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Molly Manyonganise

DARING PATRIARCHY?

A Biblical Engagement with Gender Discourses on Political Participation in Post-colonial Zimbabwe

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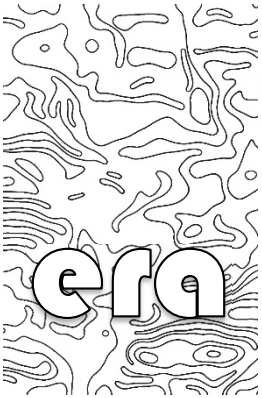
Dedication

To
the memory
of
my father,
Boniface Juru Mhuru

They thought they had buried us,
they did not know that we were seeds.
Dearly missed
and
greatly cherished.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To the women and men whose voices are captured in this study, I am forever grateful. Without them, it would have been very difficult to understand the role of religion in shaping gendered attitudes towards political participation in Zimbabwe. Through the women, the 'subaltern' spoke and I am hopeful that the politically powerful in homes, religious institutions and national governance systems will be able to lower the volume of the dominant patriarchal discourses so that the women's voices cannot only be heard but their concerns addressed.

I wish to also extend my gratitude to all colleagues who attended the seasonal Oberseminars held in the New Testament Department at the University of Bamberg where I managed to present some of my chapters for this study. Their contributions assisted in fine-tuning this study. The same goes to my friends at the Zimbabwe Open University. They went

out of their way to constantly check on my well-being in my 'one room' apartment. Through calls, we talked and laughed. It was like I was home while away from home. How could I not laugh to our common phrase '*Zvingandiuraya*' (It can kill me). I cherish the concern and support.

I would not forget to mention Professor Ezra Chitando. From the time that I came up with the draft proposal, he was there to offer advice on how to strengthen it. Throughout my fellowship, he went out of his way to share with me new publications related to the area of my research. I am always amazed by his selflessness.

Kudzai Biri, my sister, thank you for being there from the time I conceived of this idea. You guided me all the way and you stood with me during the most trying times during my stay in Germany. I pray that God may reward you accordingly.

Last but not least, to God, my heavenly father, Jesus Christ, my redeemer and the Holy Spirit, my companion, I am forever grateful for opening doors for me that no man can. Thank you for sustaining me throughout the fellowship period. *Dai vasiri Jesu* (If it was not for Jesus) ...? I am because He is.

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Wie politisch ist das Private? – Ein deutsches Vorwort zu BiAS 35

Joachim Kügler

Viele in Europa, so sie sich denn überhaupt für afrikanische Angelegenheiten interessieren, blicken mitleidsvoll und dem wohligen Gefühl, es besser zu haben, auf die Gender-Relationen in vielen Teilen Afrikas, das sie als rückständig, ja geradezu als archaisch in der Ausgestaltung der Rollen von Männern und Frauen ansehen. Dabei wird geflissentlich übersehen, wie jung die Fortschritte in Europa sind und wie klein sie in bestimmten Bereichen immer noch sind. Zudem wird ein solcher - wohl eher kulturkolonialer – Blick auf Afrika leicht übersehen, wie rasant die Veränderungen in Afrika vor sich gehen. Wirtschaftlich, kulturell und religiös sind viele Länder in einem Dauerbeben, das man als krisenhafte Erschütterung fürchten oder als das Beben beim Start eines Ozeandampfers bewundern kann. Mein oberflächlicher Eindruck ist, dass in etlichen Ländern Afrikas das Beben der Veränderung vor allem mit hoffnungsvollem Aufbruch zu tun hat, auch wenn es in manchen Regionen mehr mit Krise und Chaos zu tun haben mag. Dort jedenfalls, wo afrikanische Gesellschaften vor Veränderungs- und Aufbruchswillen beben, hat das viel mit der Stärke und dem wachsenden Selbstbewusstsein von Frauen zu tun, wofür die Arbeit von Dr. Molly Manyonganise ein beredtes Zeugnis ablegt. Mein Vorwort ist eine kommentierende Paraphrase dieser wichtigen Arbeit und verfolgt die Absicht, den deutschsprachigen Lesenden, die manchmal etwas Scheu haben, sich mit englischsprachigen Texten abzumühen, deutlich zu machen, dass es sich – nicht nur in diesem Fall! – unbedingt lohnt, die Ergebnisse einer Forschungsarbeit wahrzunehmen, die ebenso sorgfältig gearbeitet wie breit angelegt ist.

Beharrlich stellt die Humboldt-Stipendiatin Manyonganise als Religionssoziologin die Frage, was die von Religion beeinflusste Gestaltung persönlicher Gender-Relationen mit der politischen Überrepräsentation von Männern im Politischen zu tun hat. Ausgehend von dem feministischen Grundsatz, dass das Private politisch ist, nimmt sie eine Definition des Politischen vor, welche die Machtverhältnisse im privaten Raum von

Haushalt und (Groß-)Familie, sowie in religiösen Gruppen und Institutionen umfasst. Dabei geht es darum, die verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Strukturen, die Männliche Herrschaft aufbauen und erhalten, genau zu verstehen, weil diese die Grundlagen liefern für die Chancenungleichheit von Frauen und Männern hinsichtlich politischer Mitgestaltung auf regionaler und nationaler Ebene. Dabei spielt die strikte Trennung von „öffentlich" und „privat" eine ganz wesentliche Rolle für die politische Nichtbeteiligung von Frauen. Schon das Konzept von Bürgerschaft ist radikal gegendert und erzeugt in der Dichotomie von Privatem und Öffentlichem enorme Machtungleichheit, in dem es spezifische Räume für die Geschlechter schafft. Die genaue Analyse solcher geschlechtsspezifischen Räume eröffnet auch einen neuen Zugang zu der Funktion von Religion für die Entwicklung von kulturellen Konzepten, die dazu geeignet sind, Frauen aus dem politischen Raum fernzuhalten oder ihren Status in diesem Raum zu schwächen. Dabei wird auch deutlich, dass Religion in Simbabwe (wie in vielen Ländern im nachkolonialen Afrika) eine explizite Rolle spielt – nicht nur hinsichtlich der persönlichen Orientierung der politisch Handelnden, sondern auch als Quelle von argumentativen Mustern im öffentlichen Diskurs. Auch wenn manch moderner Afrikanismus gerne von einer vorkolonialen Gender-Gerechtigkeit träumt, schreibt eine genauere Analyse von Rolle und Einfluss des Kolonialismus diesem eher die Funktion zu, vorhandene Strukturen Männlicher Dominanz verändert und verstärkt zu haben. So speist sich die heutige Forderung nach einer Unterordnung der Frau in Ehe und Familie ebenso wie ihre systematische Marginalisierung im öffentlichen Raum aus vorkolonialer Schona-Kultur ebenso wie aus kolonialistischen Mustern. Manyonganise befasst sich mit dem Konzept der Frau als einer „Fremden" im Haushalt des Mannes und in dessen Verwandtschaft bei gleichzeitiger Entfremdung von der Herkunftsfamilie. Die Stimmen von Frauen aus unterschiedlichen Kontexten deuten an, dass immer weniger Frauen bereit sind, sich mit dieser Heimatlosigkeit auf Dauer abzufinden. Die Bibel und biblisch fundierte Religion gehören zweifellos zum kolonialen Erbe, obwohl sie inzwischen so adaptiert wurden, dass viele die Bibel inzwischen als afrikanisches Buch wertschätzen. Auch im Bereich biblisch gestützter Religion konvergieren Denkmuster aus vorkolonialer und missionschristlicher Tradition, um in (un-)heiliger Einigkeit die Dominanz des Mannes und die Unterordnung der Frau zu begründen. So werden in vielen simbabwischen Kirchen Frauen als unfähig zur Leitung angesehen, was auch Teil der Verkündigung und der religiösen Erziehung ist. Die

Unterordnung und Entmachtung der Frau im kirchlichen Bereich trägt dann auch ihren Teil zur Marginalisierung von Frauen im staatlichen Entscheidungs- und Gestaltungsbereich bei. So sehr es wertgeschätzt wird, wenn Frauen einen besonderen religiösen Enthusiasmus an den Tag legen und sich hoch engagiert in das kirchliche Leben einbringen, so wenig wird es für möglich gehalten, dass sie Macht- und Entscheidungsfunktionen übernehmen. So fehlen dann besonders die stark religiös geprägten Frauen nicht nur in den Leitungsfunktionen ihrer Kirchen, sondern sind auch religiös motiviert, sich im Familienleben als vorbildlich unterwürfige Frau zu verhalten und sich vom öffentlich-politischen Bereich fernzuhalten. Das bedeutet, dass besonders intensive Religiosität zu besonders deutlicher Marginalisierung von Frauen in der Gesellschaft führt. Das ist deshalb besonders heikel, weil die Erfahrung von Ohnmacht im Haus und am Arbeitsplatz oder auch der Verlust des Arbeitsplatzes häufig dazu führt, dass Frauen sich der Religion zuwenden und sich mit besonderer Intensität in ihrer jeweiligen Kirche engagieren. Dabei werden sie nicht nur von Leitungsfunktionen ferngehalten, sondern bekommen auch wenig Autorität zugesprochen. Sogar in Kirchen, die Frauen ordinieren, zeigt sich, dass sich dort gegenderte Parallelstrukturen herausgebildet haben, die sicherstellen, dass die männlich-patriarchalen Strukturen die Macht von Pastorinnen begrenzen. Zurecht geht die Autorin davon aus, dass der Teufelskreis von Entmachtung, Religiosität und weiterer Entmachtung nur dann aufgebrochen werden kann, wenn eine Veränderung im Zentrum der religiösen Inhalte selbst gelingt. Dieses Zentrum ist – zumindest formal – die Bibel, die in den meisten simbabwischen Kirchen als direktes Wort Gottes gelesen und in fundamentalistisch-selektiver Lektüre zur Bestätigung der patriarchalen Geschlechterhierarchie benutzt wird. Das fängt mit einem betont männlichen Bild von Gott und Jesus an und endet mit direkten Anweisungen zum Schweigen der Frau in der Kirche, die in den paulinischen Briefen gefunden werden. Was die Zukunft bringen wird, ist selbstverständlich nicht abzusehen, aber es ist zumindest auffällig, dass einige Frauen sich auch im kirchlichen Bereich nicht mit ihrem Ausschluss von Macht und Mitbestimmung abfinden, sondern ihre Energie in die Entwicklung von frauenspezifischen Pastoralräumen investieren oder sogar ihre eigenen Kirchen gründen. Offensichtlich – und das macht Manyonganises Arbeit sehr deutlich – benutzen Frauen in Simbabwe ganz unterschiedliche Strategien und Herangehensweisen, um die patriarchalen Geschlechtsrollen-

muster zu verändern, in Frage zu stellen, mit ihnen umzugehen oder gegen sie Widerstand zu leisten. Für den emanzipatorischen Erfolg dieses Engagements wird es sehr darauf ankommen, inwieweit die beteiligten Frauen sich selbst von den Denkmustern Männlicher Herrschaft freimachen können. Bourdieu hat ja zurecht darauf insistiert, dass das Patriarchat nicht einfach nur die Herrschaft von wenigen Männern über andere Männer und die Frauen ist, sondern ein umfassendes Sinnsystem, dass alle Beteiligten umfasst und sie in der Selbst- und Weltwahrnehmung prägt – emotional ebenso wie in den Denk- und Handlungsmustern.

Was die nationale politische Ebene angeht, so ist davon auszugehen, dass das, was sich hinsichtlich der Ebenen 'Haushalt/Familie' und 'Kirchen/Religionsgemeinschaften' ergeben hat, für diesen weiteren politischen Bereich maßgeblich ist. Die Autorin kann zeigen, dass in den privaten und religiösen Bereichen die Weichen gestellt werden für das, was im öffentlich-politischen Bereich geschieht. Familiärer und religiöser Bereich – letzterer oft in der modifizierten Ersatzfunktion für die soziale Kontrollfunktion der Dorfgemeinschaft unter urbanen Bedingungen – interagieren bei der Konstruktion der Geschlechtsrollenmuster, die sich in der politischen Sphäre auf nationaler Ebene dann öffentlich manifestieren. Auch hier ist wieder eine Kollusion von vorkolonialer Tradition und kolonialer Ideologie festzustellen. Gesetze der Kolonialherren zielen ganz bewusst darauf ab, frauenkontrollierende Traditionen zu bestätigen und zu verstärken, um Frauen aus dem öffentlichen Raum fernzuhalten. Trotzdem spielen Frauen einen wichtigen Part im anti-kolonialen Befreiungskampf, und zwar sowohl als Unterstützerinnen und Mitarbeiterinnen wie auch als Kämpferinnen. Dass sie nach der Befreiung von der Kolonialherrschaft angemessen für ihre Opfer gewürdigt und entschädigt wurden, lässt sich jedoch leider überhaupt nicht feststellen. Vielmehr wurde das Hauptverdienst an der Befreiung den männlichen Akteuren zugeschreiben. Das gilt nicht etwa nur für die offizielle Geschichtsschreibung, sondern auch für die kulturelle Erinnerungsarbeit der Literatur. Nachkoloniale Autoren zeichnen sich allzu oft durch eine historische Amnesie aus, was die Errungenschaften von Frauen im Krieg angeht. Auch die leidvollen sexuellen Erfahrungen von Frauen in der Kriegszeit wurden weitestgehend unsichtbar gemacht. Trotz aller internationalen Konventionen und Protokolle, die zu Geschlechtergerechtigkeit verpflichten und sogar trotz der simbabwischen Verfassung von 2013, die diese ebenfalls festschreibt, zeigen die Daten über die aktive Beteiligung von Frauen im politischen Prozess des nachkolonialen Simbabwes ein ernüchterndes

Bild. Manyonganise liefert Daten und Fakten zu weiblichen Parlaments- und Kabinettsmitgliedern, die eine klare Sprache sprechen und klarmachen, dass alle Gesetzestexte und internationalen Abkommen ohne den politischen Willen zur Umsetzung das Papier nicht wert sind, auf das sie geschrieben sind.

Trotz aller Marginalisierungsmechanismen weist die nachkoloniale Geschichte Simbabwes eine Reihe von prominenten Frauen auf, die auf der Bühne der nationalen Politik eine wichtige Rolle gespielt haben. Die herausragenden Beispiele für solche Ausnahmefrauen werden vorgestellt und hinsichtlich ihres Beitrags zur Entwicklung von Staat und Gesellschaft analysiert. Ziel dabei ist es weniger, historische Urteile zu fällen als vielmehr die Bedingungen herauszuarbeiten, unter denen es Frauen gelingen kann, an wichtige Positionen der politischen Macht zu gelangen. Ganz nebenbei wird damit ein Beitrag zu einer noch zu schreibenden Geschichte der Frauen in Simbabwe geleistet.

