and predicament soon after the passing of the spouse forces a search for liberation hermeneutics. Many of the widows stay dejected and traumatised when they lose their matrimonial property. West (2003:48) postulates that "there is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter, no innocent text ... we believe that an empowering and liberating interpretation of the Bible is still possible". Let their lives and plight supply interpretation that liberates.

The Human Rights Watch (2014: 17) summaries the fate of the widows saying "Many Zimbabwean widows face insurmountable obstacles defending their property or taking legal steps to reclaim it. The question is: Who is there to give a liberating

voice to the dejected widows? Can someone direct the violated widows to biblical narratives of people who once faced similar challenges in an oppressive environment and prevailed? The general trend has been to approach the plight of widows from a human rights and legal perspective, which is the background informing the multiple policies enacted by the government, yet their impact has been minimal. What has been lacking is the appropriation of faith-based resources in responding to attitudes towards widows, which is what this study sought to do.

1.7 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to contribute towards the resolution or response to the continued exploitation of widows in Zimbabwe by invoking one of the most widely followed and respected resource, that is, the Bible. The following goals will guide the study:

1. To analyse and explore the legal and social position of widows in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Zimbabwe.
2. To investigate the situation of widows in ancient Israel and first century Palestine and compare it to the situation of widows in Zimbabwe.
3. To investigate and articulate some real-life stories of widows in independent Zimbabwe.
4. To investigate the essence, significance, and function of the Persistent Widow parable in its historical context and its implications for contemporary communities, like Zimbabwe; and
5. To make recommendations to widows and other groups on responses to the continued exploitation of widows.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of the study are the following:

1. What is the legal and social position of widows in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Zimbabwe?
2. How does the situation of widows in ancient Israel and first century Palestine compare to the situation of widows in Zimbabwe?
3. What are some of the most touching real-life stories of widows in independent Zimbabwe?

4. What is the essence, significance, and function of the Persistent Widow parable in its historical context and its implications for contemporary communities, like Zimbabwe?
5. How can widows and other groups respond to the continued exploitation of widows?

Chapter 2

Theoretical perspectives

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The ill-treatment, destitution and marginalisation of widows is a complex phenomenon in independent Zimbabwe. The plight of widows needs a review. The analysis of the phenomenon can use several methodologies. This research, however, utilised two methodologies as the liberating tools on the injustice perpetrated against widows, namely the cultural phenomenon of honour and shame, and African Biblical hermeneutics (ABH). A comparative analysis shall be employed to juxtapose Zimbabwe's context and the biblical world considering the widow's experiences and redress of their plight.

2.2 HONOUR AND SHAME

Socio-cultural anthropologists such as David De Silva and Bruce Malina, Eugene Nida, Roland Muller, Julian Pitt-Rivers (1966)⁸ and Jerome Neyrey (1988:44) uphold that every person's language and culture have ethical codes that formulate and define the people within that context. However, any misinterpretation of these codes, deform the people and the codes made meaningless. Carolyn Osiek (2008:323) argues that honour-shame interprets ethical norms "in correlation with ... primarily kinship, social hierarchy, economic control and social networking" as standards. These norms regulate how one chooses the path either as wrong or right, as honourable, or shameful. The ethical codes (expected and designated role) of that community evaluate the action taken or deed done.

To interpret the spoken word, "the context into which the words were spoken" (De Silva 2000:17) are foundational to understanding a people's culture, the behaviour, and the exchanged value systems. Halliday (1978:2), supports the view saying that language "does not consist in sentences; it consists of a text, or a discourse – the exchange of meanings in inter-personal contexts of one kind or another."

⁸ Pitt Rivers (1986) is the first scholar to encapsulate the hypothesis of honour, its kith, and kin to shame and the features of an honour culture (see also Moxnes 1988:208).

Socio-cultural anthropologists saw that there should be a context for one to understand words said, deeds done, and actions taken. They concluded that the socio-cultural context is fundamental in understanding a people group as we meet in the Bible. While the Biblical world may appear extinct and remote, the Bible is still with us and its value systems are not remote. As such, the socio-cultural context of the Bible becomes the vehicle to interpret the ways of life through the search of “a relationship between the text and the socio-historical environment from which it originated” (Mahlangu 2001:88). The relationship between the text and the socio-cultural context becomes the springboard of figuring out how honourable or dishonourable any behaviour is. From this backdrop, the research used honour-shame reading model to the Parable of the Persistent Widow (Lk 18:1-6) to understand her ordeal and courage, helping to redress injustice to the contemporary widows.

2.2.1 Honour-shame worldview

The term worldview refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual or community interpret the world and interacts with it. The worldview of people is the way that a group of people look at reality. Geisler (1989: 2010), an American Christian systematic theologian, and philosopher says, “It is ... an interpretative framework ... by which one makes sense ... of life and the world”. It also means that the informative outline of life and the world’s behavioural pattern figures out lenses one uses to perceive the world. Muller’s (2000:104) worldviews account for people’s beliefs and reactions to behavioural patterns and ethical considerations. The belief of the world is not so much what people see, but what people see with. Eugene (1954:150) saw that due to different worldviews, different continents, communities, and families have negotiated differently or used different lenses with regards to “transgressions.” The lenses can make everything blurry or clear or somewhere in between depending on their type. The question is: which are the lenses used to view the world?

Muller (2000) identifies three worldviews in reaction to transgressions: Shame-honour, guilt-innocence, and fear-power. These worldviews present worldwide and form beliefs and assumptions underlying specific kinds of behaviour. They are the filters or lenses through which people decide how to act.

The first worldview, not in order of priority is guilt-innocent which is characterised by a strong sense of doing the right thing or avoiding doing the wrong thing. The worldview focuses on law, regulations, and punishment. This worldview teaches people to follow rules and are free to do what they want, provided they do not hurt another person. If anyone does something wrong, punishment or payment is the result. Questions normally asked are “What did I do wrong?” “How do I get rid of the guilt I feel for the wrong I have done?” or “What can I do for him to love me?” People who ask these are individualistically orientated and not bound by groups.

Jewish and Christian faiths precede on guilt-innocent frameworks. From it comes the essence of “spiritual warfare,” soteriology, redemption, and forgiveness. Müller as a result, concluded that the “forgiveness of sin occurs on the basis of awareness of guilt before God, not on the basis of a sense of shame before people.” The guilt-innocent worldview is more pronounced in the Western contexts which are more individualistic.

The second is fear-power concept which is more dominant in African, Latin/South American, and Asian countries within tribal groups and tribal religions. This worldview is present in animistic and witchcraft cultures where there is belief in a dual worldview: physical and spiritual. The spiritual is mostly above the physical world. People live in a constant terror of the invisible powers such as curses, witches, and ancestors. An approved ethical behaviour is a prerequisite to ensure that the unseen spirits and forces are not angry. The aim of seeking an approved ethical behaviour is to be on the right side with the spirits. This world view is also superstitious; especially among those who believe in horoscope and the occult world.

The fear-power cultural paradigm manipulates different classes of people in varying degrees for different purposes. Sometimes, people exercise the fear-power model for personal reasons or to instil fear. The paradigm has ethical implications; children obey parents; people should fit into their classes. According to On-Culture (2019):

In a fear/power environment, reconciliation happens through realignment and public display of loyalty with the other party. Obviously, this means the lesser realigning with the one in power. The one without power asks forgiveness and

mercy of the one in power. The one in power forgives and bestows benevolence. The one in power does not have so much of a need to reconcile as there are less repercussions.

In other words, loyalty and compliance are key elements than admission of wrong. It is thus, a way of life that governs society and regulates a behaviour pattern.

The third is honour-shame which is popular and strong in African, Asian, and Arabian contexts. It is a collectivist framework based on patrilineal families and clans because everyone has an assigned role. It is relationship-based, and group orientated (Hofstede *et al.* 2005:89). Communication in Honour-shame framework is indirect, and body language communicates the feelings. This research will discuss in full this worldview.

People's world views form their ethics, identity, and soteriology more than individual personality does. Globalisation has influenced the definition and recognition of honour-shame. Through the human cross-cultural pollination, immigration, wars, conflicts and search for greener pastures, the honour-shame phenomenon has become a part in many people's contexts and cultures.

2.2.2 Honour

According to Pitt-Rivers (1966), honour is the value ascribed to a person's identity and being. The value ascribed to a person runs concurrently with the group's belief where that person belongs. The society must uphold and respect those values. Honour becomes the most sought-after attribute for one to get to enjoy full membership and respect. Peristiany (1994:10) is also of the opinion that honour is the apex of the pyramid of temporal social values and it conditions the hierarchical order. It cuts across all social classifications. It divides human beings socially into two fundamental categories, those endowed with honour and those deprived of it.

Malina (2001:31) defines honour as, "a claim to the worth and social acknowledgement of that worth." The onus lies upon the community to approve of a certain behaviour, while the concerned person must evaluate their behaviour considering that community. Honour is thus, intermediated over the belief of another person, which Lendon (1197:37) calls the Public Court of Reputation (PCR). Self-

perception does not matter; the court of reputation affirms the person as honourable or not. Two fundamentals are inseparable to give honour to any person and these are the community and good personal evaluation. Honour has operational platforms as described below.

2.3 HONOUR OPERATIONAL PLATFORM

2.3.1 Honour in the blood

Focus is on external associations or connections. These are family dynamics and relations. The connection is clear because there is no separation between a person and their behaviour from the family and its social settings. A good name within the family brings honour. People receive honour when they use a family name that is known, respected, and appealed to. Through the blood lineage, one can get honour.

Jesus' status is through the bloodline, "the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Lk 3:38). The persistent widow lacked family honour as the text withholds her family name, "[a]nd there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him [the judge] and saying" (Lk 18:3a). The withholding of the family name signifies the absence of honour. A person without honour is mostly marginalised and vulnerable. Biblical customs associate the name of the person with the family name and a typical example is "Simon bar Jesus." (Ac 16:3). She is a "widow," meaning that the death of her husband compromised her matrimonial honour, and it was up to the society to figure out the value of her new acquired status. Individuals strive to protect the honour of the name. The protection of the name and its reputation becomes a priority and the guarded part.

2.3.2 Honour as a group value

Honour is dominant in communities and nations with strong group orientations. They put a high value on the harmonious integration of group members. In this regard, the society functions with the "approved and acceptance" of groups (Freeman 2015:32) which in turn, shapes one's identity and self-concept in relationship to the group's value system. The social group perspective constructs the honour or value of any person. The group ideology on honour becomes critical in formulating its meaning of honour and who should or should not have it.

In any group, values are essential. Anyone who belongs or wants to belong to the group should keep the values embodied by that group. A person who lacks group value diminishes or violates fundamentals of the group and hence is an unworthy person. While honour can be an inner quality, the group decides the value. Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh assert, “To claim honour that the community does not recognize is to play the fool.” If the groups confirm the honour, they change one’s status. According to Crook (2009:593) “An honour culture is defined by the seriousness with which the people who inhabit it protect their honour and fight to retrieve it if it has been lost.”

The values of a group are associated with courage and moral excellence. A soldier in an army would show courage in the war front simply to preserve the honour of the nation. If the enemy defeats the entire army, they receive ridicule and taunts. The army or the nation feels humiliated, defeated, and ridiculed. Courage on the soldier or the army aims to “save one’s face” because if lost it brings disrepute to the entire army (Tennet 2007:77). If any person fails the group, the community upholds and feels the consequences. The consequences to individuals may include rejection, lack of belonging, abandonment, expulsion, or loss of social position. Every adherent of the group has the mandate to protect the integrity and value systems before peers, authorities and within the social network. David De Silva (2000:25) states “Honour signifies respect for being the kind of person and doing the kinds of things the group values.”

2.3.3 Honour as a gender value

Malina claims that the concerns of honour are more prevalent where authority, gender status and respect intersect. Gender becomes the hallmark of identity and reputation. There are different standards of reputation applied to males and females (Crook 2009:592).

According to Osiek and Pouya (2010:46), it is necessary to prove masculinity in an honour society all the time: “one could only become an ἀνὴρ (man) by energetically seeking honour.” Besides, men are by default with honour. It is associated with strength or wisdom and physical challenge to keep one’s honour. On the other hand, women are weaker vessels than men and can easily damage honour in the PCR.

Africa historically classifies women as weak in a bid to protect them from dishonourable or shameful circumstances so they will not bring shame to the family or ethnic group. Society views women as potential sources of shame. In the ancient world, as in many traditional cultures today, people have different areas for the preservation or acquisition of honour, and different standards for honourable activity (De Silva 2000:10). Men occupy the public spaces while the private spaces of home and hearth belong to the woman. The reason for this relegation of women to private or non-male areas is rooted in the ancient conception of a woman's place in the world. She is not an independent entity or agent but as embedded in the identity and honour of some male (her father if she is unmarried, her husband after she marries). De Silva (2000:10) claims that if she does not protect that honour, she disgraces her husband, father, family, or the community.

For (Malina 2001:34), honour for a woman was therefore an acquired honour. She receives honour by controlling her potential in bringing shame to the family. In turn, the society acknowledges the family for training a woman when she recognises her place in society. The woman's goal was to protect and preserve family honour at all costs, even if it brought shame to her. Society honours the woman when she shows sexual purity, fertility, submission, quietness and staying out of the public eye. Proverbs thirty-one is a typical chapter of an exemplary woman who brings honour to the community, house, and the husband.

Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.... Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land (Pr 31:11-12, 23; NIV).

She kept honour through hard work and being an exemplary woman in the community. For the Middle East culture, an unchaste woman is worse than a murderer because she affects not only a single victim but an entire family. In traditional families, a woman's reputation is particularly important. When the daughter loses virginity, the family as a group loses honour. The only way for some Middle East families in such a scenario to restore its honour and avoid public humiliation, is killing the daughter (Ferraro & Andreatta 2010:277).

Another Biblical woman with honour is Tamar, David's daughter. Amnon her step/half-brother violated her (2 Sam 13:1-22). Her brother Absalom silenced her. Absalom silenced her to protect the honour of the royal family. Yet what her brother had done was disgusting and unbearable. Exemplary behaviour means living and behaving as dictated by society.

2.3.4 Significant other

This is the role, according to Mbuvi (2010), played by elders, chiefs, or kings in a culture. Any association with the people of repute or disrepute increases or removes honour. As such, Mbuvi adds that royalty would not consider marrying off someone into a poor family, who removes honour before the community. The opposite is true marrying from a rich family removes the shame of poverty. In England, Queen Elizabeth II must give her written consent for members of her family to get married. This practice dates to the Royal Marriages Act of 1772. The monarch wants to protect the family against marriages that might "diminish the status of the royal house" (Tinubu 2018:1).

The biblical hermeneutics of the ANE and response to contemporary cultural norms can use this worldview. This helps analyse key behaviour patterns found in the ANE. A negation of this method denies an appreciation of what dictates a behavioural pattern. Gilmore (1987) refers to honour and shame as the "master symbol, making it foundational and a bedrock to values and moral regulations".

2.4 GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

The Greek Roman world refers "to regions and countries that culturally were directly, protractedly, and intimately influenced by the language, culture, government and religion of the ancient Greeks and Roman." (chegg.com 2017). Historians date the Greek-Roman civilisation between 332 BCE-395 CE. The conquest of Alexander the great and his Hellenization process epitomises the world. Historians further discuss classic civilisation in the Mediterranean world. In this region, Greek was the language of the intellectual and commerce while Latin was the preserve of public management and forensic advocacy. The region took pride in education, art, and philosophy. They became founders of educational philosophy and music. In such an

environment, you could not rule out competition. The quest for honour and avoiding shame were pivotal.

Honour culture characterised the Greek-Roman culture. Seneca (c. 4 BC-AD 65) the first century Roman rhetorician and philosopher wrote, “the one firm conviction from which we move to the proof of the points is this: that which is honourable is held ideal for no other reason than because it is honourable”. People must uphold honour and respect for what it is, even without a clear reason. It becomes the principal motivator of actions and decider of ethics. Isocrates an Athenian orator recommended his young pupil saying: “Honour with pleasure was good, pleasure without honour was the worst evil” (De Silva 2000:24). Acting without honour juxtaposes a person to an animal ruled by passion or selfish ambitions.

The family lives revolved around ensuring that the family receives honour, protects the honour, and avoids shame as much as possible. Quintillion (ca. 35-99 CE), a teacher and rhetorician upheld honour as the basis of decision making, and foundational fact in persuading people to adopt or avoid a course of action. For that, Isocrates used the following phrases meant to sanction behaviour, “It is disgraceful, it is noble” (David 2000:24). Honour was thus, a foundational factor in sanctioning behaviour as it played a dominant role in private and public life. This begs the question of the biblical definition of honour.

2.5 HONOUR IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

According to Strong’s concordance, honour is from the Hebrew word *kabad* or *kabed*. The word suggests being heavy or heavier than sand, carrying the connotation of being a celebrated or respected person. According to Genesis 13:2 “Abraham became very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold”. Abraham became a heavy, celebrated, and respected person. In short, he had honour. There are various other English translations for “honour” which include precious(ness), price, pomp, glory, splendour, costly things, esteemed, rare or value.

The thread of honour that is doing the honourable thing or being an honourable person runs throughout the Old Testament: “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and

he will pursue them. But I will gain glory [Honour] for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD (Ex 14:4).

Solomon honoured God when he requested for wisdom to rule the Israelites. Solomon did not ask for his glory or pomp. God honoured him as his pleasure when he asked for wisdom to rule God's people.

God said to Solomon, since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, possessions, or honour, [praise or glory, weight, or splendour] nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore God will give you wisdom and knowledge. And I will also give you wealth, possessions, and honour, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have (2 Chr 1:11-12).

It was the delight of Kings to honour whomever they wish. When King Xerxes asked Haman for his input, he had already decided in his heart what he was going to do.

When Haman entered, the king asked him, 'What should be done for the man the king delights to honour?' Now Haman thought to himself, 'Who is there that the king would rather honour than me?' So, he answered the king, 'For the man the king delights to honour' (Esther 6:6-7).

The writers of Psalms 23 and 25 had similar premises. The same principles guided the prophetic writings. "A son honours his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty (Mal 1:6; NIV).

Yahweh questioned the Israelites' honour of God. As a Son, God expected Israel to honour the father. However, Israel negated the prevailing sonship. The Israelites had annulled the pomp and glory due to the father, God. While other cultures surrounded the Jews, honouring God was foundational values to their relationship with Yahweh before all other communities.

2.6 HONOUR IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament has the word τιμῶν for honour. Its usage is associated with the position of authority (1 Tm 6:1), a position at the public table (Mk 12:39) and acts of recognition as on Palm Sunday (Mk 11:1-11; 14:3-9). For Halvor (2010) the word

glory (δόξα; see 1 Tm 1:17; Rev 4:9) is also associated with honour. The word refers to God. To humans, there is a sense of honour, fame, and repute (Jn 5:44; 7:18; 8:50).

Other references to honour are, for example, John 12:26 (“If any man serves me, my Father will honour him”; see also Mt 15:4,6; John 8:49; Luke 20:1-4).

Some of the references in some Pauline Corpus include Romans 2:7 “To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life”. Also, in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; God bought you at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.

In Revelations, the concept of honour is also present. Revelations 7:12 saying: “Amen! Praise and glory, wisdom, thanks, honour, power, and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

In all the Biblical texts, honour is praise, worthy bestowed on a person upon performing honourable deeds.

2.7 JESUS AND HONOUR

Jesus’ life, teaching and interaction suggests being based on the honour context. He aimed to bring honour to God: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (Jn 17:3-5). Jesus endeavoured to do the will of the Father. “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work” (Jn 4:34).

Jesus’ ethics hinged on choosing what was honourable before God. Even if it meant crucifixion. He, did it gladly. His teaching contradicted the society’s mark of honour: “But whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave” (Mt 20:26-27). He also said: “But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first” (Mt 19:30). This subversive understanding of honour is in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5-9. Jesus’ view of honour

took society by storm. Jesus' perspective of honour is sensible when analysed from the perspective of God's mission (*Missio Dei*) as exposed in the mission of Christ (*Missio Christos*).

God's preferential mission and ministry to the poor, downtrodden, dishonourable people, and persons without status, such as women, children and the handicapped was a liberating perspective in outlook. Conflicts ensued when Jesus restored honour either through healing, help or liberation of individuals or groups. In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus heals on the Sabbath against the Jewish laws. He courts the authorities' anger and displeasure. As the authorities attack Jesus, His response exposes their shortcomings thereby, "putting them to shame" (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 2:1-12; Lk 4:1-13 and Lk 10:25-37).

Jesus' use of parables requires a critical analysis in exposing honour- shame. Jesus did not intend to show the historical information since all the parables were not historical. He, however, wanted the community to see who God the Father honoured. For example, the parable of the banquet and the guests in Luke 15:11-32, the regular and expected guests were too busy to eat. The owner of the banquet had to say, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (Lk 15:21c). He had to invite other people as the invited did not honour the invitation.

Jesus did not only teach honour concept, but his life and death were also an embodiment of the same principle. His teaching can transform unjust structures of the society, unbecoming and dishonourable behaviour.

2.8 PAUL AND HONOUR

Paul's writings and his ministry philosophy constantly referred to honour-shame. He penned his work and preached his gospel in a shame sensitive and honour seeking society. He also preached within the Greco-Roman world where honour-shame were key societal values.

Paul's cultural significance of honour-shame guided his philosophy, supported by the phrase "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (Rm 1:16). This summarises his ministry

ethos. His concern was not to disgrace the gospel but to honour God, in both life and death. His preaching held shocking and scandalous messages contrary to many expectations on how God should manifest himself to the world.

Paul understood that Yahweh honoured Abraham (Gn 12:1-3). Jews cherished the name “children of Abraham” (Lk 19:9; Jn 8:39; Rm 4:16; Gl 3:7, 9). It was the honour of the family name that was at stake. However, the apostle Paul revisited the whole concept and included the Gentiles in the inheritance and blessing matrix. In other words, God honoured the Gentiles too. Romans 4 asks who the children of Abraham are. Romans 4:9 states: “Is the blessedness only for the circumcised, or for the uncircumcised? God blessed (honoured) the Gentiles too through faith. The honour bestowed upon the Gentiles could be the result of the conflicts and clashes Paul had with the Jewish authorities. It can be the reason for the first Jerusalem council in Acts 15.⁹

Paul alludes to the cross through Hebrew and the Greco-Roman worldview as it was a shame to hang on the cross (Dt 21:23). In Hebrews 12:2, through the shame of the cross, Jesus received the honour of sitting at the right hand of the father. The Jews humiliated Jesus on the cross because of the honour he had for God. God in turn honoured and gave him a “name that is above all names” (Phlp 2:9) and gave him the seat at the right hand of the Father. The scandalous instrument of torture contradicted the human feeling of shame because it brought glory and honour to Jesus. In looking at Ephesians, Gosnell (2006:105) argues that the epistle has the thread of honour-shame it is a persistent theme. Ephesians’ persistence to honour-shame supplies a basis to understand the writer’s expectations to the audience when it comes to honouring in Christ. The language which supplies unity to the writings allows the many distinct lessons to hang together. The readers must look for that thread built behind the honour-shame motif developed through an array of topics.

⁹ This was the first of the church councils held in the history of the church. The call of the council sociologically is the coming together of two perennial opponents. For centuries, there has been the preservation of cultural ethos hence, the avoidance of compromise on societal values. In John 4, Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman emanates from the same. The need to preserve the cultural ethos, the honour of the community links to the purpose of the Jerusalem council. The Jews were trying to preserve their honour. I believe inviting Gentiles without any obligation to the Jewish God and way of life meant a compromise of honour they had through God and Abraham. Relinquishing this honour would have brought dishonour to their people-the Jews.

Ephesians 1:3-14 begins by giving honour to God. Ephesians 1:14-23 looks at Christ the honoured one with his exalted position. In Ephesians 2:11-22, people are to enjoy the new honoured life in God. In Ephesians 3:1-13, the writer implores joy because of the undeserved status, which is of benefit to them. Other texts include Ephesians 3:14-21, 4:1-6:20.

This document clarifies the point that even in disputed Pauline epistles, honour-shame existed and shaped the writing of the letter.

2.9 SOURCES OF HONOUR

There are two sources of honour ensued in the ANE world. According to Malina the two basic honour levels are ascribed honour and acquired honour. The third is a recent development which is the perceived honour.

2.9.1 Ascribed honour

This refers to the social standing, reputation or fame an individual earns by merits. The merits include bloodline (birth) into a royal or aristocratic family, gender, or heritage, which included family wealth or education provided by the family. It is not based on individual exploits. The genealogy of Christ of Matthew 1:1 is a classic example of his ascribed status, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”. From Luke 3:23–38, Jesus’ genealogy gave him claim to the status (ascribed honour) in the Jewish lineage and heritage. He could call “Abraham his father.” God honoured Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). The title ‘children of Abraham’ ascribed honour to individuals. Paul in the letter to the Romans 4 redefined parameters of honour to be through faith (Gal 3:28). All the gentiles celebrated this honour while the Jews felt the sense of shame. When the commander wanted to flog Paul, he appealed to his status as a Roman citizen (Ac 22:25), “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who has not been found guilty”.

Paul appealed to the acquired honour. The text talks of how Jesus received his status and recognition set up in the Jewish family line. For Neyrey (1988:15), ascribed honour is due to a person from members of basic institutions of antiquity such as family, kinship, or state/ politics.

Following Jesus' baptism, God "ascribed" honour to Jesus explicitly saying his divine love and pleasure on him. "And behold," a voice came from heaven said, "this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). Other New Testament passages alluding to honour include Philippians 3:20, 1 Peter 2:9, and Galatians 4:4-7:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

The honour of sonship is through birth, one is no longer a slave but an heir. The works and the acts of God ascribe the honour. The PCR viewed such people to have received family honour because they are born into that family. Ascribed honour is less dynamic than acquired honour.

2.9.2 Acquired/achieved honour

This is the value, or the worth of a person conferred through virtuous deeds or perpetual struggle for public recognition. A slave, a soldier and anybody can get honour through either military conquest, public performances, political action, or social behaviour. The new status of achieved honour originates through competitions, a challenge, rivalry, or warfare. Status makes up the clothing, land, location, the number of slaves and clients one buys. An individual must strive to get or keep the honour by consciously aiming to build the reputation, "embodying virtues prized by the group" (De Silva 2000:28) such as integrity and bravery. One deliberately aims to be an honourable person. The underlining precepts are the acceptability by the group through the PCR.

2.9.3 Perceived honour

This is the third dimension of the sources of honour. It comes from one's self-evaluation. A person on this platform has an honour given or assumed honour due to him, by him and through him.

Obituaries find their grounding in acquired honour. Hanson, in an article titled *How honourable! How shameful! A cultural analysis of Matthew's makarisms and reproaches* (1990), argues that Jesus teaching of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 6:20-26 would make readers believe that the words speak of an honourable and shameful life. The words give an insight into cultural norms with the blessings pronounced by Jesus to those who embody honourable behaviour. Contrary to the blessed behaviour are woes which signal "shame."

According to De Silva (2010:34), there are means used to punish the transgressor of the value systems. Normally society resorts to jail terms, confiscation of property, execution, or some form of incarceration as a way of shaming the offender. The early Church never really exercised harsh and extreme punishments among people considered deviant.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were disturbed because the apostles were instructing the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand (Ac 4:1-14).

The priests, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees punished the disciples who were bringing shame to their group. The authorities treated the disciples as deviants who needed correction as they were maligning the way of God back into the fold. Paul's experiences are a result of seeking to bring back deviant persons (Ac 17; 19:21-41). For De Silva (2010:45), punishment, beating and torture was a societal way of reclaiming its people to conform to the patterns accepted in the community. As deviants¹⁰ in the early Church, they were undermining the central honour of the group on the observation of the Torah and God's precepts.

¹⁰ The constant struggle between Jesus and the Romans, Pharisees and the Sadducees were that they viewed Jesus as a transgressor to the norms of the Jewish customs, religion, and culture. Jesus experienced the name-calling such as Beelzebub, prince of demons, liar due to the contradiction showed in the societal value systems. Jesus can be a typical person whom society tried to reclaim back to their upheld value systems. The authorities crucified Jesus because he deviated from the norms hence, the justification of the meted punishment. It was a stern warning against those who chose to deviate from the normal cultural values if they choose to shame the community. The authorities may have construed Jesus as bringing shame to the Jewish people hence, the honourable thing was to drop the seed of dishonour brought by him and his twelve associates.

2.10 SHAME

Plevnik defines shame (αἰσχύνη) as “claim to the worth that is publicly denied and repudiated” because of failure to conform to the norms. Some words which mean the same as shame include reproach, revilement, insult, disgrace, and a byword. Some actions with shame include lowering the head, hiding the face, blushing, and wearing sackcloth.

2.10.1 Shame in the Old Testament

The Hebrew Bible has examples of words and expressions for shame. According to Hwang, the meaning of “to be ashamed” and the usage has the notion of taunt, reviling and disgrace. The word accordingly has the sense of “to be ashamed”/ “shame (fullness),” and has four synonyms: “to (suffer) insult”/ “disgrace,” “to humiliate”/ “humiliation,” “to be abashed,” and “dishonour” (Hwang 2017:686). Oftentimes, it includes shameful acts such as idolatry (Isa 44:9; Jr 10; 50:2) or nakedness (Jr 13:26; Neh 3:5). Genesis 2:25 sheds light now when man had no shame, “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Shame only crept in when they ate the forbidden fruit.

Betchel (2010:45) recognises two varieties of shame. These are formal judicial shaming and informal shaming. Deuteronomy 25:1-13 states that any guilt party whipping should not go beyond forty lashes as that disgraces the guilty brother. Betchel noted the importance of keeping honour even when punishing a guilty person. Another variety is a judicial shame as found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. When a brother refused to perpetuate his deceased brother’s family through levirate marriage, he brings shame to his brother. The widow would bring him before the community elders,

his brother’s widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, “This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother’s family line.” The widow would also say, “So shall it be done to the man who does not build his brother’s house” (Dt 25:9).

The man shall live with the shame for the rest of his life. In the Psalms Informal social shaming is clear: “In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies’ triumph over me. No one who hopes in you

will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause” (Ps 25:1-3).

The Hebrew Bible does not explicitly talk of shame. The concepts are, however, clear, especially in the Psalms. Whenever the nation faced enemies, they believed God would not allow shame to fall on them. The Israelites used the covenant with Yahweh as the basis against shame. The Israelites belief in God who would not allow shame to fall on them continued in the New Testament. God was concerned with the welfare of his people, so he aimed at preserving and protecting them.

2.10.2 Shame in the New Testament

The word αἰσχύνη is the Greek word for shame. The word is associated with Luke 9:26, Mark 8:38, 1 Corinthians 1:26, and 11:4-6. The New Testament links shame to actions (Ep 5:12; Phlp 3:19) and their discovery (Col 2:15; Mt 1:19). Jesus’ death is typical of the death in “shame” because he died the death of a criminal or rebel on the cross.

Here are a few examples:

“Whoever is ashamed of me and my words ... the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he shall come in His glory” (Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; NIV)

“And they took offence at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honour except in his town and his own home.” And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith (Mt 13:57).

The person’s worth and value in this regard is lesser or denied, due to the behaviour displayed by the person seen to be opposing value systems of that group or community.

2.11 POSITIVE SHAME

This accounts to be sensitive to one’s reputation and the PCR. For women, this enables them to keep chastity and obedience to the male head of the family. When one is shameful, they make the community or society favourable for other inhabitants.

According to Priest (2000:870), “individuals from the guilt-based cultures often perceive shame as an initial feeling of guilt.” When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, they felt the shame, when they trespassed the boundary line prescribed by Yahweh. Shame develops internally because it is self-juxtaposed to ideals prescribed by the authority or group. The feeling creates a restraining effect on the individual. A person loses value and worth in a group with honour-shame value systems when they act contrary to the approved code of conduct. There is the equivalent Shona idiom which says, “*ane ganda kumeso, anombonyarawo*” (she is conscious of the dictates of the society and acts responsibly).

2.12 NEGATIVE SHAME

It is the reversal of honour also known as shameless. A “shameless” person is one who does not recognize the rules of human interaction and the social boundaries. Malina (2001:32) sees that a “shameless person is one with a dishonourable reputation beyond all social doubts outside the boundaries of acceptable moral life. Hence, the person must be denied the normal social countess.” The persistent widow in the parable of the Unjust Judge, for example, was shameless because she kept coming to the judge (Lk 18:3a). Her continual appearance before the male figure is a shameless gesture for women. She went outside her designated space.

When one shamelessly does anything, they do to the humiliation of the society they stand for or belong. Nida (1954:81) reinforces this view, saying “when one commits a shameful act, he/she not only shames herself/himself but also the group with which he is associated.” To avoid shame, one should act according to the values of the society regardless of the pain or the consequences, provided they safeguard the values of the community.

2.13 STRENGTH OF HONOUR-SHAME

The measure of the strength of honour-shame is in the restraining effects it has on individuals. An awakening of the PCR restrains certain behaviours and use of certain words, thereby creating a widely accepted order of decorum. Honour is fundamental in keeping the code of conduct of a given community with the PCR becoming key. The discipline makes sure that individuals do not show self-centred traits but function

as a cooperate entity. This discipline supplies valuable insights and raises awareness to previously ignored social features of the biblical world.

2.14 WEAKNESS OF HONOUR-SHAME

The disadvantage is that the approach limits and subjugates people who may be assertive. Opinion is widely disregarded, but PCR carries more weight. People are bound to suffer internally, prejudiced, or go through an emotional trauma for fear of upsetting the norms and value system.

The other question relates to Human Rights enshrined in the UN charter or the SGDs. Should one forgo their privileges for fear of upsetting societal or cultural systems? The argument being that If being shameless enables one to liberate themselves, then it is prudent not to follow the procedure.

2.15 APPLICATION OF HONOUR-SHAME

The questions to ask on the application of Luke 18:1-6 are: How does this text show the social setting of the justice system of her time? How do the context and the legal system of Galilean Israelites influence reading the practice and the meanings communicated? What are the values and structures of the first-century eastern Mediterranean and the Palestinian Israelite context?

The text reveals the oppressive, androgenic nature of the social setting. The presence of the widow did not move the judge as did not perceive reputation or identity. “For some time, he refused. But finally, he said to himself, “Even though I don’t fear God or care about men” (Lk 18:4-5),

The passage also reveals the callous nature of the judge. The community expected Judges to uphold the fear of Yahweh and be the heartbeat of the nation on the plight of the marginalised. The widow is not known by her name or family connection, but by her status. Her status makes it clear that her influence in the patriarchal society was insignificant. Legally or socially, that made her vulnerable and susceptible. The community perceived widows and orphans in the Yahwist tradition as vulnerable, weak, and powerless. These vulnerable needed honour and protection from the society, instead of sending the widows away empty-handed (Job 22:9).

Prophets condemned the ill-treatment of widows. Isaiah 1:23 says “Your leaders have rejected me to become friends of crooks; your rulers are looking for gifts and bribes. Widows and orphans never get a fair trial.” Through the death of her husband the widow lost her acquired honour, the society had the obligation to make sure she kept it. She had to keep the honour she had by avoiding shame to society. She also had an opportunity to save face like a well- cultured woman who needed the PCR for protection.

The widows did not receive the protection given in the Torah but oppressed (Jr 7:6; 22:3-5; Zech 7:8-14). The Jews neglected widows’ rights. In the parable of the Persistent Widow, she was left with no choice but to desert the private space designated for a woman and forcefully entered into the male space negating her honour (“and there was a widow in that same town who kept coming to him and pleading for her right saying. Help me against my adversary;” Lk 18:3). The judge had the mandate through the fear of God and the respect of the Torah, the Psalms, and the prophets to listen and offer her justice.

She instead, became a shameless woman. The legislation had forgotten her plight despite having a blueprint in the Torah, wisdom, and the Prophetic writings. She disregarded the PCR, the legislation, and the courts and pestered the judge. She finally got the reprieve she was looking for.

2.16 AFRICAN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH (ABH)

2.16.1 Introduction

When people face challenges or crisis, they appeal to some higher authority or some superior source of strength. Several platforms can be recourses to challenges. They range from political, religious, and social methods. An African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) is another choice people rely on for emancipation through the contextual exegesis of the sacred and authoritative book, the Bible. African liberation theologians believe, as Gerald West (2003: ix) said, “The Bible is a symbol of the presence of God of life with them and the resource in their struggle for survival, liberation and life”.

2.16.2 African Biblical Hermeneutics

ABH is a contemporary form of studying theology. It makes use of the “African social-cultural context” a subject of explicit interpretation. ABH is an African cultural hermeneutics, African cultural Hermeneutics, African biblical transformational hermeneutics, or African biblical studies. The biblical analysis conducts its task from the African worldview, which Adamo (2015:33) calls “a premeditated Afrocentric perspective”. It becomes a self-conscious contextual method where its operations and effectiveness are based on the African worldview and culture. The rallying point is the formation of biblical hermeneutics that are liberational and transformational. Thus, Mosala (1989:89) suggests that the starting point for African biblical hermeneutics is “the black struggle for liberation making African context the explicit subject of interpretation”.

The method embraces some contextual theologies such as Black theology, feminist theology, and womanist theology, all-embracing a liberation motif. As a liberation contextual method, the African worldview, experiences, and lifestyle inform exegesis of the text. Nyjawung, (2013:2) noted with concern that from an African point of view, “traditional” Eurocentric exegetical approaches seemed abstract because they did not address the African people and their problems in their very context. In other words, the method looks to breathe and speak into the indigenous context, giving an African face and eyes to the theological reflection thereby answering the needy questions. The ABH addresses the needs of its contemporary audience that are the overlooked, the marginalised and the ordinary person in independent Zimbabwe.

The rise of the indigenous church is a direct dissatisfaction with the interpretation supported by the missionary churches and the need to have the Bible speak to the locals. When the African formed the AICs, the lack of appeal to the African or local needs on western Biblical interpretation was foundational. The avid African scholars who vowed for the ABH preferred what Gerald West called, “bringing lives to the interpretation of text”. While Western interpretive methods focus on the interest of the text. There life’s threatening and struggles in Africa. These struggles could be race, gender, age, or economic status. They could also be traditional or cultural. Thus, Adamo (2015: 46) says when Africans interpreters come to the Bible, they want to know out what the text has to offer concerning those things. The African

indigenous churches contextualised the Biblical names such as Jerusalem, Zion, and Jordan river into names of local places and institutions. It is within these indigenous churches, white garments (*mapostori*) that you find the high prevalence of the ABH approach. As a result, the bible has an undisputed position and its power inherent in most of the indigenous churches.

Some of the African male scholars who engaged this exegetical method for a sustainable and long-lasting solution to the liberation of the marginalised include Gerald West, Itumeleng Mosala, Grant LeMarquard, Ezra Chitando and Masiwa Ragies Gunda. They developed a keen interest in the socio-historical interpretation of the Bible. The thrust was the appreciation and exegesis of the African people's daily experience of the ordinary person.

African women hermeneutics include Nyambura Njoroge, Dora Mbuwayesango, Musa Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro. They are uneasy with the traditional and patriarchal tendency of biblical interpretations. They critique Christianity as a biased manifestation of a culture "where the male has been thought to represent the whole of humanity" (Loades 1990:1). The African women hermeneutic voice strives to liberate and discard all forms of oppression, while advocating for the full humanity of every person (Peacore 2008:317).

Dube (2001:1-2) advocates for "biblical and cultural hermeneutics", a combination of the Biblical tradition and cultural understanding or interpretation of life. It underpins the cultural embeddedness of the scripture and religious texts. The African cultural authority is alive in the text and not only the authority of the message of God". The *Sitz Im Leben* influences the behaviour of the people; therefore, the Bible needs cultural and contextual exegesis to discover the voice of freedom.

Hermeneutics appears as an important starting point of understanding the meaning of the text. Hermeneutics here according to Chan (2008:379), is "from the Greek expression, "*hermeneutic*" meaning "to express, explain, translate or interpret that has its goal in understanding". The studies of the biblical world and the African culture when compared and interpreted create a just world which empowers its citizens, "the ordinary people". This is so as LeMarquard (2000:74) writes, "the

importance of the text is always related to the social and cultural context of the exegete and his/her community". Nthamburi and Waruta (1997:40) noted that if an "African is enabled to understand scripture in his/her cultural patterns, his/her contextual existence, his/her own life's experiences, the scripture will not only lose its validity but its authoritative relevance".

Colonisation¹¹ brought several trades: European merchants, hunters, missionaries, travellers, colonial administrators, and anthropologists. There were also those who stayed back home in Europe and studied Africa and its people known as arms chair researchers and fly-by-nights. The limited knowledge and opinions of the researchers about the continent reveal biases and prejudices held over its culture. They exulted white supremacy, ideology, and mind-set. The British explorer Henry M. Stanley popularised the phrase "dark continent". They gave misleading terms to African and its religion and culture. They labelled African religion animism, magic, fetishism and ancestral worship totemism, idolatry, polytheism, heathenism and primitive. These terms stimulated racial pride. The interpretations had biased knowledge and belief about Africa and its culture.

LeMarquard (2000:74) supports the view of racial prejudice when he argues that the "missionary reading of the bible was filtered through cultural lenses which were not always congenial to African traditional life". Who informed the missionaries of the African challenges, but the colonial ideologies? The bible became the book that perpetuated the imperialist agenda. Gerald West quotes Emeritus Desmond Tutu: "When the White man came to our country, he had the Bible, and we had the land." The White man said to us, "Let us pray." After prayer, the white man had the land, and we had the Bible" (West 2003: ix). The Bible became the talisman in the colonisation of Africa. However, an understanding that the bible does not belong to missionaries would go a long way in setting the agenda for the emancipation of women in Africa. The call is to engage the bible in the struggle for justice with the

¹¹ The other element that affected biblical interpretations is the colonisation of the African continent. Chapter three covers the definition of the term colonisation. The process of colonisation had the foreign white settlers assume charge over the nation the cultural belief, approach, and ideology. The missionaries' colonial mindset influenced the missionaries understanding of the bible who at times had the colonial agenda and were instruments of colonisation. Colonisation affected bible translations and interpretations done by the missionaries.

Bible being part of the struggle. This approach is necessary when injustice or oppressive tendencies are rampant on the land.

The biblical narratives read with the liberation motif in the Old Testament are in the Exodus narrative, Isaiah 58:6-7, and Jeremiah 7:6. Some of the New Testament texts are but not limited to, Matthew 10:34, the encounter between the Canaanite woman and Jesus (Matt 15. 21-28), the magnificent (Lk 1:51-53) and Jesus preaching the gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). Revelation shows the consolation in the hope of the future. For Boesak (1987:13), these should not lead to complacency in the face of injustice. It is incumbent upon those perturbed with injustice to re-read the bible with liberation lenses and examining the patriarchal translations¹² in the language. Disadvantaged people must realise that they “got the better deal” (West 2003: ix), as Bishop Desmond Tutu alluded to.

African liberation hermeneutics denounce a culture that makes women inferior and problematic., Culturally, it is the woman who has the problem if there is infertility. When there is no male heir to the throne, fingers point to a woman. The custom that forces widows to marry the next of kin compromises choices and opportunities for women. Kanyoro (2001:299) noted with concern that “some African cultures which require women to marry the brother of their dead husband ... with the church and the women endorsing this cultural practice”. In the end, it subordinates women to the oppressive patriarchal tendencies. Someone must break the vicious cycle because it gives men a sense of ownership treating women as commodities that they pass on from one brother to another (Mt 22:23-33). Further, such a culture violates the freedom of choice for widows who in their vulnerable state, the community forces her accept the brother of the deceased.

Most insurgencies call for holistic energy and united voice when faced with such a dilemma. Unfortunately, there are fragmented voices from women to stand up against the oppressive elements of culture. The widow’s challenge worsens when policy makers do not stand for them at the grassroots and decision-making bodies or

¹²Mbuwayesango (2006) writes of the Shona god who is not gender sensitive. However, the kind of Christianity brought by the missionaries was gender sensitive. The god of the missionaries robbed the Shona people their cultural heritage through colonization. God was ascribed gender, and Mbuwayesango calls for the unravelling of the colonial mindset and reignites the Africa mentality.

fora. Further, the theology of liberation needs to move from academia to a theology of activism. This is possible when women are united to confront and address the causes of women oppression. That way, women become empowered to remove the log in their eyes so they can see the log in other people's eyes (Kanyoro 2001:106).

There should be a deliberate approach of reading the Bible to devise methods that empower women and rescue them from the cultural shackles. Interrogations and challenges must mount on cultural tendencies that justify oppressive actions. John Mbiti (1986) argues against a Westernised exegetical approach as an "uncontextual" and out of touch to the realities of African concerns. He said "The Bible in many instances, is still European and closed to the realities of Africa. African interpretations methodologies must break the colonial umbilical cord. For, most of the interpretations and reading exclude Africa and its realities" (Mbiti 1986:17, 18)

Regarding the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge, this raises the following questions: Does the Persistent Widow in Luke encourage women to accept second class citizenship in society? Does the text affirm the oppression of women in the Zimbabwean context? Is the reading off, with the preferential possibility of widow's empowerment? Is the reading of the Persistent Widow revolutionary to the oppressive cultures and norms? Can we discern God's mission from the actions of the Persistent Widow? These questions are existential if analysed together with the African Biblical hermeneutics (ABH) and post-colonial liberating approach of interrogation to push or encourage women to succumb to the oppressive cultural norms of the day? If they do, to what extent? If not, what voice can we discern from the actions of the persistent widow?

Women are mostly invisible, misrepresented or portrayed negatively. The hermeneutics must engage in corrective readings or rereading of the texts ignored for a long time. Mosala upholds that every text is a product of class struggles, rooted in a certain ideology of the day. Hermeneutics should unravel and expose "the ideology which gave rise to the text" (Mosala 1989), to which he sees class struggles as the context of much of the biblical writings. An appropriating the text in the radiance of the context brings liberation. In Africa, the Bible speaks and is authoritative as open text or closed text. The Bible can, therefore, be a text of

liberation. For Salas (2014:164), “the Bible continues to be read listened to, and preached as authoritative text in the community of faith”. Reading the Bible from the women’s perspective helps “to distinguish in them the liberative elements from the divine and the oppressive elements from the human” (Dora: 2001:77). The reading should emphasise how to meet Jesus in his teaching to usher in a new dispensation, “bringing liberation to the women from patriarchal cultures and laws” (Dube 2001:4).

Reuther (1983) proposes what she calls “ecclesia” of women as an alternative space to interpretations. Space assesses texts and make what women’s experience “the centre of biblical interpretation and theological reflection” (Salas 2014:169). The language and cultural values can be vehicles to undermine a certain group simultaneously, giving women techniques of survival and resistance. So, Salas (2014:169) calls for an interrogation of every prophetic text to find liberating elements in prophetic tradition.

Contemporary feminism challenges and criticises the intention of “hermeneutics of respect” which advocates to respect and obey the Bible without critical question. It is from this viewpoint that the feminist contestation becomes meaningful. The call is to liberate the Bible from the patriarchal hegemony and women “minorization”. Biblical narratives do not have women playing a key role in them. Whenever they do so, they serve the interest of men. But the Biblical interpretations must explore some voices and the actions of women and ideologies that trivialise women. Feminist interpretations retrieve and unearths the widows’ voices and courage of women. The widows can write their history from the experiential perspective and their circumstances become the best breeding ground for theological engagement. Through this, we achieve liberation and empowerment of women. Even the same scriptures used as tools of manipulation, subjugation and oppressing of women’s justice lenses, interpreters discover justice for women.

2.16.3 Strengths of the African Biblical Hermeneutical approach

As a hermeneutical approach, ABH starts with human experience and identity. The human experience interrogates the nature and the image of God (*Imago Dei*), portrayed as having human concerns at heart. Every Biblical text is foreign to contemporary human experience and so any interpretation must consider the

colonised African experiences. The human experience becomes the bedrock of discerning proper hermeneutical approach. The assumption is that we should not remotely connect the bible to human experience.

ABH addresses the meaning of human identity and wholeness at the very core of research, drawing from an assortment of interdisciplinary acumens from anthropology, theology, sociology, and philosophy. This makes an inclusive approach in hermeneutics. Human experience, the injustice suffered becomes the reason for subverting the cultural norms.

The other strength of the ABH according to Adamo is to break, “the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholars have enjoyed”. Adamo noted that all different theological students who studied the Bible did so from the Eurocentric worldview of the texts. He also noted that Most of the Biblical commentaries, Bible Atlases, history of the Israelites and major Bible translations happened from a western perspective. The Eurocentric view dominated the scene. ABH thus, advocates for a break from the Eurocentric view to the African worldview.

2.16.4 The weakness of the African Biblical Hermeneutical approach

The weaknesses of ABH are varied. The greatest trap lies in eisegesis. The word eisegesis means “to lead into,” which means the interpreter injects his ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants. The theory expresses biases and opinions of the interpreter as it involves the interpreter’s imagination, exploration, and application. The hermeneutical approach does not consider the original and intended meaning of the passage because the method seeks the meaning of the text moving from experience to the text. That resultantly leads the would-be interpreter to align the text with his preconceived notions. This does not necessarily stand for the purpose of the writer of the text.

2.16.5 Application of the African Biblical Hermeneutical approach

The ABH method allows women/widows to tell and author their stories from their perspective of life and experience. However, due to injustice, very few succeed when they try to write or take their cases to the courts. If her claims fail in most cases, she

is unable to take her claims back to society for remedies. Hence, Adamo (2015:48) states that the purpose of ABH is liberational and transformational. Interpretation of the text from ABH perspective is transformative, seeking the wellbeing of individuals confronting the gender injustice affecting the society. The Persistent Widow transformed the belief of women when she took her story persistently to the courts until the judge granted her justice. The world and the nation seek women who are fearless and are daring to challenge injustice. The widow becomes an agent of transformation to the Zimbabwean widow's plights.

Proponents of ABH argue that there is a lot of gender discrepancies in the bible. These discrepancies either alienated women or denied them space in the justice system. ABH removes the colonisation garb that subservient other human beings. The focus of ABH is to have equal rights and be the voice of the voiceless, interpreting the text from everyday experience. The Persistent Widow had a voice which the Judge heard; she did not struggle till one feared the "black eye." Her continuous nagging gave her the voice even though her community regarded her as powerless.

ABH critics have re-valued the political, social, geographical, and historical contexts wherein such literature exists. The parable of the persistent widow reflects "a female victim of injustice; the ever-vulnerable widow at the hands of an exploitative male oppressor; and in the face of the unresponsive male judge, rises above her victim position to secure victory through persistent speech and action (Spencer 2012:264). The social setting had put the woman at the mercy of the male judge. However, in that setting, there is an identification of the weapon for salvation to the ABH feminists as persistence.

The key question for ABH is whether ordinary people can find anything of value or revelatory once we confront and question the texts with patriarchal tendencies. Questioning, daring, and challenging the status quo subverts the world's oppressive systems. From the text, one discovers the biases of typical male judges when powerful and authoritative; They choose a reaction that helps and saves them. The widow's confrontation is the only way out for the estranged widows. The persistent widow becomes a model when she confronts a male judge who is reluctant to offer

her justice because she is vulnerable and powerless. Some judges were known to respond to bribes. The intention here is to demystify the “practised norms” that prejudice people in real life in favour of the other sex.

Reuther argues that “the critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women” and fight until it is justice achieved. Spencer adds on the persistent widow that the “widow of Luke 18:1-8 is reminiscent of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B Anthony, and other women and men who fought so tirelessly for women’s suffering for women’s suffragette movement ... and they never stopped fighting for what was right” (Spencer 2012:265).

Schottroff (1995:116) adds encouraging remarks that “what we see in the parable is not the victim to be pitied but a woman who fights tenaciously and whom the sexist judge denounces as the potentially violent”. This is at the Judge’s response “so that she won’t wear me out with her coming”. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive ... the uniqueness of feminist’s theology is not the critical principle, full humanity, but the fact that the women claim this principle for themselves” (Reuther 1983:19). Schottroff (1995:16) clarifies the point that, “It is it not worth considering whether the stubborn widow does not hold a better model of innocent non-violent Jesus”. The judge finally vindicated her to avoid more troubles any more by her obstinacy.

The clear intention of the ABH approach seeks to break the spell of powerlessness and oppression and act responsibly towards others by beginning to assume, where workable, full responsibility and power. That means defying the gender roles that collaborate to support the violent structure of the world” (Schottroff 1995:117). As Desmond Tutu (1983:106) puts it as he reflected on the apartheid regime impact on South African theologians, the exploration of ABH is best in, “the heat of the battle.”

2.17 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

2.17.1 Introduction

When Individuals seek motivation, encouragement, and empowerment, they can consult past stories, circumstances, or situations from which to draw strength, lesson, or inspiration. The past stories, fables or parables can model the much-

needed courage, intended approach, role modelling or execution in the prevailing situation. Of the social scientific research methods discovered, comparative studies help in that. The question answered by this section is, what is a comparative study, research, or analysis? What is the purpose of such studies and the intended outcome?

According to Mills *et al.* (2006: 621), comparative research or analysis is a broad term that includes both quantitative and qualitative comparison of social entities. The entities include areas like geography, politics, health systems or across social groups such as ethnic studies. The intention is to assess related features of the story and find significant similarities, differences or unique aspects and the variations become the areas of study. In other words, the process selects and compares data with the view of pointing out explicit parallels and dissimilarities. The interest is to question why the observed similarities and differences between cases exist. The approach brings to boil why two people, events and relationships are similar or different. In the process, there is a combination creating an analogy.

ABH researchers have found this method ideal in looking to draw similarities of Ancient Near East culture comparing with contemporary cultures. Ukpong, a Nigerian researcher, indicated that the goal of comparative interpretation is “the actualisation of the theological meaning of the text in today’s context to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation” (Ukpong 2000:24).”

2.17.2 Advantages of comparative analysis

No matter how new a problem may appear, the current generation is not the first to tackle a similar challenge. Re-reading life stories from the past especially the dejected and overlooked, helps in finding the cure to the ills that have bedevilled the current society. It is from this vantage point that this segment addresses the challenges. Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), a French diplomat, writer, historian, and a political scientist supports this view. Through his work, he championed democracy in America through analysing the politics and social systems in America. His work focused on the 19th century phenomenon and claimed that “Without comparisons to make, the mind doesn’t know how to proceed.”

According to Davies and Potter (2017:2), comparative analysis enhances the understanding of one's own society by placing its familiar structures and routines against those of the other systems or understanding. By assessing one situation or worldview against the another, people gain a better perspective on the prevailing situation as well as the options and constraints people are likely to face. Therefore, in-depth learning comes through comparisons. Comparative analysis allows the testing of theories across diverse socio-cultural settings and the evaluation of the scope and significance of certain phenomena, thereby contributing to the development of universally applicable theory.

Further, Davies and Potter (2017) added that "comparison analysis heightens the awareness of other systems, cultures, and patterns of thinking and acting, thereby casting fresh light on social communication arrangements, and enabling people to contrast them critically with those prevalent in other cultures". The reason people act in a certain way becomes clearer as comparative research is employed.

2.17.3 Strength of comparative analysis

This study seeks to contextualise two stories of different times, space, and location. The comparative approach will be pivotal in assessing how the two cases can be similar, and how the one relates to the other. Are there similarities between the two stories? Does the method help predict the outcome of cases not yet seen? Is the oppressive trend going to persist? What will become of the society affected by the trend?

The comparative analysis draws a boundary in the cases understudy. What are key elements to compare in the stories? What elements of the stories or situation are comparable? As a result, there are areas or developments of the case understudy that are not necessary. For this research, the cultural set-ups of the era in question shall be interrogated. Both periods reveal similar patriarchal tendencies and their appreciation of the Christian or Jewish value systems.

Finally, a comparative perspective can extend to any national, socio-economic, and political challenges about what is possible, at the same time supplying the understanding that must precede prescription.

2.17.4 Weaknesses of comparative analysis

While the method is plausible, there are demerits or problems to this approach. Mills *et al.* (2006:621) found at least four problems associated with the application of the comparative analysis. These are 1) case choice, unit, level and scale or analysis, 2) construct equivalence, 3) variables or case orientation and finally, 4) issues of causality.

In relation to the case chosen, the research finds it a challenge to select cases which are at times premeditated, with a premeditated outcome. Such on the choice, the chosen cases must score high on similarities otherwise the outcome will be fallacious. In terms of unit, level and scale, the research can run into problems of, as Mills *et al.* says, choosing large units such as a country. The opposite is true if the research chooses exceedingly small units with more variations. Other problems come when the selected case understudy is, “not always self-evident”. In other words, the need is to clearly label the components to consider.

Concerning constructing equivalence, the method looks to set up areas of the case that are similar under similar measuring yard sticks. As such, one cannot compare national issues with the tribal or ethnic issues. The comparison must be on elements with equivalence in the items under consideration.

When it comes to variables, the method posed challenges as the researcher must use and understand cases with the differences. The research tends to persuade the researcher “to shift the case and not the variable-orientated”. In some cases, they regard the case-orientated approach more correctly. However, that should not dismiss the other dimensions of the research.

Comparative analysis looks to show causality. It looks for the connectedness of agents that causes given actions to happen. To minimise the problems, scholars argue for the need to show social regularities. The question will be, what are the

societal constructs that causes the given action or outcome? The intention is to show the purpose and reasons behind a given action. The similarities of actions are normally socially constructed, and their difference bear the same. There is need to evaluate the resultant action from an intended action or an accident. This is the crux of the comparative research method.

The method has higher demands for contextual fieldwork and language skills. In the research, one is bound to meet too many independent variables in a few regions of the same nation and human epochs of study. One can end up with limited generalizations outside the scope of research.

2.17.5 Application of comparative analysis

The Persistent Widow sailed in a boat full of challenges that have bedevilled the contemporary society. The challenges include violations, property dispossession, loss of dignity and abuse. The Persistent Widow persistently crossed over the protocol line to approach the judge. She persistently went alone without any male support or accompaniment. This creative approach gives resources for use to the equivalent dejected widows in Zimbabwe. The persistent widow subverted the cultural norms, the expected social status of widows in the ANE world and the Greco-Roman world ethos. Having a widow who crosses the line and challenges the ills of society to reach justice means that there are women who can stand up against the patriarchal tendencies of the society. Women and widows in Zimbabwe can give themselves a voice but have allowed greed and insensitivity to take over what rightly belongs to them.

The observation is that the poor and the weak of society are submitting to the powerful who have determined to amass anything at all cost. However, the widows in Independent Zimbabwe can find inspiration by appreciation that they are “the elect of God”. Their plight will not remain forever unresolved; there is always some recourse for them. This understanding has the potential to bring new-self-worth in a society infested with injustice. Even though they might be the minority, they can stand encouraged by the Persistent Widow who was but alone in her battle but prevailed. Such stories of the Persistent Widow according to Reid come from the widow’s

traditional stories and had the same function that the widow of Elijah and Elisha narrative:

Peasants tell the story about these events, shaping the narrative to celebrate their own ability to make a marvellous breakthrough in the struggle against oppressive restrictions on human life by juxtaposing an oppressive context and an extraordinary breakthrough of it.

2.18 CONCLUSION

This Chapter discussed approaches that could give a voice to the marginalised in independent Zimbabwe. A good appreciation of biblical texts supplies models, systems and means to liberation. Of note is that the cultural ethical conducts that regulate human behaviour are sometimes hindrances to the development of the people. A good understanding of the text is vital to achieving the intended outcome.

The analysis had several conclusions. Among the conclusions are: 1) women can rise above the traditional setups for their emancipation; and 2) tools for emancipation are available. The popular, venerated, holy and the most used book “The Bible” supplies a recourse for the liberation of women.

Chapter 3

Analysis and exploration of the political-economic and traditional position of women/widows in pre- and post-colonial Zimbabwe

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The adage “*we are the product of our time*” suggests that values and opinions regulate the life people live. The phrase proposes screwing a cap on possibilities. An interrogation of Zimbabwe’s economic-political and traditional past and its impact can be the commencement of unscrewing the cap. Can widows reminisce the past and challenge their misfortune? Can women and widows unscrew the cap on their experience? An evaluation and an analysis of women’s status in the pre- and post-colonial history of Zimbabwe helps find whether this is the case.

3.2 STATUS AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN PRE-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE

The pre-colonial period refers to the period prior to 1890. This is the period before the foreign powers and policies invaded Zimbabwe; the time before the British settlers and missionaries settled and exercised their colonial rule over the country. The African communities had their way of life organised and privileged according to their tradition and custom.

Men have traditionally been the head in African families. They are the decision-maker, owner of the wife, land, cattle, and family property save for a few woman’s household effects. Children naturally belonged to the husband. Whenever the wife would complain to the husband to look after the family, she would say, “take your children” or “look after your children” (*chengeta vana vako*). As such, the children are as “his blood” and his totem becomes the children’s totem. Further, women were at times non-existent. According to Hartman (1899:131) one Shona priest Chipanga told a Jesuit priest in 1891 that “Women are not counted”. He then took a handful of dust from the ground and said, “that is the woman”. Hartman concluded that among the Shona, “women are regarded as almost non-existent.”

While this statement could be exaggerative, the statement reveals the general treatment women experienced in the hands of fellow Africans in the traditional milieu. When married, the woman keeps her family totem.

The family praise name (*Chidawo*) is “his” and the woman stays as a stranger in the family (*mutorwa or mwana wavaridzi*). In her subordinate position and in respect of men, culture expect women “to bow her head and bend their knees or kneel when speaking to adult men, an exercise which is still very prevalent in today’s Zimbabwe” (Chigonda-Banda 2014:4).

Cultural and traditional practices regulated property rights, access to the means of production and their use. Cheater (1986) states that these cultural practices excluded women from property rights in pre-colonial Zimbabwe. Beach (1980) argued that all a woman could own was livestock and the proceeds from her skilled labour in non-agricultural pursuits. She would alternatively get her personal property through her labour and the share of the bride price paid for her married daughters.

She supplied much of the needed labour in agriculture. The labour she provided included ploughing, planting, weeding, and harvesting and everything to do with childbearing, rearing, looking after the elderly, fetching water from the river, and collecting firewood. That domesticated and made her a *de facto* household head without decision powers. Though she supplied all the labour, that did not confer status on her. As such, the “position of women meant the possession of unpaid labour, who apart from producing free labour was also a source of pleasure and producer of more workers. As such, her fertility was a prerequisite” (Cheater 1986:716).

Although she handled all the domestic life and supplied much of the labour, the man owned the land, controlled the women’s womb, labour, and made agricultural decisions. The woman owned domestic utensils, personal gifts, or direct gifts. Land ownership, inheritance and disposition was through her father, husband, brother, or sons.

The reason for the non-ownership of the means of production links directly to the payment of the bride price (*roora* or *lobola*).¹³ For Cheater (1986), *lobola* compensates the woman's clan for the loss of productive labour. *Lobola* served as the reason to exclude the woman from direct control of the means of production because she was "bought into" the family through marriage. *Lobola* further deprived the woman rights to buy property in her name, thereby preventing her from reaching economic independence. That gave the man authority over the woman and "would bring her to his home and demand her domestic, reproductive and agricultural field services", thus conferring exclusive rights to men over the wife. The husband could dissolve the marriage even without giving any reasons to the wife simply because he paid *roora*.

Women did not wield authority at the beginning of the marriage. The woman gets authority and status later in life when she gives birth to children and/or had grandchildren. She then earned the titles: mother, sister, aunt (*tete*), grandmother, cousin, or great-grandmother. She functioned fully as:

mothers especially over their daughter, as (*tete*) aunt over the education of their brother's children, as ancestors over the productive ability of their female descendants as producers or service workers that have special skills (in pottery or healing) over the proceeds of their work, as mothers of married daughters for whom the man paid *roora* over the property (Cheater 1986:67).

Besides the above-mentioned roles, women had some spiritual roles, community aid. Women functioned as mid-wives, synonymously known in the modern health practitioners as Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs). As a mid-wife (*nyamukuta*), she helped pregnant women in childbirth, to ensure a safe delivery, to save both the mother and the baby¹⁴. Women were also spirit mediums (*svikiro*), traditional healers or elders. They conversed with the spiritual world over the outcome of the liberation

¹³ The contemporary trends show that the more educated the woman is, the more the bride price expected. She is commodified. The Shona equivalent to *lobola* is *pfuma*, *Pfuma* is wealth gotten, in this case, through marriage. When the woman is married, her family gets richer (*upfumi*). The money paid is the source of wealth. Once the man pays the money, society expected women to obey and perform all traditional and expected roles of married women and the good wife. For Banda (2014), the "I bought you" mentality is the resultant.

¹⁴ Nobody would willy nilly choose to be a mid-wife. Traditionally, the role came through the spiritual world. The mid-wife had the responsibility of making sure the baby and the mother were well. In case of complications, she knew traditional herbs to enhance safe delivery or alleviate challenges if by any chance, the women had committed adultery resulting in complications.

struggle or information on the enemy. They supplied motivation and gave hope to men and soldiers in the armed struggle. One such woman was Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana who was the national spirit medium (*mhondoro yenyika*). She was pivotal as she motivated people into a violent rebellion anti-colonialism war known as the First *Chimurenga* (1896-97). According to Kaoma (2017:58), “spirit mediums employed their traditional sanctioned authority to successfully recruit masses into the movement that sought to oppose the colonial order to regain ancestral lands”.

Nehanda died in the hands of British colonisers; they hanged her due to the resistance she mounted. The unfortunate incident, however, is that the Shona history suggests Nehanda was the only Shona woman in pre-colonial history.

The nation always undermines the heroic exploits of women. Currently in Zimbabwe, there is no street named after any female war veteran or hero except *Ambuya Nehanda*. There is only one maternity hospital named after her, suggesting she is the mother of women. She is the recognised *ambuya* or grandmother. There is no building, institute, or street name after any woman ex-combatant. Is *Ambuya Nehanda* the only outstanding woman in the liberation of Zimbabwe? Statistics show women joined the liberation struggle in their thousands. However, available information about their contribution stays blurred in the patriarchal blanket and ideology. This prejudice is a result of the patriarchal society that underplays women’s importance and contributions. Women are more a form of labour reservoirs who exercise their authority in their private space.

3.3 WOMEN IN THE COLONIAL ERA

The questions to ask here include: Did colonisation affect the status of women? If it did, how were they affected? Was the traditional African patriarchal belief of women altered by colonisation?

Colonisation in the first place received help from the traditional set of African communities. Women remained managers of domestic affairs. Change of operation would have affected the much-needed labour force in the upcoming industrialisation. According to Schmidt (1992:145), quoted by (Mapuranga 2018:141), colonisation-maintained women domination by men: “The Victorian ideal of a virtuous wife,

selfless mother, and tidy, industrious housekeeper was the goal for which all African women were to be taught to strive”.

Selerud (2001:13) calls the process “*Housewifization*” where her place of influence remained in the domestic sphere. According to Morgan (2007:1), the ideology separates spheres where men restrict women to an idealized private or domestic sphere, while men are free to move between private, public, and economic spheres. This has a direct implication on gender relations. The rigid separation of these spheres was more pronounced in the colonial era than in pre-colonial era. For example, the pre-colonial era had families living together and the economic, social, political, and religious spheres were all intricately connected and interlinked, and people criss-crossed these spheres. However, the colonial system with its introduction of a cash economy, commercial farming areas and industrial hubs in urban centres made the male and female spheres to be rigidly separate. Men could now go and work in towns and farms to earn cash to pay their taxes while their rural homes became the space for women. Women remained subordinated to men, played the second fiddle, while men stayed the head with the freedom to move as they wish. It was after independence that women came out of the cocoon and a different voice appeared.

Women’s sphere of influence thus, remained in the home, the field, harvest, or pottery- making and craft making. Magirosa (2015) argued that the colonial expert perpetuated and trained the woman in-home skills such as craft wares, entrenching her or locking her there. Even though she played these crucial roles, they were private roles, away from the public domain. Everything public belonged to the husband who was working in town. Above that, the man being employed in industry or domestic work became a symbol of status and a means to keep control over the woman.

Phillips (2000) believes that tradition invented contemporary interests to suit the males. He further argues that laws enacted, policies made, and the values produced fit that category. One of the invented laws in colonial Zimbabwe is “The Native Marriage Ordinance” (NMO) of 1901. The ordinance spoke of freedom of women from forced marriage. In terms of its purpose (Phillips 2000:29) states:

The African idea that sexual orientation was an aspect of lineage membership, and that individual members were answerable to the family group for the uses they made of their sexuality, was undermined at the stroke by the ordinance's provision that no woman should be made to marry against her will. They gave priority to women's rights over the rights of her lineage.

Independence of women was not good news to some "heads" of the family. The patriarchal system without delay, appealed to the colonial laws to have women under control. This resulted in the 1916 Native Adultery Punishment Ordinances (NAPO) which criminalised adultery. This act revealed the British colonial head's attitude towards local African marriages. They intended to strengthen African marriages through penalising "elicit sexual act but the specific person of the errant married woman" (Heidensohn 2013:269). Heidensohn (2013:269) further asserts that "a married woman sleeping with other men other than her husband would be committing adultery while the man could commit adultery if only, they sleep with another man's wife".

Men could, however, engage in sexual relations with an unmarried woman without prosecution. The changing social environment with the laws enabled women to evade sanctions used to restrict independence. Some women viewed this as newly found independence. They deserted their marital homes, in the company of other men. According to Cheater (1986), the need for the legislation "was an undoubtedly the case that family heads were experiencing difficulties in controlling women. This prejudice against women to 'honour' her marital status and lineage obligation".

As colonialism roots deepened, it pushed rural black people and restricted them to communal areas known as "reserves". They appointed the remaining fertile land as white-owned commercial lands, forest lands and national parks. The British colonisers had "alienated the indigenous people from much of the fertile farming land" (Hill & Katerere 2002:252).

In 1951, the colonial settler regime enacted The Native Husbandry Act. The Act had four main goals:

1. To regulate conservation measures and ensure good farming practices.
2. to relate the stocking of each area to the carrying ability.

3. to distribute grazing rights to individuals; and
4. to redistribute arable land into compact and economic units, and to register everyone in holding of land.

The law alluded that a farmer was a man. This was unfortunate as women worked, developed, and lived on the land, while the husband worked in town. In that framework, women had no rights to register under their names, any arable or grazing land. The law stipulated that widows or divorced women would get land if only in the custody of dependent male children; even though the share of the land granted was a third of the land unit granted to a man in a similar condition (Gaidzanwa 1994:13).

The year 1979 saw the promulgation of the *Deceased Person Family Maintenance Act* (6:03). The act supplied a recourse for the surviving woman to inherit the estate when the spouse passed on or when divorced “who at the time of the deceased’s death, was entitled to the payment of maintenance by the deceased in terms of an order or court.”

The Lancaster House constitution of 1979 (subsection 3, (a) had this to say:

contained in any law shall be held to be nothing in contravention of subsection (1) (a) to the extent that the law in question relates to any of the following matters-(a) adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other matters of personal law; (b) the application of customary law in any case involving Africans, or an African and one or more persons who are not Africans, where such a person have consented to the African customary law in that case.

Up to end of the colonial rule, customary laws applied to all African customary, legal, and social disputes. The laws continued to have the androgenic flavour. The sad thing, however, was that they did not invite any woman to be part of the Lancaster house constitutional making process. This made law-making and constitutional process the male domain with the androgenic inclinations. Such approaches are bedrocks to women’s suffering and oppression as their voice was absent.

3.3.1 Political-economic era and the changes

The next discourse is to consider the effect that political-economic changes in the colonial era had on the status of women. In the 1920s and 1930s, missionaries and

the colonial government targeted the promotion of female emancipation. Laws put in place challenged child marriages, marriage without the women's consent and setting of the bride price (*lobola*). According to Schmidt (1990), these moves promoted the economic and political interest of the Europeans as it provided larger supplies of the labour force.

Women's space was rural while men were the labour force in the emerging industrial urban life and commercial farming areas. The mobility of women from the rural into the urban later surfaced. According to Barnes (1992: 595), a report released by the government and missionaries said that "there was a steady increase in the flow of women, married and single from the kraals to the towns and into the compounds." They moved in towns to sell their goods, be with their husbands and seek employment and some into prostitution.

The years between 1950 and the 1960s, saw several women objected to the colonial government's name-calling, other than using their names. The colonial government called woman, "girls"¹⁵ or "nanny". They argued that "name-calling" robbed them their identity, insulted and dehumanised them. The man objected the name "boy" regardless of the age citing similar impact. According to West (2002:28), the perpetuated notion had been, "an African woman never grows up. She stays a girl until she dies". The colonisers used this approach to reveal the gap that existed between Black people and whites and African men and African women. Their refusal showed the search for independence against the prejudices, with racial connotation to the Black people.

Some of the women got employment in town, they became more assertive in their dealing with the day-to-day life. They became so daring; challenging the status quo with the leeway supported the legal framework of the colonial government.

¹⁵ The terms alluded above as "boy" or "girls" to the Africans was a way of denigrating the locals that they were immature, could not make independent sound decisions, young and incapable of thinking and executing logically. The name-calling disregarded their age or status in the African traditional setting.

3.3.2 The impact on women

Since 1980, Zimbabwe's socio-political economy lifestyle on women has been a cycle of exploitation, oppression, and injustice. To achieve women empowerment and avert injustice, the government enacted several laws as reforming measures to empower and safeguard their interests. The selective application of these laws, however, remain a cause of concern. The steps employed reveal whether the government seriously intended to emancipate women. While every period had its own challenges, the key question is, how were the women affected thereon?

3.3.3 Effect of colonial innovations

According to Gaidzanwa (1994:13), "colonialism intensified the economic dependence and domesticity of women" through the education system. The colonisation-missionary crafted education for the locals for that agenda. The agenda looked not to alter customs and traditions but to continue to make African women subordinates.

The school curriculum, teaching practices and methods show the desire to continue subordinating women. The School administrator's goal on the purposes of the schools was:

to produce Christian womanhood, to make girls good wives and mothers and all our efforts are directed to this end.... students were instructed in reading, composition, and Arithmetic, English and music plus sewing, cooking, laundry work, gardening, and games (West 2002:69).

The school curriculum developed thus, enhanced domestication. The works of the Wayfarer Movement which was established in 1926 reinforced that they emphasised "[c]haracter building, self-control and deference to authority", which was the basis of African womanhood (West 2002:71).

The process of domestication moved to the next level in the training of women. West (2002) calls the process of training African woman as the training of "home domesticators". It was for women who had passed standard six in one of the missionary schools to be married to a man of some recognised standing such as a minister or jean supervisor" (West 2002:79). After training:

'Home demonstrator' would be equipped with medical and nursing kits and sent back to her original place of residence. From there, paid by the government and supervised by local missionaries, she would move out into the surrounding communities to supply various services such as treating minor medical problems and attending to maternity cases (mid-wifery). Her greatest role was to set up a model home; one her neighbours would emulate (West 2002:72).

Colonialism pushed families into semi-arid areas, which did not produce sufficient food for the family. The move worsened the distinction in the division of labour. Men became wage labourers to supplement the little that the women salvaged from the reserve lands. As the "waged" earnings system through the colonialism surpassed domestic food production, women's status further deteriorated. Back in the rural areas, the control of women's and children labour by the older members of the community further increased subordination. The women remained burden bearers or "unwaged family worker on small holding or in the community area, receiving little reward for their work" (Parpart 1995:8). All subsistence farming went into the hands of women so that food needed in the house was sufficient.

3.4 WOMEN DURING THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

Does war select who to affect? Absolutely not. The colonial rule affected men, women, and children equally. The indigenous men and women resorted to working together to resist and overthrow their oppressors. By 1972, the freedom fighters trained women to fight for liberation. This marked a huge turnaround for the war of liberation.

According to Mugovera (2015), "[w]omen are the backbone of every struggle or revolution since time immemorial". Fay Chung (2016) says "Zimbabwe's war against colonialism would not have succeeded without the critically significant role played by female combatants". The question is "What role did they play? What kind of status did the women enjoy during the liberation struggle? Were they allowed do everything during the liberation war? Were they fighting against colonialist or patriarchy?"

Women were influential as spirit mediums. Spirit mediums are channels or instruments in the form of a person, through whom according to the Shona/Ndebele culture, the spiritual world communicates or speaks its concerns of the world to the world of the living. Terrence Ranger (1967) and David Beach (1994) believe that

spirit mediums were strategists on the uprisings. Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, the ancient powerful Shona spirit medium (*Mhondoro*¹⁶ *enyika*) leader stirred the hearts of the Shona people into rebellion against the white rule. In Shona, they say “*vaititungamirira muhondo yerusunguko*” (she led us during the liberation struggle). Her motivations ignited the First Chimurenga.¹⁷ Some Zimbabwe novel and poem writers acknowledge her inspiration to the liberation struggle. These include Solomon Mutsvairo’s 1950 publication, *Feso*, Hebert Chitepo’s 1958 poem *soko risina musoro*. Nehanda was, according to Cde Mayor Urimbo (in Lan 1985:4), as a

small woman, very thin and incredibly old, with white hair and skin that was exceedingly black. She dressed herself in a piece of black cloth that wrapped around her body and she wore bangles, some of them gold, on her wrist and other ornaments around her neck. Her skin was dry and cracked with age and dung. She regularly rubbed her skin with dung to protect it from the sun.

Before the colonisers hanged her, history has it that she said, “my bones shall rise again”. This phrase has been the source of inspiration to many rights up to the current generation. While her name stays in the mysterious world, it has remained the source of inspiration to the ability of women. Since independence in 1980, *Nehanda’s* images and portraits are present at government buildings including the presidium offices. In 2020, the government of Zimbabwe decided to honour her significant role in the liberation by erecting a statue in the middle of the capital city of Harare to remind the masses of her importance as a woman.

There were women-initiated protests and struggles against discrimination by the colonial government:

[F]or one in 1961, against a constitution which institutionalized racism, thousands of women proved in Salisbury. They arrested two thousand women who refused to pay their fines, choosing to go to jail. However, their husbands came

¹⁶ These are tribal spirits responsible for the protection and guiding the tribe. When misfortune falls any tribe, it is because the spirits are angry; when there is success or victory, the spirit will be happy with the tribe. They are also part of the rain makers within the tribe. The spirits had access or eyes to perceive the thoughts of the spirit world which makes up the reality that affects the physical world.

¹⁷ This is the Shona Ndebele (1896-1897) uprising against the colonial rule. The natives revolted against imposition by foreigners. Different scholars give several reasons why there was an uprising. There is a Eurocentric view given by the B.S.A.C and the view given by historians such as Julian Cobbing (1974) and David Beach (1994) and Terence Ranger (1967). The latter postulates a series of fragmented uprisings as they were conscious of their needs. The uprising can be a set of struggles over taxes, struggles over the loss of land and of cattle, which were primary commodities to the African lifestyle. The former cites inability of the colonisers to change from their prejudices over the locals as they were aristocratic and affluent.

to the jails and paid their fines, demanding that their wives return home to cook (Thompson 1982:247)¹⁸.