Die Autorin macht auch deutlich, wie bibelorientierte Gender-Vorstellungen die öffentlichen Debatten über die Beteiligung der Frauen am politischen Leben durchdringen. Die Art und Weise, wie die Bibel in Afrika generell und in Simbabwe im Besonderen als (gender-)politisches Machtinstrument gebraucht wird, muss als hoch problematisch gelten. Die Aussagen von Kirchenführern im Kontrast zu Aussagen von Frauen zeigt deutlich, dass die Kirchen in Simbabwe in einem hohen Maße dafür verantwortlich sind, wie patriarchale Gendernormen die sozio-kulturellen Haltungen gegenüber der politischen Aktivität von Frauen im öffentlichen Raum prägen. Männlich dominierte Kirchenleitungen scheinen darüber hinaus auch die Rolle der ‚Grauen Eminenz' zu spielen, die im Hintergrund ebenso unbemerkt wie effektiv die Fäden der Macht zieht und direkten Einfluss auf politische Entscheidungen nimmt.

Obwohl Manyonganise dem Erbe des westlichen Feminismus offen gegenübersteht, hält sie es für unabdingbar, das in vielen afrikanischen Gender-Debatten entwickelte Konzept des ‚Womanism' in den Vordergrund zu stellen, das sich selbst als eine auf die spezifischen Bedürfnisse und Notlagen afrikanischer Frauen zugeschnittene Theorie versteht. Dabei werden dann auch die Konzepte der afrikanischen Lebensweisheit, wie sie sich im Ubuntu-Begriff verdichten, kritisch gesichtet und in ihren positiven, emanzipatorischen Aspekten herangezogen. Diese zusätzliche Quelle von Gendernormen und -narrativen steht nicht in Konkurrenz zur Autorität der Bibel, sondern stützt und verstärkt diese, wobei beide Ori-

entierungsquellen in sich ambivalent sind für den Status und die Entwicklung von Frauen und deshalb auch beide hinsichtlich der jeweils propagierten Gender-Vorstellungen immer kritisch hinterfragt werden müssen. Ziel muss die Etablierung einer positiven Wahrnehmung von Frauen und von Weiblichkeit im generellen Sinne sein. Es gilt eine Kollegialität unter Frauen und partnerschaftliche Beziehungen zwischen Männern und Frauen zu schaffen, die die patriarchale Ordnung herausfordern und letztlich überwinden. Im Zuge dieser Transformation – hin zu einem partnerschaftlichen Miteinander der Geschlechter – müssen sich nicht nur Frauen verändern, sondern auch Männer müssen eine neue, veränderungsbereite und veränderungswirksame Männlichkeit entwickeln.

Alle Beteiligten müssen sich ihrer Verantwortung, die aus den politischen Konsequenzen ihres Denkens, Redens und Tuns resultiert, bewusstwerden. Nicht nur für Frauen bedeutet dies die zum Teil bittere Erkenntnis, dass die Widerstände, auf die sie treffen, wenn sie nach Gleichrangigkeit in Familie, Kirche und Politik streben, ganz wesentlich auf Vorstellungen und Praktiken indigener Religionskultur und auf patriarchal-unterdrückerischen Elementen biblischer Tradition beruhen. Die Benachteiligung von Frauen beginnt nicht erst dort, wo sie vom Amt des Staatsoberhaupts oder anderen wichtigen Regierungsämtern ausgeschlossen werden, sondern bereits dort, wo Bibel und Schona-Tradition den Mann als Oberhaupt des Hauses definieren. Durch die synchrone Konzeption von Haushalt, Kirche und Staat, erscheint nicht nur der Präsident als Vater der Nation, sondern umgekehrt auch jeder einzelne Mann als Präsident oder gar Diktator in seiner Ehe und Familie. Die Religionsgemeinschaften als mittlere Ebene haben diese Synchronisierung ohnehin lange schon vollzogen. Das gilt nicht nur für traditionell afrikanische Vorstellungen, die soziale und religiöse Ordnung nahtlos verschmelzen, sondern eben auch und gerade für die christliche Tradition, die sich den patriarchalen Haushalt zum Prototypen ihrer inneren Ordnung macht. Dies geschieht schon in den pseudopaulinischen Pastoralbriefen, die versuchen, Frauen aus den kirchlichen Ämtern zu entfernen und die innerkirchliche Macht als religiöse Spielart Männlicher Herrschaft zu strukturieren. Nur wer sich als Herr seiner Ehe und Familie bewährt hat, kann die Eignung für ein kirchliches Amt vorweisen. Selbst wenn die Pastoralbriefe unter dem Namen des Paulus geschrieben sind, dürfen sie doch nicht als geradlinige Fortschreibung apostolischer Genderpolitik verstanden werden. Sie sind eher eine drastische Korrektur der von Paulus und anderen vertretenen

Non-Gender-Ekklesiologie, die Frauen zwar religiös zu Männern umdefiniert, ihnen aber dadurch als „Söhne Gottes in Christus" (Gal 3,26) auch völlige Gleichberechtigung innerhalb der Gemeinde zusichern kann. Ganz im Gegenteil dazu modelliert der Pseudo-Paulus der Pastoralbriefe die Kirche in ihren Machtstrukturen nach dem Modell der Vatermacht im Haus und verbindet die Bewährung als ‚Herr im Hause' mit der Befähigung zur Gemeindeleitung und macht aus genderneutralen kirchlichen Diensten, Ämtern und Funktionen wieder eindeutig gegenderte Werkzeuge männlicher Macht. Diese genderpolitische Kehrtwende muss als so dramatisch angesehen werden, dass sie im Grunde nur im Namen des Paulus vollzogen werden konnte, denn nur ‚der Apostel selbst' konnte sich so grundlegend korrigieren. Entgegen dieser fiktionalen Apostelautorität standen beispielsweise die bekämpften und verleumdeten Gemeindewitwen viel deutlicher in paulinischer Tradition. Während aber ihre Position marginalisiert wurde, hat sich in der Rezeptionsgeschichte der patriarchale Pseudo-Paulus auf breiter Front durchgesetzt – vermutlich einfach deshalb, weil er den Erwartungen der nichtchristlichen Mehrheitsgesellschaft, die man missionieren wollte, viel besser entsprach. Das gilt nicht nur für die Bevölkerung des römischen Imperiums, sondern auch für die germanischen, slawischen und anderen Völker, und offensichtlich auch für afrikanische. Auch wenn die Kehrtwende in der kirchlichen Genderpolitik, wie sie die Pastoralbriefe und andere neutestamentliche Texte zeigen, zu einer Zeit vollzogen wurde, in der es für Christen noch keinen Zugriff auf höhere staatliche Ämter gab, wurde die Synchronisierung auch mit dieser Ebene doch dadurch bestens vorbereitet. Nach der formalen Christianisierung der Staatsmacht war es kein großer Schritt mehr, auch den römischen Kaiser als den von Gott eingesetzten ‚Vater des Vaterlandes' anzuerkennen.

Und wenn heute der Präsident Simbabwes als ‚Vater der Nation' verstanden wird, dann ist dies eben auch eine zu Haushalt und Kirche synchrone Genderzuschreibung, die Frauen ausschließt, weil Väter eben männlich sind und eine Frau deshalb nicht *Vater* der als Familie imaginierten Nation sein kann. Dementsprechend wird in Aussagen von Kirchenführern deutlich, wie schädlich es für eine politische Partei wäre, mit einer Frau als Spitzenkandidatin ins Rennen um die Präsidentschaft zu gehen. Diese Partei hätte schon verloren, bevor das Rennen startet.

Es muss also klar sein, dass starke patriarchale Traditionen im Zusammenspiel mit sozio-kulturellen Normen und religiösen Denk- und Handlungsmustern die entscheidenden Faktoren sind, um Frauen von einer

aktiven Beteiligung im politischen Raum abzuhalten. Religiöse Überzeugungen und Vorurteile kämpfen erbittert gegen Ideale der Verfassung und gegen die Vorgaben, Erwartungen und Verpflichtungen von internationalen und regionalen Abkommen und Beschlüssen. Diese bleiben unter dem Druck von Tradition und Religion bloße Papiertiger, weil es sich auch für Politiker, die wegen anders gelagerter Konflikte ohnehin an Zustimmung eingebüßt haben, nicht besonders verlockend ist, sich in dieser – für sie offensichtlich weniger bedeutenden – Frage mit wichtigen Unterstützungsgruppen zu überwerfen.

Die Auswertung der Aussagen von Frauen und von Kirchenführern zeigt, dass der Bibel und vor allem der Art, wie sie benutzt wird, eine entscheidende Rolle zukommt, beim Ausschließen und Fernhalten von Frauen von politischen Prozessen. Immer wieder wird von den Interviewten auf bestimmte Bibeltexte hingewiesen, die Schweigen und Unterordnung von Frauen fordern und damit die Haltung von Frauen (und Männern) hinsichtlich der Beteiligung am politischen Raum formen. Die Distanz von religiösen Frauen zu diesem als exklusiv männlich gegenderten Raum geht bisweilen soweit, dass die betreffenden Frauen nicht nur politische Versammlungen meiden, sondern nicht einmal an Wahlen teilnehmen, weil sie überzeugt sind, dass Gott selbst den Führer der Nation bestimmt. An solchen Extremen ist deutlich erkennbar, dass eine biblizistische Religion das gedankliche Fundament der Demokratie selbst annagt, was die aktuellen Spitzenpolitiker Simbabwes natürlich nicht unbedingt stören muss, da es das existierende Demokratiedefizit (und damit ihre Herrschaft) perpetuiert. Hinter der religiösen Bestimmung von Frauenrollen im Haus und in der Kirchengemeinde steckt also ein größeres politisches Programm, das der Entwicklung Simbabwes hin zu Frieden, Freiheit und Wohlstand für alle ganz sicher nicht dienlich ist.

Dieser politischen Relevanz der Bibelverwendung wird nur eine Bibellektüre gerecht, die die Kontexte der biblischen Aussagen ebenso ernstnimmt wie die Lebenskontexte der Lesenden und versucht, diese in einer emanzipatorischen Intention miteinander zu verknüpfen. Deshalb wird die Einrichtung einer Institution zur Verbreitung der *Contextual Biblical Studies* (CBS) in Simbabwe gefordert. Manyonganise verweist hier auf das Vorbild des UJAMAA-Zentrums für gemeinschaftliche Entwicklung in Südafrika, wo Bibelwissenschaftler wie Gerald West eine umfassende CBS-Strategie zur Lektüre der Bibel mit ‚normalen' (= nicht bibelwissenschaftlich trainierten) Menschen entwickelt haben. Die biblizistische, reaktionäre Haltung, mit der viele Christgläubige in

Simbabwe die Bibel verwenden, schreit förmlich nach einer entsprechenden Organisation, die sich zum Ziel setzt, die Bibellektüre zu einem Motor für Umkehr- und Heilungsprozesse zu machen. Ziel muss es sein, akademische Bibelwissenschaft und die Gläubigen in den Kirchengemeinden miteinander ins Gespräch zu bringen und so Veränderungen – nicht nur in Genderfragen – in Gang zu setzen. Allein schon die Erfahrung zu vermitteln, wie vielfältig die Bibel in ihren Aussagen ist, könnte helfen, eine monolithische Benutzung von biblischen Einzelaussagen im Sinne der Perpetuierung patriarchaler Muster aufzubrechen. Gerade in ihrer inneren Pluralität ist die Bibel ja göttliche Offenbarung, die zu liebender Toleranz und Wertschätzung der Vielfalt und des Andersseins führen kann. Es gibt eben nicht nur die Pastoralbriefe mit ihren Patriarchatskonzepten, sondern auch das Taufbekenntnis in Galater 3,26-28, wo glaubende Frauen auf denselben Status gehoben sind wie ihre Glaubensbrüder: „Söhne Gottes in Christus"! Und aus dieser dogmatischen Grundaussage entsteht dann eben eine Kirche, in der es „nicht männlich und nicht weiblich" gibt. Das bedeutet selbstverständlich nicht, dass es keine Männer und Frauen mehr gibt, wohl aber, dass es keine Zwänge mehr gibt, aufgrund von Geschlechtszuordnungen bestimmte Aufgaben und Ämter in der Kirche übernehmen zu müssen und andere nicht übernehmen zu dürfen.

In der Vielfalt der biblischen Aussagen stellt sich natürlich immer wieder die Frage, was denn nun gelten soll. Das aber kann nicht einfach vordefiniert sein, weder durch patriarchale Kirchenführer noch durch Kirchenväter oder ‚Heilige Väter'. Es muss vielmehr eine klärende Suchbewegung der Gesamtgemeinden sein, die dies mit der gebotenen Offenheit für Abweichungen und in aller Vorläufigkeit festlegt.

Ob es die Männer in Kirche und Universität sein werden, die sich die Anliegen eines neuen Umgangs mit der Bibel zu eigen machen, oder ob es Frauen alleine sind, die aus ihrer Bedrängnis heraus Veränderungen forcieren, ist noch nicht abzusehen. Feststeht, dass es einige Männer gibt, die in der Befreiung der Frauen ihre eigene Freiheit finden, und dass die Hartnäckigkeit der Frauen nicht unterschätzt werden darf. Die enorme Zahl von Fällen häuslicher Gewalt gegen Frauen bis hin zum Femizid, die Verhöhnung, Verleumdung und Dämonisierung von unangepassten Frauen in der Öffentlichkeit sind jedenfalls deutliche Anzeichen dafür, dass das Patriarchat auch in Simbabwe schon eine verwundete Bestie ist, die angeschlagen um ihr Überleben kämpft.

Einen Beitrag zur Überwindung dieses kulturellen Gender-Ungeheuers, das Frauen *und* Männer in ihren Lebensmöglichkeiten einschränkt, will dieses Buch leisten, und als stolzer Humboldt-Gastgeber der Autorin wünsche ich ihr beim kritischen Infragestellen unguter Traditionen großen Erfolg durch zahlreiche, inspirierte und engagierte Leser:innen!