This demonstration was organised by women against the new constitution, which they alleged had failed. The demonstration marked a turn from a victim mentality among women to a victor mentality. They rallied women to this cause of freedom.

Sally Mugabe (in Kachingwe et al. 1994:17) said:

We did not tell our husbands about our plans. Early one morning, we left our homes, and by 7 am we were all assembled in the foyer of the Prime Minister's office in the city centre to protest in a peaceful manner, with placards, against the new constitution. The placards read 'Women do not Accept This Backward Constitution,' 'Give Us Our Land and Country,' and 'One Man [sic] One Vote,'. Soon, our numbers had increased to over 1500 women. The police were in their hundreds with dogs and appealed to us several times to leave the Premier's office. We refused. They called upon me, as leader, to keep order, and warned if I failed, then dogs would be set upon us, I protested, and informed them we had no leader. The crowd responded to this with clapping, songs, and slogans.

The demonstrations did spread across the country, from Harare to Bulawayo and Mutare. The action showed how women can challenge the stereotype set by the patriarchal society. They show that, when determined, women can re-shape the future. Ngwabi Bhebhe noted that the banning on the NDP coincided with the women's protest as their actions were catalysts "which shifted the struggle to a militant style". According to Kombo, (2012:63-64):

[f]ollowing the women's action of December 6, 1961, in 1964 government banned the NDP on December 8, 1961. It took the action of the women for the authorities to realise the strength of the NDP and this led to its banning. The women showed that nationalist politics was part of their struggle and that they had the competence to decide on the direction such politics took.

However, the women's action did not receive the recognition it deserves in the history of Zimbabwe. The males received the accolades, regardless. There are endless questions about this matter. Why do men steal the glory due to women?

¹⁸ The constitution of 1961 had created a parliament of sixty-five seats. Of the sixty-five seats, Africans received fifteen seats. Meanwhile, the constitution reserved the remaining fifty seats to the whites. The protest was also in solidarity with the arrested leaders of the ANC. The initiators and organisers of the demonstration were women and youths. The demonstration went across the country, with the most successful being in Harare (then Salisbury). About two thousand women with children on their back marched to the Prime Minister's office to register their displeasure. The men threatened their women at the prisons when they refused to pay the fines preferring to stay in jail. The man, however, argued that if they refused, they were going to find other women to marry.

Stolen glory does not deny the truth about the power inherent in another being. Were men protecting their historical legacy? Do women need such a recognition to spearhead other resistances? Who should tell their story, but themselves?

Women were key figures in liberation war night vigils. Their presence had a significant impact on the outcome and the flavour of the meetings. Such “public rallies were always successful when women attended in large numbers chanting slogans and nationalist songs, ululating and dancing” (Mugabe 1979:4). The *Herald Magazine* (August 1976) noted how women contributed to the success of the liberation war and night gatherings (vigils) saying that:

[an] important contribution women can make to the national effort is to support the morale of their menfolk.... Colonel Hopkins said morale was one of the principles of war and military textbooks said, “success in war depends more on moral than physical qualities.

This gave the meetings and the war the much-needed emotional rouse, boosting the morale and punch to soldier on in the struggle till the final victory.

Women took part in transporting war material. Thus, Chung (2016) claimed that:

Their traditional roles as carriers of water and firewood prepared them for long journeys, mostly carried out at night, carrying heavy loads.... They carried all sorts of weapons, including hand grenades, landmines, Bazookas and LMG gun rifles.

The young women and men were the messengers and carriers (*Chimbwido and Mujibas*) of information on the whereabouts of Rhodesian soldiers to the guerrillas.

Nicola Popovic (2016), argued that:

[r]ural civilian women often supported the guerrilla movement by supplying food, information, warm water, and shelter. The support in food and goods not only meant that women supplying the guerrillas would put themselves in danger but that they also had to compensate for the economic loss to their own families and households.

Besides being guerrilla fighters, women were medical personnel, teachers, and cooks in camps. Women showed themselves gutsy, resolute, and determined. They became key figures since the colonialists believed soldiers were only men. Women

challenged the traditional gender roles ascribed to them as women and joined war of the liberation of the country. When ZANU realised that, they started training some women to be fighters. The Zimbabwe Women's Bureau publication, *Black women in Zimbabwe* (1980:41) affirmed this in its writings:

Through their participation in the Liberation struggle, however, women have learnt a new strength, and a new conviction of their rights and creative potential. It will be the releasing of this potential, and the linking of women's emancipation to the struggle for the genuine economic independence that will finally free Zimbabwe and with it the women from the history of oppression and exploitation.

The then leader of ZANU (PF), the Former president of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe affirmed:

Not only do women feed the front by carrying war material to it from the rear, but they also fight on the front and become exposed to the enemy's bullets in the same way as men. Our women have scored many victories alongside the men. They have showed beyond all doubt that they are as capable as men and deserve equal treatment, both concerning training and appointments (Thompson 1982:247).

The statement by Robert Mugabe confirms the key role played by women. They carried firearms, fought in the battle and at times, excelled beyond their male counterparts. Seidman (1984:426) claimed that about 7,500 women fought in the liberation struggle, the truth that defied the traditional belief that women are vulnerable and fragile. The women who did not fight at the war front took part as 'cooks, informants, tended the sick and as messengers.¹⁹

The contributions undertaken by both men and women worsens the need to call for gender equality. Robert Mugabe, the late former Zimbabwean president appreciated women's contribution and explained that his organization had "learned through the liberation struggle, that success and power are possible when men and women are united as equals" (Lyons 2002:306).

¹⁹ The name *Mujiba* refer to the male liberation war supporters who served as messengers or informants to the where about of the Rhodesian soldiers. The name *Chimbwido* refers to the female war informants. These women were pivotal to the success of the war against colonisers and had several key roles to the success of the war of liberation. Besides roles given above, these women were security personnel in the (TTL) Tribal Trust Lands, the African resettled lands. They also supplied and transported food supplies for the guerrillas and organized and coordinated the nightly political meetings. They washed the guerrilla's clothes. They constantly informed the guerrilla fighters the whereabouts of the Rhodesian forces.

It is important to mention that the liberation struggle kept the gender sensitivity during its time. According to Mushangwa (2012):

Suffice to say that during the armed struggle preserved and reinforced the pre-existing divisions of labour between men and women. The patriarchal notion of men as protectors and women as the protected was effectively used in shaping gender roles in the unfolding guerrilla war, and these social arrangements were acceptable to both men and women.

Mushangwa quotes the former Zimbabwean vice president Joyce Mujuru when she indicated that men were superior to women and were responsible for their emancipations: “[T]o be fair; however, we owe a lot to our progressive male comrades who have stood by us, fought for our rights, allowed us the degree of freedom to contribute to the best of our abilities for the national course” (Mushangwa 2011).

Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000:13) acknowledged the essential tasks that women carried out during the liberation movement and concluded that it appears that their “militarisation and mobilisation did not [ultimately] bring changes in the gender division of labour, and male-female power relations”. Further, the guerrillas did not have an ideology of social transformation or women empowerment. They did not help to empower the women although the guerrillas expected and received a high level of support from these rural women.

According to Kombo (2012: 66).

When women raised issues of changing gender relations in the home, such as stopping domestic violence, the guerrillas addressed them only sporadically, just to ensure that they could continue to count on the support of the women. No one educated the guerrillas to challenge traditional structures that worked to the disadvantage of women.

Lyons (2004:42) concluded that women fought equally and heroically with men during the war, but gained little recognition compared with men afterwards. The liberation narratives supply men as leaders of the struggle. There is need to challenge the theoretical perspective notion that men were on the frontline.

The role and contribution of women is silent. Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000:10) concluded that:

far from transforming gender roles, the war further entrenched male dominance. During the liberation struggle, women continued to perform tasks long associated with their gender. They cooked, washed clothing, and performed sexual services for the male guerrillas. However, they trumpeted the fulfilment of these tasks as their patriotic duty.

Women were also recipients of abuses during the liberation struggle. Fay Chung, in her book *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga: Memoirs of Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle*, highlighted how the guerrillas abused some women as sex slaves. According to her, they treated women as "warm blankets" to the male commanders. How they treated women suggested that the political economy was highly gendered. Women served at the comfort of male fighters as sex objects. Equality was only verbal and remained a dream pipe, contrary to Robert Mugabe's assertion that there was equality. Edgar Tekere in 2007 castigated Joice Mujuru the former Vice President for returning the money looted from the War Victims Compensation Fund because they were raped several times with fellow comrades. Fay Chung's comments then makes it clear that women have remained victims in the history of the liberation of Zimbabwe.

The Focus on Rhodesia (1978) demonised the presence of women's in war camps seeking to deny their participation and said:

These [women] in Chimoio supplied casual sex for any of the terrorists who fancied them. They learnt to slaughter their own people in the name of freedom. Now, they died in the raid on their training camp by the Rhodesian Security Forces. And today, they replace women by other women who will live the same miserable lives.

The popular women who took part in the liberation struggle include but are not limited to Victoria Chitepo, Naomi Nhwatiwa, Julia Zvobgo, Sally Mugabe, Joyce "Teurairopa"²⁰ Mujuru, Oppah Muchinguri, Sifikile Masocha, Tichaona Freedom Nyambuya, Margaret Dongo and Thenjiwe Lesabi (Chitemba 2012).

²⁰ The name, "Teurairopa" is the nickname, pseudo name or code name ascribed to Joyce Mujuru because of what she did or is known to have done. This name means "spill the blood" or the "spiller of blood." Ascribing such a name is the acknowledgement of her immense contribution, exploits or

Mushangwa contends to say these women's contributions are more hailed at the museum more than in their real existences. She cited the poster at the museum in Zimbabwe which clearly depicted and stated that "[w]omen revolutionary militants fought and died alongside male compatriots in the heroic struggle to free the native country. The war of national liberation proved the greatest equaliser of sexes in Zimbabwe".

Women were part of the liberation struggle but the discussion about their contribution has always been debatable and in some cases, hazy. Mushangwa was heartbroken with the picture of women displayed at the museum who are wielding guns with one hand while holding the baby with the other hand. Despite these images showing women's participation, their contributions stay overshadowed. Who will tell the stories of women to make people realise the potential imbedded in women?

Lyons (2004:41) said that "Zimbabwean women guerrilla fighters were heralded internationally [for rising] above traditionally subordinated gender positions to fight equally with men in the struggle for national independence". The general expectation was that with the fighting spirit women showed during the liberation struggle and the way they fought alongside their male counterparts, one expected equality with the dawn of independence. This thought accounted to the reason they joined the liberation struggle. According to the *Zimbabwe People's voice* (1979:10-12),

In their active participation in the liberation of Zimbabwe, women have always been clear about the aims of the struggle. As they see it, they were fighting for national independence and sexual equality. To them the two things are inseparable, and they insist that simply to fight for improved status within the framework of the racist oppressive systems, as some 'successful' progressive women have tried to argue, is quite meaningless. The achievement of independence to them is the best guaranteeing for the establishment of equal rights for all, irrespective of race, colour, or sex. The priority is and not women's rights.

The phrase "Women breast fed the revolution" concludes the exploration of the impact of women's involvement during the liberation. The phrase suggests that

outstanding exploits which earned her the name. This shows that as a woman she outperformed and outclassed several men in the liberation struggle.

women nurtured the nation and were the life support system during the liberation struggle. It meant women performed their traditional roles and their presence in the liberation struggle signalled that the war would soon end. As mothers in the liberation, they had to suffer for their children affected by the war. However, at the same time, it was her “natural role and natural duty” to remain a mother and excluded from political and leadership functions in the new Zimbabwe. Therefore, she needed no reward (Mushangwa 2012).

3.5 WOMEN DURING THE COLONIAL GOVERNMENT

Whenever a powerful people group invades a weaker people, the imposition of a new way of life is inevitable. The BSAC through its cohorts, publicized several legislations, Acts and policies to smoothen their settlement over the conquered Africans. Most of the enactments were meant to enhance the racial segregation ideology.

The colonial government separated social amenities and institutions on racial grounds such as hospitals and clinics, which they appointed black or white. Joan May (1983:41-42), in her book entitled *Zimbabwean women in customary and colonial laws*, gives a summary of a concise account of the status of women during the colonial era:

British policy at the period of occupation of Rhodesia was to leave as intact as possible the laws of the conquered peoples, particularly in the realm of land, law, and family. The charter granted to the British South African Company in 1898 makes provision in section 14 for the recognition of the African customs and law. In the administration of justice to the said people or inhabitants careful regard shall always be at the customs and laws of the class or tribe or nation to which the parties respectively belong, especially concerning the holding, possession, transfer and disposition of land, goods, testate and intestate succession thereto marriages, divorce, legitimacy and other rights to property and personal rights, but subject to any British laws which may be in force in any of the territories aforesaid and applicable to the people and inhabitants, therefore.

Such statements perpetuated the recognition and application of the traditional African patriarchal customary laws. The western laws enforced only in circumstances that were contrary to customary laws. Under this provision, they disposed property according to traditional African customary laws.

The presence of the Christian missionaries fuelled colonisation. Because of that, Gundani (2002:156) calls the missionaries “the spiritual wings of colonisation”. The missionaries worked with and aided the colonial government in supplying a conducive environment for colonisation and segregation. They did not spare women’s lifestyles in the process. Rev Charles David Helm was instrumental in misrepresenting the treaty that duped Lobengula on the intentions of Rhodes as said in the treaty document. Their role according to Mutetwa (2015:144), was “to give spiritual and moral sanction to the colonisation and massacre of the indigenous people.”

The colonisers benefited immensely from the missionaries as they worked with the spiritually pacified and colonised African people. Religion hastened colonisation, in this case, Christianity. Most missionaries negotiated treaties on behalf of colonisers that would put the Africans under subjugation, as done through Charles Helm. This created fewer resistances from the locals due to the messages preached by missionaries.

In all the work, missionaries did not significantly alter the social setting and cultural practices of the Africans. They instead, strengthened the colonial and patriarchal systems. Mapuranga (2018) argues that the missionaries’ “teaching indoctrinated women for domestic jobs, same time uplifting the role of man as family headers”. The education was not prioritised to females. The only teaching reserved for the girl child as in the traditional set up was how to be a “good wife” (Mapuranga: 2018:145), in preparation of how to live well in marriage. Women found a home in the church while husbands were mostly in town fending for the family.

Zimbabwe’s traditional culture was, and has remained to a larger extent, patriarchal. It cannot escape anyone’s attention that the set legislative and legal systems were also androgenic. The colonial-era reveals how women’s predicaments, prospects and the strides taken to address the plight of women. The fundamental issue is to evaluate the success or failures of the reign of the colonisers to address the sustainable development of women.

3.6 WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT ZIMBABWE

With the attainment of independence in 1980, women pinned great hopes on the new Zimbabwe, that through their crucial contribution in the liberation war, were going to reap the benefits of independence. ZANU (PF) produced an election manifesto in 1980 which promised equality among people saying:

[U]nder a ZANU (PF) government, women will enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of political, economic, cultural, and family life. People will enjoy equal pay for equal work. Men and shall marry of their own free will. The state will protect marriage, the family, the mother, and the child.

There were also a women's league and the National Council of Women formed during the liberation war linked to the structures of the ruling party. The league perpetuated the ideology of the ruling ZANU party. Thomas (2010), narrating the *modus operandi* and the shortcomings of the party ideology said, "the league was run along patronage lines and composed of the female relatives of male leaders in the regime."

The ruling ZANU party gendered its roles after independence. They did not expect women to push for their rights or equality, but to concentrate on generating support and votes. They were to encourage each other to take part at all parties, rallies, and meetings. On special functions, their roles were to entertain and serving dignitaries and other guests. Bryn Thomas (2010) resonates that:

[u]pon returning home ... many female ex-combatants found that a disapproving attitude towards gender equality remained widespread. Several revealed that members of post-war society labelled them not as heroes, but instead as 'loose' women who would not make good wives. Despite all their sacrifices and their willingness to die for the liberation of their country, the rhetoric about immoral nature of female activists was pervasive.

This inescapable mind set meant that women's rise even to the top position remained in their dreams. The subordinate position continued. The society expected a woman groomed according to the traditional society of, "good woman". How about their contribution in the liberation struggle?

When the war was over, the pre-independent male's traditional belief about the woman stayed intact. Battles during the liberation struggle did not only mean

political, social, or economic freedom, but also freedom from oppressive gender inequalities. Political parties had proclaimed that without gender equality, there was no proper independence. However, things did not change as women were to keep the roles as “good women” or “good wives”. The maintenance and protection of her honour brought joy to the community, family, the husband, and she had to seek the respect of all people. It was the patriarchal society that prescribed women’s contributions and conduct as either good or bad. This was a regression in search of equality; gender politics remained. They mounted little challenge on the status of women.

Some women challenged this position while others stood to enforce the status quo. This was because of the debates carried out earlier about gender roles in immediate pre-independence period mind came from “women in the nationalist liberation movement and a small group of university-educated and professional women” (Essof 2013:33).

Most women supported the *status quo*. Other women accused those women for not supporting fellow women to achieve their highest potential. Years later in 2009, the then vice president acknowledged the difficulties associated with working with males and called for women to “start supporting each other”. On the other hand, they subjected to abuse, most parliamentarians with political aspirations. Some resorted for a struggle with the system so they could fulfil their desires. Some, however, gave in and did let go of their political ambitions.

Women who remained resolute mounted resistance to the system through different women’s organisations and groups. Mushangwa records that the formation of the Ministry of women affairs was a result of pressure mounted by women after the meeting in Mozambique. According to Getecha and Chipika (1995:80),

[h]istorically, the first post-independence changes resulted from the pressure mounted by women before independence. There was a meeting in Mozambique, by the Xhai Xhai meeting, where the women met as women within ZANU to map out their strategies to improve the status of women after independence. The women exerted pressure on ZANU to make the women visible within the new Government of Zimbabwe. This is how the Ministry of women’s affairs came to be.

The aim and the mission of the of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's affairs were that:

[i]n the struggle, the women had chance to show their potential. Their support was essential when we were in crisis. If women were comrades and equal in the struggle, then we should be comrades and equal in reaping the fruits of that struggle (Herald 1981).

In 1983, the government of Zimbabwe started an anti-woman "Operation Clean-up" campaign. Thousands of women fell victim when the government which accused them of being prostitutes. They picked the women from the streets, hotels, cinemas, and homes. Some were set free only when they produced a marriage certificate or proof of employment or else, they were forced back to rural "resettlement camps". In Mutare alone, they detained about two-hundred women at a football stadium and their employer released them. Women's pressure groups emerged from 1983 onwards (Seidman 1984:419). Most married women supported the incarcerations. Why would women support the unfortunate, deplorable, and harassment of other women? The government believed that the move would save their marriages. The other assumption was that all unmarried and unemployed women were prostitutes, so "cleaning up" would clean the environment of the predators from roaming the streets. The question that emerges from this is: Why were men not arrested? Were the women lesbians? Absolutely not, but the action was a gendered discrimination against women.

One of the groups formed in 1983 in reaction to the "operation clean-up" was the Women's Action Group (WAG). The organisation felt discriminated and unjustly treated when the government beat women and prevent them from going to work in the operation "clean up". The assumption was that all unmarried or unemployed women were prostitutes; a voice that went unchallenged even though the government claimed to seek the emancipation of women (Seidman 1984:420).

The push was a resurgence of class or gender segregation which the government felt they wanted to make women better mothers and citizens in the existing African cultural framework.

Not all women however, received help from the gains of independence. Some men preferred to keep the status quo where they dominate all spheres of influence. Programs and movements of women empowerment and advocacy were a result. On the one hand, Mapuranga (2018:140) states that some women refused to accept male dominance without putting a fight through political advocacy and legislative changes. On the other hand,

the state patronage allowed little room for the advancement of women's rights and with this gradual recognition, a different kind of women's organisation was born. The new activism brought women from different sections of Zimbabwe which was still a divided society together around gender interests for the first time (Essof 2013:36-37).

These movements challenged the perceived "norm" of being the shadow of man or working behind closed doors away from the public sphere. Women's groups appeared and became active focusing on women's welfare. According to Eerdewijk and Mugadza (2015:11), "after independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had several formally constituted organizations mainly for black women", as prayer clubs or handicraft projects. The groups included among others; the Association of African Women's Clubs (AAWC), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau (ZWB) and Jekesa Pfungwa/Vulingqondo (JPV)". Some of the organisations or groups were for income generating of women's projects while others focused on women's practical needs.

In 1986, other disgruntled women formed, Zimbabwe Widows and Orphans Trust ZWOT in response to the social needs of the grief-stricken widows and orphans. They endeavoured to help financially, legally, medically and assisted with the material concerns of its members. The membership at one time exceeded 25 000 members. The initiatives complimented the desire of the government and the non-governmental organisations as they reflected on the plight of the widows. Other organisations formed included the Musasa Project (1988) and the Women and AIDS Support Network (WASN of 1989).

Several local and regional sympathetic organisations emerged in the 1990s which played a critical role in advocating the realization of "women's rights such as the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN 1990). The

organisation was a splinter group of members who dissatisfied with the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (MCDWA). Regional networks also appeared: Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) and the regional Women in Law and Development Foundation (WILDAF), with the headquarters in Harare. WILDAF was set up in 1990 because of the women's conference on land and development. The organisation appeared as a key continental body endorsing and fortification of women's rights.

For Essof (2013:48), the 1990s was a period of high levels of activism sustained through campaigns. Musasa Project, ZWR CN and ZWLA, together with other regional groups like WILDAF and WLSA, appeared as the visible faces of the period. They lobbied for legal and policy reform. ZWR CN was a proponent of dialogue on women's ambitions and the need for change. The "*Zimbabwe Women's Voices*" publication resulted. The Musasa project targeted women violations at the top of their agenda, by offering shelter and counselling to the victims. Musasa worked alongside organizations such as the Bulawayo Lawyers Association (BLA), the ZWLA, offering legal services to the violated women, undertaking test case litigation, advocating for legal and policy reforms of women's rights. Organizations such as Women and Land Lobby Group (WLLG) and Indigenous Businesswomen's Organisation (IBWO) looked to hold "the state accountable for women's rights in key national policy processes aiming at establishing gender equality and realizing women's rights" (Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza 2015:13).

Other women formed WOZA in 2003; WOZA is a Ndebele word meaning "coming forward". The organisation supported and advocated to "collectively speak out and to stand up to claim women's rights and freedom" (Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza 2015:12). The government of Zimbabwe resisted these women's lobby groups. President Robert Mugabe accused the women of seeking, "culturally unacceptable demands". For the former President, women needed to uphold their African customs. Mugabe's conviction was that, if they wanted marriage, they should not demand rights to own a family. He advocated that the spouse of the deceased husband should have the spouse's family take care of them, in "true African tradition". Robert Mugabe's mind reveal inconsistencies to his earlier assertion that male and female freedom fighter all fought equally for their emancipation. The patriarchal domination continued. They did

not achieve equality though it was the core of the liberation struggle. The movements, advocacy and lobby groups paved way and smoothen the work of the ensuing women's cry for their rights. Some of the women's organisations that survived remodelled their operation methods focusing handcrafting, sewing and welfare less on advocacy which were their foundational values.

3.7 THE BETRAYAL OF WOMEN AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The battle for liberation leaders of the political parties promised liberation and equality. However, with the attainment of independence, they did not envisage the discriminatory outcome. This section discusses the status of women in independent Zimbabwe as discussed in the paper by Cheater (1985), *The role and position of women in the precolonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe*. Cheater noted two areas that succinctly reveal the betrayal on status and emancipation of women after independence. For Cheater, these are access to the means of production and property rights.

3.7.1 Access to the means of production

When it comes to "access to the means of production", the government continued to uphold men's rights against those of women. The implementation of the *Native Land Husbandry Act*²¹ (1951) (NLHA) forced men to decide whether they would return to the reserves to become permanent cultivators or remain in the city as provider of labour. Widows with dependent children were eligible for one third to one full share of a standard area. In independent Zimbabwe, the property remained registered in the name of the husband and it is the prerogative of the man to settle the ownership. Land in Zimbabwe is an important asset since the economy is agrarian at its core, making land the single most important means of production for the majority. Land was politically gendered ever since and the socio-legal framework continued to deprive women, even those in the rural areas who depended on agriculture. One expected that they will be an integral part of the land question in line with their important roles in agricultural production and labour reproduction.

²¹ The regime enacted the NLHA at the end of World War II when the nation faced serious food shortages. The Act deprived individuals right to Land. There was unfair distribution of arable and grazing land.

Women and widows' access to the means of production rest only on use and not ownership or entitlement. As a foreigner (*mutorwa*) in the husband's family, she could not own that land but worked on the land to feed the family. Her rights were only workable if the marriage existed. Land use and redistribution²² was thus, a gendered discourse in both pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe. These two areas are characterised by the denial of women's rights in terms of independent access to land and control of the resource.

3.7.2 Property rights

Many of the property laws were a product of the colonial period. When the country became independent, the expectation was the negation of the discriminatory practices under the colonial rule. However, the government treated customary laws with rigidity compared to the application of common law. The reason being that customary laws did differ from one tribe to another tribe, place to place and from time to time. Mutamba (2018: 24) postulated that "due to the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society; the courts have had to construct their version of customary law in a given tribe, which were particularly harsh to women and children."

Of the many court cases on inheritance, three examples may not need to escape our attention. In the case of *Chihowa v Mangwende* of 1987 (1) ZLR 228 (S), the deceased had died intestate. He left no male descendant, but a widow, two major daughters, a father, and four brothers. Under customary law, a male relative should inherit the estate. However, one of the daughters applied for an order she expected to be successful. The court did not grant the girl-child inheritance citing incapacity as the only barrier to females succeeding to the estates of their male relatives. The Supreme court ruled basing on the LAMA Act 15 of 1982, where women remained perpetual minors.

Another case which cannot escape attention is of *Magaya and Magaya* of 1999 (1) ZLR 100 (SC). The deceased died without leaving a will, he had two wives married per African law and custom. The oldest child from the first marriage was female while

²² Due to poverty and illiteracy in most Zimbabwe's rural communities, rural women find it impossible to deal with the bureaucratic procedures necessary to gain access to land or fight for their land, they have left in abject poverty. The same has left without them without access to credit facilities. Land can be the major asset that they can use as collateral security.

the first born from the second marriage was male and younger than the first female child. The female from the first marriage being the eldest, contested for the wealth because the male, younger one from the second marriage had refused her inheritance. The court ruling meant that Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA) does give women rights they did not have under customary law. The LAMA gave women the rights to be adults and to challenge men on an equal legal footing. The court ruled that women are adult persons in some purposes in Zimbabwean society, regardless of custom, but not in others; especially where there is a threat of male power over access and control of property.

The third case is the *Dokotera vs The Master* (RN 697, 1957) and it reveals the colonial attitude that subordinated women even though the law could have allowed their emancipation. The Native commissioner as the estate administrator awarded land to the deceased's young brother even though he had left a wife. Since he owned another farm, he bequeathed the land to his elder son. The native commissioner awarded the widow a gratuity and few household effects. When she appealed against the distribution of the estate. After the presentation of the appeal, the native commissioner responded:

[L]obola is not an essential requirement to marriage by Christian rites. Lobola was finally paid at the date of death. *Dokotera* is the owner of the farm-if his wife and his offspring were taken away from him on the grounds of non-payment of lobola, the farm would still evolve [sic] to the D's young brother M and his offspring.

The statement reveals how the colonial laws nullified the local customs and created non-existent customs on the immovable property to fit into their system. The amendment of 1997 came prompt as the law in reaction to the *Venariya Magaya vs Nakayi Shonhiwa Magaya* (SC 210/98), they realised that the PIR violated the widows and children.

Section 68 of the Administration of Estates Act of 1997 provided that:

If any African who has contracted a marriage according to African law or custom or who is unmarried, is the offspring of parents married according to African law and custom, dies intestate, his estate shall be administered and distributed according to the customs and usages of the tribe or people to which they belong (Welshman 1996:2).

According to Ncube, these ensured that the general law and the High Court had no jurisprudence over such matters or even to supervise the administration of the deceased estate following the general law.

Another challenge in independent Zimbabwe was the normalisation of the laws which the colonial courts had ruled that customary laws were silent on the ownership of immovable property. The existing [old] customary law before the suggested amendments clearly said that:

there is a single heir at the customary who is, in the case of the deceased man, his eldest male child or failing male children, the eldest daughter, failing daughters, the eldest grandson, or failing grandson the eldest granddaughter or on the failure of grandchildren, the deceased eldest brother. According to this customary law, a widow can never be the heir to her husband's estate (Welshman 1996:5).

The amendments proposed on the property rights, and the determination sought after was that if people were married under the general law, the general law would apply on property rights, if under customary, they applied customary laws. At the end of the day, if "an African to whom customary law applies and did not wish his estate to be distributed following the principle, will have to make a will" (Welshman, 1996:4). Property grabbing existed in high numbers by the deceased husband's relatives. Today, the same exists despite all the laws and amendments. The reason being that they viewed the widow as part of the estate or as a gadget that needed inheritance.

Ncube (1996) argues that the laws had excluded women as wives, mothers, or sisters out of the inheritance matrix. The women were owned by their husbands through the bride price. This became the reason for the proposal to the amendments on the *Administration of Estate Act of 1997* to the existing laws. They wanted to address the inequalities that had prevailed in the exclusion of widows who lost most of the property. The effected changes for Mutamba (2018), removed the firstborn (usually the son) to be the heir of the estate but the widow being the inheritor of the matrimonial home and the rest shared among the children, wife, or wives if there was polygamy.

3.7.3 Were women empowered?

The government started and enacted a lot of women empowerment initiatives post-independence. These initiatives range from the legal, social, religious, and economic fraternity to empower women. They considered the rural and urban folks alike. Some initiatives came through the government, religious organisations, lobby groups and some non-governmental organisations. However, the differences in implementation may depend on the level of education of the recipients, their understanding of the purposes of programs and long-term appreciation.

The first creation in 1981 was the Ministry of Community Affairs and Women's Development (MCAWD) responsible for accelerating the improvement and the emancipation of women in the development of communities. Van Eerdewijk and Mugadza (2015) calls it the "gender consciousness and the exploration of feminist issues".

Another immediate government response was enactment of the Legal Age Majority Age (LAMA) of 1982 which guaranteed women the popular legal majority. She could at the turn of 18 years, stand for herself, have self-consent to marriage and an equal opportunity to work. The successful enactment of the LAMA was due to the influence and contribution of women "who had participated in the liberation struggle which influenced state policy and legislations" (Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza 2015:20). According to Ncube (1987: 193), the LAMA meant that a woman would not need a guardian's consent to marry, making the payment of bride wealth irrelevant to the validity of the marriage as she can give her consent. The change was a result of the continued effort by the women civic society looking to educate women on their rights and responsibilities.

In October 1982, the government introduced the community courts to preside over different African matters. The matters included marriages, divorce, maintenance, and the distribution of estate. On the administration of an estate when a person died intestate, the procedure, according to Kazembe an Marjon (1985:57), "was meant to stop the grabbing of property by avaricious relatives to the detriment of the widow and the children". There are women's efforts that developed into the Deed of registry Amendment of 1983 which provided "for married women to register immovable

property in their own names”. The next in line was the Labour Act of 1984 which addressed discrimination in the workplaces guaranteeing women’s rights (Van Eerdewijk Mugadza 2015:20).

The 1985 *Matrimonial Causes Act* afforded people equal rights to property in case of divorce, and the parental leave regulations guaranteed women the right to ninety days of parental leave without losing their jobs. The *Sex Disqualification Removal Act* (1985) declared that they could allow women with the obligatory qualifications to hold offices and positions as their male counterparts (Jacobs & Howard 1987; Kazembe & Mol 1985). In 1987, the government amended the *Deceased Person’s Family Maintenance Act* to protect spouses, especially widows, from property grabbing relatives before winding up the estate. New women’s organisations understood something clearly at last in the 1990s and these include the Girl Child network (1992), and the Zimbabwe Lawyers Association.

Another notable other development is the SADC protocol of 2008; Article 12 paragraph 1 which calls for a 50% threshold for women in decision making. The development came because of the gender imbalances seen in the rulership system. When it came to political campaigns, according to Geisler (2004:111), “the government issued 25 per cent to women for the local government”. The then-president Robert Mugabe accepted to appoint Joyce Mujuru as the vice president. Currently, there is a “Women Empowerment Bank” whose drive has been to allow women to own the means of production.

The male-dominated Zimbabwean government adopted the 20% quota system during the land reform. There are some parliamentary seats reserved for women, to boost their representation in the national decision-making system. The remaining question comes on the determination and validation of the quota system as a canon/yardstick for fair distribution of the resources. The situation, however, continues to affirm the government’s efforts while most women have not fully grasped the vision of the state in improving their welfare.

Access to education for women has significantly improved in Zimbabwe. As of March 2020, according to Zimbabwe education Minister Amon Murwira, “the total

populations of the students in universities in Zimbabwe, 54 % are females and 74 % at teacher's colleges are females". As such, Tshuma (2020) argues that the "Education Act of 1982 provided for education for all irrespective of race and gender which a firm foundation for women to be able to access quality education from lower levels and to be able to advance to higher education". This supplies a recourse to challenging inheritance disputes. If we continue to educate and empower women, it is easy, they can boost their confidence, be resourceful enough to participate in the economy. These play a crucial role in the willingness and ability to challenge the patriarchal assumptions and the expectation that males only should inherit property.

Up until the time of the writing by Joyce and Marjon, the consensus was that the most affected widows were in rural areas. Many women were not aware of the laws that protect them. There is need for a vigorous campaign to ensure that widows and children are inheritors. Besides, widows needed to choose if the inheritance entailed being re-married by the brother's sibling or to continue in the matrimonial home with her property and children.

3.7.4 Outstanding issues on women empowerment

The governments enslaved women in two ways in the pre-and post-independence periods. These are the traditional-cultural setup and the manoeuvres of the colonial regime. Even though they took strides to address the women's plight; the challenges are still insurmountable.

The payment of *lobola* carries a servitude connotation that "I bought you" so I own you. Since the woman does not bring material things, movable or immovable to the matrimonial house, the husband owns, demands her labour and obedience all the time. Her space to demand the use of her skills becomes limited and is gender sensitised. If *lobola* is to be upheld, there should be progressive dialogue on the purpose and the possible relaxation of some traditional cultural rites that demand *lobola*.

The inheritance debacle comes because the women do not bring anything when married except a few personal artefacts. Customs and traditions of various cultures also take precedence and belief in them and become extraordinarily strong to the

extent that they override legal precedence. The husband continues to speak beyond the grave through his family members. A break from such a notion is key.

According to the UN (2014) report.

[the] country faces challenges of limited coordination of the national gender management system, inadequate implementation of the national gender policy, partial domestication of international and regional instruments, low participation of women in politics and decision-making positions, limited access to productive resources, and gender-based violence.

The several ratifications of colonial laws done by the government have not been so effective. The reason being that most of the programs are urban-based and their influence on the rural folks is minimal. The rural folks pin their hopes on the victim-friendly unit, an arm formed through the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development and the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

Some outstanding matters link to access to the means of production. The widow's access to economic resources, her own income can be a crucial factor in her ability to influence the inheritance processes due to the need for legal representation fees. The legal recourse is a complex and very inaccessible process for illiterate and the poor rural women/widows. The measures favour the violent, socially connected, and political beliefs that women are weak, powerless and the players are mostly males.

Women empowerment is still an essential part of the struggle against injustice and attainment of equality. Parpart (1995) argues that "inheritance cases are also influenced by the character of the individuals involved, especially relations within the family". Strong-willed women with support from their families have been much more able to bend the law to their designs than women with little status and hostile relatives.

However, all the movements within government arms lack capacitation to discharge their duties. Those in the rural areas need empowerment so they can claim their rights. This is because their voice is absent in rural organisational development,

productive infrastructure, and technologies. There is a strong patriarchal system that exists, and government has achieved less on women empowerment.

3.7.5 Has anything changed?

The patriarchal tendency of men as the head stays unabated. Even in death, the male relatives are still in charge. The husband continues to speak from the grave through them. Villages have become the women's domain. Woman in the rural areas is the *de facto* head of the house, or the extension of the African male bodies. The in-laws welcome the stay in the village because the in-laws continue to receive help from the son's support.

Immovable property continues to belong to the husband who was the breadwinner. All the women continue to own in the homestead was "*mombe yehumai*" the cow she receives the day of the marriage of her daughter in appreciation of the role she played. Women became a marginal socio-economic group of the society. This was so despite being the cultivator and tender in agricultural production for both family consumption and sale.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The practice of bride price payment disadvantages women in Zimbabwe because culture interprets it as a commercial transaction in which a man buys a woman thereby making it impossible for women to claim equality. Even though culture and tradition disadvantaged women in pre-colonial societies, the coming of colonialism worsened their situation through the intensification of the separation of spaces into male domains and female domains. This separation coupled with the rise of the cash economy further strengthened men's grip on family headship as the one who earned the cash while women still offer unpaid domestic labour. The liberation war did not challenge the gender imbalances in the society. The fact that women took part in the war does not amount to the empowerment of women because male freedom fighters continued to primarily look at women as objects for sexual gratification for men who were fighting the oppressor hence:

"The situation of women did not dramatically change at independence with the post-colonial government insisting on following African customs and traditions when it comes to deciding the status and position of women. The legal and policy changes did create some room for the empowerment of women but even

these appear to have been done half-heartedly hence here is need to find alternative empowering instruments that women can draw upon.”

For some time, women have always considered religion to be suffocating and a conspirator in their oppression, yet experience suggests the Christian Bible can be a resource to empower and embolden women, widows to demand and assert their rights. The national struggles pre-and post-independence supply a cue that the bible can supply a recourse into liberation. Christianity could supply a bloodless but sound argument that the use of their uncontested book arms and gives courage against injustice. Status does not dictate a character but use of the necessary tools or literature can supply a way for the emancipation of the oppressed majority or minority. A closer examination of the legal trajectory since 1980 reveals that what the nation did so far helps in shaping the future of women in the nation.

Chapter 4

The situation of widows in ancient Israel and first-century Palestine and the current situation of widows in Zimbabwe

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The comparative study of widows' predicaments in Zimbabwe and the Ancient Near East (ANE) world is workable. This chapter examines the ANE writings and biblical texts on the welfare and treatment of widows juxtaposed with the contemporary Independent Zimbabwe. An understanding of the social-economic, socio-religious, and socio-political statuses of the first century Palestine widows compared to Zimbabwe's are essential tools in search of the widow's voice and actions that can emancipate women.

This chapter defines widow/widowhood to understand their plight, situation, and circumstances in the ANE, the biblical worldview and a contemporary Zimbabwean environment. A good appreciation of these epochs shall supply insight into the ways that can liberate the disfranchised widows.

4.2 WIDOW/WIDOWHOOD

Widowhood is a gender-neutral term. In this research however, the word refers to a woman whose husband has died. As defined by Tulloch (1994:1975), a widow is "a once married woman who has lost her husband by death and has not married again". As a result, she is free from the conjugal obligations and is free to re-marry. Since the husband is dead, the traditional wedding vows, "*until death do us part,*" happen. The alterations of her socio-economic, socio-religious, and socio-political life after the expiry of these vows are the primary concern of the research.