1 | Introduction: Mapping the Field of Religion, Gender and Politics

Introduction

This study is located within two broad categories of Women's Studies as well as Gender Studies with a special focus on how these fields intersect with religion and politics. Within the field of Religious Studies, the study can be located within the Sociology of Religion paradigm as well as the Women's and Gender Studies in Religion. Women's Studies as an interdisciplinary field originally focused on the category 'women' but whose scope extends across multiple formations of power (Montague & Tambe, 2020:25). Women's Studies as an academic discipline emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when women in the feminist movement began to question the absence of women's perspectives and women's lived experiences from which gender inequality was much more apparent as a system of domination. On the other hand, Gender Studies is an interdisciplinary academic field that examines gender inequality, women's lived experience, sexuality, masculinity, and the interaction of gendered social processes with race, class, and other systems of inequality (Scarborough & Risman, 2020:41). Scarborough and Risman (2020:41) note that Gender Studies is a product of Women's Studies. As it stands, Women's and Gender Studies are now considered to be very much a matter of the present and the future (Davis, Evans & Lorber, 2006:4). Apart from these fields' focus on women's and men's interactions and the processes of domination and oppression of women by men, Davis, Evans and Lorber (2006) note that the way the organisation and structure of society itself and its cultural and knowledge productions are gendered has also been the interest of Women's and Gender Studies. On the other hand, studies of men and masculinity have come into the field to complement Women's and Gender Studies. It needs to be noted, however, this development has been criticised as one that seeks to shift attention from women's issues to focusing on men who traditionally are viewed as the source of women's marginalisation and oppression. In this case, Gender and Women's Studies have endeavoured to provide knowledge of the social processes that produce gender discrimination in specific contexts (Robinson & Richardson, 2015:xxvii). To this end, the way religion, gender and politics intersect and is experienced by women is the focus of this study. The role of religion

in this area is crucial. Winter cited in Davis, Evans & Lorber (2006:5) argues that "religion is constitutive of social organisation and power relations and central to the collective and individual internalisation of cultural identity." It is, however, important, in this case, to note that the field of religion, gender and politics is a complex one which requires careful mapping. The major challenge is in trying to bring three independent, but mutually dependent concepts together. Contestations around the role of women in both religion and politics makes this endeavour a much more daunting task. Herzog & Braude (2009:1) articulate this challenge when they argue thus:

> Religion and gender are often portrayed as timeless and unchanging, as existing outside social and historical processes, or as transcending cultural distinctions. Even scholars of religion who carefully locate their topics within detailed contexts may fall back on an ahistorical notion of 'tradition' when discussing gender roles, while scholars of gender may leave religion inadequately analysed in similar ways. Social scientists approaching politics are often unable to provide subtle discussions of either religion or gender, frequently viewing religious women as necessarily subjugated to patriarchal control, powerless and weak, and, therefore universally in need of liberation.

Hence, King (1995:53) observes that the "problematic role of religion in the grammar of democratic participation is particularly complex considering the double challenge of building female subjectivity in the political sphere and the religious sphere." The question is, therefore, not only how politics and religion shape women and how they help us understand gender relations, but also how women's endeavours and movements shape politics and religion and how they in turn constitute gender relations (Herzog & Braude, 2009:8). Proceeding from this premise, this introduction provides a detailed review of literature in the area of religion, gender and politics. This should enable us to theorise the key concepts in this study.

Theorising Politics

In mapping the field of religion, gender and politics, it is important for this study to first engage political theory as a tool of analysis. By theorising politics, the study does not seek to delve into the deep meanings of the concept but to provide an overview which can assist in its usage in the religion, gender and politics nexus. The meaning of politics as a term is contested and for Leftwich (2015:10), any attempt to define the term raises

many further and difficult questions. In Leftwich's opinion, there are two approaches that can be used in trying to define the term. First, one can use what he calls the arena or site approach which holds that politics is an activity found only in certain kinds of institutional sites or processes within societies (2015:2). This resonates with Heywood (2019:2) who associates politics with an arena or location in which case behaviour becomes 'political' because of where it takes place. Second, Leftwich argues for the use of what he calls the processual approach which holds that politics is a much more generalised and universal process which has existed wherever the human species has been found and as a result, it is a characteristic and necessary feature, if not function of all societies (2015:2). This idea is also supported by Heywood (2019;2) who views politics as a process or mechanism in which political behaviour is behaviour that exhibits distinctive characteristics or qualities and can take place in any, and perhaps all social contexts. For other scholars, the term 'politics' is often used in political science to denote the formal processes and institutions of government and elections but can also be expanded to include informal politics and the dynamics of everyday life (Krook & Childs, 2010:3). As this study shows, we cannot discuss the political without making reference to issues of power. Feminists have often argued that the personal is political, hence, have called for a definition of politics that encompasses power relations within the private sphere of the home and family (Krook & Childs, 2010:3). Since the political has to do with the distribution, exercise and consequences of power, political analysis needs to focus on the analysis of power relations (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017:1). For Kantola and Lombardo, the conceptualisation of the political is inextricably connected to distinct interpretations of power (2017:1). In this case, there may be need to focus on politics as "any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority (Dahl, 1984:9-10).

The above feminist argument calls us to consider the interface between gender and politics. Literature on gender and politics is broad, addressing gender inequality in political acts such as voting, campaigning and leading, as well as gender differences in political knowledge, socialisation, and attitudes, and women's place in political theory (Paxton, Kunovich & Hughes, 2007:263). The traditional view of politics confined it to the level of national governments, electoral process as well as formal institutions among others and ignored other spaces that could be viewed as political. Dahl (1984:9-10), argues that "the traditional focus on politics as the study

of the machinery of government and electoral politics or on political elites and formal institutions rendered women and gender invisible in spite of their foundational importance for building the welfare state and for constructing post-colonial nations, for the conduct of war and terrorism, and for maintaining social and economic privilege more generally." Quite important to feminist and womanist scholarship in relation to politics is the perceived dichotomy between the private and public spaces. It has been shown how the theory of political science has been developed within a line of thinking that from Aristotle to Machiavelli, Locke and the contractualists, has justified the right of men to rule over women and public affairs and the subordinate position of women and their association with the private domestic sphere (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017:9). By arguing that 'the personal is political', gender scholars sought to challenge the belief that women's personal problems were private by demonstrating that they were the direct result of patriarchal power (Lloyd, 2013:117). Thus, this slogan has enabled gender scholars to expand the borders of the political to include gender relations and issues formerly considered private (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017:3). From Pateman's analysis, the political is a space where unequal relations are continuously produced and transformed as well as where the public sphere is just as important as the private (Pateman, 1983). She further argues that democratic ideals and politics have to be put into practice in the kitchen, the nursery and the bedroom (1995:222) (spaces traditionally viewed as private). Hence, Kantola and Lombardo are of the view that the political include both public and private/personal issues, which means that [among other issues] care, violence against women or sexual and reproductive rights are political issues as important as finance, agriculture or defence among others (2017:12).

From the above, it follows that any study of gender and politics calls for an understanding of the wider societal structures that reproduce the continuing patterns of domination and inequality (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017:12). For example, male dominance in formal decision-making positions had been (and at times continues to be) viewed as natural and incontestable, and male authority in the family was/is seen as a biological necessity (Celis, Kantola, Waylen & Weldon, 2013:5). Thus, gender and politics scholars argue that the roots of this enduring male domination in politics are complex and profound, hence, the need to challenge the overrepresentation of men and the reflective gender blindness in politics (Celis, Kantola, Waylen & Weldon, 2013:5). Therefore, the discussion of gender and politics nudges us to consider discourses around citizenship

so that we can grapple with the idea of political participation which is the focus of this current study.

Gender, Politics and Citizenship

While scholarship has dealt with the concept of citizenship at the national level, this study engages with the concept starting from the micro level of the family and moves with it to the macro level of the nation. As shall be shown in Chapters two and three, questions around women's citizenship within the family and religious institutions such as the church require further probing because they point us to how women are socialised for national political participation or lack thereof. The concept of citizenship was popularised by Marshall (1950) who defined citizenship as a full membership of a community. For Marshall, citizenship consists of three elements namely civil, political and social rights. Marshall's definition of citizenship took the focus beyond government, politics and the legal system, to consider interaction of people with collective groups at all levels of society (Amri & Ramtohul (2014:1). For Walby (1997), Marshall's model of citizenship is useful in discussing degrees of citizenship obtained by different social groups at different levels. In Marshall's opinion, the key principle which underlies citizenship is the principle of equality of status (Lister, 2005:479). Lister (1998) conceptualises citizenship as agency. She, therefore, asserts a perception of human agency as both located in dialectical relationships with social structures and embedded in social relations (Jones & Gaventa, 2002:18). Yet citizenship can also be theorised as an identity and practice that is likely to differ across the spaces in which people's lives are played out, for example, the home, personal relations and national politics to the global arena (Jones & Gaventa, 2002:18). On the other hand, Turner (1993) defines citizenship as a set of legal, economic and cultural practices which define an individual as a competent member of society. This definition allows us to analyse how individuals and groups have differentiated opportunities of becoming competent members of society. For him, citizenship identity, the sense of belonging and solidarity is necessarily connected with the problem of unequal distribution of resources in society (Turner, 2017:2). Due to this understanding, he disputes Marshall's understanding which tends to view citizenship as universal. Universalising citizenship is seen as turning a blind eye to differences and inequalities among individuals and groups and it also does not suppress those differences and inequalities. For instance, in a society

where some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, insisting that as citizens, persons should leave behind their particular affiliations and experiences to adopt a general point of view serves only to reinforce that privilege; for the perspectives and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate this unified public marginalising or silencing those of other groups (Young cited in Turner, 2017:11). More importantly, by focusing on uniform and equal application, this understanding of citizenship is gender blind because it fails to recognise the fact that modern societies are suffused in patriarchal traditions, which make for male domination and privileges (Roy 2005:28). Feminist scholars have criticised Marshall's notion of citizenship for ignoring the gendered nature of social citizenship (Buckmaster, & Thomas, 2009-10). They view Marshall's conception of citizenship as based on assumptions of a particular form of social or family structure dominated by men where women would continue to play a dependent role within the family (Buckmaster, & Thomas, 2009-10).

Gender scholars have, therefore, argued that citizenship is a gendered concept (Richardson, 2000a; Friedman, 2005; Roy, 2005; Bayes, 2012; Groenmeyer, 2014; Turner 2017). For example, feminist scholarship on citizenship has critiqued the issue of the exclusions produced through the application of a restrictive notion of the 'political', built on the rigid separation of the public and private spheres (Pateman, 1989; Lister 1997a; Jones & Gaventa, 2002; Amri & Ramtohul, 2014). Roy (2005) has gone to great lengths in trying to explain the reasons why citizenship cannot be seen as exclusively a public enterprise. He argues that citizenship is not confined to the public or political spheres because its practices of the public and political spheres are themselves related to conditions in other social spheres, such as those of family and civil society (2005:4). He, however, notes that gender is noticeable to the meanings and practices of citizenship also in these other realms. He, therefore, argues that "if citizenship is about full membership in one's community, then the realms of culture and society are necessary contexts for its practice (2005:4). In his analysis, Roy notes that gender and citizenship intersect and engage each other in a variety of ways, often through the mediation of other social institutions. He condemns the discursive practices surrounding the notion of citizenship which have produced dichotomies where the space of citizenship [becomes] increasingly identified with male and public activities. While the public/private distinction was essential for the assertion of the liberal idea of the citizen as a free individual, for Roy (2005:28), it also led

to the identification of the private with the domestic, which played an important role in the exclusion and subordination of women. He, thus, argues:

> Modern citizenship, while not entirely excluding women, incorporated them on the basis of their socially useful and dependent roles as mothers and wives, placing them, thereby outside the sphere of politics and distancing them from resources and opportunities such as education, property, etc, which equip individualsfor political participation.

Roy's analysis is critical for this current study as it assists in the understanding of women's contested citizenship from the level of social institutions to that of national politics. Focusing on Africa, Amri and Ramtohul (2014) acknowledge that African scholarship on gender and citizenship is still in the infancy stages. However, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) has since 2008 supported research that engages with issues of gender and citizenship which has led to a number of publications focusing on this area. One of the notable publications is a book edited by Amri and Ramtohul (2014) titled *Gender and Citizenship in the Global Age*. One of the contributors in this volume, Groenmeyer, grapples with the issue of gendered citizenship within the South African Context. Focusing on political citizenship, she argues that it defines roles and relationships inherent in society that dictate who is inside and who is outside as well as which activities are valued. For her, political participation, therefore, leads to different types of exclusion from the advantages that membership secures (Groenmeyer, 2014:320). In her analysis, she notes that feminist conceptions of citizenship recognise the public/private dichotomy and how it has gendered social relations between women and men as citizens (2014, 320-321). She argues:

> Daily experience of food provision, childcare, income generation, and household duties often limit women's participation outside the private sphere. This divide entrenches women's gender roles and responsibilities within the family, caring and child rearing and the informal workplace, and men's gender roles in decision-making, formal politics, economics and the formal workplace. The sexual division of labour is closely linked to certain definitions of citizenship, which traditionally saw men as the holders of citizenship rights on account of their position in the public arena. Women and their concerns were outside the realms of citizenship and their roles though contributing to society, were not valued as worthy of membership in terms of decision-making and public activity. Therefore, definitions and understandings of gendered roles within citizenship are

> inevitably partial because the experiences of women and men vary according to their different roles and the nature of power relations within society (Groenmeyer, 2014:321).

She, however, cautions that people are members of more than one community at the same time and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege.

Groenmeyer raises critical issues pertaining to citizenship, one of which is how the rights approach to citizenship is flawed due to its failure to factor in gender. In concurrence, Nyamu-Musembi (2007:236) criticises the rights approach to citizenship because it excludes the experiences of citizenship mediated by other markers such as relationships between gender inequality, political participation and active social citizenship. This is significant for this study as it attempts to untangle the relationship between gender and political participation through the prism of religion. Critical questions arise for this study namely: **1.** to what extent are women considered as citizens in social, religious and national institutions in Zimbabwe? **2.** If so, what is the content of their citizenship? **3.** if not, what informs their exclusion and/or marginalisation? **4.** How does this conceptualisation of gender and citizenship influence the disparities in political participation between men and women in Zimbabwe?

Gender and Political Participation

A theoretical confusion obscures the term 'political participation'. What this entails is that there is no consensus in scholarship pertaining what the term means. The lack of consensus arises from what needs to be included or left out of the theoretical as well as the operational levels. While arguing that there is no true definition of political participation, Verba and Nie (1980) posit that any definition of political participation must take cognisance of the research context. Verba and Nie (1972) note that political participation is not one dimensional and cumulative but fragmented and specialised. Some scholars have argued that the contemporary world needs to redefine the concept of political participation so that the new definition embraces the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs).