Widowhood is a distressing experience because with the death of the husband, a woman loses economic support, social identity, stability and in most cases, suffers social exclusion and labelling. In Africa, marriage is sacrosanct because it offers some cultural and social privileges. Customary law is sacrosanct and according to

the court in a Zimbabwean case of *Magaya v Magaya* (1999) 3 RSC 35, it is only the legislative action that can alter it. Culture and tradition withdraw marriage privileges upon the death of the husband but remain intact upon the death of a wife. The withdrawn privileges include access to economic assets such as bank accounts and any other financial investments, productive assets such as land,²³ loss of protection and status. Thus, widows lose status, privileges, and assets more than the widowed-male²⁴ counterparts. When women die, men can remarry within a short time, however if a woman remarries after her husband dies, the cultural set-up institute an inquisitive inquiry. Society and tradition remain suppressive of widows. The rubric of an oppressive society is clear in the suspicion cast on the woman upon the death of a husband. African world view insinuates that a man cannot die before the woman. When the man dies even with a known ailment, the community accuses her of infecting the husband or greedy for the property bought.

Under Numa, the 2nd King of the Rome, widows could remarry at least ten months after the death of the husband. When she chooses to remarry earlier, she could sacrifice a pregnant cow as way of showing that she married before the expiry of the ten months mourning period the “rationale behind the mourning period was religious: the widow should honour her dead husband and early remarriage would offend the spirits (Manes) of the dead man” (Grubbs 2002:220). Grubbs further adds that “by the late Republic, however, another justification for a ten-month delay had developed: the need to avoid *turbatio sanguinis* (“confusion of blood”), that is, uncertainty about the paternity of any child conceived in a second marriage. Ten months were the normal duration of pregnancy in antiquity (Hanson 1987). If a child was born to a woman within ten months after her husband’s death, society assumed the late husband conceived the child. It appears, a woman had several laws regulating her conduct and how she must behave after the death of the husband.

²³ Land as noted in the previous chapters that the patrilineal line owned it. The woman’s access to use the land is viable only in marriage. As soon as the husband passes on, the patriarchal family managed the land. Inheritance targets those assets for they must remain in the husband’s family.

²⁴ Males are the authors of the laws in the patriarchal society. The implication and persuasions of the laws seem to favor the widowers. As such women get to the receiving end of the quagmire the nations find itself in.

The death of the husband entails a demise of socio-cultural and economic life. The in-laws challenge the widow's continual stay and enjoyment of the matrimonial home and her right to inherit any property. This is a gendered concept because historically at the end of the marriage contract (*ketubah*), women cannot inherit anything, be it chieftainship or any other property; the family disinherits her. She becomes an asset to inherit²⁵ and keep and remains a foreigner (*mutorwa*) in any marriage. The assumption is that when the husband dies and if she remarries, her interests shift to the new family. From this belief, she cannot take anything away to her new home.

The African community treats a woman as a perpetual minor, "*vakadzi ipwere*". As a perpetual minor, she continues to be a minor with no full legal responsibility. Khetan (2015:70) quotes Ashtavarka in his book *There is no honour in killing* who once said, "Women can never be her own mistress". His belief is that every woman is a servant who cannot be her own servant. Khetan (2015:70) then put what he regarded as the norm when he said "[t]he father protects her while she is maiden, the husband while she is youth and the son while she is aged". The perception, therefore, is that women can never be independent while they are alive. A man perceives his honour in relation to his possessions and in many ways, the women and his family are his possessions and objects for protection too. She cannot make informed decisions, hence the quest of the in-laws to supply guardianship or provide a male relative to help. Legal systems mostly supply a little recourse to the inheritance challenges, and some lose children to the husband's lineage.

The death of the husband means "the loss of the male protector, an important factor of her social identity and status" (Carrol 2003:890). Under traditional customary marriage, the courts normally seek the consent of the male relations who are the contenders. In death, she loses her protection and fortress. Because of this social stigma, the word widow gets the undertone of a person living on the fringe of society, helpless and in abject poverty.

²⁵ In the traditional Zimbabwean culture, there is a ceremony of "*kugara nhaka*," "*ukungena*" in Ndebele (transl. "presiding over the estate). On this day, the whole family sits together for the woman to choose whom she wants to take over the husband ship in her life. The one who is picked takes over all responsibilities including the wife. While the woman could choose her elder son (if available), she needed to consider her sustainability and financial strength. If she chooses her son and not the husband's brother, the family releases her; albeit that could be the beginning of her vulnerability and poverty in society.

The traditional gender bias adds to the heavy burden that widows must endure. If the widow chooses to remarry, she has an inferior position in the new marriage. As a result, inheritance from that earlier marriage is a nightmare. These changes significantly affect her economic position, status, self-concept, lifestyles, and her social relationships. These create an increased number of socially and economically destitute elderly widows and contribute to the “feminisation” of poverty.

4.3 WIDOWS IN ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The question answered in this section is: What or where is the ANE? How were the widows viewed in the ANE and affected? According to Foster (2011:11):

The Near East is the region of Southwest Asia, specifically the area encircled by the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Red Sea, and the Persian/Arabian Gulf. In modern times this region includes the countries of Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and western Iran. Some scholars also include Cyprus and Transcaucasia (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) in their definition of the Near East. These countries are "eastern Mediterranean" and “the Caucasus” respectively. Egypt, though certainly a player in terms of Near Eastern ancient history.



Figure 2: Ancient Near East (Source: bible-history.com)

Ancient near east is the cradle of civilisation. ANE was the first to practice intensive agriculture all year-round. The region produced the writing system, invented the potter's wheel, created the first centralized governments, law codes and empires. The region also introduced social stratification, slavery, and organized warfare, and it laid the foundation for the fields of astronomy and mathematics. A survey into available literature, key personalities, and lifestyle of the ANE clarifies the status and concern of women and widows. The ANE culture generates foundational values to the culture prevalent in the biblical times.

Social justice dominated in the ANE literature. The ANE world considered the disadvantaged groups within the communities and these included widows, orphans, and foreigners. Their welfare became the hallmark of leadership within the literatures found. Outlined in the following sub-sections are some of the key personalities in literature judged by their concern for the disadvantaged, the poor, and widows, simultaneously shaping the worldview on widows.

4.3.1 King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BCE)

According to Bromiley (ANET:78), Hammurabi was the first king of the Babylonian dynasty of 1792-1750 BCE. According to history, he was a micro-manager concerned with all aspects of his rule. His famous law code according to tradition came from the god Shamash. He had a set of rules and laws known as the code of Hammurabi²⁶, which somehow reflected the biblical tradition and the surrounding communities. The code was “an eight-foot stele of black diorite” written on stones for immutability. From his laws “Hammurabi boasted that his laws provided justice for the poor” (Encyclopaedia 2017).

His laws supplied a recourse for the surviving spouse, whether male or female. The Hammurabi law code mentions two economic resources which are the dowry and the husband's estate. The dowry is a sum of property or money brought in by a bride to her husband on their marriage. If the woman died, the widower would return the dowry and the in-laws would return the bride price. The husband's estate was not

²⁶ History regards the code of Hammurabi as the best legislation of Mesopotamia. He described himself as, “The King who made the four quarters of the earth obedient” (see <https://www.khanacademy.org/>)

meant for the widow, but the children benefited. The code stipulated that the estate should support the children. The economic welfare of the survivors, widows or children occupied the epicentre of the law code.

In his prologue, Hammurabi affirmed that his calling was to “make justice appear in the land. To destroy the evil and wicked [so that] the strong might not oppress the weak” (Patterson 1973:226). In his closing remarks, he concludes the reason for the declaration of the laws saying: So that the strong might not oppress the weak to give justice to the orphaned female children and to the widow. Through the Hammurabi laws, the widow kept her dowry upon the death of the husband. Any pressure exerted on the woman out of the matrimonial residence attracted a penalty. This law code got the support of the state.

4.3.2 The Code of Ur Namma

Ur Namma was the king of Sumer and Akkad. He reigned between the period 2112-2095 BCE. He was the first to record law code, believed to have come from the gods with him being the administrator of the laws only. The laws spoke primarily to the freeman and wives. According to Podany (2014:50), he gave widows a preference, presenting himself as “a king who had the welfare of his people uppermost in his thoughts”. In his prologue, he is a kind and pious king devoted to order and justice. Podany (2014:51) maintained that he protected the feeble of the society: “I did not deliver the orphan to the rich. I did not deliver the widow to the mighty. I did not deliver the man with one shekel to the man with one mina (60 shekels) I ended enmity, violence, and cries for justice. I established justice on the land”. Ur Namma’s law code is for the economic freedom and to end any form of injustice that could threaten the weak of the society.

4.3.3 Egyptian King Meri-Kare²⁷

Meri-Kare was the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh of the 9th or 10th dynasty. In Egypt, the protection of the widows, orphans and the poor were a mark of the benevolent king. Enns (2008:687) provides a discourse on kingship and moral responsibility of the Egyptian king Meri-Kare purported to have been written by his father Khetty III of the

²⁷ The name appears in different variations as Marykara or Merikare.

20th Century BCE dynasty declaring “do justice, that you may live long upon earth. Calm the weeper, do not oppress the widow” (Philosophical Quotes 2013). History suggests a troubled father gave the statement towards the end of his reign to his son citing reasons for his downfall and to restrain potential rebellion. The son was going to succeed him eventually.

King Meri-Kare emphasised the importance of justice which results in the maintenance of peace in the empire. King Meri-Kare knew that if justice was not present, discontentment will destabilise the empire.

4.3.4 The Ugarit texts

The Ugaritic texts are a body of ancient cuneiform texts discovered in 1928 in Ugarit (Ras Shamra) and Ras Ibn Hani in Syria, and written in Ugaritic, a Northwest Semitic language.

The Ugarit texts mention that “judging the cause of the widow is a true mark of a good ruler” (Bromley 1973:1060). It was the duty of the Ugarit king to protect widows and orphans. In these texts, they reveal the cases of two royal figures in the following fashion: “Thereupon Daniel the Raphaman ... picks himself up he sits before the gate ... he judges the cause of the widow(s), he adjudicates the case of the fatherless” (Patterson 1973:226).

4.3.5 King Keret²⁸

An archaeologist excavated the epic on the site of Ugarit on the northern coast of Syria. According to O’Connor (1989:1), the archaeologist did excavations between 1930-1939. The cuneiform excavated had the legend of Keret, the king of a place called Khubur. He was the son of El, the head of the pantheon, and of Asherah, El’s wife. In that classic writing, the avid son confronted King Keret on his sickbed saying:

You did not judge the cause of the widow, you did not pass on judicially the case of the wretched, you did not drive them that preyed upon the poor, and you did not feed the orphan before you or the widow behind you. Since you have become a brother of the sickbed a companion of the bed suffering, come down from the kingship I will be the king I will sit in your authority (Patterson 1973: 226).

²⁸ Kret is his other name.

The care of widows was a constant pride to those in authority, especially the kings. In another text that has citation on widows by Gibson (1977:84), it reads:

Let the widowed (**almnt*) (mother) indeed hire herself out,
The sick man takes up (his) bed (and go),
The blind man indeed stumble along behind,
And let the newly wed husband go forth,
Let him make away with his wife to another,
With his beloved to a stranger.

The above text supplies the following conclusions: First is that the widow had no support and protection and as such, needed to hire herself out for the covering. Second, she could also enter any agreement without an adult male relative. A further examination of the Ancient Near East culture reveals the heart and concern for the less privileged, however can suffice to confirm that widows were a special people as far as care was concerned.

4.4 WIDOWS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

According to Simkins (2014:22), “while the biblical tradition shares similar concern for the widows and orphans as in the Near East traditions, the formulation of the biblical concerns, however, is notably different”. The Ancient Near East concern was in the hands of the kings while in the biblical tradition, “the king is absent,” which Rylaarsdam (in Buttrick 1982:1007) said: “God is not directly involved in the affairs of existence. He delegates to the agents, such as Hammurabi, who can play an independent role”. God is the father of orphans and the protector of widows (Ps 68:6).

Deuteronomy 10:18 stipulates that God “defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.” In other words, God obliged the society to respect the rights of widows (Dt 10:18; 27:19), and not to take their clothing or cattle as a pledge (Dt 24:17). Widows along with aliens and orphans, according to Deuteronomy 14:29 and 26:12-13, received a tenth of all the produce in the third year, the year of the tithe so that they may eat in the towns and be satisfied”.²⁹ They could glean the grains, olives and grape harvest

²⁹ The tithe belonged to the Levites and God commanded the widows, aliens, and orphans to partake of it. It simply shows that the plight of the widows was God’s concern. He, therefore, would command

(Dt 24:19-21). The community invited widows to the festivals, to celebrate the feast of weeks and booths with the people of Israel (Dt 16:11, 14). The burden fell upon the community and not on the leaders.

Conversely, the Hebrew world views widows as legally and socially vulnerable. Widows were at times unfairly treated after the death of the husband. The historical literature records a widow seeking recourse from the prophet Elisha (2 Ki 4:1): “The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha: “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now, his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

According Simkins (2013), the biblical tradition did not include widows among the poor and the needy of the society. The bible included the widows among Levites, aliens and at times, with the sojourners. This group does not own land. Since they do not own land, the Deuteronomic code required that those with land look after widows. This meant that the widows, aliens, and orphans’ experience of poverty was a “condition of their socio-economic status” (Simkins 2014:24). This would amount to mere neglect of the societal responsibility.

Steinberg objected to universalising widows’ plight and their social status from the ANE to the Biblical tradition. He argued that widows had different social and economic status in the ANE and the biblical traditions. Steinberg saw that the Hebrew bible has three types of widows and with their social status became the basis for sympathy. The classes of widows in the ANE and the biblical tradition help to learn the plight of the importunate of Luke 18. The classifications are *Almana*, *Issa* *Almana*, *Esset-Hammet*.

4.4.1 The *Almana* widow

Almana is a widow with limited economic support. She is in various stages of destitution, who may have had a living male adult relative, either too poor to help or unwilling to offer her economic support. The words of Zimmerman (2019) support the

humanity to take part in the widow’s welfare. He is giving them what belongs to him simultaneously making the people aware of the need to support those who were on God’s heart. The Levites received tithes from the community because they had no farming land in Israel, aliens were not citizens in Israel, widows who had no property rights and the orphans were fatherless minors.

notion when referring to the etymology of the word “*Almana*” which he said comes from the term for mute, and “*yatom*” or orphan is related to roots which mean to mutilate or cut off. The widow has lost her mouth along with her husband, having nobody to speak for her any longer. She belongs to an underclass or a social weak class of the society, as she has lost emotional and financial support. According to Hiebert (1989:130), she “is a widow bereft not only of a husband, but neither a son nor a father-in-law to protect her against the social economic vulnerabilities of being a woman alone.” Since the husband is dead, she is without legal protection and was susceptible for the economic debts left by the husband and she was without a male who ordinarily provided the women with access to the public spheres. So, the *Almana* lacked kinship ties, only the dowry is her source of livelihood. We can draw two conclusions about *Almana*. She had male relatives and secondly the existing are not willing to assume responsibilities over her life.

The story of Tamar in Genesis 38 is a typical example of the *Almana* widow. For Tamar, the brother-in-law was there, Judah the father-in-law was alive. When the father-in-law sent her back to her people, she became husbandless. Genesis 38:11 states, Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Live as a widow in your father’s household until my son Shelah grows up”. For he thought, “He may die too, just like his brothers”. So, Tamar went to live in her father’s household. Judah’s stance shows that when Tamar’s husband died, she did not have a male relative to protect her and no one was willing to take any responsibility over her.

This woman is in a difficult situation because she is unable to inherit anything except the dowry she brought and few a personal belonging. If there is inheritable property, she is bound to remain in the patrilineal family. The Torah grouped widows together with the aliens and the Levites because they do not own ancestral land. The term widow in the Hebrew language is *Almana* and in the LXX is $\chi\acute{\eta}\rho\alpha$, “indicating not only the death of the husband but also loneliness, abandonment and helplessness” (Brown 1973:1073).

4.4.2 The Issa-Almana widow

An Issa-Almana is an inherited woman with sons. She has redemption rights of her husband's ancestral estate through her son.³⁰

The Hebrew Bible mentions four widows with sons. The first widow is in 1 Samuel 14:4, as the woman of Tekoa. She had sons who had a feud, they fought, and one died. When the community wanted the life of the brother, she appealed to the king saying.

Now, the whole clan has revolted against your servant; they say, 'Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed; then we will get rid of the heir as well.' They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth (2 Samuel 14:7; NIV).

The other widow is the mother of Hiram (1 Ki 7:14). She was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali. Her son was from Tyre and a skilled craftsman in bronze, who King Solomon called into his service. The third woman is king Jeroboam's mother (1 Ki 11:26): "Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon's officials, an Ephraimite from Zeredah. His mother was a widow named Zeruah". The fourth is the widow of Zarephath (1 Ki 17:8-24). She is both *almana* widow (1 Ki 11:20) and *Issa-Almana* (1 Ki 11:9-10). When her son passed away, she got the title *almana*. She was *Issa-almana* before the son died. These two circumstances reveal the position whether she deserved the sympathy of the community or not. If she was vulnerable without the son, society had an obligation against disfranchisement.

4.4.3 The Esset-Hammet widow

She is an inherited widow without sons. She is the "wife of a dead husband" (Ruth 4:5). The husband dies without siring heirs to exercise the redemption rights of the properties.

³⁰ When Uriah died, the Bible does not mention Bathsheba as a widow. David at once, took her as his wife. She had some inheritance left over from the husband Uriah. The Bible does not mention Solomon's mother as a widow. She had a son who would inherit the father's estate and would speak on her behalf.

In Genesis 38, Tamar is an *eset- hammet*. She was married³¹ to Judah's first-born son, Er. God put Er to death due to wickedness. Judah asked Er's brother Onan according to the Levirate marriage custom (Dt 25:5-6) to take his brother's wife to sire children with her. This would have allowed Onan to inherit the brother's property. He knew that the offspring would be his brother's heirs, so he will not, "be blotted out of Israel. So, when he went into his brother's wife, he would waste the semen on the ground" (Gn 38:9). Onan committed evil towards Tamar with *coitus interruptus*. Genesis 38:9-10 says, "God put him to death". The two husbands died without siring children, without leaving an heir. Since Tamar had no children Judah sent her back to her father's house³² and all the land was inherited by the husband's family (Rt 4:1-3) (Ndimukika 2003: 6). She could go back to her father's house. She returned "to the legal and economic security of her family".

Ruth is an *eset hammet* (Rt 4:5), "the wife of the dead man",³³ and the husband who died without siring children. So, Simkins (2014:22) argues that Ruth was a widow according to the levirate marriage of Deuteronomy 25:5-10. She was able to return to her father's house and receive all legal and economic security.³⁴

The use and meaning of the words *almana*, *issa Almanna* and *Esset Hammet* shall help understand the plight of the Persistent Widow (Lk 18). The word *almana* is the used word for the widow in the Pentateuch. The word has its roots according to Thurston (1989: 9), from the Hebrew word *alem*, which means, "unable to speak". She could not speak for herself but depended upon the care and protection of male

³¹ Marriage in many and contemporary cultures is not merely the coming together of two individuals, these are two families coming together. When the man dies, nothing dissolves the marriage. The wife remains attached and obligated into the family she was married to. The story of Tamar (Gn 38) is such an example. She remained in the in-law house until Judah, the father-in-law released her. Judah wanted Tamar burnt when he heard that she was pregnant because he was still the father-in-law to Tamar. This is an example of the strength of marriage bond in other cultures.

³² Widows had special privileges in the community; even those whose parents served in the sanctuary. The childless priest widow living in her father's house would partake of the priest's meat (Lev 22:13).

³³ The phrase, "the wife of a dead man" applied to Ruth the wife of Mahlon as well (Rt 4:10). If this is anything to go by, it means the woman remained the wife of the dead person until required rituals happen. According to the Levirate law she remained the wife of dead man (see Dt 25:5-10). Sometimes the widow entered this union against her will to protect her interest and those of her children.

³⁴ Some scholars, such as Moses Maka Ndimukika (2003), believe that longevity was a blessing from God (Gen 15:15) and conversely, the early death signified punishment from God for the sin committed (Isa 54:4; Rt 1:13). This understanding accounts for the reproach and social stigma attached to widowhood.

relatives who had the legal authority to speak on their behalf. The word has the connotation of someone needy and helpless. This is an emerging crisis in Zimbabwe, of many widows who are up the creek and puir demanding societal reaction. A woman without a man or sons was vulnerable and was a victim of exploitation or oppression. Help to such widows is inevitable. The common denominator of all needy widows is the absence of the ancestral land in the estate of the deceased husband.

4.4.4 Poetical books

The five poetic/wisdom books in the Old testament include of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. In these books, widows are people who desperately needed the societal, royal, and other people's care and concern. Those who did not pay attention to widow's needs are considered evil and uncultured.

In Job, a man with an evil heart is one who does not regard the needs and the welfare of the widows (Job 14:1-4;14, 21). From the discussion between Job and Eliphaz, "there is a price to pay for neglecting and abusing widows "(Walker 2015:27). Job's friend turned to him and said told him that the reason for your suffering was that you neglected the welfare of widows (Job 22:9). Job however, defended himself and swore that he was innocent of such malpractices (Job 29:7-7, 31:16-17, 21-23): "if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let God break it off from the joint".

The Psalmist clearly painted the picture of the righteous God whose acts are inclined to the plight of the widows (Ps 68:5). Psalm 146:9 says, The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Solomon reiterated that the ill-treatment of the downtrodden of society incurred wrath from God himself. Further, God watches the widow's land against the greedy and the

proud. Proverbs 15:25 has the same approach: “The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow’s boundaries”.³⁵

4.4.5 Prophetic writings

Several prophets admonished God’s people to show their righteous acts through the care of widows, orphans, and the foreigners. Israel’s wickedness was “exposed because of the ways in which Israel had treated the widow. Israel oppressed her, preyed on her, and exploited her. Israel ill-treated the widow in diverse ways. This was displeasing to God and perpetrators expect to be confronted with his curse and judgement” (Croft & Walker 2015:28).

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel reveal how unconcerned Israel was about the welfare of the widows. This was wickedness in the eyes of God. “Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the fatherless, and the widows’ cause does not come to them” (Jr 7:4-8; Is 1:23).

The prophets saw that the princes and the officials polluted justice, whom he accused had become renegades and rebels running after favour and bribes at the expense of helpless members of the society. “But the helpless members of the community, the orphans and the widows who should be their special charge, cannot obtain attention” (Buttrick 1956: 177).

On the eve of the exile, Jeremiah accused the Israelites of forsaking the will of the Lord, “they had forsaken God, God will destroy them, winnow them like grain with a fan and their widows will be increased (Jr 15:7-9). The failure to uphold the cause of the widows was one of the reasons why God sent them into exile. The society had the obligation to protect the widows from the would-be predators: “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless” (Is 10:1-2).

³⁵Land was a precious commodity to the Israelite community. The boundaries marked and kept original parameters (Dt 19:14). Land belonged to the family and its boundaries were important (Pr 22:28; 23:10-11). The vulnerability of widows made them easy prey to those who would look to steal land. The Lord Himself promised to keep widow’s boundaries against any movement.

The care for the orphans became the litmus test for righteousness. On this, the Bible says Jerusalem and its rulers had failed dismally. Malachi pointed to the coming ministry of the forerunner of Messiah Himself and the righteousness he would inaugurate as a result (Ml 3:1-6). According to the Buttrick (1956:177), “he regards sins against the social order as the sins which God is most particularly concerned. In this list, only sorcery is classed as a religious sin all the others are social, and the prophets lay chief emphasis upon the wickedness of those who exploit the weak and the helpless”.

According to Bromiley (1973:1060), there are four ways in which the woman whose husband has died would find economic security: 1) If she had no sons, by the law of the levirate marriage (Dt 25:5-10) the husband’s brother was expected to marry her although he could refuse to perform duties; 2) she could return to her father’s house (Gn 38:11, Rt 1:8); 3) she could re-marry if she was young or wealthy (1 Sm 25:39-42; 2 Sm 11:26 ff, Rt 1:9, 13); or 4) she could remain unmarried and support herself and any children she might have.

The widow’s inheritance rights were insignificant. Some scholars believe that Israelite widows could inherit land as was the case with their Mesopotamian counterparts. But the evidence is sparse. Traditional practices and systems apportioned land through the patriarchal family to whom it belonged.

4.5 WIDOWS IN THE APOCRYPHAL WRITINGS

Apocryphal writings are biblical or related writings that did not become part of the accepted canon of Scripture. According to the Collins Dictionary, the word originated from the Latin word *apocrypha* (*scripta*) hidden (writings) and from Greek, word meaning ἀπόκρυφος implying to hide away. This is a list of books that did not make it in Jewish canon or the Protestant canon of scripture. Scholars label the books amorphous or a dubious collection of texts, initially accepted but later rejected from the list of the canonised books or sacred texts. The authorship of the apocryphal books is doubtful and unauthenticated.

Different church traditions accept these books differently. The church traditions with different acceptance are the Roman Catholic, Greek orthodox and the Russian

Orthodox church. The Roman Catholic Church list of apocryphal books are Tobit, Judith, the Additions to Esther, the Additions to Daniel (the Prayer of Azariah and the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon), the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, sometimes known as Sirach, Baruch similarly known as 1 Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees. The Greek Orthodox Church appends 1 Esdras, Psalm 151, the Prayer of Manasseh, and 3 Maccabees, with 4 Maccabees in an appendix. The Russian Orthodox Church inserts 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Psalm 151, and 3 Maccabees.

In the apocryphal books, it became a custom that the rich sent the widows wine for the Passover meal; in the time of the Maccabees widows could deposit their property in the temple treasury (2 Macc 3:10). In these books there were some kind gestures for the widows, they shared in the battle spoils. In 2 Maccabees 8:28-30 one reads:

And after the Sabbath, when they had given part of the spoils to the maimed, and the widows, and orphans, they divided the rest among themselves and their servants. After doing that, they had made a common supplication, they besought the merciful Lord to reconcile with his servants for ever. Moreover, of those that were with Timotheus and Bacchides, who fought against them, they slew more than twenty thousand, and very easily got high and strong holds, and they divided the spoils among themselves. They included the maimed, orphans, widows, yes, and the aged also. They each received an equal share of the spoils.

The Lord is fair and does not show partiality. He does not prejudice the poor; when someone who has been wronged prays, the Lord listens. When orphans and widows pour out their prayers, he does not ignore them. The tears running down a widow's cheek cry out in accusation against the one who has caused her distress" (Sirach 35:12-15).

The community and individuals thus, had a responsibility for the welfare of the widows. They knew that widows were vulnerable and had no means of financial support when they remained unmarried. They knew also that they needed legal representations (Ndimukika 2003:14). Conjectures drawn from such could have arisen because of the social stigma. They called widows with names that could only denigrate her.

4.6 WIDOWS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament does not elucidate much on the socio-economic status of widows when compared to the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible. There is a continuum in the concern. Wallis (2005:212) concluded that “we found several thousand verses in the Bible on the poor and God’s response to injustice ... one of every sixteen verses in the New Testament is about the poor or the subject of money”. This shows an important dimension in the New Testament for the concern for the less privileged including the widows.

4.6.1 The gospels

The gospel narratives mention several stories of widows with their different challenges. Jesus had a special interest in widows and their state. There is Anna the prophet.³⁶ She was an early witness to Jesus as the fulfilment of Israel’s hope (Lk 2:36-38), a widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-15), whose son died. She met Jesus on the way out to the bury her son. There is also a poor widow who gave as an offering her last two copper coins as an example of true devotion to God (Lk 21:4; Mk 12:41-44). Jesus spoke about her as a woman of piety. Jesus condemned and protested the exploitation and devouring of the widows by the Pharisees (Mk 12:40). According to Nwaomah (2019:19):

The Greek word translated “devouring” *κατεσθίωντες*, has different shades of meanings but refers to the act of plundering of properties. This act describes the unscrupulous acts of the temple leaders in dispossessing widows of their inheritance through all forms of injustice like charging usury, grabbing their property, and stealing welfare money from the temple. Bock suggests that the use of the word *κατεσθίωντες* suggests that the temple authorities misused funds given to the support for the poor.

Such stories of the suffering and exploitation of widows from their privileges and potential support resources came in the form of parables, such as the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-8).

³⁶ Tradition argued Anna to be the poorest and most pious widow. She was however, privileged to meet the infant Messiah just after birth. She is a model of piety and godliness, “with fasting and supplications night and day,” and she is said not to have “departed not from the temple”. Her waiting and piety in the temple led to meeting Jesus and her prophecy. She spoke about, “the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem”.

According to Bromley (1973:1060), widows stayed a marginalised group and victims of exploitation, “even by religious leaders (Mk 12:40)”. In the same vein, the narrative in Luke 7:11-17 depicts the picture that the death of the son spelt great tragedy to the widow’s livelihood, she does not have the means of survival. Jesus’ appearance and ministry reflect the heart of God over the plight of widows.

The Christian church accedes to the duty of supporting the widows as found in Judaism. Jesus even castigated the Pharisees whom he accused of devouring the widow’s houses (Mk 12:41-44). Despite the hostile environment, Luke 21:2-4 records that some widows became the role models in society within their poverty when it came to matters of faithfulness. Jesus commended her saying, “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on” (Lk 21:3-4). The widow’s exemplary surrendering to God’s provision, showed a life of radical dependence on God, who replaces her husband.

Reading the gospels, Jesus advocated justice, love, and compassion to the vulnerable, downtrodden, women and the poor. His preferential choice to the poor is not coincidental but an integral part of his mission. Therefore, Lanza (2013: 54) noted that “the Gospels emphasised the duty of the Christians to the unfortunate members of the society and he frequently admonished his followers to give their wealth to the poor”.

4.6.2 Acts

Acts is the compendium of the beginning of the church. The writer is Luke, the doctor who penned his work to, “His most excellent Theophilus”. Historically, the coming of the Holy Spirit marked the transition of the early Church from being Jerusalem centred to being global in mission. The apostles managed the ministry of the early Church then. As they continued the ministry, the kerygma of Jesus guided the operations. They aimed not to deviate from his teaching but respond to the needs of the community as situations develop. So, how did the early Church get to grips with women’s and widows’ affairs?

The early Church took their obligations seriously to support the vulnerable and the needy in their community. The care of widows was principal in the apostolic church (Ac 6:1-7) in the ministry of the early Church. The widows received support from the church's or members' free will offering. Due to its growth and the demand in ministry, the early Church overlooked the penuries of the Hellenists and Grecian widows in favour of the Hebrew widows in their daily distributions. Outwardly, Nwaomah (2019: 22) noted that the daily distribution of food may seem trivial but beneath the cause of this crisis is the great animosity that had existed between the Hebraic Jews and the Hellenistic Jews. The apostles endeavoured "to give attention to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Ac 6:4). The church assigned that responsibility to set apart individuals to care for the vulnerable. According to Brown (1973:1073), there was the "murmuring of the Hellenistic group because of their widows, as compared with those of the Hebrews, were being put at a disadvantage. This led to the choice of seven men from the Hellenistic section who were charged with the care of those widows".

Buttrick (1956:89) points out that "the case of widows without legal protection was particularly hard, and the church quickly copied the Jewish custom of providing funds for their relief". When the church selected other members, the ministry of the early Church expanded, and effectiveness was inevitable.

Acts 9:39-41 shows a group of widows formed in a club set-up or the order of widows. The deceased widow Dorcas was a "model of piety and godliness" (Patterson 1973:232). Genuine godliness was a hallmark³⁷ of genuine widows. Dorcas' benevolence offers two conclusions in the nature of the early Church: the church practiced care to the widows and Dorcas was a widow who ministered to other widows, a replica of the benevolence nature of the early Church. The presence of other widows on her funeral shows how she had affected their lives, and that widows felt exposed. This text singled out widows because of their special commitment.

³⁷ The Biblical texts are, however, silent on whether the church and community practiced the concern for the widows. At the same time, the silence does not mean that the community never really did anything. Since the Bible writes about the concern; this suggest that the welfare of the weak was the concern of both God and man.

4.6.3 The letters

This corpus developed a criterion for qualifying one into widowhood and thus, deserved help from the community of believers. Paul in his letter, brings a new shift in respect to the widows: “Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor 7:8-9). The encouragement to those in widowhood was to search for the need for salvation rather than to pursue the practical concerns of everyday life.

According to 1 Timothy 5:3-16, the community of widows considered the enrolments age for “widows who are really widows”. The qualifications for the enrolment were that the widow was to be sixty-five years of age or over; that they had been “the wife of one man,” presupposing that they only once married; and that they had led valuable and charitable lives.

While the church supported widows, there seemed to be an understanding that the younger widows had chances of getting married, hence they were not among the widows who needed church support. The widows with surviving relatives were to receive support from their surviving relatives making it definite that there was a criterion of accepting widows on the list.

According to Bromley (1973:1060), “to be enrolled as a widow, she had to be at least sixty years and to have demonstrated a commitment, to remain unmarried and to give herself in the service of God”. In that regard, the care of the widow was a pastoral responsibility. The New Testament churches recognised their responsibility and duty to the widows. Taking care of widows became the essence of true religion that is without fault. James 1:27 wrote; Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from the pollution of the world.

For James, this is the religion that God accepts. According to Brian and Walker (2015:25), “to take care” is synonymous “with the action of a doctor who, in visiting the sick patients, showed care for them and supplied their needs”. Through this gesture, the widow’s needs and “appropriate sympathy and relief was ministered”.

4.6.4 Revelations

When the church was under Roman persecution at the end of the first century, her suffering was impotent in her grief. She became a grief-stricken widow while the Romans boasted: “Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow; I will never mourn’” (Rv 18:7).

Revelations 18:7 portrays a picture that widowhood would soon vanish with the intervention of Yahweh whose presence stood for the end of suffering. Yahweh protected the widow as the husband and not a χήρα (widow). Being a widow meant vulnerability, hence the need for protection from society. At the end, the Lord will restore her fortunes just as said in Revelations 21:4: “The lord will wipe away every tear from their eyes”.

4.7 Widows put next to orphans

The Mediterranean world, the Jewish Bible, the apocrypha, and the Christian texts discuss widows, their plight, vulnerability and need for sympathy the same manner it discussed the orphans. An orphan is a child who has lost both parents. However, according to Fitzgerald (2016:201), “the contemporary meaning of the word speaks of the death of both parents, contrary to the antiquity meaning which denoted the death of the father. When the father died, the child became fatherless. Being fatherless meant devoid of livelihood and protection which the patriarchal society upheld”. These fatherless and/or parentless children could not own land or inherit any ancestral property such that they could not make a living off the land. The loss of the father meant that the orphan had no economic base on which to subsist and not the support of a familial network.

Several factors merit discussions why there are orphans in Zimbabwe today as in the ancient world. The research carried by Fitzgerald (2016) highlights five common trends of the increase in the numbers of orphans and widows.³⁸ He mentions the following contributing factors:

1. Public health care where the writer testified to the health problems related to malnutrition and disabilities. These shortened the life span of an individuals.

³⁸ Emphasis is mine

2. Life expectancy: Geography, gender, ethnicity, and epidemics lowered the life expectancy.
3. Dangers associated with childbirth. Most mothers died giving birth. The fathers had to rear children without their mother thereby affecting the numbers of soldiers in the army.
4. The difference in the age of the first marriage. The ancient Mediterranean testify that man married older than women thereby increasing the number of widows as men tended to die earlier due to age.

West (1978:327) also noted that there is also evidence for females being married at ages between 12-14, that is shortly after puberty. According to Xenophon (*Oeconomicus* 3.13; 7.5), Isomachus says that he married his wife when she was only fourteen, at a time when she was “a mere child who had seen and heard almost nothing”. Given the low life expectancies in antiquity, “only one or two of every ten men reaching the age of marriage would still have a father alive” (Golden 1990:111).

The Hebrew Bible records the special place of orphans and widows, such as Exodus 22:7 and Deuteronomy 10:18. The wisdom literature such as Job 24:3; Job 22:9, Psalm 94:6 accuse the people who mistreated orphans. The prophetic writings such as Isaiah 10:6, Ezekiel 22:7; Zechariah 7:10 and Malachi 3:15 state that a society that tolerates the abuse of the widows and orphans is a disastrous society.

In the New Testament, the care of the vulnerable is the standard measure of benevolence in the society. Jesus’ ministry was characterised by the care of the vulnerable group of the society. Paul’s ministry had a similar flavour. James 1:27 states: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”.

The Zimbabwean culture values family bonds and ties as an integral part of the growth and development of society. Any mishap that disturbs the family ties or connection creates problems. People expected society to exercise pity and compassion. The presence of orphans and widows in the society elicits sympathy.

There are similarities on the plight of these two groups. They are the vulnerable group, the weak of the society. They are all deprived of their financial and emotional partners of life. The orphans would have lost the parents' support, the hand they could lean on or the support necessary for their sustainability. The widow is equally disadvantaged. This research showed at the beginning that this thesis, that everyone received justice, that the downtrodden find a voice from the equally affected and prevailed persistent widow. The Biblical concern of the orphans can cascade to the widows, who are in their dire need and lack a livelihood.

4.8 THE SYMBOLIC USE OF THE TERM WIDOW

The word 'symbol' suggests being or standing for something and in this case, the widow. The word symbolically denoted the defeated nation as under a curse or even under God's reproach. Society viewed the widow's condition as a reproach from God. That could be the reason Biblical texts compared widowhood to a nation under threat and cursed arguing that the women would become widows. This was another way of saying that they killed the men (Ex 22:24; Ps 109:9; Ezk 22:25; Jer 15:8, 18:1). This depicted the sorry state of the nation which was vulnerable to the enemies. According to Draper (*et al.* 2003:1060), even a "city could be called a widow figuratively" (Is 47:5-9, 5:3 and Rev 18:7)", or, as in (Is 54:4), "God can restore a widowed city". In Lamentations 1:1, the text states "how deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave". From the text, Jerusalem has merely become like a widow, but not truly a widow. The husband would soon return to console her.

4.9 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ANE, BIBLICAL TIMES AND WIDOWS IN INDEPENDENT ZIMBABWE

This section juxtaposes the condition of widows in the three epochs and draws some comparisons. The ANE, biblical tradition is compared side by side with contemporary independent Zimbabwe. Areas considered are the process from the beginning of marriage, within marriage, and when the husband dies. Other areas considered are the life of the widow in the patriarchal community after marriage vows have become invalid.

4.9.1 Traditional and cultural systems

The word “tradition” according to Honer (1990), are customs, beliefs or thought processes passed on from generation to generation. This definition reinforced the work of Gruburn (2001:6) who defined tradition as the “name given to those cultural features which, in situations of change, were to be continued to be handed on, thought about, preserved and not lost”. The practices become the bedrock of culture and values in the society. However, while they are bedrocks, they can be snares that need revisit to ensure human beings treat and perceive each other according to new set protocols. The challenges of widows in Zimbabwe deserve the analysis of tradition and its implications on how widows are treated.

Tradition is a drawback in most communities in application of legislations, seeking justice and giving a voice to the voiceless. According to Azeem (1995:22), “the continuous and unbroken tradition since Biblical days give female members of the household no right of succession to the family estate”.

The woes of a woman have the roots from birth. When a girl child is born, the neighbours would congratulate the family remarking the cows are coming home, *mombe dzaakuuya kumba*.³⁹ Since African societies were agro-based, the coming of cattle significantly changed the wealth status of the family. More cattle meant more wealth and a source of draft power in cultivation and this raised the family’s social status.

From birth, the woman’s education was to regulate her behaviour, domesticated her with strict behavioural expected norms in anticipation of livestock. According to Article 153 of the Saudi Policy on Education, “a girl’s education aims at giving her the correct Islamic education to enable her to be in life, a successful housewife, an exemplary wife and a good mother”. Such as seen in Saudi Arabia statutes, a girl educated was meant to create or make a good woman out of her, one who knows

³⁹ *Mombe dzaakuuya kumba*” is a Shona phrase meaning “more cattle have come in the family”. When the girl child marries, the family gets richer when the groom family gives more livestock as dowry to replenish labour, to seal the relationship between the families and to appreciate the family for raising a good woman. Women became the source of wealth. As a result, where she was married off, she had to supply labour, bear children to justify the amount paid as *lobola*.

and respects culture. Hamdan (2005: 44) studied Saudi Arabia's approach to female education and wrote:

[T]his was to ensure that women's education did not deviate from the original purpose of female education, which was to make women good wives and mothers, and to prepare them for 'acceptable' jobs such as teaching and nursing that were believed to suit their nature.

Zimbabwe traditional thought pattern is no exception to the Saudi thought. The country's motive was to create a good woman with exceptional moral standards and submissive to the male counterpart. Zimbabwe's cultural values taught girls to buy into an assigned role, a role in which she was subordinate to man, not enough to challenge him. The woman's basic role was to keep the structure of the family and therefore, of society.

Sending the girl child to school was not a priority. A girl child was to be married off, a source of wealth (cattle and goats) to her natal home. In times of poverty or famine, the girl child could be married off (*kutema ugariri*) to cushion the suffering of her natal home. Early child marriages were culturally normalised when the family was poor. Women commodification continues. The more educated the girl is, the more lobola in-laws demand. The culture continues to worsen the subjugation of the woman whose marriage is a source of revenue to the family. As a result, the life of a woman is commodified. The process of commodifying compromised the woman's rights and privileges if not taking them away from her. This continued commodification undermines the dignity of the woman even when grown up. When married, she must respect her husband, at death another male relative assumes headship over her.

We can draw some parallels between the life and survival of the girl or young woman in Israel and contemporary Zimbabwean culture. Both cultures reveal that the father has a huge say and the women are subservient to him. In the Old Testament which shapes much of the life of the New Testament, "the father had authority to sell his daughter for the future marriage, (Ex 21:7-11), to her in marriage to who he wishes (Dt 22:16) and annul her vows. The above texts minimise the independency of women even though she is not so much commodified. While scripture is silent about

her release from slavery if they sold her off, her “choice” into liberation was when she marries the head or his son.

Once married, a woman’s recognised social status and security was in the home of her husband. Her status, in the ANE, biblical and independent Zimbabwe’s socio-economic status are decided by “her roles as wife, mother and mistress of the household” (Kavey 2005:4). This accounted for her *de facto* private space in the home. If the husband abused her, her family would plead with her to hang on. They would say, *ndizvo zvinoita varume*, (transl. that is what men do). If the husband were promiscuous, the family would request her to endure considering the dowry paid. More so, if the family she was married to were rich, she had to tolerate everything. The husband handled supporting and standing for her in all public spheres and concerns. So, the death of the husband meant vulnerability to abuses sentencing her to economic and social uncertainty. She becomes truly an *alem*, unable to speak or represent herself and culture obliged her to have a male relative to speak for her.

As soon as the husband passed on, the woman remained in the husband’s family as his widow. Her support could come from her son. Otherwise, customs evoke the levirate marriage popularly known as *kugara nhaka*.⁴⁰ This was for the widow to be married to one of the brothers of the deceased. Independent Zimbabwe like the ANE and biblical tradition, would not force her into marriage to the husband’s brother. If she did not want the levirate marriage, she could reject it, but the process had to be official. If the family elders consented to her demands, they would release her, and she would not expect support and protection from the husband’s family (Kavey 2005:5).

⁴⁰ This is a festival presided over by the elders of the community of family clan or tribe. Their purpose is the welfare of the widow through inheriting the woman and the immovable property in particular the land. The community/family elders give the widow the knobkerrie which she must give to the man (husband’s brother/s) she feels should inherit her. If she refuses, support decreases, and vulnerability increases in cases where the widow is not gainfully employed. In some instances, relatives take over property and children from a widow when she refuses to accept inheritance and would evict the women from the matrimonial homestead. The mother of children born within a marriage automatically becomes the guardian and sole custodian when the father dies. While the procedure could have started out of concern and pity, it has instead subjugated women and some women have perceived themselves that way. Therefore, in some quarters the women resistance is extraordinarily little to the procedure taken as the order of the day.

In the more primeval scheme of succession like in biblical times and independent Zimbabwe, widows are part of the estate and remote from the legal personality of an heir but as the slave. The levirate marriage (Dt 25:5-10) is like the Zimbabwean marriage of *kugara nhaka*. Both are re-marriages looking to perpetuate the inheritance of the deceased husband's property. A closer analysis of the levirate marriage and *kugara nhaka* shows that it has a dominance element to the independent decisions of a widow. While the system purports to be a strategy to protect and support the socio-economic and socio-continuation of the family unity, it is suppressive and manipulative. Further, it assumes that women are sexually weak and cannot survive without male relations and sex. It is based on this assumption that men (elders) decide who a woman is to remarry. The need for a will for the woman to inherit anything provides "ample evidence that a woman has no independent legal status but is treated as the private property of her husband" (Phillips 1973:351).

Similarly, in contemporary Zimbabwean traditional and prevalent culture, marriage buys the woman into the family through the payment of *lobola* and so cannot inherit anything. *Lobola* transfers her reproductive rights to the new family she is married into. She becomes a property that is inheritable after the death of the husband, if she is to remain of value in society and in the family. The new man in her life, the husband's relative inherits the estate, including the wife, and all immovable property. This is like the dowry in the ANE. A woman (widow) can consider hers in marriage are only household goods. She cannot own or inherit any economic estate such as land or cattle.

When it comes to the Mosaic laws, the Torah acknowledged the daughters as potential heirs where there was no surviving male child. The story of Zelophehad's daughters in Numbers 27:1-11 is an example. Even in this case no one allowed widows to inherit anything. So why are female members of the society normally *alem*, poor and disadvantaged? According to Rabbi Einstein (in Azeem 1995:22), "men owned the women – before marriage, by the father; after marriage, by the husband, after death by the patriarchal family". Azeem's assertion has the similar view from the question the Pharisees asked Jesus. They raised a question on the inheritance of a woman who had seven husbands in her lifetime. The Pharisee

tested Jesus on the set up in the next life. According to Luke 20:33 (*par.* Mt 22:28; Mk 12:23), the Pharisees asked Jesus: “Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?” The text and thoughts emanate from the levirate marriage of a women’s identity after widowhood. The tradition seemed to have continued during Jesus’ time hence the questioning. This suggest that the life of the woman or widow finds identity in the presence of man or relationship with man in her life.

According to Ndekha (2013:37), there was a lack of inheritance rights, “especially when a father dies leaving a daughter”. Available material shows that culture and tradition had been perennial impediments to inheritance in both the ANE, biblical times and the contemporary world. The case of Zelophehad, it took the daring daughters to challenge the repressive gender law and significantly changed the legal status of all Israelite women born into families without a male heir (Ndekha 2013:37). These daughters like the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-6) supply a model to challenge injustice and perpetuate justice for women in Zimbabwe. The girls traced their legitimacy (Nm 27:1) to the claim of the inheritance. They held boldly to the uninvited act of *standing* at the entrance of meeting (Nm 27:2b).

A mother could not be an heir at all while the father was alive. The daughter could only inherit anything at the discretion of the male relatives. This could account for why widows and orphan females were among the most destitute members of the Jewish society. The last century saw the continued rise of the violations of widows within the Christian fraternity. Both the ecclesiastical and civil laws of Christendom do not allow daughters to share with their brothers, the father's patrimony. Besides, the systems deprive wives of any inheritance rights. These laws survived till late into the 20th century.

The provisions of the culture and tradition in both set ups desire to uphold the welfare of the widows. The parable of the Persistent Widow (Lk 18:1-6) portrays an abuse of the system that requires to mount challenges against its operations. An appeal to repeal cultural and traditional practices in favour of human rights continue unabated. In the Shona and Ndebele culture, the system does not expect women to inherit anything. Whenever families talk about inheritance, traditional and cultural

systems and practices prescribes that a male relative or the son are the heirs to the estate.

4.9.2 Legal and social systems

The Legal Age Majority Act (LAMA) of 1982 brought a sigh of relief when the law said that people are equal in inheritance. Women, who according to tradition are perpetual minors cannot represent themselves, so they always need the voice of the man. Their witness or suggestions could not be fully trusted. In Luke 24:11 on the resurrection appearances of Jesus, the disciples “did not believe the women, because their words seemed to be like nonsense”. The androgenic society drafted the laws and determined the laws. Similarly, a long-standing tradition of subjugating women was agreed to during the Lancaster house constitution. Feminists and womanists from around the globe have continually advocated for the emancipation of women. In Zimbabwe, the economic and political voices to consider the empowerment of women in general have been on the rise. This has negated the plight of widows in society.

Women in the biblical times had rights to property inheritance and maintenance by it. The society is socialised towards male orientation and this stereotypes the direction of certain legal and social systems. Despite these laws, the legal systems have not fully resolved the inheritance wrangles in society. The suggestion is to agree on property settlements outside the legal system or challenge the systems to diminish these changes.

It is this dual application of the laws that is still a cause of concern to women. These daily struggles to achieve equality in the Zimbabwean community need to be prioritised. Yahweh condemned the Israelites into exile due to the negation of the laws of the land.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This Chapter traced the contours of widowhood, their concerns, and the terrain they use which subjugate, deny, and manipulate many women and widows. The patriarchal nature of society has labelled and brand widows as properties at the

mercy of male figures. The chapter detailed the observations from the historical Biblical narratives and extra-biblical communities such as the Ancient Near East.

Despite the negative attitudes towards widows, some narratives show the concerns to care for the welfare of women. The preferential choice of God in the mission of Jesus Christ and how Jesus showed compassion to widows is remarkable. The care of widows is the mark of good leadership, true worship, and moral uprightness. The Torah integrated the concern for widows into important festivals, covenant making and upholding of the religious life of the Israelite community. The difference between the ANE and the Biblical tradition's concern for the widows is that in the ANE, the care for the widows and the orphans was the responsibility and virtue of the King, while the Biblical tradition has God as "the father of orphans and the protector of widows" (Psalm 68:5).

Wayne (1936:145) asserts that "the Early Church's narrative on hospitality ... was not limited to the specialised function with the poor, relief for the widows and the persecuted, but also to all the disadvantaged people of the society. This was of equal importance since it operated in the dissemination of the gospel tradition." Moses' solemn challenge summarises what should be taken by the people in Zimbabwe today: "Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow. Then all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Dt 27:19; NIV).

Chapter 5

An investigation and articulation of some real-life stories of widows in independent Zimbabwe

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The paucity of cases of the violations of widows in Zimbabwe is alarming in both urban and rural communities. Documents and biopics of disenfranchised widows inundate the print and electronic media houses. All women activists and advocates, NGOs, regional and international bodies have voluminous reports of widows' assaults in Zimbabwe. Regardless, the patriarchal institution acknowledges the untold desecrating stories of widows.

This Chapter uses the publications of academic researchers, court cases, media reports, documents, workshops, and conference materials in investigating the ordeal of widows in Zimbabwe. The magnitude of suffering triggered this research to explore the terrain of widows' fate at the hands of men and patriarchal systems of manipulation, disenfranchise, victimise, and violation of their dignity. The research argues that in exposing such desecrating reality of widows, transformation is possible when society upholds justice and healing of the wounds it nurtured. The premise of such an argument is that widows' manipulation, violence, and victimisation is societally sanctioned and accepted.

5.2 DRIVES THAT DISENFRANCHISE WIDOWS

5.2.1 Enemies in the backyard: Stepchildren and the voice of surviving family

In the Zimbabwean context, there is the challenge of seeing women through their ability to reproduce and bear burdens. Patriarchy ill-treats women when it suits the male-dominant voices. The Shona adage "*Musha mukadzi*"⁴¹ loosely translated "a

⁴¹ According to this proverb, a woman is the crux of the home. It means she can clean the house, look after children, strangers and look after the extended family and able to sustain life in the absence of the man. Women have greater adaptation skills and can cope better with stress than men (see Wyrzykowska-Pycior, 2003). A man, however, is unable to fulfil those duties. However, upon death, all that disappears. She once returns to be a perpetual minor. Other proverbs which exalt, and honours Women's status and contribution include "*Nherera inoguta musu wafa mai*," (transl. an orphan get the best feed/meal on their mother's funeral). This suggests that even after the father passes on,

home is stabilised by the woman/mother as backbone of the family” applies best when there is production or success in the presence of the man folk. This goes further to satisfy the concept that every woman is married for reproduction; not taking into consideration the scientific or health conditions associated with reproduction. Culture and tradition blame the woman when the marriage does not bear children, regardless of the conditions of marriage. The fate of childless marriages has affected many women in Zimbabwe upon the death of the husband. When the husband had children outside marriage or in earlier relationships, there is serious victimisation, violation, and disenfranchisement on the childless widow. The stepchildren and the voices of the close family members become joint forces to push the widow out of her matrimonial property.

Childless widows stand no ground to challenge the forces of surviving children and the relatives of the deceased who in most cases, look to throw her out the window for varied reasons. However, everything comes back to greed, evil and historical consideration of women as personal moveable property. In Zimbabwe, there are cases of the reality of widows disenfranchised by the stepchildren and deceased’s family.

In 2015, the court heard the case of *Bhila v Master of the High Court & Others* (HC 4396/13). The applicant (Elsie Bhila) was married to a man under civil law; they had four children. He died intestate. After his death, the family found that the deceased had three other children born out of wedlock. These children, the third to fifth respondents, sought to inherit each a child’s share, from their late father’s estate. The applicant (surviving spouse) argued that since the children were born out of wedlock, they could not inherit *ab intestato*. She had, in terms of 3A of the *Deceased Estates Succession Act* (Chapter 6:02), received the matrimonial home. However, the courts ruled in favour of the children whether born in or out of wedlock as beneficiaries in the estate of their biological father, who had died intestate.

The High Court heard another case in 2018 of no HC 2843/07 concerning the estate of former Mayor of Masvingo. Thomas T. Zawaira who too died intestate. The court

there is still adequate life for the survivors. How then does she become a child on the death of the husband?

sat to decide “whether or not the children of the deceased born out of wedlock are legitimate intestate beneficiaries of the estate of the late Thomas T. Zawaira”. The court gave equal status to all the ten children whether born out wedlock or born in wedlock.

According to Nar (2018), the Supreme Court in 2015 had previously confirmed the ruling in the case of that former Mayor of Masvingo council member Thomas T. Zawaira. The magistrate’s court then barred the ten children born out of wedlock from inheriting in favour of the six children born in wedlock (Nare 2018:2). The High Court three years later, ruled in favour of the children born out of the wedlock. The ruling bequeathed all the children an equal share of their deceased father’s estate. This landmark ruling alongside the ‘bad blood’ with the “formal set up” or “daddy’s new wife” concept causes a stir in the distribution of the estate. The in-laws or the deceased’s family normally take sides with the children. Such are the cases of Priscilla Mushonga Misihairambwi and Pamela Tungamirayi and several others.

Priscilla Mushonga Misihairambwi, a prominent, parliamentarian, Human Rights activist, and an ardent feminist was a victim of the patriarchal abusive and oppressive tendency over her inheritance. According to the *Herald* (29 August 2009), the late husband’s nine children petitioned the High court to convene a meeting to appoint an executor to the estate of their father. The two different wills presented suggested the couple wrote the first will in 2005 while the late husband alone penned the second will in 2008. The Master of High Court upheld the last will from the testator.

Priscilla Mushonga Misihairambwi ceded all the property to the stepsons and the in-laws. According to the *Herald* (2010), “the properties in dispute included the Mount Pleasant House, a flat in the Avenues area, their funds in joint local and foreign accounts and several vehicles.

According to Paradzai (2012:10), Priscilla surrendered saying, “I would prefer to become another statistic or a victim of a society that unfortunately has failed not only to protect me but to provide a platform to the majority of widows that must face this abuse every day”. Most widows and fellow feminists had looked up to Priscilla as a

potential role model. They expected her to defend herself and to be a role model to other widows who found themselves in a similar position.

The research supposed, she portrayed herself as a virtuous woman who dared not to challenge the public male domain area avoiding the label, “disobedient Eve’s or Jezebel’s” (Bellis 2007:3) when “arguing over property”. Her success without the support and voice of the male person was bleak. That is why society strips women their honour when not under the tutelage of men, childless, widowed or divorced. According to Malina (2001:48), society regards women as sexual predators and aggressive and hence, dangerous. Was the society going to demean her for the act? In most African communities, public opinion is the chief sanction of all conducts and property belongs to that community. However, one can argue against the society’s discriminatory *modus operandus* as the source of most of the widows’ deprivation and suffering fearing denigration from the community. Priscilla lost all the property rights due to the need to preserve personal honour. According to Mhofu (2017), she did not mount the legal fight but succumbed saying:

I am an activist, I had access to information. I had access to the best lawyer. I had access to the courts. At that time, I was a Cabinet Minister. Yet I woke up one morning, I had nothing, absolutely nothing; except suitcase and clothes I had on when I walked out.

She could have fought her case with determination, tenacity, and persistence, not with access to information or best lawyers. The words of Thucydides (*Hist.* 2.45) suit what went on: “the greatest glory for women is to be least talked of by men, either in praise or blame”. She held on to the “glory of the woman”, she lacked tenacity, persistence to gain what was rightfully hers by law. The prominent Lawyer Beatrice Mutetwa accepted that it was “tragic for all Zimbabwean women that she has given up the fight so easily”. Her name, reputation and ministerial position were strategically positioned to inspire ordinary widows who needed some inspiration. She was the right person to restore hope to the disenfranchised widows. When she resigned, a dark cloud hovered over dehumanised widows.

The Zimbabwean (2010) reports Sylvia Chirau WLSA director saying women’s organisations and other lobby groups watched from the terraces because they concluded that the minister was going to win her case:

We assumed everything was going to be okay because the law was on her side. We did not know that this was going to happen; she was not supposed to give up, she was an empowered woman. I can understand the decision, but it was an unwise decision, she is powerful and empowered.... She should have stood up for her rights.

Her ministerial position and its influence positioned her to resist property disposition. Her position with its honour however, worked to the contrary. She protected her reputation at the expense of inheritance.

Another prominent widow was Pamela Tungamirayi, who was married to former Zimbabwe Air Force commander, Josiah Tungamirayi. Josiah was the Minister of indigenisation and died in a South African hospital after an alleged food poisoning. The property wrangle over Tungamirayi estate ensued soon after his burial. The High Court Master rejected the will that was presented. According to the High Court record HC 5635/05,

[t]he will made by the testator bequeathed the bulk of his estate to his two sons (stepsons). The estate included the matrimonial home and its contents together with the farm and all its equipment and shares in various companies. The deceased gave the surviving spouse a personal car, a bedroom suite, kitchen household effects and one television set.

This provisional judgement handed down under the provision of Section 5 of the Wills Act (Chapter 6:06), said that no provision, disposition, or direction made by a testator shall work to vary or prejudice the rights of any person to whom the deceased was married to a share in the deceased's estate. The High Court Master queried the amount of property bequeathed to Pamela as the surviving spouse. Indeed, the will prejudiced her. The estate distribution could not go ahead.

The second contestation was that the will, the original document brought from the master's files, did not follow Section 8 (1) (b) and (d) of the Act. The testator drafted the will on three A4 size pages and was partly typewritten and the other part handwritten in the testator's hand. The pages of the will did not bear the testator's signature or the witnesses' signature on each page. The testator signed the will on the last page in the presence of the two subscribing witnesses. The Masters reject the will because it did not subscribe to the formalities set out in the Act.

Thomas, the stepson prejudiced Pamela “who evicted her from the matrimonial home in Glen Lorne. He also refused to pay back Pamela’s \$30 000 loan to a local commercial bank” (Mushava, 2015). “She (Pamela) left for the farm, where Thomas and Tawanda evicted her again. She left all her belongings at the farm and lived in a rented house in Eastlea in Harare until she died in 2010. Thomas and Tawanda were Pamela’s stepsons. The deceased and Pamela did not have biological children together. Pamela raised Tawanda and Thomas who were from a former union. She at the end of the saga said, “I felt betrayed by both Thomas and Tawanda’s behaviour”. According to reports when she died her clothes were still at the farm.

How could Pamela succumb to the eviction without mounting resistance? How powerful or intimidating were the stepchildren that she did not stand up for her inheritance? The Administration of Estate Act (6:01) says she is the surviving spouse and rightful heir to the estate.

In another case, Tracy Chiwonde married a widower. The husband passed away after a couple of years but without children. The stepchildren harassed the widow over the house where she lived with her husband. The three sons wanted the property for themselves. The *Administration of Estates Act* (6:06) however, states that upon the death of a spouse, the surviving spouse inherits the property. The sons could not accept that. “They are giving me sleepless nights,” Chiwonde said. “They want me out of this home” (Moyo 2019). Chiwonde lived by herself in her husband’s house in Mabvuku, a high-density suburb in Harare.

One of the sons, Dennis, explained why he perceived things otherwise, “our biological mother owned the house in question. But now it belongs to an outsider because she was the last who was married to our father. It’s not fair” (Moyo 2019).

Linnet Saungweme, a gender-rights activist from the Musasa Project, said such stories of bitter quarrels between widows and their spouses’ families over property are common in Zimbabwe. The widow and her children usually lose out. Musasa Project as a non-governmental organisation aims to reduce violence against women and girls and to help them rebuild their lives after experiencing gender-based violence. The project does not intervene in the wrangles but helps victims adjust to

life after assaults, abuse, or disinheritance. Widows suffer violence at the hands of the in-laws.

Widows in Zimbabwe find it difficult to inherit any property. Women in the Shona culture inherit “*maoko*” property, which are kitchen utensils such as pots, spoons, and plates. They can hardly inherit cattle, houses, or land. Instead, women themselves are assets for inheritance like any other property. Even though the laws have changed, tradition still plays a significant role (Moyo 2019).

There is another case of Monica Masunda. Monica married Henry, a widower. Henry had three children, one boy and two girls. Henry and Monica lived together for at least ten years under the *Unregistered Customary Union* (UCLU) before Henry passed on. Henry was a manager at a leading local supermarket. The couple bought several movable properties including a vehicle and household effects in town. They built a home in the village where there was a herd of cattle, chickens, and goats.

The inheritance debacle began on the day of burial. The two aunts and the three stepchildren teamed up to grab all the property. The intention was to dispossess Monica of every movable or immovable asset including financial or material benefits from his place of employment. They used the death certificate of the late Henry’s wife to claim benefits from work, of course without success. With his death certificate, they intended to appear that Henry never remarried.

The matter spilt into the civil and then the magistrate’s courts. The worst scenario was when aunts denied having known her, related to her, even that she shared life with Henry, their brother. The courts needed a relative whose surname was the same as the deceased. The initially available people were the contenders on the estate. The “father”⁴² saved the day when she invited him to the court unknown to the rest of the members. His appearance neutralised the story after a long-protracted struggle.

⁴² This father was the younger brother of Henry’s father. The possible distances of the relationship made the father an ideal person to help the suffering and defenceless widow. Otherwise, she stood to lose everything in the researcher’s opinion if he was the biological father.

She got her reprieve. She won back her inheritance but suffered emotional wounds and scars in the process. That very week she delivered a daughter and named her Hope. Had it not been for her younger sister's courage and resilience who stood by her side, she could have lost all. She had lost the will to fight and she was heavily pregnant. The courts eventually resolved the matter. People who stand at the dejected widow's side, to encourage, model and give hope are instruments of success in court cases.

Some widows like Mushonga, I believe, value honour in the society and honour of the society rather than mounting a spirited resistance, even if it meant losing honour to win her inheritance. She valued the PCR more than her rightful inheritance.

5.2.2 Enemies in the backyard: Deceased's relatives

Traditionally when one is marrying and being married, the family of the husband has influence on the proceedings than the wife's family. This is because a woman is married to a compound or lineage. These power imbalances are patriarchally socialised. Further, it is because women are 'property' whose rights are transferrable from one man to another and from one family to another. The family treats the widow with contempt and disrespect upon the death of the husband. The questions arise, who is the enemy in the backyard? Why is there no respect of *Ubuntu* in Zimbabwe upon the death of the husband? Why is there too much strife when it comes to estate execution regardless of the status of the will?

They treat sacrosanct marriage vows, privileges, and rights with contempt when it comes to the interests of the relatives to the party. This is so because marriage is communally shared. If this is true, then love to families is conditional while to the couple in marriage, it may be unconditional. The deceased's relatives expose the woman to the reality of conditional love when the husband dies.

Enemies in the backyard are the relatives whose interest and power yield out of greediness and perverse egos. Other female relatives who the society expect to stand in solidarity with the widow instigate the tension. Such was the estate of Ignatius Dika (DRH 1175/2001). Ignatius Dika was married to Annamary Matingo. The couple had a UCLU union and the deceased worked with Standard Chartered

Bank. According to Tsamba (2001:33), they had a house in Msasa Park, and two motor vehicles- a Nissan Sunny and a truck, plus household goods, and effects. The deceased left cash adding up to a million Zimbabwe dollars.

When the matter came to the court for the appointment of the executor, Gladys Dika (the sister of the deceased) challenged the appointment of Annamary (surviving spouse) as an executor. She objected that the surviving spouse, “was still very young and would remarry and take the property to her natal family” (Tsamba 2001:33). The reasons for challenging the appointment of Annamary was a “desperate attempt to get the property which was left by the deceased” (Tsamba, 2001: 33). This selfish attitude created animosity.

Some cases appear when the relatives⁴³ are interested in the estate. The patriarchal relatives usually cite that the widow is young, will remarry and another man cannot use their relative’s property. Some in-laws believe that property ownership is in the patriarchal names and lineage. Of course, this happens mostly when the estate has a substantial value. In some instances, Tsamba (2001) noted that the deceased’s relatives abscond coming to court for registration or the appointment of the executor. They would prefer themselves to oversee the distribution of the estate in their favour.

Enemies in the backyard will watch every detail of estate disbursement with open eyes to oppress, dispossess and victimise the widow. They are not compassionate and acceptable to the value of love, dignity and respect of the union that existed between two parties to the marriage. In some cases, they do it to settle their past egos and feelings. What they claim is taking away or usurping the marriage rights of the surviving spouse.

Sadly, in the estate wrangles, relatives can go to the extreme of bringing accusations and sometimes refuse to take part in the execution hearings, by absconding the hearings. In extreme cases, they revive certain rivalries with past girlfriends or divorced partners. This turns ugly especially when there are no biological children. It satisfies the social imprint that every marriage must produce the fruits in the form of

⁴³ The relatives here include in-laws, siblings, and members of the family of the deceased.

children. In Zimbabwe, child adoption is not an affirmed method of rearing children in marriage.

In some cases, relatives refuse to go to court to confirm widows as the surviving spouses. Error Masunda's sisters-in-laws refused to go with her to court for their brother's estate. They set preconditions that she signs an agreement to share the estate. She did not consent, so no one benefited; they lost the financial benefits to the state.

The surviving spouses are denied their status as wives or are accused of being "girlfriends", "gold diggers". The family accuses them of merely co-habiting. Monica Marumahoko is a typical case. The relatives brought the death certificate of the former wife claiming that their relative was never married. The in-laws at times opt to bring a "girl-friend" or the divorced wife (if any) to further their interest. This was the case in the estate of Shamiso Mafuko (DRH 2739/2000). They had a customary marriage with a woman in the rural areas. They had five children. The deceased had another marriage in town and sired two children. On the estate registration, the in-laws denied Angeline Matambanadzo (who stayed in town) her status. They insisted that they did not know her. They preferred the rural woman. They knew they would receive help from her since she would not do anything without consulting them. However, the court ruled that they were all married, and they shared the estate.

The desire to benefit where they did not sow drove the enemies in the backyard in their perspective of the widow upon the death of their relatives. Greed leads to carelessness, malice, and vice. Maphosa (2013) quoted a victim of abuse who said "when my husband passed away, we had a house in Mpopoma, a car and a house in Gwanda. When he died in a car accident at work, all this vanished". The in-laws claimed all the property and the left the widow destitute. In a similar case in Marondera, Mashonaland East, Maude Taruvinga was a victim of the patriarchal traditions as well. She lost her claim to her matrimonial home. The husband died intestate.

I eventually decided to leave my husband's land because I could not endure the harassment anymore. No one could help me. Even the police took the side of my husband's relatives ... many widows find themselves thrown out of their homes

by greedy relatives and give up because of a lack of knowledge and (because they do not receive) protection from the law (Chifamba 2013).

There are cases when the patriarchal family harass widows without success especially when there is a will left behind. The harassments leave trails of damages and emotional wounds. Mr. Matshazi died intestate and appointed the widow as the heir to the estate. The estate included, "a house in Matshemhlope, a car and the usual household effects and goods" (Ncube 1994: 128). The brothers of the deceased contested the contents of the will because their brother had no children from the marriage. They felt they had to have a share in the estate. As a result, they began accusing the wife of causing the death of the husband.

According to the widow,

[s]ome of my brothers-in-law thought they would inherit my husband's property since we had no natural children of our own. When they realised that he had made a will in terms of which I was the sole heir, they were very unhappy and subjected me to a lot of harassment. They accused me of killing my husband. The pressure and harassment were so intense that I felt psychologically and emotionally exhausted. However, there was nothing they could do about the will. Now they have left me alone (Ncube 1994: 128).

While Maliyaziwa Malunga mourned her husband, she also battled with the in-laws who conspired to seize her house in a custom that has affected thousands of women in Zimbabwe each year. The in-laws seized the property and money from the bereaved widow soon after their relative died. After the death of Malunga's husband in 2013, the relatives locked her in her home, forced her to open her cash box, and went away with \$4 000 and documents to the property.

Malunga constantly kept doors locked fearing that some of those in-laws may come and harass her. Malunga felt the stress and pain of going to court. She developed high blood pressure and has lost weight because of stress. She lost a considerable amount the estate to the in-laws. HRW said Zimbabwean widows whom the in-laws threw out of their homes often have little chance of justice because many marriages are UCLU.

Farai Mpalasa lost her husband, Charles. The death of the husband inflicted pain and traumatised her. This bereavement was not the result of the loss of her partner,

but also by the later treatment she received from her in-laws. When Charles died in 2006, he was the breadwinner in the family. Farai had never dealt with the family finances. When Charles died, she left all the funeral arrangements to her brother-in-law, handing over her husband's bank cards and documents to him. Two months later, when she requested tuition fees for her children, she discovered that her brother-in-law had drained all the accounts.

He took all the money, and he said the house and furniture belonged to his brother, as Farai had never worked a day in her life. Four months after her husband died, she and her three children, aged 17, 15 and 13, were forced to move out of the matrimonial home in Chitungwiza, a dormitory suburb of Harare. Her brother-in-law now rents out the house. Since this ordeal, Mpalasa had to find employment as a live-in domestic worker in Harare. Her children live with her aunt in the rural areas. She says her in-laws have done nothing to help in taking care of them. "It is as if we stopped being family after [my husband's] death," she says. "My children do not know his family, and they rely on me to take care of them (Cook 2017:1).

With such harassments, widows must fight for their rights, they should be strong and should not give up. The call to the policymakers is to protect the vulnerable, often elderly widows. The impact of property grabbing is devastating. When they violate the widow's property rights, the widows end up being homeless, destitute with lost livelihoods.

When Moud Gohwa Taremeredzwa lost her first husband at the age of twenty-six, she faced a stark choice: move in with her deceased husband's elder brother as his new wife or lose everything she had worked and lived for – including her children. Moud opted for the latter. With nothing but a blanket and her last new-born baby boy, she moved back to her parents' homestead in rural Zimbabwe (*Daily Maverick* 2017).

Deborah lost all farming fields to the brother-in-law. The worse thing was when she narrated her condition saying, "I cannot even walk on 'his' fields... He is happy to see us suffer" (*News24*, Jan 2017). The violation and disenfranchisement cases such as Deborah's inundate the LRF. Every year, the LRF attends to more than five hundred cases. The question to ponder is: Can widows assert their rights through the courts? *News24* questions whether each case will be decided on its merits.

When Sheila Chimoyo's husband died in 2011, accusations started flying at once. Her in-laws claimed she had used witchcraft to kill her husband. The relatives seized the small house where she lived with her two children in Harare. The in-laws accused her of bewitching her husband. It was a terrible experience because everything happened while she was still mourning. Chimoyo's case is one among thousands of other cases. Many widows in Zimbabwe lose property to in-laws, soon after the death of the husband (Newsday 2017). In another incident, the in-laws accused the widow of infecting her husband in a bid to inherit the estate. The family alleged that she was on a mission to infect the young brother if the young brother inherited her as wife. So, when the husband died, the in-laws devised ways to evict her from the homestead. The blame game significantly contributed to justifying evictions.

Another widow, Fortunate Mhuri's late husband had a successful business of selling auto parts. The husband committed suicide. She was devastated by his death. Fortunate confessed that they were a happy family before the husband passed on. When he died, his sister-in-law forced Fortunate to leave the house. She had three children with nowhere to go. The in-laws told her to leave everything for which they had worked. She ended up staying with her children in a small, rented house; doing menial jobs to make ends meet.

The in-laws accused Chimoyo of being a witch, she nevertheless managed to pick up the pieces and runs a small import business selling clothes, linen and kitchen utensils. She buys items from neighbouring countries for resale and now manages to feed her children and send them to school (Newsday 2017).

A few relatives will come out in the open like James Masuku who testified that he had no interest in his brother's estate (Ncube 1994). His only interest was to have his brother's children receive their rightful amount of property for their inheritance. So many people would want to amass the wealth at the disadvantage of the surviving spouse.

5.3 ENEMIES IN THE BACKYARD: CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL SACRED COWS DEVOID OF UBUNTU

Culture is a way of life accepted by a certain group of people as normal. It then defines the belief system, norms, and values. In the African-Zimbabwean context, culture preserves the dignity, sanctity and integrity of humanity and communal harmony to a large extent. The custodians of culture advocate for justice and fair distribution of resources. The jurisprudence of society has the poor and the vulnerable in mind. *Dare*⁴⁴ is always ready to give a fair trial. Hence, it is an open system. This is like Rwandan *Gacaca* courts, whose main thrust was to search for healing in the troubled communities. The belief was that a healed community heals the nation, otherwise a hurting person hurts others. The process also gives ears to the violated minority.

However, over time, some characteristics have come to define culture and tradition to suit egocentric interests and, in the process, making cultural sacred cows. The traditional norms do not justify the property grabbing from widows within the Zimbabwean society. While customs would not allow women to own property or to inherit directly, they would always have access to land, housing, and other assets to support themselves and their children. The inheritance entitlement would then pass on to the children once they reach adulthood and male relatives would administer the process. They would fulfil their duty to protect and care for the widows. There are, however, several practices that contribute to the violation of widows. These are witchcraft accusations and inheritance rights which are a private affair and families assume that they do not need to give an account. When they accuse the woman of causing the death of the husband, instead of allowing her to inherit everything at the death of the husband, the unfounded accusation successfully defends the culture of property grabbing. The second is that “the inheritance process is a private family affair”. Despite the accusation and condemnation of property grabbing from the widow, there is little active opposition from community members or leaders who do not want to interfere unless consulted. There are also significant cultural factors that

⁴⁴ This is the Shona name for the African traditional courts. It was a forum where the community, family, or people resolved disputes. There would be a presiding chair of the proceedings traditionally being the elder/s of the community or clan. *Dare* was however male dominated; women would sit passively to see but would not make any contribution that affects the determinations. However, the ruling of the *dare* was for the good of the community and the well-being of individuals.

allow relatives to go unpunished when they grab property from the children and the widow. Taruvinga, a victim said, "...I eventually decided to leave my husband's land because I could not endure the harassment anymore. No one could help me. Even the police took the side of my husband's relatives...many widows find themselves thrown out of their homes by greedy relatives and give up because of a lack of knowledge and (because they do not receive) protection from the police" (IPS 2012).

The in-laws do not perceive any need to account for their acts to the children of the deceased or the community. In some cases, the in-laws take control of the burial so that the widow or orphans cannot get the death certificate from the Registrar General and thereafter, access the estate. The relatives who have the burial order can obtain the death certificate and gain access to the estate themselves. Due to the gender roles attributed to them, women often feel they are not able to oppose (male) relatives or to ask outsiders for help when the in-laws violate their rights after the death of the husband.

The suffering of the widows is linked to the in-laws' desire to conform to the traditional practices and interpretation of customary laws. Informal customary laws empower the in-laws to inherit the property through the patrilineal system. Save the Children and FAO's (2009:3) research in Mozambique representing African mind discovered that "the organization of the extended family defines control and inheritance of property such as land, houses, cattle and other assets along with the patrilineal family". The extended family includes male members of the family, women and girls are temporary members of the family who when married, leave the home to become members of their husbands' families. The inheritance process also finds its strength from the Shona proverb, "*kugara nhaka huona dzevamwe*"⁴⁵. The in-laws are the major players in the inheritance processes. The woman is a foreigner, (*mutorwa*), the family does not consult her, and her opinion does not matter and besides, she is an asset to inherit. According to the presentation made on the

⁴⁵ In Shona, the proverb means we learn from others the manner of distribution of heritage. We learn from others and are then able to sustain our legacies and our heritage. This proverb therefore, negates the formal laws in favour of the informal community or tribal practices. The process suggests that inheritance is a private family affair. Neighbours can hardly contribute; they will settle it as a family affair when the same process happens to them. The community leaders and elders can be active but normally intervene when asked to.

workshop on *gender equality*, Kapuna, (2011:2) argues that the family decides who inherits the property without the widow's consent. The inheritance process does not heed any legal framework. The law affords the first heir as the deceased man, his eldest male child or failing male children, his eldest daughter, failing daughters, the eldest male grandson. In all this, the widow does not feature.

Human Rights groups such as HRW and WILSA carried out several extensive types of research covering all the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. The Human Rights Watch (2017) published a document entitled, "*You will get nothing*": *Violations of property and inheritance rights of widows in Zimbabwe*. The watch group "investigate abuses, exposes the facts widely and then puts pressure on those with the power to respect rights and secure justice" (Human Rights Watch 2017).

The Human Rights Watch documented the story of Michelle (57 years) who said, "when her husband died, her in-laws took over the fields she had tilled for decades. They took the fruit from the trees and sold the harvest from her fields, leaving her without any livelihood. They further harassed, intimidated, and insulted her by surrounding and physically restraining her and telling her to leave the home. She only got the reprieve after the intervention of the Legal Resource Foundation (LRF).

In another incident, the Human Rights Watch documented the story of Glynn (50 years) who testified her heinous ordeal under the in-laws: After her husband's death, things became difficult. "There was no support for food, and I could not send my children to school. They (my in-laws) kept saying I should leave the house.... They kept saying go away, which pained me, so I left. I just left my matrimonial home" (Human Rights Watch 2017:1). According to the report, Glynn left the home she owned with her husband. She did not see the way out when she faced constant harassment from her in-laws. She went back to her natal home. Glynn's biological family welcomed back with her and the three children. She has turned into a subsistence farmer. From the proceeds, she can send her children back to school.

In another case documented by Laurel (2008: 9) for FAO, the in-laws of Beauty⁴⁶ (widow) entered her marital home and took all the property without her permission. She hired a lawyer who challenged the confiscation at the magistrate's court. The magistrate ordered the return of all property to her because she was the executor of her deceased husband's estate concurring to the provisions of The Deceased Estates Succession Act amended in 1997. The magistrate called a round table to discuss the matter, but the widow's in-laws refused to attend. According to Laurel (2008), Beauty's father in-law insisted that he had the rights to administer his son's estate. He appealed to the Master of the High Court to allow him to exercise his rights. When the widow and her father-in-law met, violence erupted. Both parties went into custody. Although a will was not involved, the High Court handled the matter, and the widow became the executor.