A gender analysis of political participation has led to the unravelling of factors that inhibit women from active political participation. Jennings (1983) offers a situational and socialisation explanation to the disparities

that are glaring between men and women's political participation. The situational explanation looks at the contemporary characteristics of a woman's life space. Such roles as wife, mother, divorcee, widow, and homemaker are said in one way or another to inhibit political participation (1983:364). She further argues that these are confining and isolating roles to the extent that they do not permit easy access to such political resources as time, money, contacts, organisational life, channels of communication, and the general skill levels that typically accompany high rates of political action (1983:364). Hence, in her analysis, even when women break out of such traditional roles, they are often expected to continue to carry the traditional roles along with the new ones which often results in their interest in politics being stifled. On the other hand, the socialisation explanation proffers that boys and girls are socialised into different participative roles which results in them learning that adult political expression is more of a male than female gender role (1983:365). Since, these norms are inculcated early they work against later efforts that are aimed at encouraging more female participation. Due to this, Jennings, sought to establish if the roots and variations of the gender disparities in political participation can be traced back to practices within the family which can be regarded as practices that reflect societal norms about gender-appropriate behaviour. She further examined the salience of politics in the home in order to determine its effect on the gender-participation relationship. Her focus was on how frequent children discuss political questions with their parents. She found that fathers were the most to discuss political questions with their children which led her to conclude that socialisation processes within the home appear subsequently in the form of participation inequalities between women and men (1983:372). As a result, for Jennings, the social learning of political roles helps to produce mass publics biased in the direction of greater male political participation. A notable weakness of Jennings study is its failure to analyse the family as a political institution in its own right where political power dynamics are almost always at play and are influential in shaping attitudes. Thus, the concept of space and place in shaping gender identities becomes significant.

Arising from the above, the concept of space as gendered becomes crucial. Therefore, a view on gender and political participation leads us to a consideration of gendered spaces. Scholarship on gender has argued that space plays a central role in the construction of gender. For Myrdahl (2019), gendered space refers to the myriad ways in which space in all its forms- material, discursive, metaphorical, emotional, among others is

produced by and productive of gender norms and relations. She further argues that the gendering of space has specific material consequences for people's daily lives, their mobility as well as their sense of identity. Low (2006:129) cited in Huning (2014) opines that a "genderisation of spaces is effected through the organisation of perceptions which leads in the sense of somatisation of social order, to a choice of place and a placing practice that reproduces structural principles of society." Spain (1993) focuses on the inseparability of knowledge and space, women's lesser access to certain spaces, and the association of space with gender stratification. She argues that although women's status is a result of a variety of cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors, the physical separation of women and men also contributes to and perpetuates gender stratification by reducing women's access to socially valued knowledge. For her, women's position within society, whether measured as power, prestige, economic position, or social rank, is related to spatial segregation in so far as existing physical arrangements facilitate or inhibit the exchange of knowledge between those with greater and those with lesser status. Thus, studying spatial institutions opens avenues of exploration into the mechanisms that sustain gender stratification. Spain presents Edward T. Hall as one of the first social scientists to explain space as the 'silent language' and the 'hidden dimension 'shaping human action in 1959 and 1966 respectively. To this end, she analyses families in the context of dwellings, education in the context of schools, and the labour force in the context of work places as a way of identifying gendered spaces and their association with women's status in both nonindustrial and advanced industrial societies. Spain's theorisation allows this study to analyse politics in terms of political participation in view of religio-cultural beliefs and practices. Specifically, on how religion and culture play significant roles in the construction of women as outsiders in public spaces as well as how that kind of construction functions as "effective media for both reproduction and renunciation of hegemonic gender orders (Huning, 2014).

In their analysis of gender and space, Olsson and Ruotsala (2009) bring back the concept of the private and public domains. They see space as largely generated by men with the exception of domestic space which has women as its major users because the contrast between public and private domain confines women in domestic spaces. They argue:

> Space, place and gender are all interrelated as culturally specific ideas. The way we think about space and place is connected to the way we think about the social constructions of gender relations (2009:11).

They further argue that gender is an essential part of using and exploiting space, and space shows how gender is constructed and understood. In addition, spatial practices create and maintain gender differences, meanings and social practices (Olsson & Ruotsala, 2009:11). In this case, the study of gendered spaces in the context of political participation opens new possibilities of perceiving the everyday socio-cultural as well as religio-political dimensions. It, therefore, becomes imperative for this study to examine the way religion and gender interface so that their influence to political participation is correctly juxtaposed.

The Concept of Religion and Gender

Feminists and Womanists have engaged in debates and discussions that endeavour to show the interconnectedness of religion and gender. Using gender as both a critical analytical category as well as a tool of cultural analysis, they have been able to identify ways in which religion has been used as an oppressive tool for women. Until the 1980s, the view of religion as presented in religious studies, social anthropology and the sociology of religion was still one in which women were largely invisible and a gender perspective was completely absent (Gemzoe, Keinanen & Maddrell, 2016:5). This was criticised for distorting the understanding of religion. Hence, Leszczynska and Zielinska (2016:7) and supported by King (1995:1) note that the concept of gender has in recent years become one of the key categories of analysis used in social sciences and in the field of religious studies and its varied dimensions. As King (1995:1) rightly notes, "there exists a large agenda to be addressed in order to overcome women's invisibility, marginalisation and subordination in history and society." The intersection of religion and gender constitutes a central theoretical and methodological framework to address issues of inclusion and exclusion, production of difference and the complicated power relationships in societies (Hopflinger, Lavanchy and Dahinden, 2012:16). In a study of gender and religion, Warne (2001:145) notes that gendering is central to the operation of religious systems. However, she observes that more often, the aspect of gender is absent from scholarly analysis. It is, therefore, not surprising that King calls for detailed historical research in order to uncover voices, experiences and contributions of women in the religious history of mankind (1995:14). Writing on Muslim contexts, Gole (1996/97) argues that women's visibility, women's mobility and women's

voices constitute the political stakes around which the public sphere is defined.

Scholarship on religion and gender have also questioned the marginalisation of women from leadership positions. According to O'Connor (2010) many feminist theorists have drawn on Foucault's views on power and discourse to examine the various ways in which women are oppressed by formal and informal institutions, cultural discourses and social practices. Weatherby (2010) has noted that women face oppression through restricted and even marginalised roles. Rohman (2013) and Durham (2016) writing on Islam and Christianity respectively, have highlighted how both religions use their sacred texts to justify the marginalisation of women from leadership positions. Wallace (2000) discusses her experiences within Catholic institutions. She argues that although women have made some inroads into formerly all-male occupations, the situation for catholic women aspiring to get the priesthood has not changed. In her opinion, in the Catholic Church, the closer one approaches the sacred space of the clergy, the more quickly women disappear (2000:507). She further notes that in Catholicism, though female members of religious communities occupy a special place in the church because of their vows, it is a fact that all women are laity, including the sisters. Hence, as non-clergy, they cannot aspire to the ruling standpoint and therefore, do not have a voice in decisions regarding church laws, governance, or organisation (2000:507). Having noted the overt and covert resistance to women's leadership within religious institutions, Wessinger (1996:5) concluded that in most religions, women are expected to provide volunteer labour and financial support. However, for her, critical questions need to be asked as follows: Why are women excluded from the leadership of their religious institutions? Why women are considered incompetent to be religious leaders? What does the lack of women in leadership roles say about how all women are viewed? In her final analysis, she argues that "the exclusion of women from leadership roles sends a message to all girls and women that devalues their inherent humanity, worth and capacities" while the "full inclusion of women in religious leadership sends the message to girls and women that they are as valuable as men in their human nature and talents" (1996:5).

Another stream of scholarship has over the years, begun to challenge the construction of religious women as passive victims of religious ideologies. Such a perception is seen as obscuring the religious woman who actively participates and subverts patriarchy within religious institutions. Central

to this school of thought is the theme of agency. Bjork-James (2019) notes that scholars studying women's participation in non-liberal religious movements have shown that often women participate in patriarchal religions in the pursuit of their interests. Gemzoe, Keinanen & Maddrell (2016) have called gender scholars of religion to understand women's religious agency. In Africa, African Women Theologians are renowned for having contributed immensely to how we should understand how women have been disadvantaged by the abuse and misuse of religion.

The Concept of Religion and Politics

Political scientists as well as religious studies academics have grappled with the relationship between religion and politics. For quite some time, it was believed that there was need to separate religion and politics. Religion was largely perceived as a private exercise while politics was placed in the public domain. In fact, secularisation theory had predicted a decline in religious life as economies become more industrialised (Berger, 1967). According to Gill (2001:117), "for nearly a century and a half, one of the most firmly held beliefs in the social sciences was that religion and religious organisations inevitably would fade from social (and perhaps even private) life." It was largely believed that as societies become more modernised in the form of scientific progress and bureaucratic specialisation society would be cleansed of superstition and the need to rely on churches for social welfare. In this case, it was envisaged that religion would cease to influence public life, politics included. However, secularisation theory was proved wrong because religion has persisted to the extent of emerging politicised forms of religion. Haynes (2008:1) opines that from the 1970s, there has been a growth of the political influence of religion. He further notes that from the same period, there has been increased political involvement of religious actors within many countries of the world. Hence, Gill (2001:118) is of the view that ignoring religion means overlooking a potentially important variable in explaining politics. For him, there are many instances where religious motivations influence political conflicts which makes it clear that religion continues to make its presence felt in the realm of politics across the world. Gentile (2001) notes that there are instances where religion has been politicised and politics sacralised. He argues that in Africa, the sacralisation of politics was the whole typical of the new states that emerged from the demise of colonialism (Gentile, 2001:xix). All this serves to show the close links between religion and politics.

In a publication titled *Religion, Power, Politics*, the World Council of Churches (WCC) observes that the relationship between religion and politics is topical within academia, at conferences as well as in the programmes of political foundations. One of the questions that the WCC's study sought to answer is crucial for this current study; that is, in what way in the global context do traditional perspectives on the role of religion and politics need to be revised and rethought? This current study identifies gender as a critical component of both religion and politics. The other aspect that WCC notes is the ambivalence of religion within the field of politics as it is also an active agent of violence if one takes into consideration the issue of religious terrorism that most societies have had to experience. Despite these shortcomings, WCC acknowledges that religion needs to be taken seriously as a central dimension of human existence (WCC, 2013:39). While the rise of secularism had prescribed a clear separation of religion and politics and the relegation of religion to the 'private' sphere, WCC's study argued that there is a public awareness of religion. What is important also from this study is its observation that religious communities and religious movements are trying to position themselves in the global competition for power and political influence. The study highlights that under the pressure of the process of globalisation, all religions are being forced to reflect in a new and critical way on the relationship between religion and politics. It, therefore, becomes important for this current study to note how notions of gender are being infused in both concepts so that women also benefit by fully participating in both religion and politics.

Fox (2018) analyses the relationship between religion and politics in modern times informed by the social science approach to religion. Fox justifies this approach on the basis that his point of departure is that religion is a social institution or phenomenon which strongly influences human behaviour. He argues that religion and politics have been interconnected throughout history (2018:14). From Fox's analysis, religion's influence on politics manifests through multiple and sometimes overlapping agencies. It, therefore, becomes prudent when looking at the relationship between religion and politics to consider how governments address religion, the political activities of all sorts of religious groups and organisations, and religion's influence on society in general (2018:14).

Chitando (2020) opines that the interface between religion and politics is complicated by the overlapping characteristics between the two conceptual spheres. In his analysis, he argues that politics is religion and religion

is politics. For him, politics and religion are constantly conjoined, interwoven and co-mingled (2020:3). He, therefore rejects the separation of religion from politics and argues that "the stance that there is a clearly demarcated field called 'religion' that stands in sharp contrast to 'politics' is itself part of the politics of defining religion." Hence, it becomes crucial to explore how religion is entangled within other dimensions of society, politics included. Focusing on Zimbabwe, Chitando (2013a) shows the interface of religion and politics in so far as politicians manipulate religious symbols, concepts and persons to consolidate their grip on power. He argues that there is a mutual transaction that takes place across the religious and political spaces. For example, politicians can deploy religion when it suits them while religious actors can also deploy politics for their own benefit. Key to Chitando's analysis is the fact that "religion and politics are ... systems of survival" (2013a:vii) to the extent that the distinction between the two is blurry. He further avers that both political and religious actors have the "capacity to generate and retain loyalty which to a large extent may guarantee the survival of both the politician and the religious functionary" and this requires a high degree of demagoguery. On Mugabe, Chitando (2020:3) notes that his religious positions were deeply political. While Chitando's analysis did not examine the intersections of gender, religion and politics, it helps in our understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. The issues of gender could be implied in the demagoguery of the politicians and religious leaders who are mostly men because it carries with it prejudices over and against women.

Other scholars have grappled with the intersections among religion, gender and politics. Mapuranga (2013c) examines the interface among religion, gender and politics in Zimbabwe. She notes with interest that the realm of politics within the Zimbabwean context is male-dominated. Mapuranga's interest in this study was to establish how religion determines women's political participation in Zimbabwe. She concludes that both African traditional culture as well as Christianity have over time not encouraged women's participation in politics. Though Mapuranga observes that from 2008-2013, there has been an increase in the number of women playing active roles in politics, she opines that religion and culture continue to hinder the majority of women from active political participation. In light of the above literature analysis, the key question that arises for this research is how far the appeal to biblical texts as well as religio-cultural beliefs and practices have influenced women's political participation in Zimbabwe.

The Context

As alluded to above, scholarly debates on religion and gender have shown the marginalisation of women in the various facets of life. African women theologians have done a great job in analysing the marginalisation of women in religious, economic and social circles. It has been pointed out in some publications how African women theologians regard their theology as being a gift to the church and to women because it privileges women's voices by doing theology from the perspective of African women's experience. However, though African women theologians have dealt with the lived experiences of women in Africa, very few if not none of their works have looked at women's experiences in politics. This has been a major criticism against the Circle of African Women Theologians.

In trying to plug this gap, this study, therefore, critically engages with gender discourses on political participation in Zimbabwe, focusing on how the Bible (both oral and written) has been used to deny women political offices in the land. The study's reference to political office needs to be understood broadly, that is, to include women participating in decision-making in their homes, religious institutions, local government, political parties to mention but a few. The study focuses on establishing how dominant religio-cultural discourses on political participation have deployed biblical texts in ways that have shaped Zimbabwe's political terrain to be gendered space. The study argues that the challenges women face in their endeavor to participate fully in politics in Zimbabwe are not only embedded in culture, but have also been reinforced by the way biblical interpretation pertaining to women's public roles has been done. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the interpretation of the Bible by both Zimbabwean politicians as well as church leaders in a bid to safeguard the space from women perceived as 'dangerous'. In other words, the study endeavours to examine how the Bible has been deployed to control gender discourses on political participation in Zimbabwe. To a large extent, this study shows the centrality as well as the influence of the Bible in shaping gender relations, even in those areas that have to a large extent been perceived as non-religious. A volume edited by Ezra Chitando titled '*Prayers and Players: Religion and Politics in Zimbabwe*' (2013a) served to show the intersections between religion and politics in the Zimbabwean context. This study, therefore, seeks to open up more political space for women by examining how the everyday is suffused with politics, that is, politics as affecting interactions between individuals and groups thereby facilitating women's participation in politics at all levels.

The justification to engage in such a study stems from the observation that Zimbabwean politics dominate the media, both national and international. It is, however, the contention of this study that first, its gendered power dynamics have not been adequately dealt with especially the appropriation of biblical texts to justify the exclusion of women from occupying high political office as well as being active political actors. Second, the study contends that the relegation of women to low political offices is not accidental, but is designed to maintain hegemonic masculinities in authoritative positions as a way of subjugating women. Third, the study argues that it is not accidental that women dominate/are the majority in church where they consume a high dosage of patriarchal politics and then refrain from engaging in politics which leads to their marginalisation. The study argues for the interrogation of both the religio-cultural beliefs and biblical texts that are being deployed to keep women in politics in Zimbabwe at the margins. Therefore, it becomes imperative that this study (i) challenges these widespread toxic patriarchal assumptions and (ii) mobilise more women to occupy different spaces/posts at different levels.

The aims of the study are to: (a) identify how male political as well as church leaders interpret the Bible showing how the biblical text influences their understanding of women's political leadership roles in Zimbabwe; (b) find out the influence of African (Shona) religio-cultural beliefs on the interpretation of the Bible by male politicians and church leaders on women's political participation (c) examine the extent to which certain biblical texts have been used to cement the marginalisation and brutalisation of women in politics; and (d) suggest ways of reading the Bible in liberative ways for women in politics in Zimbabwe.

Methodological Considerations

The above aims are to be achieved through the engagement of both an 'insider' and 'outsider' approach. I adopt this approach cognisant of the fluidity between the two positionalities. For instance, I am fully aware that one is not wholly an insider or an outsider. The positions shift depending on spaces and circumstances. Naples (1996) argues that the insider/outsider status is never fixed or one dimensional but fluid and multi-dimensional, and researchers' positioning is always being negotiated and renegotiated during the research process. Bourdillon (1979) cautioned us from treating the two positionalities as exclusive. He argues that "it is possible

for the researcher's point of view to overlap with that of his/her informants and consequently for the etic to coincide with the emic." I, therefore, utilise this dichotomy to position myself epistemologically. It is true that any discussion focusing on religion, gender and politics within the Zimbabwean context places me on an insider position by virtue of myself being a woman and a Zimbabwean who also belongs to a specific religious institution. However, it would be too simplistic if I were to position myself as having the privilege to speak on behalf of all women who are Zimbabwean and are members of religious institutions of their choice. Using 'woman' as a category of analysis can be very problematic in this case because women are diverse and their experiences vary depending on their class, race, religious affiliation, ethnicity among others. Hence, while I am a black Zimbabwean woman affiliated to the African Pentecostal tradition, I stand challenged to speak on behalf of other black Zimbabwean women who belong to other Christian formations or other religions. Furthermore, I am not an 'active political figure' in the formal sense. Hence, when I speak of the intersections of religion, gender and politics in Zimbabwe especially as it pertains to national politics, I can only do so as an outsider. This position shifts when I begin to speak about politics within the home and in religious institutions though, because these are spaces that I am familiar with. I also make a disclaimer here: Women belong to heterogeneous homes and religious institutions. I am a married woman in a 'monogamous' union with children while other women are in polygamous unions, others single, divorced and yet others widowed. Furthermore, I am a professional woman, gainfully employed, hence, I have certain privileges that I enjoy which the unemployed urban and rural women may not. It can only be fair to assume that in such a scenario, as women, we experience gender relations, religion as well as politics differently. Scholarship has shown that gender, class, religion and sexuality produce different kinds of women in relation to different kinds of patriarchies (Grewal & Kaplan, 2009:58). Yet Bertolt (2018:7) has cautioned us against homogenising the female category because this inhibits us from taking into account the diversity of experiences. It is, therefore, important for me as I navigate through this study to be considerate of the different categories of women that this study seeks to focus on while drawing strongly on their commonalities. The study takes into cognisance the contestations around the homogeneity of women by recognising that their lived experiences are different across periods and spaces among other things.

I am also aware that doing research as an insider has been heavily criticised for being biased. However, Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013:252) have offered insights which have been useful to me every time I assumed the position of an 'insider 'in this study. In reference to feminist research, they suggest four steps of managing the insider experience namely (a) minimising the use of inside experience by making no attempt to represent it in research; (b) utilising inside experience strategically to gain access to data that is difficult to come by if one was an 'outsider'; (c) maximising the role of personal experience in research and (d) incorporating insider experience by treating [myself] as one of the research participants which to a large extent reduces the power differential between the researcher and the researched. While by no means easy to follow, these steps are useful in minimising how the insider position influences the way data is gathered and interpreted. Shifting positions, in this case, is something I continually did and it provided me with the opportunity to capture the political experiences of women in Zimbabwe as accurately as possible.

Theoretically, the study uses gender as a category of analysing political participation in Zimbabwe. In this case, the African Womanist approach is utilised as a way of establishing the various levels at which women are marginalised in Zimbabwean politics through the use of the Bible (oral and written). The choice of this theory is done cognisant of the debates surrounding it in comparison with feminism. Womanism, as an approach was coined by Alice Walker (1983) in response to the shortcomings of feminism. Ogunyemi (1985/86) calls it Black womanism. Western feminism had tended to obscure the experiences of women of colour within and without Western contexts. Its obsession with sexism meant that other experiences of Afro-American women which had nothing to do with gender were not accurately articulated. Walker wanted to name black women's struggle as one that was multipronged. It was a struggle against white men's patriarchy, white women's racism as well as black men's sexism. It was, therefore, important for this category of women to find an alternative voice to articulate their marginalisation in terms of gender, race and class among others. Hence, self-naming is central to womanist theorisation as Ogunyemi (1996:16) argues "naming ourselves meaningfully as we have always done in our cultures historicises our circumstances and focalises politics". Those who adopt and adapt the nomenclature of 'womanist' and 'womanism' are making a particular statement about how they want to be referenced and with whom and what they want

to be associated (Coleman, 2013:6). In this case, first wave womanists rejected the projection of feminism as waging a war against men, yet even black men found themselves marginalised by both White women and men. While on the African continent, feminism was adopted as a useful tool for gender analysis, questions were later raised due to its negative perception of womanhood, motherhood and the family. Its perceived militancy against the institution of the family was largely foreign to African culture. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), for example, is critical of bad feminism which disparages motherhood, the family and promotes lesbianism, an aspect which she feels is not African. Kolawole (2004:262), therefore, finds womanism as a conciliatory gender concept as it emphasises cultural relevance, the family, motherhood and the intersection between various forms of oppression, social stratification and marginalisation based on race, ethnicity, class and gender. It is the contention of this study that we cannot grasp the deployment of motherhood in Zimbabwean politics outside the medium of patriarchy. It, therefore, becomes imperative for this study to question the deployment of motherhood in Zimbabwe's gendered politics in order to untangle its contradictions and complexities (Biri, 2021). An interrogation of the use of the concept of motherhood within Zimbabwean politics in ways that serve patriarchal interests is crucial for any African womanist analysis. Ogunyemi (1985/86:24) succinctly defines African womanism as a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood. It concerns itself as much with the world of power structure that subjugates blacks.

For Ogunyemi, an African womanist is best known by the fact that she is conscious of more than issues of sex and gender (Coleman 2013:4). This differentiates it from the exclusive nature of feminism. Kolawole (2004:261) notes that womanism has been accepted by many African scholars because of its inclusive nature. I have already indicated that this study presents women with diverse backgrounds; women who have been marginalised from political participation at various levels. The African womanist approach comes in handy to incorporate every category of women while at the same time acknowledging their differences. Kolawole (2004:265) argues that this approach is more likely to carry many more categories of women on board as well as men who are the majority of policy makers and are needed to initiate women-friendly policies and eradicate certain traditional attitudes to women that are detrimental. She further avers that womanism appears to be the most functional and broad-

based of the African gender theories as it addresses the plurality of expectations and the multiplicity of viewpoints (2004:263). Hence, for this study to be more representative, it needs to draw from the strength of African womanism to be accommodative to the views of the majority of African women in Zimbabwe regardless of class, ethnicity, and religious persuasion, among others. Their expectations and viewpoints matter particularly as it pertains to how we can come up with a gender-inclusive model for political participation in Zimbabwe. It should be a model derived from them and one they can own.

Feminism was further presented as 'fighting' patriarchy. It appears that the fighting has been interpreted literally. Hence, to label oneself as feminist particularly within the Zimbabwean context can be misconstrued as literally fighting men. One can be ostracised for using this label and it can lead to one being shut out from meaningful discussion that may otherwise lead to the much-needed gender attitudes change. Coleman, (2006) explains the predicament of identifying herself as feminist. She explains that when in conversations with her male friends and she identifies as a womanist, they think of her as a black church woman, but when she identifies as a feminist, they become uncomfortable and start to align her with lesbians, fear she would question their power and wonder if she calls God in feminine terms. In this case, Coleman's male friends think that being a womanist is more respectable than being a feminist. Oyewumi (1997) has castigated Western feminism for imposing foreign gender categories on Africa in ways that misrepresent the lived experiences of African women. It is in light of this that womanist approaches have been embraced particularly on the African continent as being relevant to African women as they try to analyse their condition and experience. On being asked about the difference between feminism and womanism, Alice Walker insinuates that the latter is a deeper shade of the former. In other words, she implies that womanism has a deeper understanding of the African women's experiences than feminism. While feminism had presented African women as victims, African womanism acknowledges the agency that women have to negotiate and subvert oppressive structures within their societies. To this end, female models of authority are critical for African womanism. This is crucial for this study as it enables us to examine the various prominent women who have assumed leadership roles in Zimbabwe's religio-political spaces and how they have been treated.

The theory is also useful in establishing how dialoguing women in politics in Zimbabwe can be a sure way of ensuring the 'true' healing of the nation through inclusive gender narratives of political participation. Williams (2006:118) argues that the womanist theory concerns itself with survival, community building and maintenance so that a positive quality of life is established for all. Williams further alludes to the fact that women can take the lead and act as catalysts for social change within their communities (2006:118). Ogunyemi (2006:28) notes that the African womanist approach in particular recognises that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy. Hence, the ultimate goal of womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women (Ogunyemi, 2006:28). The major four tenets of womanism have been identified as radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love and critical engagement (Floyd-Thomas, 2006:7). However, Coleman (2013:16) has called us in our deployment of womanism for the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female not to forget to critique male [religious] power that dominates, excludes and selfishly names and violates. For her, womanists should develop an interest and not be detached from politics in their local contexts and beyond. This study takes particular interest in how religion and culture has shaped gendered political participation in Zimbabwe.

The other strength of African womanism is its emphasis on negotiation and dialogue. Ikwechukwu (2011:89) notes that this theory can, through dialogue and characterisation of gender make reconciliation possible. She explains:

> [African] womanists constantly talk of the conference and the roundtable, the opponents and the partners can negotiate contrasting themes. Problem-solving should be a two-way street. The more approaches and perspectives are adopted, the more successful the negotiators become. The skill of the negotiators and their willingness to make concessions are equally needed.

This tenet of African womanism has been perceived as weakening the gender struggle. I have argued elsewhere that while dialogue is critical for this approach, we, as women are mindful of the fact that giving up privilege can be difficult for men (Manyonganise, 2015). Skill is, therefore, required when negotiating the giving up of patriarchal privilege because this involves giving up power as well. There is need to convince the 'opponent' (men in this case) that we are both victims of creatures called religion and

culture. Men have been entangled in a web of patriarchal power from which they are failing to break free while women's condition has been defined by how they conform to patriarchy. African womanism allows for this journeying of women and men consciously making the other gender aware of how certain beliefs and practices are making the other uncomfortable. Such a quality is useful for this study as it provides us with ways of conceiving how the marginalisation of women in Zimbabwean politics has been shaped by religio-cultural beliefs as well as how these can be negotiated through dialogue to the point where men in Zimbabwe and possibly beyond can consciously give up political privilege. Hence, through the African womanist lenses, this study endeavours to show the necessity of women's presence in Zimbabwe's political spaces through an understanding of the gender inequalities that are prevalent in Zimbabwean politics. The theory further enables the study to question why it is difficult to redistribute political power to women.

While noting the distinctions between feminism and womanism, Philips (2006) has cautioned us from rigidity. She argues that while some gender scholars prefer to be identified as strictly feminist and womanist, these identities are fluid. Coleman (2006) while acknowledging that she was shaped by black feminist scholarship, crossed the boundary and began to identify as a womanist, but constantly taps into feminist analysis. Hence, it is possible for one to traverse these spaces and assume a different tag depending on the context as well as subject under discussion. Philips observation is crucial as it allows for complementarity between the approaches where one can tap into the strengths of the other. I have argued elsewhere that while I identify as an African womanist, there are certain instances where I draw insights from feminism without necessarily losing my identity. I, therefore, agree with Coleman (2013:19) who argues that "if womanist religious thought relinquishes a sense of ownership identity and consciously notes the connections among the various forms of feminism, it has the potential to link to various types of struggles and form unlikely but fruitful alliances in its pursuit of social transformation."