There are documented testimonies from widows stripped of their inheritance (*Nhaka* or *ilifa*). The findings of Laurel's (2008) research showed that most "abuses go undocumented and their perpetrators unpunished, while government, UN agencies, and human rights activists have long ignored the rights of disadvantaged older people". Despite such devastating experiences, policymakers are ignorant of the abuses, they continue making, reviewing, and developing new laws and hosting workshops discussing how to protect widows or the weak of the society.

Widows who published their ordeal revealed that appeals against the laws never really yielded favourable outcomes. The cost of engaging advocates, the nature of paperwork, travelling costs are hindrances in the widows' pursuit of justice. The legal costs worsen her situation since the estate, which is also the cause of disagreement must pay for the cost.

This is the truth of the case of Emma Thandi and Beaver Chimanikire. The couple was married under unregistered *Customary Law Union* (UCLU). The husband, Beaver Chimanikire, had an earlier marriage under *Marriage Act* 5:11. Beaver was finalising his divorce papers when he married Emma. Emma was 27 years of age at the time of his death had enjoyed the 8-year happy marriage with him as her first

⁴⁶ Not her real name.

husband. The couple sired a baby girl who was two years old when the father passed on. The estate dispute began soon after the funeral.

Emma was a stay-at-home spouse when the husband died. She was a typical African woman who preserved the honour of the family by keeping the woman's private space. When the time came for the estate dissolution, she became a stranger/foreigner (*mutorwa*) who could not contribute or be consulted. The High Court Master requires that a formal death notice to the Master, Assistant Master, or magistrate must be received within 14 days if the person dies leaving property or a will (Newsday, 2017). The deceased left some properties. The in-laws bequeathed the estate under the informal African customs. Under the informal customs, the relatives announced an invitation to debtors and creditors on the burial day. It meant that if the deceased owed anyone, they would come forward. Beaver's estate owed no one. The in-laws decided and kept what they believed belonged to their son. Emma returned to her maternal home without anything apart from her belongings and household effects.

Emma did not go to the courts to contest her marriage privileges. Her relatives dissuaded her from going to the courts. They felt that it could worsen the rift between the families. PCR regulation influenced her decision. In recognition of public opinion, she endeavoured to keep her honour and the honour of the family.

Property rights did not matter above the honour she could lose. She, with her relatives, chose to be a good daughter-in-law (*muroora*) and good people, respectively. Most female-headed households according to FAO (2006:28) do not seek any legal action due to ignorance about the inheritance laws and fear of witchcraft accusations:

When my husband passed away, his relatives claimed everything. I tried to look for help through the chief and he tried to talk to his relatives, but nothing changed. I recommended the legal resource foundation, but the threat of witchcraft came in and because I was afraid, I withdrew the case. I am now struggling to make ends meet through gardening and beer brewing but before my husband died, we had fishing equipment which enabled us to survive.

The culture of *kugara nhaka* ritual is prevalent among the Shona and Ndebele culture. For the Shona/Ndebele culture, *kugara nhaka* prevents a woman from becoming destitute. However, victimisation is present in the process. A lady victimised by the in-laws said:

When he [husband] passed away, the relatives had intense conflicts for me and had to ask me to vacate our marital home after I refused to have the young brother come in as my husband. I had to join my ailing mother who had a hut in Tsholotsho where my other children were.

The refusal to *kugara nhaka* removes the hedge of protection and is enough reason for the in-laws to evict her from her home and land. She becomes susceptible to the exploits and oppression of the heartless members of the deceased families or the community.

5.4 ENEMIES IN THE BACKYARD: MITIGATING FACTORS

According to Chipoyera (2018), unemployed, uneducated widows suffer the most. They have in-laws to contend with over the estate, the heavy burden of fending for the children and an image to protect in society. Society tends to ignore or stigmatise them and they continue to suffer in silence.

Such is the predicament of Sara, another victim of the brutal patriarchal society. Two years after retrenchment, her husband died after a short illness leaving behind Sara and her four children. The widow suffered a heartbreak and did not know where to start. She had depended on his income. She did not do well in school and was married at a noticeably immature age. Her husband managed all the costs. Sara handled her husband's funeral single-handedly. To make it worse, her in-laws took all their valuable property leaving Sara and her truly little children with nothing.

The children left school because she could not afford to pay the school fees. Her eldest daughter passed her Ordinary Level but could not continue with her education because she could not afford the fees. According to Chipoyera (2018), her mother commented saying, "my daughter ended up getting married at 18, I do not blame her, I could not feed her properly here. She was probably looking for a better life, I am glad her husband is a good man".

Polygamous marriages pose challenges on the widows' inheritance. *The Administration of Estates Amendment Act* No. 6 of 1997. Section 68 (3) of the Act states:

68 (3) a marriage contracted according to customary law shall be regarded as a valid marriage for this Part (inheritance) despite that it has not been solemnized in terms of the Customary Marriages Act [Chapter 5:07] and any reference in this part to a spouse shall be construed accordingly.

This is with the High Court case No. HC 3989/12 of the estate of Leonard Dube who died 18 June 2012. Before he died, he was living with the surviving spouse Lucy Ncube. They had been married for 12 years before he passed on. They had the customary marriage union. Before Lucy's marriage, her deceased husband, Leonard was married to Marble Dube. According to Ncube, Marble and Leonard were divorcing when she was married. Leonard, however, died before the divorce was finalised according to case number HC 5734/99.

As the wrangle raged, the plaintiff (Marble Dube), objected to declaring Lucy Ncube as the surviving spouse because she did not have a marriage certificate to prove she was lawfully married to the late Leonard Dube. According to the Judge, the issue that arose from the facts was purely legal *viz* the legal status of a customary law marriage contracted when either of the parties was married to someone else following the Marriage Act (Chapter 5:11). The court could declare the plaintiff as the surviving spouse to the late Leonard Dube.

In another case of *Chinho vs. Chinho and Others* (HC 572/05) [2006] ZWHHC 99, the two women argued, each claiming to be the surviving spouse. Each woman argued from her own merits. At the end of the day, the applicant (Jennifer Chinho) and the first respondent (Lorrain Chinho) were all ruled spouses of the deceased and would help in terms of rule 28(1) of the Zesa Staff Pension Fund Rules. The case prejudiced the woman (Jennifer Chinho) who had 27 years of customary marriage with the late Mr. Chinho to include the one who despite having a marriage under Marriage Act 5:11 contracted three years prior, and without children.

While the laws purport to support women in a polygamous setup, the same laws create conflicts among widows. The cultural systems and the formal courts create a rift that needs investigation.

5.5 IMPACT OF PROPERTY GRABBING

When human beings interact, fight or quarrel, there are bound to be consequences. These consequences can influence the character, character development, or behaviour of someone or something. Property grabbing, violations and abuses of widows do alter their behaviour, relations, and socialisation. How does the grabbing influence the livelihoods, status, identity, or image of the widows?

5.5.1 Psychological impact

According to Ogweno (2010:1), widowhood itself before property grabbing has psychological implications. The mind and the emotional state of the widow is distressed and shattered. It is a stressful experience that requires adjustment more than any other transition in life. The woman must cope with the grief, emotional distress and the new social reality in her changed status, estate registration and the costs involved. Marriage assumes a new social and traditional definition. For Chukwu-Onkoknwo (2015:72), “the very moment a woman loses her husband, the woman loses her prized dignity”. Once the union is shattered and eroded coupled with property grabbing, her emotional condition is made worse. According to Umeh and Jane-Frances (2015:306), reflecting on the plight widows of Imo state in Nigeria, “widowhood by implication is a stressful life event demanding a practical support system”.

According to Folta and Deck (1987:332), very few women escape widowhood without a change in lifestyle or loss of income. Priscilla Mushonga had to start her life all over again. She left the house with a suitcase, stayed in a hotel to avoid humiliation initially. She later bought a house. Ninety-one percent report economic and living problems that developed since widowhood. The widows suffer emotional, physical, psychological, financial, and social challenges. The widow of Matshazi in Ncube (2012) was sobbing as she narrated how she suffered. She nursed severe emotional scars when the in-laws harassed and insulted her and grabbed the property.

5.5.2 Economic impact

Widows lose more than just their husbands; they lose land and their security. As for the research carried out by the Widow's Hope of America, widows lose seventy-five percent of their support bases at the death of their husband. Glasgow University in America also added that Widows have a 30% higher risk of death in the first six months after the death of their husbands. They truly die of a broken heart. Umeh and Jane-Frances (2015:307) noted that widows in Nigeria end up being poor. The poverty is beyond income and includes "the well-being or good life in a multi-dimensional sense that makes up both material and psychological components". Most widows survive without a roof over their heads, no means of income and no support from the in-laws or maternal relatives. This was the case of a widow in Gwanda, who lost livestock to the late husband's brother. The brother-in-law sold all the livestock and did not share the proceeds with the surviving spouse, leaving her and her sick child in abject poverty. Those who are gainfully employed survive on their income. The relations with the in-laws stay soured. The inhuman treatment pushes elderly widows into extreme poverty. Many widows testified that poverty affected them because of property grabbing. Fighting back takes courage and the money needed to cover legal costs is beyond most widows.

5.5.3 Sociological impact

According to (Dube 2017), younger widows tend to experience stress associated with widowhood at an early age. The widows struggle to raise their children single-handedly and at the same time having to confront their psychosocial ills of growing up, without the help of their parents or immediate families. The property grabbing and stripping amounts to Gender-Based Violence⁴⁷ (GBV) which is condemned by CEDAW, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and several other instruments in Zimbabwe, the SADC region and internationally. The ill-treatment of widows contradicts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) article 3 which states that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person", and article 5 which reads, "no one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment". In the same vein, disfranchisement of widows contradicts

⁴⁷ United Nations (UN) define Gender-Based Violence as, "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately." The violation can be physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual and it can be in public or private.

the SDG on promoting gender equality and women empowerment. The trauma associated with property grabbing lasts longer and the scars spoil how the victims socialise with those who do not know their case or before a potential future husband.

The disinheriting of the widow affects future generations. When the in-laws disinherit a widow, it becomes extremely difficult for widows not only to feed their children, but also to support themselves. Some widows form clubs and groups for socio-psycho support and economic programs to alleviate their suffering. Some widows resort to cross border trading, selling vegetables or engage in illicit and immoral activities. According to Umeh and Jane-Frances (2015: 313), their study in Imo state as a common trend on Southern African and Zimbabwe alike reveal that farming, hawking, entrepreneurial development, apprentice and commercial sex working are the coping mechanisms taken to lessen the influence of the disinheritance of their late husband's properties. Children drop out of school, get into early marriage and another cycle of poverty is inevitable.

5.5.4 Religious impact

The church is the "called out" community living and showing a lifestyle that, "seeks and saves the lost". The church, as Augustine puts it, "must be a hospital," a place for the wounded and the hurting, where restoration and healing are present. The church has become a haven, where the selected few are safe. When that happens, the following questions are worth considering.

Do dejected widows feel betrayed by the church and church leaders? How about their peers within the religious community? Would the widows feel they belong to the community of faith or they develop new and alternate relations? The church is looked up to, as the haven. In some cases, battered widows give up on the hope that change will come through social institutions such as the church. Instead of seeing the church as part of the solution to the abuse of women, they unanimously perceive the church as a big part of the problem. Author Davidson (1978:132) says the animosity toward the church is rooted in the widow's memories of deep personal pain through stigmatisation and segregation in the church.

When the church is silent, alternate voices speak. When other voices speak, the society loses *Ubuntu*. Some widows adopt alternate ways of survival. These include selling household wares, vegetables, or commercial sex work but mostly in abject poverty. Sometimes widows return to their natal home, starting their lives all over again. Marriage life becomes an episode of disturbed moments. Depending on the voice that speaks, we lose dejected widows or won over other voices of the moment.

5.5.5 Social and ethical impact

Ethnographers note a growing deviation from the traditional formal marriage practices to informal type of unions among the urban dwellers. Traditional marriage practices brought the two families together with elevated expectations such as hard work, reproduction, or respect on the part of the woman. Man controls all forms of activities in life including those of the wife, he is a provider to the family. The deviation trajectory is among the rich, educated and the urbanites. Urban women noted with concern the pressure *roora* exert on them. The deviations look to evade *roora* and expectation that come with it. The result is that most women prefer cohabiting, eloping or delayed marriages, and where *roora* is not emphasised or almost scrapped off. Women who prefer eloping argue that they can walk out of the marriage if it is abusive. They formalise the marriage if they realise the potential of staying longer together. Most women delay marriage until they have finished their education and acquired a considerable amount of property. This is all done to evade the control of the patriarchy.

The trend looks to avoid the pressure exerted by the patriarchy after the payment of *roora*. When a man pays *roora*, there are cultural demands and expectations on the woman. A woman tries averting property grabbing when she buys her own property before *roora*. Since marriage in Zimbabwe is “out of the community of property,” at least women feel safer and not threatened with property grabbing.

5.6 Constraints to widows’ resistance

The violations perpetrated against widows cause untold suffering. Widows continue to look for reprieve within the supplied legal and human rights channels. However, it is not an easy walk, sometimes the walk is impossible. The available recourses have limited options to rescue widows from the heinous treatment.

According to Izumi (2006:36) blockades that hamper the long-sought freedom include the limited space provided by the legal options, the ineffectiveness of the help from village heads, witchcraft accusations and the belief in kinship relations.

The legal recourses, mechanisms, and statutes available for widows have not significantly yielded the desired results. They have not protected or relieved the widows from violations. Whenever there is an appeal to the laws, customary law and traditional practices take precedence. Priscilla Mushonga, Emma Chimanikire, and several others succumbed to the strength of the culture and the patriarchy. Priscilla agreed that this is the wild beast between widows and their freedom. As a result, mounting resistance against the in-laws is a cultural lack of positive shame especially when the marriage sired children. Even the natal families discourage widows from resisting property and land grabbing because of the belief that the paternal family is always part of raising the children. The sired children (*vana vavo*) belong to them. The widow needs the paternal family when the child is sick. This is because there is a spiritual connection to any sickness or mishap; hence the consultation of the spirit world requires absolute paternal input. When there is a daughter for instance, her marriage requires the father; as such, harmony between families is a prerequisite. It is the father who charges the *lobola*, authenticates the marriage and gets the bulk of the *lobola*. In that regard, the woman is reluctant to mount resistance to property grabbing.

Several widows concurred that help from the village heads has been a nightmare. The widows accuse village heads that they compromise their societal role in the way they help in the stories. However, there are few cases though not significant, where village heads successfully averted the violations of widows.

Witchcraft accusations for the women is another obstacle from mounting resistance against property or land grabbing. Since women stay strangers in the family, she is the only one who can bewitch the family. The members of the family she is married into cannot cast a spell on each other. The family usually accuses the widow of bewitching the husband, making her powerless to resist the property grabbing. When accused, the way in which the family evict the widow is like meting the

deserved punishment to an offender. According to Mhoja (2018:1), when a family accuses the widow of being a witch in Tanzania, they blame her for her husband's death, throw her off her land or lose all her children. Monica recalled one of the cases she represented in court when the family accused Flora (the widow) of bewitching her husband. Monica narrated the widow's ordeal saying:

When she arrived, Flora found that her father-in-law had locked her matrimonial house, denying her access. Her ownership of land and property had decided who she was in terms of social identity, and without them, she was insecure and powerless.

Some killed the widows for the imagined crime of killing their husband. Witchcraft accusations also serve to settle personal vendettas. Resisting eviction becomes impossible.

While the widows could be aware of their rights, they opt for ways that do not sour the relations due to the need for family support. She will not resist, especially in case she needs their help and support with regards to raising the children. They would rather settle the property wrangle within families in an internal arrangement. These constraints are fundamental to understand as they also become the foundation of the need of the character of the Persistent Widow. The Persistent Widow bypassed those constraints and won her case.

5.7 CONCLUSION

We have noticed that the injustice perpetrated against widows knows no status, age, or locality. Most of the suffering is at the hands of the in-laws. The in-laws believe they are rightful heirs to the estate through the patrilineal system. The challenges are worse when the marriage did not sire children. If there were children in the earlier marriage, the contested estate has substantial value and if the widow is young who, in most cases she is free to re-marry after the death of the husband. Battered and stigmatised women must have their plight addressed.

There are thousands of undocumented stories in urban and rural areas. This suffering supplies an investigation of some potential role models who can empower them. There are constraints that come between widows and their property. These constraints form the grounds for the needs of the character of the persistent widow.

The voice of or the opinion of the society dictates conduct in most widows even though they lose their belongings at the end of the day. Zimbabwe needs an ABH an exegesis of the bible from the African soil to make the text relevant. After such heinous experiences can another person arise to inspire and energise widows in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 6

The essence, significance, and function of the parable of the Persistent Widow in historical context and its implications for contemporary communities

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A person's significance is decided by past, present and potential future impressions. The impact of a person from the *Sitz Im Leben* shows how that person develops transformational personalities in society. The Persistent Widow can affect many lives if appropriated. This chapter endeavours to interpret the parables from the historical perspective and then examine the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge with the quest to decode lessons. This Chapter explores the significant role of the widow in Zimbabwe's socio-cultural, historical, and religious contexts. What life lessons could she offer to the widows or women in general in contemporary Zimbabwe?

6.2 JESUS' USE OF PARABLES

An investigation into the kerygma of Jesus reveals that he taught more in parables than any other method. Mark 4:34, says that "He did not say anything to them [the crowd] without using a parable." However, with his disciples, he explained the parables when he used them. For Hunter (1960:7), "the parables of Jesus make up more than one-third of his recorded teaching". The challenge comes when figuring out whether the "presumed Jesus teachings" have the authentic Jesus' *ipssima verba* or *ipssima vox* of the preaching in the early Church. Scholars like Sanders, Meier and Crossan advocated for multiple attestations to discern the authentic biblical passage. According to Sanders and Davies (1989:323), "a passage is more likely to go back to Jesus if found in two or more sources which are independent of each other". Plummer's (2009: 4) research states that Jesus' parables are among authentic sayings with multiple attestations. They are influential and popular to those who hardly read the Bible. Jesus' use of parables is a historical method; however, the contents are not historical but a product of redaction criticism. Whether people

are believers or not, they use concepts and philosophies that emanate from the parables. What are parables?

6.3 WHAT ARE PARABLES?⁴⁸

Boucher (1983:15) is sceptical when it comes to the definition of parables. For him, parables “should not be understood or defined using the same sense in the scholarly discussion today as it was in antiquity”. This is because of the ambiguity on the meaning of words in the Old and the New Testament and their usage over time. The word “parable” at times meant Proverb or wise saying as found in *Luke 4:23* “Physician heal thy yourself”; a simile (Mt 5:14) “You are the salt of the earth”; (Matt 10:16 “I send you out like sheep among wolves”; figurative sayings “new wine in old wineskins” (Lk 5:36-38), story parables, which are fictional in nature such as the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-3), the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-8). Boucher (1983) explains that “antiquity did not have one precise and fixed meaning of a word but included a wider variety of speeches”. Thus, Stein (1981:16) argues that a single definition of the parable is problematic due to linguistic and historic uses of the word.

The English word “parable” in the New Testament is a direct borrowing from the Greek word “*parabole*”. The word comes from two Greek words, *para* throwing and *bole* meaning side by side. Snodgrass (2008:7) attributes this definition to what he called the “root fallacy”. Seeing a parable as an illustration reduces the parable to the popular kindergarten definition, which says a parable “is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning” (Stein 1981:15). While the statement is true, the definition lacks stimulus when a parable discusses human to human relationships. The definition lacks the essential part of the parable; namely, comparison.

There is no agreement among scholars as to how many parables there are in the synoptic Gospels. Moulton (1912:313) has put the number between 33-79. According to Bruce (1983: ix-xii), there are thirty-three parables and eight parable-

⁴⁸ Scholars argue that other Jesus teachings do not qualify as parables in the true sense of the word. These are similes, allegories, and metaphors. Parables do not have myths and symbolism that need interpretations. A true parable has a complete story with a beginning, ending and plot. Therefore, the Good Samaritan and the Persistent Widow are true parables. The line between parables and allegories is however at the same time a fluid one. Parables are by historical setting, situation, and literal context (see Kuske 1995).

germs, while Trench, (1841: v, vii), supports there are thirty parables. The lack of agreement on the number of the parables amounts to the difficulties in the definition of parables.

6.3.1 Parables in the Old Testament

The Old Testament has several statements, stories and phrases that qualifies as parables. The Old Testament word *marshal* (*mashal*) used often referring to far more than simply an “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning”. According to Cleveland (1963: 621), the word refers to proverbs, (1 Sa 10:12; 24:14; Ezk 12:22-23), a prophetic figurative discourse (Nm 23:7), a “similitude” (Ezk 17:2), a poem (Ps 49:4), or a riddle (Ezk 15:5). From this, the word *marshal* is a byword, satire, or a word of derision (Isa 14:3-4; Hab 2:6). The word also relates to riddles (Ps 78:2; Ezk 17:3 ff; Ps 49:4 and Pr 1:6). The other use of the same word describes a story or an allegory (Ezk 24:2-5; 17:2-10; 20:49). They equated the knowledge of wisdom to the knowledge of parable. Snodgrass (200: 51), “to know wisdom approximated the knowledge of the parable”. Ecclesiastes 1:17, “Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind”. Even in Apocryphal, Sirach 1:25 says, “In the treasures of wisdom are parables of knowledge”. Also, in Sirach 3:29, “A heart of discernment will appreciate a parable, and an ear of attentiveness is the desire of a wise person”.

From this, it becomes clear that in the Old Testament, a parable included a much wider variety of concepts than simply stories that had moral or spiritual truths. The stories were pivotal as they were the source of wisdom and a display of astuteness. From this definition, Stein (1973) argues that a parable is not a story at all.

6.3.2 Parables in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the term *parabole* refers to a “broader spectrum of similar concepts” (Stein 1981:18). This definition of the parable shows discrepancy without stages, across a continuum and limiting it only to a specific set of values or purposes. As found in the Old Testament, the term can refer to a Proverb, (Lk 4:23) “physician, heal yourself”, Luke 5:36-38. It can be a riddle, “how can Satan cast out Satan” (Mk 3:23), a comparison (Mt 13:33), a contrast (Lk 18:1-8) (Snodgrass 2008:10). A parable also refers to a metaphor or a figurative saying (Mk 7:14-17; Lk

5:36-38). However, the parables in Mk 2:21-22 and Matt 9:16-17 lack the term parable; they simply tell some facts. These range of meanings get their definition from the Hebrew word *marshal*. For Snodgrass (2008:10), “these are dark sayings intended to stimulate thought”.

6.4 TYPES OF PARABLES

6.4.1 Parables as metaphors

Several scholars like Aristotle and Dodd (1935) have defined parables as metaphors. Metaphors are “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable”. Reinstorf and Van Aarde (1998:607) showed a metaphor as “an unfamiliar word used in place of a familiar word”. The phrase, “The kingdom of God is” (Lk 15:11-22) normally prefixes the metaphor. The unacquainted one will be the nature and essence of the Kingdom of God; where the father waits patiently for the return of the son, gladly welcomes him back with the party. In this context, the story of the behaviour and character of a prodigal son is familiar. Therefore, metaphors stand for, and do not illustrate an entity with the purpose of clarification. Scholars have not accepted that Jesus’ parables are metaphors.

The designation of Jesus’ parables as metaphors restricted the definition solely to the context of the historical Jesus. The protest of metaphorical definition was that one cannot offer a definition according to one *Sitz Im Leben* but imbedded into different contexts. This meant that the context in which the parable appeared was key in interpretation. This allowed a variety of meanings on the same parable. When scholars discovered shortcomings to the metaphorical definition, other approaches and strategies came into play. One strategy employed by the New Testament authors was to read the parables of Jesus as allegories.

6.4.2 Parables as allegories

In the early Church, the allegorical method of interpretation dominated the scene. The various features of the theological thoughts of the church influenced the allegorical interpretations. The interpretation did not consider the intended meaning by Jesus or by the Biblical writers. Some known allegorists include Augustine, the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

Some recent scholars who interpreted parables as allegories include Blomberg (1990) and Snodgrass (2000).

The term allegory is a Greek derivation, ἀλληγορία with “*alla*” meaning different and “*agoreuo*” meaning proclaiming. The word suggests veiled, figurative, or symbolical language; saying something different from what appears. The allegorical method was a way of entering into the secret meaning of the text. This means that interpretations could differ depending on the interpreter. If Jesus could do it, his followers could follow suit.

The parable of the sower (Mk 4:1-20) is an example of an allegory. In the parable, the sower sows seed on diverse types of soil (4:3-8). Jesus interpreted the story bringing out the deeper meaning of each type of soil. Each type of soil stands for a type of person and their response to the proclamation of the word of God (4:14-20). The interpreters of this time assumed two levels of interpreting parables- the earthly sense and the spiritual, which is the heavenly sense.

The interpretation of parables as allegories has its own shortcomings. According to Snodgrass (2000:5), the “interpretive procedure assumes that one knows the truth before reading the text, and then finds that truth paralleled by the text being read- even if the text is about another subject”.

A parable implies a short allegorical story, designed to convey some truth or moral lesson or as Stein (1981:15) says, it is “a brief story using events or facts of everyday life to illustrate a moral or spiritual truth”. This definition suits the 21st- century individuals whose native language is English. The definition does not address the biblical language and time usage. The first-century Greek definition says a parable (παραβολή) is “an illustration, a comparison, or an analogy usually of a story rising from a common event of everyday life to show a moral or spiritual truth” (Stein 1981:16). This definition poses challenges since Jesus did not live entirely in the Greek environment. While he spoke Greek (Mk 7:24-30, 31;15:2), his native language was Aramaic. As such, the New Testament usage and understanding of the word becomes complex.

6.5 HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF PARABLES

6.5.1 The early Church (up to 540 CE)

6.5.1.1 Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE - ca. 50 CE)

Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher is one of the early practitioners of allegorical interpretations. He, with the influence of Greek philosophically allegorised scriptures to harmonise Biblical texts. He used allegorical interpretation on texts that appear contradictory with the nature and behaviour of God. In so doing, the intention was to bring a deeper, moral, or spiritual meaning of the text. He showed that the teachings of the Old Testament were in tandem with the Greek Philosophy which he had accepted. Philo came out of the Greek way of life and applied the allegorical method of the Old Testament scriptural interpretation. Even on the texts that were not acceptable to them, they were allegorised simply to get a deeper moral meaning which could be Christian.

Christianity and Judaism both shared similar thoughts. Even today, the church still has adopted the same method. Old Testament books such as the Song of Songs have found a true and deeper meaning. It is an allegory of the love of Christ to his church (or Yahweh for Israel); the other parables that have received an allegorical meaning in the Gospel include Mark 4:3-9 with 4:13-20; Matthew 13:24-29 with 13:36-43, giving the impression to treat all parable as allegories.

6.5.1.2 Marcion (ca. 110-160 C.E.)

Marcion was a Christian theologian. The early Church ex-communicated him as a heretic because he rejected the Hebrew Bible and other New Testament writings which are in the Biblical canon today. The writings of Marcion are a testimony that the early Church accepted and adopted the allegorical method in the church.

Marcion takes the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:3-45). For Marcion, Jesus appeared for the first time as the Good Samaritan between Jericho and Jerusalem. His interpretation was docetic in nature as it denied the theory of incarnation. If the assertion is to go by, it means Marcion interpreted some passages allegorically. He later allegorised the parable of the Good Samaritan. The early Church used the parable on Christological rather than teaching an ethical attitude.

6.5.1.3 Irenaeus (ca. 130-200 CE)

He was born in Asia minor. Irenaeus offered evidence of allegorical interpretation of the Bible. For him, the parable of the Labourers (Mt 16:1-16). The workers for him were those called at the beginning of creation. Those who received the second call (Third Hour) were those who lived under the “Old Covenant”; those who received the third call (Sixth Hour) were those who lived during Jesus’ ministry. Those who received the last call were Irenaeus’ contemporaries. For him, the vineyard must be righteousness and the household standing for the Spirit of God. The denarius will be the knowledge of the son of God which is immortality.

Regarding the parable of the Hidden treasure (Mt 13:44), the field symbolised the scriptures and the treasure symbolised Christ. As for the Good Samaritan, he is Christ who had compassion and was willing to bandage the wound of the man who fell on thieves and the two denarii stand for the “image and inscription of the Father and Son”.

6.5.1.4 Tertullian (ca. 160-220 CE)

Tertullian also interpreted parables allegorically. According to Stein (1973), Tertullian interpreted the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32) as follows: 1) the older son is the Jew who is envious of the divine offer of salvation to the gentiles, 2) the Father is God, the younger son is the Christian. 3) The inheritance that the young son squandered represents the birth right man possesses which is wisdom and natural ability to know God, 4) the citizen from the far country represents the devil, 5) the swine represents demon, 6) the garment represents sonship which Adam lost through transgression; 7) the reign represents the Christian Baptism; 8) the feast represents the sacrament of the Lord’s supper and the 9) fattened calf slain for the prodigal son represents the saviour present at the Lord’s supper.

6.5.1.5 Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD CE)

He is a contemporary of Irenaeus and Tertullian. He was born Titus Flavius Clemens. He was a theologian and philosopher who followed the Alexandrian hermeneutical tradition and allegorised parables. He taught at the Catechetical school in Alexandria.

He interpreted the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In his interpretation, the neighbour represents Jesus. The thieves for him, are the rulers of darkness (Eph 6:12).

The wounded man according to Clement stands for “us” humankind, who because of the rulers of darkness, have fallen into sinful passions. Clement explained the wine as the blood of David’s vine which represents Jesus’ blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. The Oil is the pity or compassion of the Father. The innkeeper to whom the saved man is entrusted are the angels, principalities and powers that should serve us.

He viewed the binding of the wounds of the mugged man as the symbol of love, faith, hope and of salvation. The two denarii are the rewards the angels will receive for the service. The statement suggest that angels share in the deliverance from the vanity of the world.

6.5.1.6 Origen (ca. 185-253 CE)

Origen was a Biblical scholar and philosopher, born in Alexandria. He was a student of the Alexandrian philosophy. He analysed Scriptures on three levels: 1) the literal, 2) the moral, and 3) the allegorical. As Breck (2001:58) quotes him, “for just as man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so in the same way does the Scripture.”

His is the famous exponent of allegorical interpretation of scripture in the 3rd and 4th century. He is the father of allegorical interpretations. Origen’s interpretations distinguished between the letter and the spirit. He made a distinction between letter or literal meaning with the spiritual, which is the deeper or spiritual sense of the text. Origen highly regarded the spiritual meaning of the text more than the literal.

He interpreted both the Old and the New Testament from the same perspective. He interpreted the Numbers 33 narrative allegorically. The names of the places mentioned in Numbers 33:5 has a deeper meaning. Numbers 33:5, “The Israelites left Rameses and camped at Sukkoth.” The names are the progression of the soul. He found spiritual significance in the names of the places.

He allegorized the New Testament Parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16). The first call referred to the people who were alive at creation and Noah, the second call are those who were alive between Noah and Abraham, the third call are those between Abraham and Moses, the fourth call to those alive between Moses and Joshua and the fifth call to those alive between Joshua and the time of Christ. The household represented God and the denarius salvation.

Origen allegorised the parable of the Good Samaritan. For him, the man who was going down to Jericho represent Adam. Jerusalem is the paradise. Jericho is a symbol of the world. The robbers are the hostile powers. The Priest and the Levites symbolise the law and the prophets, respectively. The wounds are disobedience and sin. The donkey is the body of Christ who bore our sins. The stable or the inn is the church, while the two denarii is the knowledge of the Father and the Son. The manager of the stable stands for the guardian angel to whom the God entrusted the care of the church. Lastly, the promised return by the Good Samaritan stands for Jesus' second coming. The loss of the traveller's garment as a symbol for mankind's loss of immortality and incorruptibility.

6.5.1.7 Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-390 CE)

Ambrose is also known as Aurelius Ambrosius. He is one of the most influential theologians of the fourth century. He was the bishop in Milan. Ambrose interpreted scripture from a three-fold perspective. According to McGrath (113), "the writings of Ambrose developed a threefold understanding of the senses of scriptures: in addition to the natural sense, the interpreter may discern a moral and rational or theological sense.

For Ambrose, according to Stein (1981), The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) symbolises Christ. The man going down from Jerusalem was a Christian shrinking back from the martyrs' conflict to the pleasures and comforts of the world. Ambrose was a Biblical interpreter of his time. His background was of persecution. Robbers stood for the persecutors of the church.

6.5.1.8 Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE)

Augustine was a Latin Church Father and Bishop of Hippo, argued to be one of the most significant thinkers in the history of the church after the Apostle Paul. He was a prolific writer who extensively wrote on theological systems that influenced the church. His exegetical approaches shaped the early Church and influenced the medieval church thinking. He also interpreted parables as allegories.

The allegorizing of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) reached its highest point with Augustine in the history of the early Church. Augustine interpreted the parable in the following manner: The man who was going down to Jericho is Adam. The city of Jerusalem from where he is going is the city of heaven. The moon (Jericho) signifying our mortality⁴⁹. The robbers are the devil and his angels. The act of stripping him signifies the taking away of the man's immortality. The beating of the man stands for the persuasion to sin.

The man left half dead, according to Augustine is the effect of sin; he was dead spiritually but half alive due to his knowledge of God. The Priests who passed him by is the Old Testament priesthood, while the Levite is the ministry of the Old Testament (Prophets). The Good Samaritan is Christ, while the binding of wounds is the restraint from Sin.

The oil stands for the comfort of good hope. The wine is for the exhortation to spirited work. The beast used is the body of Christ, the Inn is the Church. The Two denarii are the two commandments of love and the Inn keeper represents the apostle Paul. Finally, the return of the Good Samaritan is the resurrection of Christ.

6.5.1.9 Aristotle (384-322 CE)

Aristotle is an ancient Greek philosopher, the greatest intellectual influential figure of the Western history. According to Aristotle, "a metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else: the transcendence being either from the genus to species or from species to species or on grounds of analogy". For John K in the same vein argues, "it is a type of comparison by which one uses the fictional world to

⁴⁹ There is wordsmithing at play here. The Hebrew term for the moon is Jericho.

make clearer sense of the real world” (Killgallen 2008:11). According to this description, a metaphor becomes a comparison in which one transfers some aspects of the another to the other. These are two sentences, or streams of thoughts compared with another by placing them side by side. The phrase shows, “The kingdom of God is like”. Biblical texts with the introductory, “The Kingdom of God is like” are Matthew 18:23; 20; 22:2; 25:14. From this premise, a simile becomes a metaphor as there is an insignificant difference.

6.5.2 The Middle Ages (ca. 540-1500 CE)

The Middle Ages in Europe is also known as the Medieval Period. The period spans from the fifth century to the 14th century. The period began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE and fused into the Renaissance and the Age of Discovery. Some scholars call this period, the “Dark Ages”. It is dark because the period did not record significant advancement but used the thoughts of the earlier age.

In the middle ages, scriptural interpretation became systematic, adding controversies in the process. The early Church magnified the three-fold interpretation, (literal, spiritual and the sensual/moral). The chief proponent was Origen. The middle ages added the anagogical dimension. The anagogical method looked for the heavenly or eschatological meaning of the text. The fourfold (*Quadrigena*) sense of scripture that dominated the middle ages are: 1) the historical-literal; 2) allegorical/typological; 3) anagogical; and 4) tropological (ethical/moral) interpretations. According to McGrath (2011:114), the sense of the fourfold states the following: The literal sense teaches about deeds; the allegorical [sense] what to believe; the moral [sense] what to do; the anagogical [sense] for what to hope. The most affected word in interpretation was Jerusalem. The word referred to a specific city of Judea in the literal sense; in the moral and topological sense it referred to the human soul; in the spiritual sense or allegorical sense it referred to the church; and the anagogical sense it referred to the heavenly abode of the saints.

Who are the chief speakers and exegetes of this period and how did they interpret parables?

6.5.2.1 Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604 CE)

Gregory was born of an aristocratic family in Rome. He was born at a time when cities and commerce had declined. It was also the time when famine and plagues had depopulated the countryside. Historically, he is the founder of Medieval papacy. The papacy exercised both secular and spiritual oversight. He pioneered a mission to Canterbury where he sent at least forty missionaries there.

His immense influence on the parable interpretation is in his homilies of the Gospels. He dedicated the homilies to both clergy and laity, hence the simplification.

Gregory's Biblical interpretation was profoundly symbolic or *allegorical* because he always looked for the "other meaning" or the non-literal meaning of events, words, and things. His distinguished methods of Biblical interpretation were three-fold. The three-fold seeks scripture all the time. These were the literal, the allegorical and the moral. The moral sense represented what we should do, or how we should live. The allegorical referred to the spiritual truth or experience, to the Kingdom of God, to heaven, to eschatology, to Christ or to all things concerning the life of church communities. The "anagogical," interpretation entails the mystical, prophetic, or eschatological.

In the interpretation of the Parable of the treasure in the field, Gregory combined the allegorical and the ethical exhortations. For Gregory, the reassurance stands for our desire for heaven. The field in which the treasure is hidden is "the conduct by which we achieve heaven". The actions of the man who finds the treasure resemble how one can achieve the longing for heaven. The man who sells all that he had to buy the field stands for how one must renounce the pleasures of the flesh, restraining earthly desires and enjoying seeing God's instructions.

In the parable of the net (Mt 13:37-50), he argued that the fishing net is the church, and the fish is the whole of humanity. Once the net is full, the net must come to the shore where one separates the good fish from the bad ones. Gregory urges Christians to hold in the net until they reach the shore, which is the last judgement, where there shall be no change.

Gregory also interpreted the parables of the Labours in the Vineyard (Mt 20), the parable of the Wedding Feast (Lk 14:7-14), the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), and the parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30) in the fashion of Origen and Augustine. The summary of Gregory's interpretation shows the use of both the allegorical and ethical/moral teaching of the parables.

6.5.2.2 Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1124/1225-1274)

Thomas was an Italian philosopher and doctor of the church. He met the work of Aristotle while studying at the University of Naples. In his studies, Thomas viewed, "interpretations of the Bible as critical, because scripture was God's primary source of revelation to human beings" (Gower 97). He believed that for as long as God is the author of scripture, he has power to signify meaning even through things. Scripture for him, includes the first sense, "the literal or historical sense and the spiritual sense, which for him is based on the literal sense". The spiritual sense occurs in in three aspects: the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical sense. His conclusion in agreement with Augustine was that scripture has several senses. He further argued that there should be no confusion in the senses since everything has its roots in the literal senses and not from the allegorical sense.

Interpreting the parable of the Wheat and Tares, he used the parable to argue when the church should excommunicate people from God. His argument was that excommunication is unavoidable because of mortal sins. "Therefore, the church, who should imitate the judgement of God, prudently decided that the community should not be excommunicated, lest the wheat be uprooted together with the tares and cockle" (Gower 97).

Chrysostom influenced his theological interpretation who questioned "whether Christians should be compelled to the faith". His two-sided response argued that:

heretics deserve to be excommunicated from the church and severed from the world by death, because it is a worse offence to corrupt other's faith (and damage eternal souls) than to forge money (and damage earthly lives). The secular state condemns forgers to death and heresy is a much graver matter, so, much more reason is there as soon as they are convicted of heresy to be not only excommunicated but even put to death. The church, however, shows mercy to convert the heretic.

The other question was whether the parable teaches that Jesus commanded his followers to allow the tares to grow into the field until harvest. Thomas refuted vehemently that, “excommunication by the church is a different from, “uprooting” the heretic and should be an attempt to save the heretic soul.

Thomas saw that the parable reprimands against uprooting the tares since the action could uproot the wheat as well. Thomas used the parable on whether it is lawful to kill sinners. He argued that “killing a heretic is not contrary to our lord’s command, which is to be understood as referring to the case when the cockle cannot be plucked up without plucking up the wheat”.

Thomas Aquinas emphasised literal interpretations even though he defended the allegorical interpretation and the four-fold meaning of scripture in the “Summa Theologica”. The literal interpretation he argued, is the intention of the author. The literal sense, he declared is the sole locus of the authoritative sacred doctrine. In that regard, parables are poems in which human authors could express their intentions. This, he spoke on the backdrop that God directly authors the spiritual sense of the scripture.

Other notable figures who continued the use of the early Church Father’s allegorical interpretations cautiously like Thomas are Theophylactus (1050-1108) and Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153).

The period between the early Church and the middle ages was characterised by allegorical interpretation of parables. For two thousand years, parables, the allegorical interpretation dominated the scene. We can attribute the change from basic assumptions on the interpretations to the new methods to the unsatisfactory response of the prevailing method of interpretation. From this period onwards, new methods come into play.

6.5.3 The Reformation and post-Reformation (1583-1888)

This is the 16th-century movement for reforming the church against the abuses in the Roman Church. This period ended with the establishment of the Reformed and

Protestant Churches. Some circles would want to call the period, The Protestant Reformation. The era was characterised by a religious, political, intellectual, and cultural disruption that disintegrated the Catholic Europe, setting in place the structures and beliefs that redefined the continent. In this research, the period merges with the enlightenment period.

The reformation period ushered in a new paradigm in basic assumptions on how to interpret scripture. Previously the bible was an obscure book interpreted by the elite and the common person could not understand it. The general populace depended on the church officials and authorities on Scriptural interpretations. Influenced by the renaissance thought, the reformation period gave rise to the interest in the study of the classics of antiquity from Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and other Semitic languages. The interest gave birth to personalities such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli with new scriptural interpretations. What were their thoughts and how did they view scripture fostering the interpretation of the parables?

6.5.3.1 Martin Luther (1183-1546)

He was a Roman Catholic cleric who renounced the fourfold sense medieval scriptural interpretation. According to Ellingsen (2017: 21), Luther believed, “scripture is its own interpreter, who he said is the easiest and clearest”. In so doing, he undermined the validity and use of tradition and allegory as reliable guiders in scriptural interpretation. He likened the allegorizing of scripture to “clerical jugglers performing monkey tricks,” because it was too hard to understand. He preferred the one meaning literal sense of scripture which for him was the plain meaning of scripture interpreted Christologically- considering the message of God’s unconditional love. Scripture has one meaning found in the literal sense and not allegorically. He disputed the exegetical work of Origen and considered it, “worth less than dirty”.

Besides denouncing allegory, the cleric believed in the importance of experience in interpreting scripture. His belief was that one can become a good theologian through experience. Experience becomes an essential element of understanding faith and the holy Scriptures. He further argued that *anfechtung* leads to an appreciation of

how pleasant the word of God is. He thus, said: “[I]f I would live long enough, I would like to write a book on *anfechtung*, for without this nobody can understand Holy scriptures, not faith, or know the fear and love of God, indeed he or she cannot know what hope is” (Ellingsen 2017:24).

Experiences informs the nature of God and the hermeneutical methods applied which is attached to human experience. The search of solutions from life threatening matters is linked to an understanding of God.

In as much as Luther refuted allegorical interpretation, he nevertheless allegorised parables. The best example is his exegesis on the Parable of the Good Samaritan. According to Stein (1981: 49), Luther’s allegorical interpretation went as follows:

The man going down to Jericho signifies Adam and all humankind, the robbers are the devils who robbed and wounded him. The priest represents fathers such as Noah, Abraham who came before Moses. The Levite represent the priest of the Old Testament. The Good Samaritan is the Lord Jesus. The oil and the wine are the gospel that from beginning to end, the oil is the grace. Wine is the cross of Christ we are called to bear. The beast is Christ; the inn signifies Christianity in the world. Lastly, the innkeeper is the preacher of the word of God (Stein 1981:49).

6.5.3.2 John Calvin (1509-1564)

John (Jean) Calvin was a French theologian, priest, and reformer in Geneva during the period of the Reformation. Calvin filled his ministry with lecturing, preaching, and the writing of Biblical commentaries, treatises, and various editions of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Among his commentaries were interpretations of parables.

He protested the allegorical method of interpretation. His view of the early Church’s allegorical interpretation as “idle fooleries”. In response to the parable of the Good Samaritan, Calvin preferred to show that, “neighbourliness obliges us to do our duty. Neighbourliness is open to the whole human race and not to friends and relations only. Even in the 19th century, the allegorical interpretation continued to dominate the parable’s interpretation. Trench looked to interpret the parable in the context of time and Jesus’ situation and emphasized the ethical dimension of the parable.

6.5.3.3 John Maldonatus (ca. 1534-1583)

He was a Spanish Jesuit born around 1533 in casa de Reina. He was a student of theology, Greek and philosophy. His response and interpretation on parables are linked to the Protestant Reformation especially the writings of Luther and Calvin. Thus, Henning Graf (2009,3:206) said that “Maldonatus was a warrior who seeks to gain victory only through scripture and theological tradition”.

In his scriptural interpretation of the parable of the Sower (Mt 13:3-8), Maldonatus added a word of caution against “forcing a parable into a one-to-one correspondence with the aspect being illustrated. Instead, the whole of the parable should be compared to the whole of what is being said” (Gowler, 2017:129). In his interpretation of the parable of the Net (Mt 13:47), he warned against the Luther and Calvin’s followers whom he called, “modern heretics”. For the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” could be understood as naming either the gospel or the church.

Luther and Calvin are as wrong in Maldonatus’ day as the Donatists were in Augustine’s. Augustine had refuted the Donatists often, effectually, and completely, and for Maldonatus, Augustine might as well have been directly “against followers of Luther and Calvin long after”. This is so great a matter, that whoever reads them may substitute the word Donatist for those of the following of Luther and Calvin (Gowler 2017:130).

In his interpretation of the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Mt 20), Maldonatus argued that interpreters must focus on the essential elements and the primary message they convey. This parable for him, has eight essential parts and some non-essential elements. The essential elements are; 1) The household is God, 2) the day when the labours are hired is the day of creation to the end of the world, 3) the vineyard is the justice and commandments of God, 4) the hours of hiring signify different ages from the beginning to the end of the world, 5) the market place is the world that is outside the church, 6) the penny is the salvation to eternal life, 7) the evening time when the denarii is paid is the final judgement or the end of human race and finally 8), “ The landowner commanding the workers who were called last to be paid first means that the workers who were called at last hour are preferred to the

workers who were called earlier. Gowler (2017:131) reasoned that those who were called at the last hour “had laboured as much in one hour as the rest in the whole day”. In all, Maldonatus looked to refute the Protestant reformers and their growing influence.

The interpretation of parables as allegories prevailed from the time of Tertullian to the 19th century when scholars adopted a new phenomenon. While some church fathers and reformers like Tertullian and Calvin protested allegorical interpretation, there are traces of allegories in their approach.

6.5.4 Modern interpretations

The group of scholars in these modern interpretations favoured the historical critical method. Scholars in this category include Adolf Jülicher, Dodd and Joachim Jeremias. This group of scholars looked to recover the original parable Jesus spoke, believing the Gospel interpretation to be secondary and superfluous. They articulated principles by which to do so chiefly by stripping the parable of any hints of allegory and insisted that parables make only “one point”. The next question is: How did they articulate their understanding and interpretations.

6.5.4.1 Adolf Jülicher (1857-1938)

Jülicher was a German liberal scholar who according to Blomberg, single-handedly destroyed allegorical interpretations. His 1888 publication was a two-volume book *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* which defined the concepts of parables. He looked to expose the inadequacies supported by the allegorical interpretation. Thus, Reinstorf and Van Aarde (1998:605) argue that “Jülicher’s work is primarily an attack on the allegorical and the moralistic interpretation of parables and he insists that the essence of the parable is similitude, a comparison”.

Jülicher described a parable as a figure of comparison (expanded simile) which one secures the effect through the juxtaposition of a similar but unrelated entity of a mixed nature alongside something that is less known, indistinct, or vague. His argument is that a parable is a similitude which has only one-point contact between the image and its object. He also argued that Jesus never intended to conceal his

message. This is a clear evasion from the allegorical interpretations which potentially supplied multiple meanings. Scholars from this period began to ask what Jesus meant when teaching in parables.

The parable becomes a single picture aiming to portray one single object of reality. Therefore, Reinstorf and Van Aarde (1998:606) say every effort focuses on recovering the historical setting (*Sitz Im Leben*) of each of the parables with all necessary historical information concerning the individual features. The must be a comparison analysed in historical context of Jesus' ministry, at the same time conveying a single idea of the widest possible generality that is usually ethical in character.

However, Adolf had reacted against the former emphasis on allegorical interpretation of parables denying the presence of any allegorical element in the parables of Jesus. Whenever allegories appeared, he would blame it on the and the evangelists. Jülicher depended on Aristotle and the Greek theories of rhetoric for defining what a parable is rather than depending on the Old Testament.

6.5.4.2 C.H. Dodd

He argued that “at its simplest, the parable is a metaphor, or a simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about the precise application to tease it into active thought” (Dodd 1961:6). The typical parable, whether it is a simple metaphor or more elaborate similitude or a full-length story, presents one single point of comparison. The details are not intended to have independent significance” (Dodd 1961:18-19). The meaning we attribute to the parable must be congruous with the interpretation of his own ministry offered by Jesus in explicit and unambiguous sayings” (Dodd 1961:32). For C.H. Dodd, parables then become pointers to “the kingdom of God” here and now.

However, he went on to say that for one to understand parables well, there should be a recognition that Jesus was not speaking to the 21st century man but to the first century. One needed to interpret the parables from the *Sitz Im Leben* of Jesus and the context of his ministry. He interpreted all parables from his “realised eschatology” concept. These included parables such as Matthew 13:28-30 (the Fig Tree),

Matthew 24:45-51 (the Wise and the Foolish Servants), and Matthew 25:1-13 (the Watchful Servants); the scholars interpreted the parable from the realised eschatological view. As such, Dodd's theory was partially correct as Jesus' teaching consisted of both realised and consistent eschatology.

6.5.4.3 Joachim Jeremias (1900-1979)

He was a German Lutheran theologian. Joachim Jeremias pursued Jülicher's one-point method of parables interpretation. He added a dimension that a parable is a figurative of speech, uttered in a situation of the life of Jesus usually on the one of conflict intending to correct, reprove, or attack. Parables from the view become "weapons of warfare."

Form criticism influenced Jeremiah's understanding of parables seeking the parable's original form or the genre of the parable. As he did so, he stripped away the allegorical features used by the early Church to return to the original utterances by Jesus. He castigated parable of its introductions, conclusions, and interpretations.

6.5.4.4 Eta Linnemann (1926-2009)

Linnemann was a German Protestant theologian. She followed Jülicher's interpretation of the one-point meaning of the parable. She then added with vigour that all other elements of the parable do not have an independent meaning. In other words, they lose meaning once removed from the parent parable. She said that similes, metaphors, and allegories are all related to parables. For her, a similitude is a story of a typical situation told as a metaphor and appealing to common experience as the basis in truth. She defined a parable as a story of a very particular situation told as a metaphor which confronts the hearer with a decision as to the truth or reality that the unique episode conveys.

6.5.4.5 Dan Otto Via (1928-2014)

Via was a prolific writer of more than forty articles on Biblical studies. His primary field of teaching and researching in the New Testament studies. His focus was on theology and ethics. He also had an interest in literary criticism and the religious

significance of fiction. He died in 2014 at the age of eighty-four. He contributed immensely to Biblical hermeneutics.

He argues that “Jesus’ parables were a language event in that they injected in a new possibility into the situation of his hearers. The audience through parables was offered a new a way of understanding their situation in history” (Via 1967:53). “A parable as a whole dramatizes an ontological possibility that which is there and possible in principle for a man as man-and the two-basic ontological (human) possibilities which the parable present are the gain or loss of existence, becoming authentic or unauthentic” (Via 1967: 41). His view is that a parable is an independent text even if it removes Jesus in the process.

According to Snodgrass (2000:13), Via’s interpretations have three basics:” 1) histo-literary criticism; 2) literal existential analysis; and 3) existential-theological interpretations.

6.5.4.6 John Domini Crossan (1934-)

He is known for his association with the 1980-1990s Jesus Seminar, an organization of lay and clergy critical biblical scholars. Crossan is the author of controversial writings on the historical Jesus and the origins of Christianity.

For him, “figurative language has two quite different functions. One is to illustrate that information precedes participation. The other is to create participation so that participation precedes information. The former function produces allegories. The latter produces a metaphor on the verbal level and symbolic on the non-verbal level.... The parable tells the story which on its surface level is possible or even factual within the normalcy of life. A myth tells one which is neither of these on its surface level”. (Crossan 1985:14).

According to Blomberg (1990:32), a “true parable is regarded as an extended simile”. For Kuske (1995:97), the stories resemble real-life and natural situations. However, they do not have any mythical or supernatural elements.

Early 21st century scholars such as Dodd (1961), Jeremias (1972), Blomberg (1995), Bultmann and Wiseman preferred definitions as the early century hearers heard the parables. The historical-critical approaches introduced a strong sceptical element to parable interpretation. But it also restored the life setting of Jesus (*Sitz Im Leben Jesu*) as a primary context for understanding. Plummer (2009: 4) adds that “any interpretation of the parable which fails to consider its original historical context is doomed to fail”. Van Eck (2009:4) says that “we will simply have to take the social and cultural values (culture of the first-century Mediterranean) of Jesus and his hearers seriously”. Snodgrass (2008) calls parables “stories with intent” because they aim, “to awaken insight, stimulate the conscience, and move to action”. This is because parables have a prophetic role especially of those who have the message of God.

This research adopted and used the modern categorisation of definition by Getty-Sullivan in appropriating the parable of Luke 18. According to Getty-Sullivan (2007:2), any definition of the parable must include four things; 1) comparison, 2) the object described, with a twist that arrests hearers, 3) it describes the new or the unknown drawn from experience and 4) the subject in question designed to engage hearers. These observations are key in understanding Jesus’ usage of parables, their purpose and the intended meaning and interpretation of the parable.

6.6 PURPOSE OF PARABLES

The question that is critical in understanding a genre of literature is to explore the purpose. The dictionary definition for purpose is, the reason for which we do something, create or for which something exists. The use of parables was not unique in the Jewish community. The unique feature is that there is no elaborate evidence of extensive use of parables before Jesus and in the early Church. The presence of parables during Jesus’ ministry calls for an investigation. What could have been the reason Jesus used parables? What purposes did the parables serve in Jesus’ time?

The questions above are central as we look at the context of the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge. The context invited Jesus to use parables to make the message of the kingdom of God clear. Therefore, it is prudent to argue that parables did not only point to the kingdom of God to come, but also to the life of the

here and now. This is the present continuous understanding of the kingdom of God. This is clear in the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge. Justice and injustice issues are continuous outcry of women in every society. According to Getty-Sullivan (2007:3), Jesus used parables that suited the oral culture of his original hearers. The question is, “How can one arrive at the *Sitz Im Leben* of the parables of Jesus?” Such a consideration has led several biblical scholars to view parables from several standpoints. Some have considered parables seeking what they mean, do or how they work. With this thought in mind, we can arrive at the intended purpose of parables.

Mark (the evangelist) testified that Jesus taught only in parables (Mk 4:2,11). A critical question to ponder is what purpose did the parables serve or how did they work? The other question is “why did Jesus teach so extensively in parables?” The disciples also noted a swing in Jesus’ teaching flair, so they inquired, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” (διὰ τί ἐν παραβολαῖς λαλεῖς αὐτοῖς; Mt. 13:10). Their question begged to understand why he preferred using images, figures and metaphors and not using open, literal, and straight forward language easily understood by many. Their questioning invites an investigation and an interrogation about why Jesus opted for the use of parables.

Jesus’ response suggested that he longed to hide wisdom or truth from some people while revealing it to others. Jesus’ answer in Matthew 10:13 and Mark 4:10-12 is quite shocking when he said, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside, everything is in parables so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise, they might turn and be forgiven”.

Jesus’ parables were didactic. For Brown (1979:743), Jesus used parables to “illustrate and persuade by the help of pictures” as vehicles for revealing spiritual truth and causing people to decide and act” (Fee & Stuart 1993:138). Stiller (2005:12) calls it “an invitation to join him [Jesus] in the launch of his Kingdom”. In so doing, parables gave concrete, pictorial and challenging expressions to religious, social, and moral issues. The Old Testament story of David and Nathan (1 Sam 12:1-12) becomes a classic example of a parable where David “burned with anger”

at the man who stole the lamb and wanted instant justice. When the prophet Nathan pointed out that David was the man, he felt instant remorse and repented. The parable becomes a story with a punchline, which Dodd says it serves to, “to tease the mind into active thought”. For Wenham (1989), the unusual twist of the parable gives it affect and biting force.

Stein (1981:35) states three reasons why Jesus used parables: 1) to hide His teaching from those outside (Mk 4:10–12; Mt 11:25–27), 2) to illustrate and reveal His message to His followers (Mk 4:34), 3) to disarm His listeners (Mk: 12:1–11; Lk 15:1–2).

Lockyer (1963:17-18) lists Finnis Dake’s seven constructive motives for employing parables: 1) to reveal the truth in a different way and create more interest (Mt 13:10-11,16), 2) to make known new truths to inquiring minds (Mt 13:11-12; 16-17), 3) to make known mysteries by comparison with things already known (Mt 13:11) 4) to hide the truth from disinterested hearers and rebel hearts (Mt 13:11-15), 5) to add truth to those who love it and want to know about (Mt 13:12), 6) to take away from those who hate and do not want to believe (Mt 13:12) 7) to fulfil prophecy (Mt 13:14, 17, 35).

For Stiller (2005:12) parables serve as “a way of breaking into resistant minds with insights that stun his hearers, not with a surprise and twist but also with shocking wisdom”. This would compel listeners to show their attitude towards Jesus and his kerygma. Parables thus, invited people to work and meditate on the teachings otherwise, they would stay a mystery. Jesus’ preaching brought people face to face with the punch line of his message, contrary to the message preached daily in ordinary language.

Therefore, interpreters must exercise extreme caution not to lose the original context of the parable, the picture, the challenge and then confuse the intended use.

6.7 INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLE (LUKE 18:1-8)

6.7.1 The gospel of Luke

Traditionally, Luke, also argued as the writer of Acts, is the author of the Gospel. Luke's gospel becomes the first of the two volumes written by Luke the physician. He was Greek speaking and a gentile believer basing on Colossians 4:10-14, a convert of Paul, writing from either Antioch (Syria) or Asia Minor (Turkey). The dating of the gospel hinges on whether Luke used other synoptic gospels materials such as Mark. Mark wrote this first gospel between mid-50s and 70s. If Luke wrote the gospel after the gospel of Mark, the plausible date would be around 80-90 AD.

So, what evidence is there to confirm Luke's authorship of both volumes? Scholars have agreed that the two volumes Luke and Acts have similarities that point to a single author, while some radicals still refuse that notion. Cadbury in Stream (2008:99) refuted Luke's authorship and said, "there is much about the tradition and the circumstances of its origin to lead us to suspect that it is solely from the New Testament text". Mount further argues that "The "I" in Luke 1:1-4 was an unknown Luke whose name provided a handle for Irenaeus to link with the Luke of the Pauline letters" (Stream 2008: 99).

Most scholars agree that the author's name is Luke, but the identification of Luke stays a perennial problem. Since this research is not on authorship but the content and material found in the Gospel, the researcher will use the title Luke as the writer of the Gospel. There are two distinct evidence on authorship to testify on authorship, which is external and internal evidence.

6.7.2 External evidence

Several ancient texts testify to the authorship of Luke. According to Stein (1997:21), "the oldest Greek Manuscript contain the title "The Gospel according to St Luke". Besides, there is the Muratorian Canon (ca. 170-180) according to Stein (1997:21) which reads "The third book of the gospel: according to St Luke". It is the first volume to state that Luke was a physician who went with Paul in his missionary journeys. Irenaeus (ca. AD 180-185) believed that Luke wrote the gospel, he called him "the inseparable companion of Paul (Irenaeus, 3.14:1). Tertullian (208) *against Marcion*

mentions also “Luke the follower of Paul as the author of the third gospel” (Stein 1997:21).

Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and several early Church Fathers confirm Luke’s authorship. From this observation, we can conclude by the words of Geldenhuys (1999:43) that “Early third century tradition have attributed the authorship of the third gospel to Luke. Recently however, some scholars have rejected the tradition that finds Luke, the companion of Paul, as the author of the third gospel”. The ascribed notion puts forward the idea that the writer might not have been the companion of Paul.

6.7.3 Internal evidence

The gist of the prologue of both Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1-11 suggest the continuation from the other as they are all addressed to Theophilus⁵⁰, whose identity stays a matter of speculation. The Epilogue of Luke 24:50-53 and the beginning of Acts (1:1-11) suggest a second volume of the work previously done. Luke is mentioned by name three times in the Pauline and Deutro-Pauline epistles always with affection (Col 4:14; 2 Tm 4:11; Phlm 24). From Colossians 4:11, Paul’s companions “who are of the circumcision,” are distinguished from those afterwards named, we gather here that he must have been before his conversion as a Gentile.

In the latter of part of the second volume of the Acts of the Apostles, the writer does not write as an outsider, but as a participant. This comes out in the “We” passages. According to Carl and Pervo (1993: 66), “the narrator intrudes into the narrative (Ac 16:10-17; 20:1-18 and 27:1-28:16). Some critics argue that the “we” passages are part of the sea voyages genre while the author himself was not a participant. However, it does not appear to be the case when one reads 16:13-17; 20:7-12, 18-38; 20:2-10a. Arguments brought by Robert Stein (1997) suggest that the author used eyewitness material which then he fraudulently used to claim that he was a participant. So, if that is the case, can we credit the work of the man who intended to

⁵⁰ The name Theophilus (Θεόφιλος) is a derivation of two Greek words, (θεός) which means God and Philos (φίλος) which means love. The name suggests the lover of God. This creates own challenges when considering the meaning of name whether it was an individual or a group of God lovers. However, many scholars ascribe to a Roman official whom Luke wished to give a credible witness of the persons of Jesus Christ.

give an orderly account of things to be dependable? This can help appreciate these statements from face value that the author was a participant.

6.7.4 Luke's audience

Biblical scholars vary on the identity of the recipients of the gospels. Some scholars argue that Luke wrote the gospel from a certain place, at a particular time, responding to needs of a particular audience, community, or group of people. However, some scholars like Bauckham (1998), Johnson (1989) and Robbins (1991) argue that for all the gospel, the writers wrote to the whole church assuming a universal flavour. The other view creates an assumed audience known as the "implied reader"⁵¹, who did not necessarily exist but created by the author as an "ideal community". The Gospel of Luke is no exception. There are, however, many questions about the community Luke wrote to or there are implied readers.

Some scholars have argued that Luke wrote to a Gentile audience, others God fearers, citing Theophilus (Lk 1:1 and Ac 1:1). Different views argue that "Theophilus is not an actual name but a metaphorical or fictional one, whom others suggest he was a Roman provincial governor who was later to hear his case" (Stein 1997, 27), or as his name stood for; a God fearing or loving community. Those who subscribe to the Gentile audience cite 6:14, 8:54, 22:42 and 23:45. The audience is then argued to have been the Christian Gentile audience, whom Luke understood to be familiar with the tradition, so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught (Lk 1:4).

Others claim he is writing to Christians from a Jewish background, or a Christian church which was becoming more Gentile than Jewish. Similarly, there are questions as to the nature of the community for whom Luke is writing. Opinions vary as to whether Luke is writing to a specific community, a group of communities or an "open

⁵¹ This is the reader whom the author had in mind while he wrote the text. See Schmid (1971, 1973, 1986), he calls the reader, "the ideal reader". The ideal reader is in the imagination of the author, the implied reader understands the ethical codes, customs, and norms of the community and the final interpretation of the text. The implied reader answers the question: What is the relationship between the text and reader? As the writer put pen and paper down, the "implied reader" guides on the choice of words and the language adopted.

market” (Tenney 1985:129). The attested view is that Theophilus was a God-fearing Gentile. According to Stein (1997:270):

If Luke’s readers were Gentile-Christian, there are some clear implications about the purpose of his writing. Various suggestions that Luke wrote for the purpose of evangelism or to defend Paul at his trial or to defend Christians in the eyes of Rome must be rejected. The purpose of Luke-Acts must be understood in some way as ministering to the needs of a specifically Christian audience.

Whoever the implied reader can be, Luke names his first and primary recipient as Theophilus. Even though Theophilus was the primary recipient, the gospel according to Bauckham (1998), has a universal flavour. Bauckham’s view tallies well with the interest of this research, to seek the emancipation voice not only for widows in Zimbabwe, but also beyond.

Luke has a special interest in the widows wishing society to appreciate their worth and showing the divine being successful in communicating with women/widows as compared to the traditional temple and the male dominated society or the priestly order. Luke has more episodes of widows and women in general and their welfare than other evangelists. The author mentions several widows.⁵² The widows include Anna (Lk 2:36-38), the widow of Zarephath (4:25-26 see also 1 Ki 17), the widow at Nain (Lk 7:11-17). The author mentions a community of widows (Lk 20:47), the widow’s gift (Lk 21:1-4), the food distribution to the widows (Ac 6:1-6), and widows mourning the death of an exemplary widow, Dorcas (Ac :39-41). These widows are “more than victims who needed help; they are examples of outstanding devotion” (Levine 2015:243), or models of piety marked by chastity and fasting. The deliberate choice of the author to mention these widows helps understand the significant contribution and essence of the persistent widow (Lk 18). The same helps interpret the author’ interest and Jesus’ use which makes the widow a role model. According to Dodd (1961:4); “the task of the interpreter is to find out, if he can, the setting of the parable in the *Sitz Im Leben* in the Gospels, and the application which would suggest itself to one who stood in that situation.”

⁵² Widows are important characters in Luke-Acts narrative, they introduce to the reader the element of protest, as characteristic both of God’s initiative and faithful human response against injustice, the unfairness of life through death and defenceless when faced with challenges. Through the stories of widows, Luke’s narrative God shows his compassion and response to human needs and how widows can petition against injustice.

There are two foundational factors, according to Herzog (1994), that are key to appreciate Luke's understanding of the parable. These understand the parable is an urge to persistence in prayer and as an eschatological discourse. Below is the discussion considering those factors:

6.7.5 The parable urging continuous prayer

When one reads the parable either from Jesus' perspective, the evangelist *Sitz Im Leben* or the early Church setting, one can assume that there was persecution in the early Church. Luke 18:1 becomes pivotal on the call to consistency in prayer. According to Forbes (2000:209), "there are two reasons for prayerfulness: 1) For God to vindicate the faithful praying believer (Lk 18:7-8a), 2) to be found faithful (Lk 18:8). Ash (1973) suggested that the parable spoke to the contemporary problems in the Lukan community, thus he takes pains to make the point clear of continuous prayer amid persecution. Jesus questioned whether his disciples would trust in the justice of God and not lose heart despite adversity. For Marshall (1978:669) and Linnemann (1966:121), the parable intends to "induce that faith in God, through consistency in prayer. Perrin (1967) and Bailey (1980) all agree that the parable sought to encourage believers to pray when faced with fear, which Perrin (1967) calls, "natural and proper". From this perspective, consistent prayer becomes inevitable expecting the eschatology.⁵³

The call to "persistence in prayer" raises some theological questions. For the Jews, continuous prayer was offensive and annoying to God. Three times a day were enough for them (see Dn 6:10). The encouragement to pray *pantote* does not inspire confidence because of God's delay to "vindicate the elect" (Herzog 1994:1181). The other problem is the character of the judge. If the widow was the petitioner, it is a given conclusion that the judge is God. But is God so callous that the plea of his people does not move him? From that perspective, Herzog (1994:469) argues that Luke is arguing from "the lesser to the greater", if the judge responds to the widow, how much more will God respond to the cries and petitions of the saints. Augustine, because of that called the parable the "How much more". How much more would

⁵³ Buttrick (2000) refutes the notion about persistence in prayer arguing that it was not the original Lukan intention of the parable but an intrusion.

your heavenly father do if the earthly judge does it that way? For Morris (1974:262) the parable is of the “How much more ... variety” (*qal vahomer*) where the writer contrasted God with the unjust judge. The argument is that if “we” who are evil can answer and give justice, God can do even more and do it better. The text implies that God is the Father of the elect and answers their prayers. In response to the delay in answering the plea of the widow, Cadoux (1931) argues that God knew strong reasons for the delay even though the parable does not intimate the reasons for it.

The other debates relate to the connectedness of verses Luke 18:1 and 8. Do they contradict? Luke 18:1 says: “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” Then Luke 18:8 reads: “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” Is Luke 8:8 Jesus’ *ipssisma verba*? The difference suggests that Luke used material from another source. Do they mean the same? Some scholars are content to suggest that the author would not have kept them if they were contradictory?

6.7.6 The parable placed at the end of the eschatological discourse

Scholars like Grundmann (1969), Herzog (1994), Jeremias (1963), Fitzmyer (1985), and Green (1995) connected the parable to the myth of the fading of the Parousia. The eschatological discourses of Luke 17:22-37; 19:11-27 concluded the eschatological teachings that no one can decide the time of the return of the Son of man. According to Geldenhuys (1977:446), Jesus taught that while his return delayed, he nevertheless encouraged believers to persist in prayer, knowing that He will come at the right time. When he returns, he will answer their supplication by destroying the powers of evil and causing his chosen one is to triumph.

The above interpretation is premised on the phrase “Son of Man” in Luke 18:8 “I tell you; he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” The parable comes at the end of Jesus’ eschatological discourse (Lk 17:20-18:4). For Catchpole, “the Son of Man is the eschatological vindicator of the elect. Perseverance till the rescue which was eschatological and inevitable. The thought hinges upon Luke 17:20 which says “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come.” The Pharisees taunted Jesus about the Messianic Parousia, which many were

expecting. For Buttrick (2000), Luke was dealing with the delay of the Parousia which was fast fading from the scene giving rise to prayer instead.

Linnemann (1966) believed that there was persecution in the church when the evangelist wrote the parable. The parable comforts the disciples facing persecutions and pressures to deny their faith and the potential failure of their faith. Weiss and Schweitzer postulated that Jesus suggested “interim ethics”. As believers faced persecution, they needed the endurance and patience of the widow while waiting for the return of the Son of Man. The expected Parousia must motivate persistence. Hence Luke 18:8b says, “however, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

The persistent widow becomes the role model to a praying believer whose endurance should not wear down. The persecuted believer must endure persecution until vindicated. Jesus exhorted the disciples to keep on praying until his imminent return.

If eschatology and persistence in prayer are the themed lessons drawn from the parable, there are objections raised as a result. The problem of theodicy will not escape one’s attention. How could God allow people to suffer if He cares for them? Manson (1948:308) argued that “God’s delay was to allow Israel to repent”.

Herzog (1994) however, agrees that the traditional reading of the parable has since overtaken the scene presented in it. While scholars agree that the context of Luke was correct, the problem is how to fit the details of the parable into the theme of persistent prayer. Buttrick concludes that; while we may well have Jesus’ parable here, neither the second coming sentence nor the prayer interpretation goes back to Jesus himself. How then do we interpret the parable?

These unending debates allow this research to independently use some modern theories as the debates among scholars continue unabated on the correct meaning of the parable. The next session, the analysis of characters in the text, the applies modern Biblical hermeneutic approaches in appropriating the significant role of the parable.

6.8 THE DISCIPLES

Scholars argue that Jesus addressed most parables towards a specific audience with the intention to educate and strengthen the faith. In this parable, the audience are the disciples. Thus Luke 17:22, Luke 18:1 testifies to that. Jesus presented this parable to his disciples”, then he said to his disciples (Lk 17:22). In Luke 18:1, “then Jesus told his disciples a parable” the disciples were learners or apprentices of the expert to get the necessary life skills. The main point of being a disciple was to go wherever the rabbi went, sit at his feet learning from him. The disciples belonged to the school of that teacher.

The purpose was “to show them [the disciples] that they should always pray and not give up” (Lk 18:1). Lockyer (1963:229) adds “the objective of the parable was to teach perseverance in prayer.” When one reads the parable through literal interpretation, consistency in prayer is the only conclusion, not general prayer, but praying until the end, until deliverance comes (Lk 18 8b). According to Pentecost (1982:114), “the one who has the right cause may rightly persist in pursuing it.” The disciples are to pray consistently if God would answer. According to Pentecost (1982:113), the reflection is in Luke 12:35-46 and 21:36. Jesus created characters in the parable to supplement the lesson on persistence. The discourse, therefore, emanates from the disciples’ request that Jesus teaches them how to pray.

6.9 THE PERSISTENT WIDOW

The parable points to the contemporary challenges widows faced in the unjust socio-cultural structure of the society. The widow had an unyielding character faced with the cultural biases, powerful patriarchal and biased legal systems that disregard the interests of the poor and the weak. Yahweh, however, sees widows as weak and in need of sympathy, love, and care (Ex 22:21-24; Dt 10:18;27:19). The first-century socio-cultural milieu viewed the *χήρα* (*chera*) as the silenced one, not trusted, as an outsider and not allowed to testify in courts. She defied notions of the defenceless and cultural shameless woman when she “stepped out of her cultural determined status and role and demonstrated the capacity for perseverance and resistance against an unjust judge” (Spencer 2012:23). According to Malina (2010: 63), “culture brands her public reproach to the judge as a shameless behaviour”.

6.10 THE WIDOW'S REQUEST

Luke 18:3 says, "And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to the judge with a plea, "Grant me justice against my adversary." Her request said, "Give me the judgement of protection from, or vindicate my right and so protect me from". The verse suggested, "preserve me against his attacks not the popular notion, "Deliver me out of his power. She had a matter related to the death of her husband. The widow lived in the same city as the Judge. The Judge was her only hope out of the dilemma and responsibility for her welfare and justice (Plummer 1964:412).

She is only known as a widow.⁵⁴ The parable does not mention her age, income, or degree of dependence. What is the nature of the case presented before the Judge for adjudication? Jeremias (1963:153) believes that the issue, "appeared to be a money matter; a debt, a pledge or part of the inheritance, which is being withheld from her and that there is a single judge. She may have tried to reclaim her *ketubah* which is the money "the husband pledged to her as an inheritance when death occurs" (Herzog 1994:487). Since she is a widow, it is logical to assume that the matter before the courts had to do with an inheritance. The estate supported the widow unless she chose to return to her father's house⁵⁵. The text is silent about adversaries. If inheritance is the reason for the dispute, the in-laws are the possible contenders and they had turned against her. Furthermore, the estate must have been significant hence the reason for the debacle. The absent name, the family name suggests a lack of honour. Her widowhood status is a matter of concern in Jesus' teaching.

6.11 THE WIDOW'S CHARACTER

She is a woman of few words with character. She was persistent despite uncertainty, bold, and strong because she "kept coming" to the judge. This highlights her

⁵⁴ "She is a widow," the phrase speaks of two implications. She was either vulnerable and easily fell prey to the greediness of society or the judicial system. Secondly, she had privileges according to the ANE, the Old and New Testament customs. She was a candidate for sympathy and protection from abuse. The setting presents an obvious conclusion to her matter, that she evoked sympathy at the same time exposing the unjust judicial or societal systems. She had neither a protector to coerce nor money to bribe the unrighteous judge. The widows become an object of sympathy. The Old Testament denounces those who take advantage of the poor and the weak.

⁵⁵ Orpah returned to her people when she realized that there was no prospect of having a husband in the family. She also saw that there was nothing to inherit as all the three were widows with nothing to inherit. I suppose on her return, she was going to start all over again, needing to get married.

repeated attempts to persuade the judge. She also “kept saying” the same thing to the judge, “Grant me justice against my adversary”. Persistence was her only weapon since she did not have any bribe. Her demeanour before the judge is unacceptable when seen in the light of her first-century socio-cultural setting of honour and shame. The judge might have felt intimidated by the widow because no woman had addressed him before in such a forthright manner. Public Court of Reputation (PCR) construe the widow’s public demand for justice as a shameless act.

In Luke 18:3, she implores the judge to take her case and defend her vital interests. According to the cultural expectations, her public reproach to the judge was shameless behaviour (Perry 2012:298). She is an *almana*, or a “silenced one” in society (Curpatrick 2002:216), powerless and had no one to present her case or cause. The silenced one, without male support, ventured into the public space for her plight on her own to get justice. According to Pentecost (1982:114), “her sense of rightness for her cause made her persistent in her case ... she dismissed any sense of shame in her pursuit of justice and in doing so caused confusion to the judge.” From an anthropological point of view, the judge did not consider the impact of the widow’s response in a bid to protect himself or keep his ascribed honour.

The other questions investigate the place and religious belonging of the court to which the judge belonged. Was he Hellenistic or a Jewish judge? Derrett (1971) believes the widow avoided the customary Torah courts and went to the Hellenistic judge. She was seeking expedition of her case. Hellenistic judges were known for deciding cases in favour of those who offered the highest bribe. If she appealed to the Hellenistic Judge, she could not claim her widow’s privileges according to the Torah. The second opinion suggests the Judge was Jewish. The Hellenistic judges would not have ascribed shame to the judge if indeed that was known to them. The latter becomes appealing because of the phrase, “neither feared God nor man.”

Snodgrass (2008) proposes what this research advocates that interpreters should not only pay attention to the widow or the judge characters, but the process that brought about the request of the widow. Her actions create the reason for the story and her appeal to the judge prompted the judge’s reaction.

6.12 THE CHARACTER OF THE UNJUST JUDGE

The author's introductory statement sheds light on the parable and gives clues to the character of the judge as shrewd, unrelenting, or hard because he acted out of the bounds of society. Luke 18:2 says: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought". As in his world, judges have power to be the administrators of justice⁵⁶ but, he had no respect for either the *vox Dei* or the *vox populi*. According to Luke 18:2, the phrase "In a certain town there was a judge" suggests the operation ground of the judge. The widow stayed in the same city "to demonstrate unequal living conditions between the rich and the poor, whose world views are different from each other" (Matsoso 1992 91). The judge was an urbanite. The question to ponder is this: Why is the case passed on judicially by just one judge? According to Jeremias (1963:153), "it would seem it was a money matter: a debt, a pledge or of inheritance being withheld from her. If the matter pertains to the list, one judge could preside over the matter.

The judge, "neither fears God" (τὸν θεὸν μὴ φοβούμενος). The name of God never alarmed, or struck the Unjust Judge with fear, depicting that he was an antithesis to what the Torah expected. Yahweh supplied a criterion to select the judges:

But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter because they will share it with you (Ex 18:22-23).

The judge, on the contrary, lacked moral or ethical standards which, Cotter (2005:331) referred "as devoid of *pietas* and *humanitas*". Many of the judges did what pleased them. This is because some of them did not receive salaries, as such, it was easy for them to accept bribes to earn a living. The people with cases would send bribes days before the trial. When poor people come to see the judges, the attendances would tell the people that the judge was busy and would allow the poor to bother him. The attendances would know beforehand if people were poor coming

⁵⁶ The Torah, Judges and prophets condemned judges who perverted justice, (Ex 23:6-9; Lv 19:15, Isa 1:17).

to seek audience, if days before their arrival, he did not receive any bribe. The irony of the parable is that, even though the judge did not fear God, the poor widow humbled him, the Judge became afraid of the weakest member of the society.