For primary data, the study utilises the phenomenology of religion approach to ascertain how the African (Shona) indigenous religio-cultural beliefs on women's political participation have found expressions in biblical interpretation in Zimbabwe. The major strength of this approach in this study is that it nudges me to shelve my preconceived ideas. I am encouraged to accurately describe religious phenomena as it presents itself to me albeit with the challenges this presents. Most importantly, through

field research which is a requirement in this approach, phenomenology of religion has given voice to the subaltern voices and allows me as a researcher to capture the experiences of Zimbabwean women who are often marginalised from political participation or ostracised for daring to venture into politics. In this case, the study utilises public discourse as presented in newspapers, social media as well as sermons. This is crucial as it enables us to establish both the conscious and unconscious framing of women as political outsiders within the Zimbabwean political milieu. In this case, discourse and narrative analysis become useful in the process of analysing gathered data. Discourse analysis fits very well in this qualitative study because of its interpretivist and intersubjective nature. Marlow (2017) notes that discourse analysis is concerned with implicit meanings that can be decoded in public discourse, text and media. He further argues that public discourse is often structured in ways that marginalise minority groups on legitimate beliefs, values and ideologies of more dominant groups. In this case, discourse analysis is helpful in untangling gender representations in political participation in Zimbabwe. It enables us to identify the dominant group which is responsible for constructing a gendered discourse of political participation in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, it provides us with analytical tools to examine documents, media, sermons among others which are put in the public domain and are meant to shape public opinion on women's political participation using gender lens. Schollon (2008:vii) aptly explains what constitutes public discourse when he argues that public discourse is (1) always and inherently political (2) stakeholders in the political process may operate from positions of power or from minority positions, and therefore, (3) all participants in public discourse as well as all citizens must face up to the difficult dilemma of trying to win, on the one hand, but on the other hand, insisting on preserving open, free, non-coercive negotiation of their positions to enable democratic processes for making decisions. He then calls for a restrategising of the ways in which minority voices can come to be heard within the political processes of democratic nations. In this case, the use of discourse analysis enables us to establish the gendered patterns of political participation in Zimbabwe and how religio-cultural beliefs and practices are weaved into this gendered discourse. In the final analysis, it becomes important to determine how such a gendered discourse can be reconfigured in ways that can make it gender inclusive. The study also adopts the narrative analysis approach because of its ability to utilise stories to de-

scribe human experience and action as well as allowing people to construct meanings of life experiences (Oliver, 1998:245). Neitz (2004:399) is of the view that narratives open up spaces for us to pay attention to the voices of the people who are at the margins rather than in the centres of power. By allowing women to tell their stories, this study engages in a contextual exploration of how gendered notions of political participation are generated and maintained through the influence of religio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as the way the biblical text has been interpreted. Spivak (1988) explains the power differentials that exist between the researcher and the researched for as long as the researcher perceives the researched as the 'other'. Focusing on the category 'woman' in feminist studies, she cautions us not to take it for granted that the subaltern can speak. Spivak is not implying that the subaltern do not have a voice, but that even when they do speak, the danger may be in those researching trying to speak for them which may result in misrepresentation of facts as well as the silencing of the researched. It therefore, becomes important for this study to present the voices of the women as they are and to try as much as is possible to journey with the women in deriving meaning from their own voices. The study ceases to be about the women but one with the women. In this case, a total of sixty-five interviews were carried out. Of these sixty were women and five were male church leaders. Fifteen of these withdrew their participation from the study, mostly at the end of the interviews because they were suspicious of their anonymity being maintained. Some actually used WhatsApp to indicate their unwillings for their interviews to be used for this study. For ethical purposes, I had to withdraw their responses from the study.

Structure of the Book

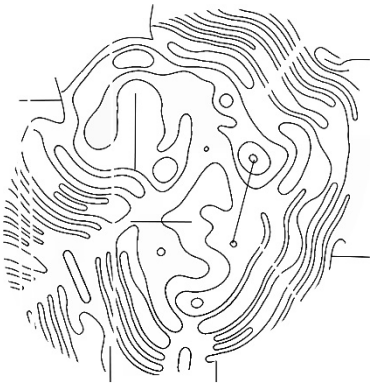
The study is divided into seven chapters. This first chapter is the introduction to the study. It provides a discursive analysis of the interconnections among religion, gender and politics. Basically, the chapter lays the foundation to the study through the problematisation of these key concepts as well as a literature analysis of the work that already exists in the field. Chapter Two focuses on African Women and the politics of the home. The chapter endeavours to deal with the paradox of gender, power and identity within the home in pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe which to a large extent has found expression in the present day nation. It further examines the effects of colonialism on women's citizenship

within the home which has shaped the perceptions of women as decision-makers. In Chapter Three, the study examines African women and power politics within church institutions in Zimbabwe. It provides an appraisal of women in religion as well as women and religion. A contextual analysis of the entrenchment of male headship and leadership and how this is embedded in cultural repositories as well as how this has found resonance in biblical interpretation is done. The chapter intends to show how religion is a major factor influencing the way gender is constructed in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. The concept of agency is weaved into this chapter by providing an overview of women's groups that have emerged in the various strands of Christianity showing how they are navigating the rough waters of patriarchy. Chapter Four is an analysis of women, religion and politics at the national level in Zimbabwe. The Chapter highlights the way religion has shaped women's political participation in Zimbabwe. It explores how politics in Zimbabwe has been masculinised and how women in politics have been sexualised. Political perspectives that have been shaped by religio-cultural attitudes are provided on selected women in politics in Zimbabwe. In Chapter Five, the study engages with dominant biblical as well as religio-cultural beliefs and practices that serve to exclude women from political participation in Zimbabwe. It practically questions the exclusion of women from political participation due to the way religion and culture has informed gender roles. Chapter Six focuses on coming up with a gender-sesitive and gender-inclusive framework for political participation in Zimbabwe. It is envisaged that such a framework is instructive of the way negative gender attitudes influenced by religion and culture need to be interrogated, challenged and eventually discarded so that both men and women can participate in politics on an equal basis. The Chapter, therefore, recommends a rereading and interpretation of the Bible in life affirming ways. Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter of the study. It summarises as well as provide study conclusions as well as a way forward.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the introduction and the orientation to this study. It laid the ground upon which the following chapters are going to stand by mapping the field of religion, gender and politics. What came out clear in this chapter is how the three concepts are closely intertwined and further intertwine with other categories such as citizenship and gendered

spaces which are important in our understanding of the field. The differentiation of the private and the public ran through the above analysis and it exposed the gender power dynamics in this division. As Herzog and Braude (2009:7) puts it, it was shown how the private sphere represents the logic of tradition, while the public sphere represents progress, rationality, and modernity which results in the private sphere being viewed as marginal and secondary to the public arena in which the more important and more highly valued social activities occur. For Herzog and Braude (2009:7) this marginality projects onto women, allegedly the 'natural' inhabitants of the private sphere, rendering their activities secondary to those conducted by men in the public arena. While agreeing to a certain extent with this view, the chapter argued that when it comes to political participation, even the private sphere is crucial because of the presence of gendered politics within this sphere which eventually shapes attitudes towards women's political participation in the public sphere. Questions of women's citizenship in both spheres were then raised so as to provide useful lens with which to view women's general marginalisation from political participation. The chapter also provided Zimbabwe as the focus of the study. It gave the intention of the study as one that is to establish how religio-cultural beliefs in Zimbabwe have found expression in gendered interpretation of the Bible in ways that are meant to shun women out of political participation in Zimbabwe. In order to deepen our understanding of how the private is also political, the next chapter examines African women and the politics of the home.



2 | African Women and the Politics of the Home

Introduction

The previous chapter engaged in the theorisation of the key concepts that inform this study. This chapter focuses on women within the social institutions of marriage, kinship as well as the family. It provides an analysis of how African women are acted upon by the politics manifesting itself in the home as well as how they navigate it. The chapter traces the societal positions of women from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. It seeks to present the contestations in scholarship pertaining women's citizenship within the home. Such an analysis is meant to enable us to locate Shona women's position within the home as well as the politics that guides it. In other words, the chapter rejects the widely held view that in Africa, colonialism brought with it the subordinated position of women. Rather, the chapter argues that colonialism reinforced the gender culture of most African societies, Zimbabwe included, while at the same time it introduced new gender perspectives. A presentation of women's voices in contemporary Zimbabwe is done in order to show how the home remains gendered space as a result of both the pre-colonial and the colonial periods.

Women in Pre-colonial Africa: An Appraisal

There is a dearth of literature that focuses on women's status in the pre-colonial period. Moagi and Mtombeni (2020:1) note that while there has been mass production of scholarly literature on colonial and postcolonial women in Southern Africa, the pre-colonial period has not received enough attention. They, therefore, attribute this omission on the fact that the production of mainstream historical literature was done by men, about men and for men. However, women have begun to write about women in pre-colonial times. Such scholarship has come from both African and non-African scholars. Reading through these scholarly works shows divergent views on the status of women. There are four schools of thought that have emerged on women's status in pre-colonial African societies. Early feminist scholars who were largely non-African, presented African women as oppressed, domesticated and helpless. Some non-African scholars have also tried to justify the oppression and marginalisation of women in pre-colonial Africa. For example, Greene (1999) sought to show how gender and ethnicity overlapped in ways that determined the

course of social change among the Anlo, an ethnic group in Ghana in pre-colonial Africa. She argues that there were justifiable reasons why the women particularly the young ones were subordinated by the men. These were centred on the religio-cultural as well as political transformations that occurred which in a way reconfigured the Anlo society. Parpart and Staudt (1988) present a mixed view of women's position in pre-colonial Africa. Focusing on governance, Parpart and Staudt (1988) argue that throughout history, African women have had a different relationship to the State than have men. They observe that while women in certain classes and ethnic groups may have had greater access to the State, women have been underrepresented in African state affairs. Their analysis of African pre-colonial societies shows that a few women were awarded some power which was mostly informal and not authoritative. This leads them to conclude that "women in Africa have tended to exert power indirectly rather than directly through positions of authority." Parpart and Staudt (1988) further observe that some women held high political office, either through heredity or election. For example, in Yorubaland, the Iyalode is presented as having had jurisdiction over all women and represented women's concerns on the king's council (an institution which was dominated by men). Among the Ewe of Ghana, an elected queen mother is said to have had a council of elderly women who acted as advisors. Women also had a representative who could seek to influence male councils (Parpart & Staudt, 1988:3). The importance of the queen mother position was also noted among the Asante, Baganda and the Zulu kingdoms. However, despite women holding political office in some pre-colonial African societies, Parpart and Staudt (1988:3) note that they did not have equal authority as compared to male officials.

However, scholarship on gender arising from some African as well as non-African scholars writing on Africa has disputed some of the views of early non-African feminist writers. It is only prudent to highlight what informs this position. Amadiume, in *Male daughters, Female husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (1987) argues that western scholars had misunderstood the flexible gender system among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. They failed to observe that women could occupy the position of 'husband' and in so doing pursue the same kinds of strategies as men. Due to this fluidity of gender roles, Amadiume is of the view that both women and men could traverse the gender spaces. Hence, for her, since biological sex did not always correspond to ideological gender meant that women could play roles usually monopolised by men, or be classified

as 'males' in terms of power and authority over others. In her analysis of the Igbo culture, roles were not rigidly masculinised or feminised and there was no stigma attached to breaking gender roles (Lindsay, 2017:93). In concurrence with Amadiume, Oyewumi (2005) disputes the existence of gender categories among the Yoruba of Nigeria. She questions the historicity of the gendered interpretation of the Oyo oral traditions. She argues that Yoruba society was free of gender categories. In her opinion, gender-biased social categories are absent in the indigenous conception. For her, "the differences coded in the Yoruba frame of reference were age-based...seniority was the language of status" (2015:170). Oyewumi is of the view that the existence of gender among the Yoruba is an invention of colonialism. While acknowledging Oyewumi's views, Bertolt (2018) observes that her work cannot be applied to the entire African continent because of the diverse cultural realities.

Machakanja (2015) engaged with the status of women in the political spaces of pre-colonial Africa. In reference to women's political position, she argues that "indigenous political systems represent a period of extensive political variation in the political systems of ethnic groups in Africa. She observes that women were conspicuous in high places. She, however, notes that indigenous African women played important roles in many African cultures, for example, as queen mothers, queen sisters, princesses, chiefs and holders of offices in towns and villages. She gives the examples of the Lovedu of Nigeria, the Nubian queens, daughters of Nubian kings who represented their dynastic interests in Southern Egypt. Women in Egypt are said to have enjoyed the same rights as men, though this is disputed by some scholars. However, for Machakanja, these examples dispel the notion that African women were silent drudges who were subjected to bearing children, to the practice of female circumcision, and to accepting their husband's polygamous privileges unquestioningly (2015:200). Even in patrilineal societies, Machakanja argues that the sexual division of labour in indigenous agriculture gave women a great deal of power and formal authority. For her, women's labour [was] made significant by the institution of bride wealth that accompanied marriage (2015:200).

Other African women scholars have also argued that in societies that were matrilineal, one cannot talk of women oppression. However, a critical question that arises from such an analysis is, are matrilineal[1] societies

[1] A matrilineal society is one in which kinship is passed through one's maternal lineage.

automatically matriarchal[2]? In her study of matriarchal societies across the globe, Goether-Abendroth (2012) makes arguments that are critical for this study. She argues that matriarchies observe gender equality and that this is despite these societies placing women at the centre. She argues "the necessary conditions of the definitions of matriarchy are that mothers are at the centre of society, as manifested by matrilinearity and by mothers' (women's) power of economic distribution, both in the context of gender equality (2012:xxvi). For her, matrilinearity is important because it organises the social relationships of the entire society as well as ensuring that these relationships through female inheritance and the political decision-making processes that follow from it. While women are at the centre in matriarchal societies, Goether-Abendroth (2012:xxvi) observes that they are not hierarchies. Yet for her, matrilinearity and gender equality cannot constitute a true definition of matriarchy if these are not supported by the power of economic distribution which must be held by women. Her argument is that a true matriarchal economy is one that is anchored on the economy of mutuality, a characteristic that is absent in patriarchal societies. In her study of West African societies, particularly the Akan, she notes how power is split between the king and the queen. While the king ruled men, the queen ruled women. She further argues that the history of Africa is littered with royal female leaders whose courage and determination has been kept alive in the memory of their peoples and who still are highly venerated in ancestor religions (2012:394). Goether-Abendroth (2012) places the blame for the rise of patriarchy among the Akan on foreign religions such as Islam. While this can be true, questions arise on the relationship between matriliny and matriarchy. Most scholars appear to have confused the two concepts. For example, it appears that Goether-Abendroth (2012) tried very hard to have the Akan fit into her theory of matriarchy yet what appears to be the case is that the Akan were/are a matrilineal society. The same appears to have happened to McGee (2015) when she studied the Ashanti of Ghana. I argue in this study that while there are a lot of women in traditional Africa who wielded power, most of them are products of matrilineal societies and not matriarchal ones. Even these, in one way or the other found themselves in positions where patriarchy became a stumbling block to their full empower-

[2] A matriarchal society is one whose social organisation is centred on a woman as the authority.

ment. When Goether-Abendroth blames Islam for the introduction of patriarchy among the Akan, she may have missed what Shin (2016) observed among the same society, that is, the Akan society is patriarchal, although it is based on a matrilineal system. Shin's observation is crucial because it assists us in understanding the subordination and marginalisation of women in most matrilineal societies across Africa. This would also help in understanding that in the majority of cases, foreign influences did not really change the cultural structures of these societies, but merely reinforced them. Such an understanding would challenge scholars from Africa who have disputed the existence of gender in pre-colonial African societies and who have championed the argument that this is an invention of colonialism. In her study of the Chewa in Malawi, Phiri (2000:24) notes that though this matrilineal society promised some form of freedom and status for women, it was still men who had power over them in that a woman remained always under the strong power of her uncle and/or brother. She argues:

> The Chewa woman was looked upon as the root of the lineage (*tsinde*) as well as a dependent (*mbumba*). The two perspectives show that although a matrilineal society gave a woman high status and a certain amount of freedom which was not there in patrilineal society, she was also heavily dependent upon, as well as controlled by, her uncle and brother who had total power over her, whether single or married. Her family power did not mean matriarchy.