The judge also “did not care what other people thought” (καὶ ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἐντρέπόμενος).⁵⁷ According to Hultgren (2000:254), “the judge does not respect others and had outright contempt for those who come before him”. Because the judge lacked sensitivity to man, there was no way he could consider the widow’s plea.

His conduct made him fall short of the expected conduct of the judges, “appointed ... in the cities through all ethnic tribes, and strictly forbade the wresting of judgement, respect of persons or taking bribes” (Lockyer 1963:300). A judge with honour was righteous, showed no partiality and would listen to the offended one. In other words, the judge was shameless. So, Manson (1949:306), Jeremias (1963:153), Bailey (1980, 130) and Herzog (1994:1199) argue that the judge was corrupt, he would extort bribes on face value and was not ashamed. He was brutal to people; he was unjust in his execution of duties of justice and he had no respect for the poor. It is not disputable that with these attributes, only those who could afford to bribe, to perpetuate corruption and those who subscribed to the judge’s ideals, political, social, cultural, or traditional views got out with something. For Manson (1949:306), Jeremias (1963:153), Herzog (1994:1199, and Bailey (1980:130) the phrase suggests the judge who responds to bribes. For Herzog (1994:1199), the Judge is corrupt and irredeemable. For Jeremias (1963:153), the phrase in Luke 18:6, “unjust judge”, means the judge is corrupt and brutal. Bailey (1980:130) says that the judge is beyond shame. The judge’s inability to sense the evil of his actions before the one who should make him ashamed is a cause of concern. He does not realise how painful his actions were to the widow (Herzog 1994:1201). From the above statements, the judge fell far short of the expected behaviour of judges in the Torah. He is in total violation of what his office stands for.

⁵⁷ Some scholars like Hedrick have appraised the judge for having no fear of man or God and being honest. The argument is that his decision was based on what he saw or perceived to be the right judgement. It was the widow who compromised his integrity for his comfort. If indeed that is the meaning of the statement it is the widow who annoyed him, not because she was right, but did not want bother in his office. But when one considers the Torah, the judge’s character lacks Ubuntu.

The judge was a man of authority (ἐξουσία). He had the power to control the behaviour of the deviant widow, who fell out of the normal social limits of the prevailing purity code. His power made him blind to Ubuntu. Lockyer (1963:300) puts it this way: “The judge was callous and dead to pity. Because of his power, Boice (1983: 159) argued that the judge was not concerned with giving justice, so he kept sending away the unjustly treated widow without settling her problem. How could the judge worry about supplying justice to a woman who disregarded her socially accepted boundaries?

Even though the judge lacked morals and conscience, he, however, had his weaknesses. He did not have patience and endurance to the bother of the deprived widow. The law allowed the poor widow into the court until she received the justice for which she was begging. While the Judge did not care about anyone. His human flaws were the entry gate that allowed the widow to get justice. He did not care about dispensing justice to anybody and especially the deviant widow who could not offer him any bribe.

6.13 THE JUDGE’S RESPONSE

The question on the judge’s response is: Why did the judge refuse to give justice at the beginning, but later gave it? The judge’s first response was to wait. For some time, the judge refused to grant her justice. In the delay, the judge disrespected not only to the laws of God but for the common Jewish practice. But how was the judge worn out by constant irritation and bother of the widow if he did not care about anyone? Jesus had a way of pointing out the motive in the judge’s decision.

For some time, he refused. But finally, he said to himself, “Even though I do not fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, otherwise she eventually wears me out with her coming!” (Lk 18:4-5).

Scholars, such as Scott (1989) guessed on reasons for the judge's reluctance. Some scholars like Stuhlmüller (1964) argue that the judge acted out of laziness. Jeremias (1963:153), supports that the judge could not act against the widow's powerful opponent and his bribes. What kind of trouble would the widow cause to the

judge? For Blomberg (1990: 225), the judge “is concerned that the widow will wear him out (ὕπωπιάζη)⁵⁸ strike under the eye causing a blue-black eye”. Figuratively, “giving a black eye” meant making the judge look bad in public, defaming him for not responding to the widows’ plea and not doing his job properly. Lockyer (1963) content to say that even though the judge dispensed justice at the end, he did it out of a selfish motive. Was the judge afraid of physical attack from the widow, if he had authority, as alluded by the text? For Pentecost (1982:114), the judge “simply wanted to relieve himself of the bother that the woman’s persistence brought to him. There was no ending as the widow was determined to continue bothering. Liefeld (2000:257) analysed the character of the widow from the honour and shame cultural perspective that the widow exposed the judge as someone who ignored a person in need. He did not do his job thereby losing the honour he might have gained and be known as the “tough judge.” The parable then falls within the metaphor of the poor widow against the powerful unrighteous judge. The widow wins because she was persistent.

Hultgren (2000:253) calls the judge “ruthless by any human estimation ... in light of Jewish law and custom”. He violated Yahweh’s double commandments of love; “love God with all your heart, strength, mind and love your neighbour as yourself” (Lk 10:27). The community expected Judges to administer and mediate justice. The judged had no kind heart and honour for the weak one, the neighbour, the widow. The testified to “generally the disorganisation and corruption of justice which prevailed under the then government of Galilee and Perea” (Lockyer 1963:300). The system appears to have negated the plight of the neighbour.

Suffice to say that the widow and the unjust judge are key members of the society. The Judge is the carrier of justice and law, while the widow deserved the peace, compassion, and care from both the religious and political landscape. The judge and widow’s conduct and treatment are foundational to the moral fibre of society. Their conduct requires restrain and piety, respectively.

⁵⁸ Paul used the similar phrase in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, to keep down, keep in subjection, (see Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). The statement comes from the boxing ring where one strikes under the eye causing a disfigurement, or a black eye. The judge expressed apprehension that one day the widow in her despair might hit him in the face.

6.14 The significance of the parable to the contemporary Zimbabwean widows

6.14.1 Persistence as the weapon against culture

The parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge has in a way, laid roots for the struggle of women worldwide and especially in the Third World countries; particularly the sub-Saharan African countries. Women in these nations continue to fight for their liberation to build holistically, new humanity against patriarchal cultural prejudices and social injustice. How can the persistent widow allow other women to break the mind set and culture that induced them to assume an inferior role to men?

Culture is a set of ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society. Zimbabwe, as “a particular people or society,” have cultural norms on the status of women pre-marital, during marriage and in incidences of widowhood or divorce. Women are culturally and historically perpetual minors from since the pre- and post-colonial periods of Zimbabwe. This has taken away women’s strength and courage in many cases. The patriarchal systems trample upon and disregard their decisions or opinion. The patriarchy consults women in private in most traditional circumstances, so cannot independently make informed decisions. The Wolof people⁵⁹ have a demeaning proverb which says, “a woman is a child, she must be guided all the time.” Like Zimbabwe’s cultural thought, a woman needs the patriarchy to think, bequeath the estate, or inherit after being widowed. Since she is unable to decide her case, the patriarchal family, or the biological son must be generous to her. Her fate can culturally be decided without her contribution. According to Blomberg (2004:171), the persistent widow “is a classic victim, a pattern of helplessness in the Ancient Middle Eastern world. Widows, like orphans, are the biblical examples of the dispossessed”. They need role models or gather the voice that emancipates them.

The nature of the dispute of the Luke 18 widow is not known. According to Hultgren (2000:254), the dispute could have been a “money matter, a lawsuit against one of the heirs of her husband’s property or perhaps the in-laws evicted from the home”. Blomberg (2004) suggests that the widow was unable to help herself and needed a male to relative represent her at the courts of law. Whatever the dispute was she felt

⁵⁹ The Wolof people are from West Africa. They are an ethnic group found in north-western Senegal, the Gambia, and in south-western coastal Mauritania. It is the largest ethnic group Senegal and are a minority elsewhere.

she had a just cause, and the right for the judge to hear her case. The knowledge that the cause was just is the impetus needed to fight against oppression and subjugation. God commended the widow's persistence against the "unfeeling and uncaring judge," who accepted finally granted her justice. The Persistent Widow started change and transformation. Her story could have been the talk of the town. Her approach indeed helped others to see the potential in the unimportant woman facing an impassable situation.

The persistent widow is a leading role model character like other widows in the bible such as Tamar, Judith, or Ruth. They found ways to intervene and act in ways which saved their people⁶⁰. Instead of blaming their fate, they found ways to save themselves and their people. When Priscilla Mushonga failed in the inheritance dispute, she accused the culture of oppressing widows and not allowing them to enjoy their matrimonial home with its residue.

The widow's continuous coming and pestering the judge was the first step. The culture expected the women to appear in court accompanied by a male person or a son to stand for her. Against the culture, she kept going to the judge pleading for justice over her adversary. At the same time, as a female, she had an advantage in the whole matter. In her powerlessness, she could approach the judge and present her case. Blomberg (2004:171) asserts that "man would quickly be evicted or locked up if he behaved similarly". The first sight of the woman at the court did not affect the judge. It was later when he perceived the threat to his person and office that he bowed to the demand. The widows/women in Zimbabwe can take a lesson from the widow in seeking justice.

The redactor of Luke's gospel wrote from a patriarchal and imperialist social reality. This view should help women to read the text with understanding so they can apply the situation to their position and recognise and recognise the urgent need for women's parables or women's narratives.

⁶⁰ The Zimbabwean widows referred to in the previous chapter had many opportunities to be leading personalities in pursuits of justice as well as oppressive cultural norms. Since most of them like Pamela Tungamirayi and Priscilla Mushonga lost the battle because of their timidity, the persistent widow and her tenacity must inspire other widows to challenge unfair practices.

Africans value *muroora akanaka*, a good daughter-in-law. A good daughter-in-law does not argue or challenge things as they are or cultural norms. She is the most trusted or loved by the in-laws. So many daughters-in-law have lost their inheritance in pursuit of being *muroora akanaka*. A “good daughter-in-law” has a sense of shame, so she is careful to keep her honour as a reputable person in the eyes of her peers. In other words, the honour was the underlying force that motivated and informed social behaviour. However, Bashoor (2007) recognised that “in communities where honour and shame loom large as in African societies, people resort to extraordinary measures to keep and gain their honour”. The widow at the end of the day, persisted against the expected cultural norms.

The persistent widow noticed how culture oppresses the weak. Women or widows are potential sources of shame. “The persistent widow could have chosen honour which signified respect for being that kind of person and doing the kinds of things the group values” (David 2000:25). The persistent widow subverted the cultural systems and norms that suppress human rights. With tenacity, the widow subverted the *good muroora* phenomenon, the concept of women, as the vehicle of potential shame and destruction created by inaccurate reading of the creation story.

The Biblical patriarchal prejudiced the Persistent Widow in the same ways they treat widows in contemporary Zimbabwe. In both cultural systems, women were vulnerable to exploitation from a tender age to widowhood. When married she stayed a foreigner in the family that she married into. Because she is a foreigner, two options exist when widowed, a return to her people or levirate marriage (*kugara nhaka*). Furthermore, according to Nidith (1979:144), “a woman, particularly an outsider to the culture, would not be considered a full member of the clan or family until she bore children under the clan’s name. The child is the physical representation of this bond”. The Persistent Widow was childless making her a foreigner to the inheritance and having a say in the estate. So, she represented herself in the court of law.

People would have seen the widow come and go to the court as the text tells us that she kept returning to the judge (Lk 18:3). Those in the court would have heard her and her story and agreed with her in her plea. Yet she was on her own. This is often the

case with those who pursue justice. While many may agree with an issue, very often onlookers do not see the issue as part of their problem. Sylvia Chirau (WILSA director) remarked:

We assumed everything was OK because the law was on her side. We did not know this was going to happen: she was not supposed to give up. She said they had expected the minister to win her case easily because she was powerful and empowered. Most women following her case thought she should have stood up for her rights (Mandizvidza 2011:45).

The Luke 18 text has more impact because the widow persisted following a solitary course.

Persistence for justice exposes socio-cultural biases. The judge's soliloquy exposed him. If the democratic space allows people to protest to expose the biases against the marginalised, the poor and the weak get justice. The protestor must keep on protesting. Malina (2001) looks at the concepts of honour and shame as values in the first-century Mediterranean World. He talks about people being out-of-place negatively as deviants but those who are out-of-place positively are the prominent people. He states: "while they are abnormal, they are not unclean, impure, or polluted. They are super-clean or super-pure, so to say" (Malina 2001:28). The persistent widow is the bright light that we see amidst the darkness, the only sure hope for those who are seeking that path. The widow's experience becomes the fertile source of engaging with the bible and starting a theological reflection. Theological reflection is a discourse in human experience. This is because theology should judge advocacy.

In as much Jesus taught perseverance, the struggle against cultural domination in Zimbabwe is possible through constant knocking on the door of justice.

6.14.2 Perseverance as the weapon against social injustice

The English Cambridge dictionary defines perseverance as a continued effort and determination. The word means a steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, especially despite difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement. There was a wall between the widow, justice, and her inheritance. The court created and erected the separating walls, the same place where people expect justice. The

widow's grievance needed the court to intervene. The court is the last source of arbitration. The powerless, the offended and the affected in contemporary Zimbabwe need the courts to intervene without prejudice. From the courts, people expect hope, the respect of human rights, laws respected and for Africans, to experience the value of Ubuntu.

The widow confronted her wall; the judge who had no regard for what God and the people thought about his persona and his conduct. The Judge was not concerned about the possible meeting with the widow. It is unfortunate that the place where she expected justice became the obstacle and the place that compounded her problems. The character of such judge/s should not deter widows in Independent Zimbabwe from mounting resistance against injustice. The character disposition of any legal person is not a hindrance but must be the reason for mounting resistance

From the contemporary point of view, the Judge lacked *Ubuntu* ethics. *Ubuntu* ethics exalts doing and responding to issues for the common good, valuing human life and dignity. The Unjust Judge almost deprived the widow of her deserved dignity and rights. However, she challenged authority devoid of *Ubuntu* becoming the model to the other violated widows. Since the Judge feared no man, he saw the woman and concluded that he did not need to entertain her pleas. Furthermore, she was a widow, a person of no importance.

The widow approached the judge in her vulnerability for arbitration, "grant me justice against my adversary" (Lk 18:3). For Blomberg (2004:174), she persevered and annoyed the judge. "Because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she will not eventually come and attack me!". The Judge gave in because he wanted to save his face but, not because of the cause of justice. Some biblical commentaries reflecting on the response of the judge with the androgenic mentality, have negatively labelled the persistent widow a "nagging woman" (see The IVP New Testament Commentary Press). She was a nagging and a constantly harassing woman in the eyes of the patriarchs she defeated. The word wants to explain away the defeat by tagging the women negatively.

According to Newsom, Ringe and Lapsley (2012: 42), a widow is “on the fringe of social structure”; she is in the unique place of weakness to “confront those with the power to improve her status and to gain what she desires”. Pentecost (1982:114) argue that the judge showed a selfish character which cared less about Justice. He simply wanted to relieve himself of the bother that the widow had become. According to the Blomberg (2004:169), “the persistence of the widow awakened self-consciousness in the judge”. The phrase “wear me out,” suggests someone causing a problem thereby inducing a favourable response from the authority. Widowhood, symbolizing the “needy” society, is also a practical phenomenon in Zimbabwe.

Widows in Zimbabwe, like those from other societies, expect the in-laws and tradition and the courts to protect them. Yet that protection does not come *gratis* (as a right) without bribing, sexual favour or losing some of the property in one form or another. Whatever impact this has, Judges must dispense justice without conditions but on merits as a human being. The invitation to the dejected is to pester, annoy or bother until the resurrection of *Ubuntu* and the granting of justice. Whatever the method the dejected widow evoked Ubuntu.

The widow embraced “self-positive” thought and talk. She was not afraid of failure because she believed in success and the law. She did not wait for outsiders to approve her. She did not feel sorry for herself or intimidated by anything or anyone. She believed in herself and thought positively of the outcome of her predicament. If the widow stands for the early Christian community, the church exhibited a strong, self-identity, united in an intense apocalyptic expectation. The community widows in Zimbabwe tenaciously can wait for their day of redemption. Before the eschatology, the early Church needed perseverance on their knees signalling their vigilance. The dejected widows do not need passive resistance but vigilant persistence, continuously going out and speaking up for justice and equality. There are countless women around the world who do not make international headlines but persist in the pursuit of justice in their daily lives. Men first treated Zimbabwean women as underdogs during the colonial liberation struggle. Eventually, they realised the potential and strength of the fairer sex. So, women received training and education as that afforded to man. It was through their determination that earned them the rights to gain equality with their male counterparts.

The widows in contemporary Zimbabwe relate to this story. If God upholds his covenant, this research shows how that covenant and its underlying morals are of greater importance to God than the nationality or gender of the participants. The nature of the dispute with the adversary is not known. What is important to note is that women fought for recognition in bygone days and to the present day continue to do so despite the opposition they meet, so *Aluta continua*.

6.14.3 Persistence against gender injustice

The gender roles prescribe to people what they ought to do and how to behave or have honour. Gender roles are culturally decided rather than biological. It is the society that dictates men and women expectations. Society has since exerted and prescribed roles and behaviour patterns for women. African Traditional society values the girl child as a source of potential wealth, otherwise she must be subservient, well mannered, dependent enduring, soft hearted and conservative towards the men. The society groom women and socialise them to be good wives and mothers.

In the story of the persistent widow, the Biblical world had prescribed gender roles and space. Her private and honourable space at home. Malina (2001:47) argues that society expect widow to respect, see, keep up the boundary lines, the definitions, and the orders of her social group of widows. She shamelessly entered the male space unaccompanied to dislodge her adversaries, to reclaim her rights, dignity (*Ubuntu*), and inheritance. Society regard women as not credible witness. She needed a male family relative to escort her, otherwise, the society construed as a person of deviant character.

The persistent widow defied the gender stereotypes and “kept going” to the judge for justice alone, unaccompanied, and vulnerable until she prevailed. The judge would have lost his reputation if he had denied the widow her rights. To keep his reputation, the Unjust judge responded positively to the widow’s plea. The challenge for honour mounted by the widow took place outside her private circle/space, the home. The widow argued from the viewpoint of social equals from the creation narrative (Gn 1:26-28) model as something to discern from her persistence. The judge looked at the acts of the widow with the potential to shame on him. the judge weighed whether

it was honourable to allow the bother to continue. At the end of the day, whatever the Public court of Reputation (PCR) could have said, or say after, what mattered to the widow was receiving justice at whatever cost.

From the contest of honour of Luke 18:1-6, widows in contemporary Zimbabwe can begin from the biblical textual analysis or Contextual Bible study (CBS) and appreciate the creator's narrative of the *imago Dei* (Gn 1:26-28). If, as argued by Bird (1997), that the biblical culture and tradition are a product of the patriarchy, there is no reason to doubt that widows or anyone can create a culture and system that is just and considerate. If God created people in his image, why not view justice from the similar perspective.

6.14.4 Persistence as a weapon against economic depravity

Widow's abject poverty sets in when major economic resources used by the couple are of real value and the husband and his family controlled the estate. Poverty sets in when the widow is also not gainfully or formally employed. Land ownership and use by the couple during the subsistence of their marriage is through patriarch. All property traditionally belongs husband, who is why through his relatives the husband speaks from the grave. Hers is the *ketubah*. The hostile environment, weak law enforcement approach and corrupt systems prejudice many widows. Land ownership and use are important because they carry a sense of identity and belonging. They have both religious and spiritual significance. This is because the land belongs to the ancestors of the people. Normally, land is the only resource for the widow and her children to live on.

The call for social justice and fair distribution of resources should be for all including prophets, other proclaimers of the gospel. The victims of abuse must be shapers and creators of their destiny in the economic sphere. The story of the Persistent Widow is an example of many ordinary people who resisted injustice seeking redress economic injustice in the royal courts, ordinary courts or with the people of positions of authority. Other stories include the story of Ruth-Naomi who wanted the name of Abimelech preserved, the story of Tamar (Gn 38) who wanted a seed for her first husband preserved. The other women who cried for justice are Rizpah (2 Sm 21:8-13) she kept a vigil over her sons' bodies until they were buried decently, the woman

of Tekoa (2 Sm 14), the two harlots (1 Ki 3) who went to Solomon or the “cannibal women” (2 Ki 6:26) who went to King Joram. Widows in Zimbabwe have many people to emulate from.

The adversaries of most of the widow’s content with land and other economic resources. Their livelihood is the target. The legal recourse is expensive and is a lengthy process, such that most widows suffer in silence. In Zimbabwe, due to the HIV pandemic, the number of female house-headed families are on the increase. Further traces of totalitarianism, nepotism, corruption, patriarchy, and injustice are also on the increase. These developments complicate the woman’s life and welfare. A re-reading of stories above and the persistent widow reveals that most men from the community or from the family are absent from supporting women. Olojede (2013:770) noted with concern that “these dire needs are not reflected in policy formulations or revenue collection”.

How can one fight against the unjust system and/ or in consideration of the prevalent abuses in society? It but through persistence. Even though she may be a foreigner *mutorwa* to the family, the persistent widow was a protagonist of a culture worthy emulating. “The persistent widow wearied and annoyed the one power. “Should not the widows in Zimbabwe rather do the same” (Olojede 2013:770). The widows in independent Zimbabwe can find ways to navigate against the oppressive systems imposed upon them. A widow in Bulawayo had no registered marriage. When her husband died, the ugly oppressive head of the patriarchy through the in-laws brought in a declaration of facts for her to sign so they could transfer the ownership of the house to the young brother. She objected and the house is still in the name of the late husband. No one signed the affidavit, and the in-laws bragged about the incident citing that she will not do anything about the house “*hapana zvaanoita neimba iyoyo*”. The Persistent Widow showed the bravery that halted the potential dispossessions. The contemporary widows can learn from the woman who cried for justice until they prevailed.

6.15 CONCLUSION

This story is an inspiration to downtrodden widows by the unfair legislation practices. The male masculinity, the authority (Εξουσία) of the judge including human frailty did not prevail against the helpless widow, but she prevailed against injustice.

The words of Lockyer (1963) are ideal parting words:

The widow did not prevail because of her eloquence or elaborate plea. Her words were few, eight only, 'I pray thee avenge of mine adversary.' Her cry was short and explicit. She had nothing about her widowhood, her family or divine judgement upon the unjust judges. She got what she longed for justice against her adversaries.

As a way of concluding the community must understand that life is not fair to a certain class of people – the women. If the unfairness continues to exist, persistence in search for justice is foundational.

Chapter 7

Recommendations and response to the continued exploitation of widows

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This conclusion of the study of the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge (Lk 18:1-8) highlights the significance and relevance to the experiences of widows in Independent Zimbabwe. It is three-fold. The summary highlights 1) the major findings of the research; 2) the significant contributions to the study; and 3) the recommendation to further contextual biblical hermeneutics. Even though the investigated worlds are centuries apart, the socio-historical, religious, and political contexts of the communities are similar, and the contextualisation of the discovered remedy is possible. The contextual interpretation of the bible supplies indispensable lessons.

7.2 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The research investigated the following issues; Why does the socio-legal system continue to disenfranchise women? Who are the culprits that disenfranchise widows? Why are some people not ashamed to perpetuate victimization and marginalisation of women in post-Independent Zimbabwe? Do laws and policies play any significant role in alleviating the suffering of widows? Does Christianity play a significant role in search of sustainable solutions? Do we have role models that help address women's challenges?

The preceding chapters have pointed out clearly the historical, cultural, and patriarchal traditional practices of the perpetuate violation of widows in the pre- to the post-colonial period in Zimbabwe. The prevailing conditions are a direct or indirect result of the appeal to African "male masculinity," the work of and activities of missionaries, colonisation, and the African's life *modus operandi*. Humankind has not changed much; laws still dictate the superiority of the male above that of the female. These entities fuelled the already entrenched oppression and segregation of women. This segregation gave birth to different forms of violence and violations. The

violations deprived women of “*Unhu*,” being a person and the identity and privileges that comes with marriages. The violence, according to Manyonganise (2019:171), is a form of communication. The violence “tells” women to subordinate themselves to those who perpetrate violence.

Culturally, women are “perpetual minors”, called “*vakadzi ipwere*” in Shona. Children need guardians and are incapable of making sound decisions on their own. Men make important life decisions on behalf of women and women only comply. If she does not obey, she is “met with fury and usually, rewarded with violence” (Manyonganise 2019:171). The violations, devoid of Ubuntu, do not consider the burdens women carry and continue to bear, such as raising children, tilling the fields, looking after extended families while the husband is away at work. The violations further ignore her contributions in the liberation struggle for the independence of the nation. Women’s continued stay in designated private space through the dictates of the culture and tradition to safeguard her acquired honour and respect.

The research saw that Zimbabwe could not have achieved political independence without women. The participation of women in the liberation struggle is key to appreciate power inherent among women. Women also suffered from different fronts; from the front line and when left home. The women played several significant functional roles in the front line that made the struggle easier. They carried food supplies, informed *vakomana or vanamukoma*,⁶¹ sang and danced in the camps. The singing boosted the morals of the soldiers as they went for the war. The women who remained behind at home also contributed significantly. However, there are a few official documents about their contributions. When documented, the stories carry patriarchal undertone. This makes men to appear as the only significant players in the liberation struggle.

Since Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980, there are several policies and frameworks publicized to redress gender inequalities and imbalances, but violation continues unabated. The research found out that more much attention is needed to cultural

⁶¹ The name “*Vakomana or vanamukoma*” (boys or our brothers) respectively were given to the Zimbabwe’s liberation soldiers appreciating them in the struggle. The name was used to conceal them as war liberators.

habits and practices that make it difficult to prosecute male offenders. The LAMA of 1982, CEDAW, *The Domestic Violence Act of 2007* and several other Acts local, regional, and international were a legal reaction against abuses perpetrated against women. The laws “intended to make violence against women a private supposedly to shield the victims. However, abuses kept rising. The research saw that violations against women continue unabated because African inheritance ceremonies and rituals are private family matters. The manner the family distributes the estate makes it hard for the legal minds to prosecute the perpetrators.

The research acknowledged the immense women’s historical resistances to abuses and the formations of pressure groups like Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), Women’s coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), Women and land rights in Zimbabwe and several other women empowerment organisations and ministries, with the intention to address women’s issues. The state machinery to promote gender concerns was ineffective and this compelled the development of those self-governing women’s organizations to foster female equality. The formed pressure groups sprouted locally, regionally, and internationally. Even though they are in their numbers, they did not significantly influence the much-needed change in the way women are treated. Whenever there were some changes, they were temporary only looking to appease and silence those pressure groups. As a result, there was no sustainable changes and the demise of the leaders of given pressure groups meant the death of the idea.

The research found out that when widowed, the man decides the woman’s future through patriarchal relatives or their son to protect her, otherwise; men inherit her (*kugara nhaka* like levirate marriage). Culturally the woman is incapable of making informed decisions, more particularly when in an emotional traumatic circumstance such as the death of the husband. The males must inherit the widow as a way of keeping her status and her dignity. The inheritance process is a private cultural, clan or family-based and non-members or local leaderships, the police even local chiefs find it difficult to intervene against “violations” unless invited. Because of these setups, violations go unchecked.

The political Independence of Zimbabwe promised to undo the violations but did not significantly alter the cultural violations and suffering of women. The new

Zimbabwean government insisted on following African customs and traditions when deciding status and inheritance issues. The quoted stories and cases of the violations and disposition of property is a testimony to the effective inability of the legislation to address the concern of women. The African woman has men all her life, in her natal home to protect her and when the new man *lobola* she pays, she transfers all her rights into the family she is marrying. The research discovered that most of the widows' violations to disinherit are in the hands of the in-laws although there could be other mitigating factors. The in-laws believe they are *bona fide* inheritors to the estate. The abuse is more prevalent when the widow is young. The in-laws object to her taking the estate to a potential new relationship. In most cases, the relatives send the widows away empty-handed to her natal home. There are thousands of documented and undocumented stories in urban and rural areas that reveal the ugly head of tradition. The violations propelled this investigation for potential role models and how the wheels of injustice can be halted.

Christianity, when contextualized is a bloodless religion based on the greatest commandment "love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Mt 22:39) and Matthew 7:12, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets". The texts supply a sound argument for sustainable solutions. The use of the uncontested book, the Bible, taking a cue from victors of social injustices, arms the marginalised and gives them courage against any form of injustice or violations. The contextual use of the Bible and its interpretation by the "ordinary people" supplies weapons of emancipation to the oppressed most or minority. The Bible is key, if we are to entertain sustainable change on the suffering and promotion of gender equality.

Even though ANE and Biblical culture, tradition and patriarchy could have negative attitudes towards widows, they also show extensive concern for the aliens, widows, and orphans. God's mission (*Missio Dei*) and the Jesus mission (*Missio Christi*) show compassion to the vulnerable. The care of the weak of society; widows, orphans and aliens become the hallmark of good leadership, true worship, and moral uprightness.

The church's kerygma at the pulpit should be pragmatic. It must be pragmatic enough to provoke action leading to the release of those in the dungeon. The message from the Christian faith that encompass liberation is an observable fact in the Bible. Jesus came "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Lk 4:18). The reading or the preaching from the Bible should complete its liberation work. The denial and abuse of women's rights is rooted in the hegemony of social injustice rooted in Zimbabwe's tradition and culture rather than the Christian essence.

The research concluded that the patriarchal framework in the biblical narratives, Zimbabwe's cultural and colonial mentality prohibits women from becoming full-fledged *human* role models. The persistent widow is a role model who pestered the Judge until he granted the widow justice. She is astute and is a woman of courage who decisively takes charge. She is a woman of courage and any human who finds themselves in a comparable situation can follow her examples.

7.3 POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF THE STUDY

Since independence, women in Zimbabwe expected change against the abuse perpetrated against them. The promulgation of several legislations promised them a new life. However, there has never been any notable change, women have now begun to look elsewhere to redress their challenges. In the history of Africa and Zimbabwe, the Bible continues to play a significant role in the communities of faith. Even non-believers acknowledge that the bible is an important book. The courts of law hold high this Book to authenticate their statements. People swear upon it to prove their confession or statements in honesty. The Bible is also a new alternative in addressing the plight of women. The question arises; why did the author of the gospel leave out the name of such an important woman? Was not she important enough for the Bible not to mention her by name? Was the Bible minimizing the significant role of widows, or she was standing in for all the abused women and widows?

The research suggested a new way of dealing with the problem of abuse and violations against widows through nameless and invaluable people. Men may try to continue controlling women by downplaying the seriousness of the abuses women

are undergoing. It is also easy to underestimate the religious, social, and economic impact of the abuses on women. It is especially important for women to protect themselves from impact of those abuses. This study is not a person-centred research or a re-appeal to laws. The motivation of this research is understanding the impact of the abuses leading to challenge the attitude of the in-laws, surviving family members and the redundant laws and frameworks. Several laws and legislation enacted have not addressed the violations of women. Abuses are on the increase, there is an answer somewhere and models are there. We can use Biblical narratives to search for the role models. The persistent widow (Lk 18) is but one singled out woman in the research for women to emulate and challenge violations. She understood the gravity of violations and sought a reprieve and she persisted until she obtained justice.

The study proposed ideological studies proposing a new Biblical reading that speaks to the marginalised. According to Schaeffer (2016:110), the afflicted ones “require the kind of religion which the historical Jesus proclaimed; one where compassion and to reduce the suffering in all its dimensions are the priority, and where peace replaces violence and extreme poverty, and sickness are substantially addressed.

The study allows the reader to see that if God commended and changed the rules in the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge, it is highly probable that when Zimbabwe applies the same principle, women gain the deserved honour. These stories can be sources for constructing norms and a new model for contemporary African society. The search for emancipation is foundational and the answer is in the Bible.

With the myriad of violations against women, the researcher concluded that the Bible is an indispensable tool both in colonising and liberating the “ordinary or weak people” of any socio-historical-, political-, or religious injustices. The rise of biblical feminism was another way of interrogating the meaning of biblical texts from a given contextual point of view. The Bible is the last court of appeal. The Bible has a revolutionary and liberating motif if contextualized. The Bible becomes a weapon against the enemy for uplifting the marginalised groups. The biblical world sheds

light on personality that achieves intended results, challenges the biased application of laws and the selective use of the laws.

This research supplied a victim led process and solution, which adheres to globally accepted norms and international laws. The survivor informed solution leads to effective transformation and healing of similarly affected victims because it supplies efficient and effective processes to address the most pressing needs, as identified by the survivors themselves. The idea of survivors leading their own movements enhances responsiveness within the community of their ability to further improve both their own future and those of others like them. Such capability encourages survivors to rise from horrific conditions with dignity and pride in their work. The process awakens Ubuntu ethics, which recognise that one is part of a greater whole. Victims of abuses carry the transformational power embedded in them. The power to influence begins from the inner conviction that cultural practices deprived you of your entitlements and rights. The victims should protest injustices right at the office of authorities that turn a blind eye and ear to abuses, rejects, and compromises the privileges of the weak. Perseverance must complete the task through the voice of the violated.

The research wanted every widow to discover their preferred identity. Further, the research wanted widows to develop their preferred practices and celebrate their identities. The widows must take part in the study, sharing in addressing cultural discourses and social practices that promote injustice or that create oppressive situations and deconstruct them. The research wanted marginalisation of widows within every sector of life to liberate themselves through practical contextual theology. The also researchers wanted to introduce widows to new possibilities of becoming heads of their own culture and destiny.

Any person, ordinary, unknown, or nameless, once regarded as invaluable can be a protagonist of new narratives that God commends. “Will not God vindicate his chosen who cry unto him day and night. The tenacity of such women in our time is vital for the deliverance of justice. Just as Persistent Widow in the bible encourages by her tenacity, women from our country can learn and start transformative explorations. While the Persistent Widow might not have been known by name but

by her condition, her actions and words are noteworthy and important that the Holy Scriptures included her as the voice of the underdogs. The call is to promote and create a new destiny regardless of gender, race, popularity, or significance. The parable of the Persistent Widow helps acknowledge, show, and praise women in ways that are appropriate in any culture. Widows can be admirably brave and risk their lives and honour to reach justice that impacts the future.

This study approach made use of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) as the starting point and then contextualized the story to give force and impetus to the fight for justice and freedom. The words of Curie (2014) are the best summary that “Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and confidence in ourselves. We must believe that people are gifted for something and that this thing, at whatever cost, must be attained.” Hence, the widows must always take a cue from the persistent widow as a role model against all forms of prejudice and abuses.

7.4 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Aluta continua (the struggle continues) as a culture continues to exploit women in Zimbabwe and indeed worldwide. The sustainable search for peace and freedom should underpin gender equality in Zimbabwe. The research should, however, not limit itself to women only. The call includes every gender, race, and age. The exploitation and oppression manifest in different forms in the societies of Zimbabwe. Professor Chitando at the Association for Theological Institutions in Southern Africa (ATISCA) conference in 2010, noted that the stronger ones (men) have unlimited control over the other (women). Men must see God in the female sex, otherwise, there will be no fairness.

To promote gender equality, the society and women must further challenge and interrogate oppressive practices. Women can begin the search for freedom. With the increase in the use of technology, the voices of the crying of the widows are very loud. They do not need to travel around because the world has come to women. Education and access to internet should open new horizons for the widows in Zimbabwe. Their voices should not only be sounds of mourning and dejection; the voices should also speak about the success of women in different sectors of life. The

readers of these stories will then feel relieved and assure other women of the possibilities of freeing themselves from the tyranny of man.

In discussing the Christian teaching about education of women in Zimbabwe, it is important to discuss the normative Christian teaching and the diverse cultural practices among Christians in Zimbabwe⁶². Christianity and other learning institutions are criticised as perpetuating patriarchal alienation and subjugation. The Bible texts can be catalysts in promoting the welfare of women. Further, Zimbabwe's government has not prevented girls and women from studying both in private and public centres of learning. Zimbabwean women have a better literacy rate than men. Women have vast opportunities to study abroad in fields they wish to pursue. These are windows of opportunities that women need to continue exploring.

Women in independent Zimbabwe have made significant strides in advocating for women's quota system. In the 2013 harmonised elections, women's representation in parliament rose to 34 percent from 19 percent. This was because of the quota system. Tshuma (2018) says that "Quotas are methods used in politics as a means of addressing women's macro and micro level needs in society". The quota system as constitutional provisions "is a tool to facilitate women's participation in politics against patriarchy and male hegemony" (Chihoro & Kache 2019). Quota systems are crucial, but they are not an end in addressing the plight of women. Even though the elected numbers dropped, their presence increased, thanks to the quota system. A further investigation of how women can increase their participation is necessary. An investigation of how the quota system benefits can be the beginning of gathering the voice of women to enable equality. It is also incumbent upon women to use the given

⁶² In 1989, Mercy Amba Aduyoye (*Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy (Orbis, 2005)*) founded the "The Circle of the concerned African women Theologians". The vision of the formation centered on exploring the position of the African woman in the society, hinder the African woman from developing into a full human being, factors that legitimizes the disempowerment of women, the effects of the patriarchal tendencies in the society, the effect of colonialism and that Biblical interpretation were dominated by males. On the founding of the movement Teresa Okure of Nigeria was the only woman theologian present. However, the number of women has since increased over passage of time. Other notable women contributors in this research are Musimbi Kanyoro (2001, 2004), Madipoane Musenya (2004) Musa Dube (1996; "Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Storytelling Feminist Reading of Mark 5:24-43" in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube (SBL, 2001).), Dora Mbuwayesango, Nyambura Njoroge (2001) and several other contributors. The increases in numbers are a positive contributor in search of contextual Biblical hermeneutics to empower women.

quota system as a vehicle to search for the voice and workable systems that speaks to the plight of widows.

To sum up, the contextual use of the Bible will help in bringing out the long-hidden voice to the fore. Following this research, biblical characters are an inspiration to the marginalised women in society. This research encourages more research on human empowerment beyond mere oppressive norms. Women must strive for empowerment and use the legal system to their advantage. Too often, patriarchy takes advantage of the legal system that could have worked to the betterment of women. The hope is that that the law, policy makers and the oppressed can use this research to discover the suppressed women's voices.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Given the circumstances, the important question of this research was: For how long will this untapped character or talent remain hidden within dejected widows? Whose responsibility is it to unleash the power in women? Women have always played significant roles, have transformed lives, bear the burdens of life, and played key roles in life even in the liberation struggles for independence. Naomi Nhiwatiwa (2004: 49) said:

You have read of Chimoio when Ian Smith sent a fleet of helicopters to kill the refugees at Chimoio and killed hundreds of the Zimbabweans. It was the women's brigade that shot down Ian Smith's planes. You read about the exploded oil tank near Salisbury very recently, it was a brigade led by women that blew up the oil tanks near Salisbury. So even though the Zimbabwean women suffered double oppressions, we see her persistence and her courage to liberate her country.

The only way forward is for women to understand that they do have the rights and it is up to them to be courageous and knowledgeable about the legal system that governs them. It is time for action and not to appeal for sympathy. According to Chitando and Manyonganise (2011:160),

[W]omen ought to stop putting too much emphasis on their victimhood status and take full responsibility for the way they are treated and viewed by the society. This is partly true because women too have been perpetrators in Zimbabwe's conflict, beating up people and acting as informers and snitchers, inciting violence, cheering, singing, and dancing while people were being beaten at different militia bases.

If women do not fight for their rights, no one else will. Their silence will be a sword of doom over their heads.

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