Phiri's explanation reveals the presence of patriarchal control and authority in matrilineal societies. She concludes that the Chewa matrilineal society was also patriarchal. As such, Mama (2001:15) has critiqued viewpoints that deny that gender has any significance to matters authentically African by inventing an imaginary pre-colonial community in which gender did not exist. She argues that "gender in all its diverse manifestations has long been one of the central organising principles of African societies past and present. Mbilinyi (1992:40) has warned us against creating a new myth of a progressive tradition and a backward modernity. I largely agree with scholarship that is cautious in (re)presenting a gender equal pre-colonial Africa. For example, Mbilinyi's viewpoint is directed against cultural nationalism which has caused most African gender scholars to turn a blind eye to the many ways in which African women were treated as second class citizens in pre-colonial Africa. As shall be shown later, there were indigenous cultural practices and beliefs which relegated women to marginalised positions even before the advent of colonialism. A critical analysis of gender relations in the colonial period tends to show that in

most cases, the colonial administrators only reinforced what already existed particularly within the Zimbabwean context with special reference to the Shona. While Amadiume argued that no stigma was attached to breaking gender roles, the Shona ridiculed those that sought to traverse the gender spaces. Hence, a man who was always seen in the company of girls was termed *jengavakadzi* (one who always follows women) while a woman often seen in the company of men was termed *jengavarume* (one who always follows men). The issue of space being gendered among the Shona is shown by the fact that men who liked to always be in the kitchen were said to be broom-dodgers (*nzvengamustvairo*). Since such identities were not socially acceptable, both men and women observed gender rules strictly or they would be regarded as social outcasts (see Bernard Chidzero's novel titled *Nzvengamutsvairo*). In this case, gender can be understood to have been a social organising tool even in African pre-colonial societies. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, (1995) founder of the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians critiqued the gendered nature of most African cultures. She views African culture as a site of struggle for African women. Becker (1998:259) cited in Geisler (2004:18) argues that "the accounts that try to present pre-colonial African women as having wielded power tend to glorify individual African female rulers without detailed analyses of the specific historic circumstances under which they lived." Hence, from Geisler's analysis, such accounts uplift outstanding cases over the majority of women who must be postulated to have had much less authority and political power. Such expositions have led Robertson and Berger (1986) to argue that African women's unequal access to power and resources does not result exclusively from colonialism and capitalism. In the same vein, Schmidt (1991:735) rejects the notion that views African women's subordination as solely the result of policies imposed by foreign capital and the colonial state. For her, collapsing female oppression into the capitalist mode of production bypasses the issue of patriarchy (Schmidt, 1991:734). Rather, the most plausible view needs to be that indigenous and European structures of patriarchal control reinforced and transformed one another evolving into new structures and forms of domination (Schmidt, 1991:734; Tamale, 1996; Geisler, 2004:19). Tamale (1996) opines that though women wielded substantial economic and political power, it does not suggest that their status was equal to that of men. She argues that even in pre-colonial Africa, men dominated positions of political, economic and social order. From her point of view, what colonialism did was to push women to the limits of subordination. In the same

vein, Montgomery (2017:229) is of the view that while it cannot be denied that the colonial period profoundly transformed social and political organisation including gender roles and hierarchies in African societies, it is also true that the history of Africa did not start with colonialism. For her "gender inequality and female disempowerment in terms of the limited social and physical mobility already existed to varying degrees in African cultures before the arrival of missionaries and colonisers" (2017:229). In this case, a critique of some of the cultural beliefs and practices that placed women at the periphery of society prior the advent of colonialism is necessary.

Women as Aliens in their own Homes: The Paradox of Gender, Power and Identity in Pre-colonial Zimbabwe

In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, relationships centred on kinship bonds (Comaroff, 1980a; Radcliffe-Brown & Forde, 1987; Pauli, 2019). Marriage played a pivotal role in these bonds as well as in determining the amount of power accorded to men and women. The payment of lobola was and continues to be central as a way of authenticating any marriage. This is despite the enactment of laws[3] that somehow make it possible for a couple to be recognised at law as married even without paying the requisite lobola. While culturally, the practice of paying lobola for a woman before they could become one's wife was generally viewed as a way of binding two families together, it had its own ramifications when it comes to disempowering the married women as well as unmarried daughters. The lobola practice has been criticised for objectifying women's bodies. Chiweshe (2016) views this practice as entrenching patriarchal power while at the same time commodifying women's bodies. In traditional societies as well as in contemporary society, the practice turned/turns women's bodies into sites of struggle through the interaction of patriarchy, power and politics. For example, socially, women remained legal minors for the rest of their lives (Walsh & Scully, 2006). Hence, it remained the prerogative of the husband to discipline their wives at times without any legal recourse. According to Samkange and Samkange cited in Pearce (1990:149), a woman occupies an ambiguous place in the moral system of the Shona due to the fact that, though she is regarded as a *munhu* (person), she could still be beaten as a child (see also Manyonganise, 2015).

[3] The Legal Age of Majority Act enacted in 1982 makes it possible for men and women to get married at law even without the payment of lobola.

Gender scholars have begun to protest against the infantilisation of women.

Traditionally, Shona women were treated as aliens (*vatorwa*) within families they were born and married respectively. In their analysis of *Nhango dzemudumba* (which is poetry that was used in traditional Shona societies by aunts when counselling married women and older girls looking forward to get married), Chigidi and Tembo (2013:73) note that the notion of women being aliens in their husbands' homes was reinforced. In this regard, they were advised to follow the rules set by their husbands. From Chigidi and Tembo's perspective, such advice gave "direct instruction to women to submit themselves completely to patriarchal power and domination" (2013:73). As a result, they were excluded from contributing towards decision-making. This was a preserve of men (husbands, fathers and sons). For Parpart and Staudt (1988:2), women were barred from the chiefly court which rendered them politically powerless. They further note how this led to women living in fear of abandonment and poverty if they opposed male dominance. Among the Shona, she notes how women lacked legal rights as they were under the control of whatever male they lived with (1988:2). Their safety remained in them being loyal and obedient to these men.

In a patriarchal society such as the Shona, women's condition was worsened by the fact that they could not own land. Writing on Africa in general, Sheldon (2016:2) argues that:

> In much of Africa, land was not owned by individuals but was controlled by a social group that held the rights of access to the land. Use of specific plots of land was decided by leaders of the group, who were not always men. Leadership was intertwined with control over women's labour, and the arrangement of families through marriage was a matter of significant interest to the senior clan leaders.

This is a clear indication that women could not directly own land in precolonial Africa. For example, in Zimbabwe, though there were certain crops that were deemed feminine, women had to rely on their husbands' generosity for pieces of land to grow these. All land remained in the hands of fathers and husbands. Peters and Peters (1998) highlight the fact that wives and divorced women accessed land through usufruct rights availed to them by their husbands and fathers or brothers respectively. Shona culture stipulated that a son could only own land at the point of marriage. In other words, women were used as passports for men to have title to land which they eventually deprive women of. Such deprivation only meant

that the women were consistently dependent on the men for their economic well-being. Cheater (1986:66) observes that women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe were economically active in agriculture as well as craft production, and had some control over grain in stores. However, they did not control the means of production in these spheres, though they provided much of the labour needed. Hence, despite women's centrality to agricultural production, they generally had only indirect access to power and authority in African societies (Sheldon, 2016:3). It is, therefore, true that in Shona society "patriarchal authority severely limited women's political and economic power" (Parpart & Staudt, 1988:2). In concurrence, Cheater (1986) explains how women were excluded from the politico-jural authority which controlled among other things the allocation of land. Seidman (1984:421) notes that in contemporary Zimbabwe, most Zimbabweans, both male and female argue that women and men were equal in traditional society because access to communally held land gave everyone equal, if not identical status. For her, this may be a romanticisation of the past. In her analysis, looking only at the access to the means of production, this view of traditional society ignores non-economic forms of male domination. She, therefore, argues that "although both women and men had access to land through membership in lineage groups, women had almost no formal authority outside the home (1984:421). She notes how women were expected to feed families from the surplus made from their farming activities. Thus, in her critique of Ubuntu, Manyonganise (2015) observes that the ethic creates gendered exclusionary identities particularly for women through the perception that they are aliens in their own homes. She argues:

> ...married women are often excluded from important decision-making meetings within their husbands' families. When they go to their families of birth, they are told that they cannot make any decision because they no longer belong(ed) there. In this case, these notions of *mutorwa* (alien) are a creation of exclusionary identities which often reinforce/d exclusionary boundaries. More often, women find out that they do not belong to either their families of birth or the families to which they are married (2015:34)

While Manyonganise's analysis is informative of how Shona women are still perceived in contemporary Shona society, it is important to note how the pre-colonial gender set up continues to influence post-colonial societies. In other words, the pre-colonial understanding of how to perceive a woman through gender lens persists in contemporary Zimbabwe specifically among the Shona.

Some scholars in Zimbabwe have tried to argue that there were times that a respected aunt in the home could be accorded space to act as the father, what is commonly known as *babakadzi* (female father). In the same vein, one's mother's brother could be viewed as *mairume* (male mother). I am of the opinion that this can be equated to what Amadiume meant when she referred to male daughters and female husbands. I, however, argue in this study that while this is true, the *babakadzi* only became respectable because she assumed a masculine role in particular instances and reverts back to her feminine role once she is done with solving a particular problem within her brothers' families. It is common cause that in the event that this *babakadzi* dies in the family that she is married, it would require the presence of even a smaller male child from her family of birth for the funerary rites to proceed yet if a male person dies in the absence of this *babakadzi* the rites would proceed in her absence for as long as there were/are male persons present from his kith and kin. It is, therefore, prudent to acknowledge that in pre-colonial Shona society, women's authority was largely informal. From Cheater's perspective, women exercised authority in their roles as mothers specifically over their daughters; as aunts over the social education of their brothers' female children and as ancestors over the reproductive capacity of their female descendants. Other areas noted by Cheater where Shona women had authority was in their possession of special skills in pottery and healing not forgetting their recognised right over a part of lobola meant for mothers whenever their daughters got married. In her analysis, Cheater (1986) expounds how women's authority increased as they grew older as well as when they stopped menstruating. She posits that "commonly, post-menopausal women became a type of 'honorary male in the village society, having lost the mystical influence associated with domestic menstruation, abandoned domestic responsibilities to the work of younger women…" (1986:67). This implies that the elderly women would only exercise authority in so far as they were able to manage and control younger women, making sure they do not deviate from the designed patriarchal norms. The 'honorary male' became the mouthpiece of patriarchy in their old age. What is important in Cheater's analysis is the fact that she notes how the influence of these elderly women remained "out of sight, in the private domain" (1986:67). They too were restricted from frequenting the male world of public decision-making at the traditional court.

The other sphere where women exercised some semblance of authority was in religion. Women were recognised as spirit mediums. Cheater

(1986:68) finds spirit mediumship as both a fascinating and ambiguous role played by Shona women. She notes how the prominent spirits in the public domain such as Chaminuka and the *mhondoro* spirits of deceased chiefs were/are predominantly male, yet the mediums who transmit the spirits' messages to the living were/are mostly women (though men could also act as mediums). A good example of a woman spirit medium who is nationally recognised is that of Charwe the medium of Nehanda Nyakasikana (see Chapter 4). Shona women used spirit mediumship to subvert patriarchal control. Women who were mediums to revered spirits were themselves respected by both men and women. Hence, Cheater (1986:69) argues that "religious roles in traditional belief systems, therefore, afforded and continue to afford exceptional women, who refuse to conform to the standard female 'social personality', an escape route into individualised positions of power as well as authority based on traditional religion" (1986:69). It is important to note that spirit mediumship became contested space as both men and women claimed ownership of certain spirits at both family and community levels. For women, it was a struggle for recognition while for men, it was mainly a struggle for more power and control.

Musha Mukadzi (A Woman makes the Home): Recognition vs Disempowerment

Shona culture is awash with sayings, proverbs and idioms that depict men and women in different ways. Scholarship on gender in Shona culture has examined the implications of the various sayings that have a bearing on the status of women. While some depict women either positively or negatively, there are yet others that are ambivalent. While these are varied, this study focuses on the concept of *musha mukadzi* (a woman makes a home) as it was deployed in pre-colonial times among the Shona. There is debate on whether this saying was/is empowering or disempowering to women. Taringa (2014:402) and Sande (2017:56) view the saying as an affirmative portrayal of women as pillars of survival and sustenance of families. Arguing from an African Pentecostal perspective, Sande posits that this saying shows that women have leadership skills and roles which [were] developed within the home. The general implication is that without women, families would not survive. However, Chigidi and Tembo (2013) have noted how this saying was presented as though it is empowering, yet it had subtle connotations of disempowerment. They argue:

> At face value, the proverb gives the impression of a woman with power. It appears like she is the one who fires the shots. [Yet] when people say *musha mukadzi*... They mean that she must sacrifice herself so that that home survives. In other words she must bear children, cook, sweep, wash for everyone, go to the fields, bring firewood, fetch water, entertain visitors and husband's relatives, etc. In short, she must sacrifice herself in the interest of others without complaining. But this woman has no 'power'; she has been reduced to a beast of labour, a slave. If this proverb is uttered to a man it educates him to remember that he must keep or have this human being called a woman who is a doer of all things around him. If it is uttered to a woman, it is a reminder that her selfless sacrifices are needed to keep the family going (2013:77).

From the above analysis, it can be deduced that the saying acted as a reinforcement of the domestication of women. Manyonganise (2010) critiqued the saying for its restrictive nature to women particularly on their mobility (both horizontally and vertically). She argues that among the Shona, the home, culturally, was synonymous with morality, dignity, respect etc which were viewed as characteristics of an ideal woman (2010:19). Such a social construction largely ensured that women confined themselves to the private spaces of the home. Public places were culturally the domain of men to the extent that women who dared to venture into these spaces were stigmatised. Thus, Chikwira (2020:37) notes that the different ways through which women [were] socially located resulted in contested spaces. Yet, it is in public spaces that decisions pertaining to economics, politics, religion, etc were taken. Such contestations persisted during the colonial period and beyond.

African Women and Colonialism: A Religio-Cultural and Political Appraisal

A gender analysis of the impact of colonialism is fraught with its own challenges. In Vince and Rodet's opinion, "the challenge of applying a gendered perspective to the study of colonial experiences has not only been to reintegrate women into colonial narratives, but also and above all to engage in an epistemological rethinking of the categories, methodologies, and sources we use." (Vince &Rodet, 2007:1). From their perspective, using a gender lens to approach colonialisms is a "means of moving away from the opposition between metropole and periphery, multiplying and provincialising metropolitan sites" (Vince & Rodet, 2007:1). Thus, a gen-

der approach is crucial in "demarginalising colonial experiences, analysing these as highly complex issues, and highlighting the ambiguities which lie at the heart of colonial systems and their practices" (Vince & Rodet, 2007:1). It is important to note from the onset that the history of colonialism is a history of domination; not only the domination of the coloniser over the colonised but also of men over women. Writing on Namibia, John (2021:115) notes how local matrilineal kin and inheritance structures were disrupted by encouraging patriarchal narratives and notions of the ideal, male-headed household. The reason for this was that colonialism was championed by men who created multiple inequalities between conquerers and the conquered, and with the importation of more patriarchal ideologies often encouraged more hierarchical relations between men and women (Strang, 2021). As such, in this section, I attempt to examine how African Shona women as historical subjects in a gendered colonial world were active agents in the making of the colonial empire through their daily lives, their families and their communities, in ritual and belief, in their travels, their struggles, and their travails (Allman, Geiger and Musisi, 2002:11). While one school of thought has credited colonialism for providing avenues of empowerment in the colonial economy, others have tended to valorise its negatives. In her study of Mozambique, Sheldon (1998) offers a positive critique of colonial education and argues that while the curriculum offered was viewed as aimed at domesticating women, it equipped women with skills which they used beyond the home in both colonial and post-colonial periods. Scholars offering these insights have only focused on how African women were able to empower themselves economically. They have not paid attention to how colonialism reinforced the African patriarchal notions of women and domesticity to the extent that women were generally excluded from actively participating in public life. On the whole. Allman, Geiger and Musisi (2002:11) note that few publications have taken colonialism and women's modes of adjustment, negotiation, and resistance as their central problematics.

Women in colonial Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) were viewed from multiple perspectives. For us to understand these perspectives, there is need to examine the changes in the socio-economic as well as political spheres that accompanied the colonisation of Africa in general and for purposes of this study, Zimbabwe in particular. Colonialism brought with it a new economy which required the labour of able-bodied men from the African communities. The establishment of farms, mines and industries in towns saw most black men leaving their ancestral lands in search of

paid work. This was exacerbated by the introduction of a number of taxes to be paid in European currency by black Africans to the colonial government. In Zimbabwe, the hut tax forced African men to sell their labour cheaply to the colonial government. Schmidt (1991:733) note that African women and children were forced to stay behind in remote rural reserves undertaking subsistence farming in order to feed themselves as well as supplement men's wages. Schmidt (1988:45) notes that as men migrated from home in search of work, women's status declined and this decline was often accompanied by an increasing burden of work as they assumed responsibility for tasks previously done by men as well as their own. She further notes that in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), in the early years of colonisation, women in some parts of the country were influential in the emergence of peasantry that removed the need for male labour migration. They quickly responded to market opportunities by introducing new crops as well as coming up with new ways of earning cash incomes. However, once wage earning surpassed food production as the determining factor in household survival, women's social status deteriorated further (Schmidt, 1991:735). This was worsened by the overcrowding and overuse of land in the reserves where black Africans were forced to live. African reserves meant that women expended increasing amounts of energy for ever diminishing agricultural returns (Schmidt, 1988:48). The introduction of formal education resulted in children leaving women to face the burden of agriculture and house work all by themselves. Hence, Barnes (1999:xxiii) argues that "if gender and gender relations are used as a cornerstone of analysis of colonialism, it becomes clear that African women and the allocation of their labour were centrepieces of major struggles about social reproduction, which was in turn the very bone of contention between African and settler societies."

Faced with the above adversities, women sought ways to escape rural life in search of new economic opportunities in European farms, mines, mission stations and towns. Studies done on Southern and Central Africa revealed that African women in the early years of the twentieth century exercised a new found mobility which provoked the development of various schemes to try to control them (Barnes, 1992:587). Schmidt (1991) shows that the colonial government in Southern Rhodesia made a clear alliance with African patriarchy to control African women's mobility. Schmidt (1988) puts forward various reasons for this restriction on women's mobility. She first acknowledges that the migration of African women from rural areas had serious implications for rural African society as well as for

the profitability of capitalist enterprises and for the colonial policy of indirect rule. In this case, she notes that the colonial government was against the establishment of a permanent, potentially volatile African population in the urban areas. It further wanted to curtail the possibility of Africans cutting ties with their rural homes which would result in them demanding more political rights as well as higher wages if women and children were allowed to live with their husbands and fathers at their work places. In addition, the colonial government expected women to also bear the social costs of production through caring for the sick, disabled, retired workers as well as raising the new generation of labour (Schmidt, 1988:49). From the perspective of African men, women needed to stay in the rural areas so that they could maintain kinship and community ties and provide a home for male labourers when they were no longer of use in the European-controlled economy. The rural home was also crucial as a burial place for the men in farms, mines and towns. The majority abhorred being buried away from the ancestral lands. The saying '*ini Kambuzuma*[4] *handidi, ndinonovigwa kumusha* (I don't like Kambuzuma, I am going to be buried in my rural home) was popularised during this period. It was, therefore, important for the women to stay at home and maintain that place of eternal rest for the men, women and their children. There was a possibility that if women were to abandon their rural home to join their husbands, they could lose it because their right of access depended on continuous cultivation (Schmidt, 1988:49). On the other hand, African chiefs, headmen and male elders wanted women in the rural areas so that they could continue being under the authority of their fathers, guardians and husbands. Hence, when legislation was put in place to discourage women from moving away from home, African men in Southern Rhodesia welcomed it. Barnes (1992) gives insights into a number of laws that were put in place in order to control the movement of women. Most of the laws were gendered and tended to objectify women. For example, three key legislations were put in place to not only curtail women's mobility but also control their sexuality. These are the Native Marriages Ordinance (1901), the Natives Adultery Punishment Act (1916) and the Native Registration Act (1936). Schmidt (1990), Barnes (1992), Manyonganise and Mhuru (2021) have discussed these Acts among others in order to show how they impacted on women's freedoms during the colonial period. The

[4] The urban burial place for black Africans during colonial rule in Harare was located in Kambuzuma, a black African high-density suburb.

Native Marriages Act of 1901 criminalised child pledging as well as forced marriage and ensured that a girl needed to give her consent before getting married. When forced to get married, the girl had the liberty to report her father or male guardian to the colonial administrators. Hence, women and girls who felt aggrieved by the men in the rural areas utilised this new found freedom to run away from home. Some ventured into prostitution in urban areas while others ran away with husbands of their own choice. Barnes (1992:587) notes that men who were working on mines and towns still required cooked food, as well as clean clothes and above all sexual services from women. These needs were provided for by the mobile African women. Men who had taken up employment in farms, mines and towns discovered that their wives were engaging in adulterous relationships when they were away. Some of them chose to stay at home and never return to work as a way of safeguarding their marriages. To a large extent, this disrupted operations at farms, mines and industries to the chagrin of the colonial administration. On the other hand, African chiefs, headmen and male elders felt their authority over women slipping away. They blamed the colonial government for disrupting traditional modes of control over women. The situation was compounded by the rising incidences of problems such as venereal diseases and prostitution. Barnes (1992) notes that these were wholly assigned to a 'natural immorality' of African women. She argues:

> African women were perceived as being defiant and obstinate- had become slaves to gross passion and deaf to reason. Women who crossed the boundaries of respectable behaviour increasingly ran the risk of being labelled immoral and diseased – evil vessels of contamination (1992:590).

This shows that the colonial government started to view the standards of morality among African women as very low and, therefore, resolved that they would not relax the bonds of custom any further as that would lead to more infidelity. Schmidt (1991:736) observes that colonial records are filled with adjectives characterising African women as indolent, lazy, slothful, immoral, frivolous, savage and uncivilised. The enactment of the Native Adultery Punishment Ordinance (1916) needs to be understood in this vein. The Ordinance sought to criminalise sexual relations between an African man and a married African woman. However, African men could have multiple sexual relations with unmarried African women. Manyonganise and Mhuru (2021) note with concern how the Ordinance only criminalised sexual relations between African men and white women while sexual relations between white men and African or white women

(whether single or married) were permissible. The Native Adultery Punishment Ordinance was a product of consultations between the colonial government and African male elders. It, therefore, reasserted their authority and strengthened their traditional bases of power as well as allowing them to establish new ones (Schmidt, 1990:626). The establishment of native boards at district level was meant to assure men of the control and authority that they had on women. Schmidt (1988:70) views these as safety valves which were meant to deal with mounting African grievances. The boards comprised African chiefs, headmen and other respectable men. No woman was in the board. The intention of the boards was for airing complaints against 'wayward' women. All women in urban areas had to be returned to the rural areas if they did not have a marriage certificate. In this case, marriage became a pass for women to access urban areas something which was not a requirement for men. Hence, when women brought grievances before the colonial courts, they were easily thrown away as being against tradition and custom. Yet, the chiefs, headmen and African male elders had exaggerated some of the version of traditions to their own advantage as well as that of the colonial government. In any case, the colonial government could not afford to estrange the African men who were critical agents in the implementation of indirect rule (Schmidt, 1988:70).

The above is evidence that during colonialism, women struggled against a reconfigured patriarchy rooted in both indigenous and colonial cultures (Allman, Geiger & Musisi, 2002:11). Victorian notions of domesticity were transplanted to the African continent in order to mould 'better' mothers and wives (Allman, Geiger & Musisi, 2002:11). The Natives registration Act (1936) served this purpose. Its purpose was to satisfy persistent male demands for effective restrictions on women's mobility. It further represented the further institutionalisation of women as home-makers. For Akyeampong and Fofack (2012:3), while pre-colonial Africa was not an era of perfect gender parity, the colonial era clearly emerged as an era of institutionalised gender inequality. In concurrence, Seidman (1984:422) is of the view that where precolonial society treated women as both reproducers and producers, colonial policymakers tended to treat them primarily as mothers, whose proper role was to care for children while their husbands supported the family. Therefore, women had to stay at home to perform these duties well. Hence, in Southern Rhodesia through the above mentioned Act, women needed a pass to get into urban areas if their marriages were not registered and they did not have a marriage certificate. In

certain cases, for the women to get a pass, they needed the consent of a husband or a male guardian. Barnes cites a colonial official A.S Cripps commenting on this Act. He said:

> It is true that many complaints have been made at meetings of some of our Bantu societies about non-control of women but it would seem that these were not aimed [at those] who come into town for buying and selling but at women and girls who come and stay and make their homes in the locations without proper husbands and that the demand for control was for the control of these.

The implication of Cripps analysis is that it paints rural life as having been meant for women while urban life was for men. Restricting women to rural areas would mean that they continue to depend on their husbands for upkeep. Schmidt (1991:739) argues that colonial officials were of the view that African women could best be controlled through economic means. For example, as long as women were dependent upon their husbands' access to land and cash income, their behaviour could be kept in line. Section 51 of the Native Affairs Act empowered chiefs and a Native Department official to summon a woman in the urban areas back to the village failure of which they would have committed a crime (Barnes, 1992:598). Adams (2006) has castigated both colonial and mission policies which contributed immensely in socialising African women into European gender norms and 'appropriate' forms of social organisation. She, therefore, accuses colonial administrators of narrowing women's sphere of activities through what she calls the housewifisation of African women. Jeater (2000:36-37) critiques the 'whore' label ascribed to women in urban areas. She argues that women who lived independently in urban areas were not perceived or treated as full members of the society. Hence, they were not perceived as fully human because they did not live in ways that gave them proper, recognised cultural and social identity. For Jeater (2000) it shows that women did not have a 'place' in town in which their identity could be asserted. As a result, the town was experienced as aggressively male space and was dehumanising to women. Jeater notes that among the Shona, relationships are constructed and patrolled through the control of physical spaces. As alluded to earlier, the *dare* (court) is men's place while women own spaces such as kitchens and birthing huts. It is shameful to cross the boundaries in an inappropriate space. Such beliefs were transported into the urban space where men protected public space as male space. Therefore, women who operated shebeens were automatically labelled 'prostitutes'. Jeater (2000:42) argues that:

> African men appear to have been making claims to public spaces in the urban environment in an assertive and somewhat aggressive way – 'furious riding of bicycles, noisy parties, large football matches in spaces which prevented other people from using the footpaths across them. It seems that African men, in their use of open ground and street corners were asserting a right to urban spaces in a way which marginalised African women's access to those spaces.

As Kuper (1980) notes, such behaviour is premised on Southern Bantu cultural systems which perceive space just outside the boundaries of the homestead to be gendered as male and associated with young men. During colonial rule, this generally created the notion that the place for African women was in the rural areas. Jeater (2000) notes that African women were viewed as being 'in town' and not 'of town' since urban areas could not be 'home' for them.

Colonialism also reinforced the objectification of women's bodies. For example, once they were alienated from land, black Africans faced a plethora of economic difficulties. Hence, they turned to bride wealth for relief. Barnes (1992:595) notes that by the early 1930s, rural officials were remarking that fathers and guardians had come to regard these payments as a fair means of accumulating cash to pay taxes and meet other financial obligations. This is despite the fact that, traditionally, lobola was just a symbolic exchange of gifts between families. This change marked the beginning of the commodification of a woman's value to her family which has persisted today. For a girl to gain value, they had to be restricted within the confines of the home. They had to be barred from going to towns because urban areas were viewed as centres of evil; where prostitution was rife. A virgin girl would fetch more at the point of marriage. Hence, keeping the girls at home would ensure that men in the women's families were in a position to control the marriage process (Barnes, 1992:595). From Barnes' analysis, the custom of lobola was perceived in this case as a deterrent for young girls not to seek employment away from home. This could have been the genesis of the commercialisation of the practice where women began to be viewed as objects that could be purchased. In fact, the colonial administration and the African male elders felt that if a man pays more for a wife, it would become difficult for the wife to opt out of the marriage for fear of her parents or guardians failing to pay back the lobola (Schmidt, 1986). In this case, women became men's purchased property once lobola was paid for them. This greatly diminished women's ability to decide how they wanted to lead their lives (Geisler, 2004:20). During the First Chimurenga (1896-7), women were used as objects of

negotiation by the colonial government. They were abducted and used to force their husbands to surrender. Lyons (2004) notes that during the colonial period, women were taken as hostages, used as pawns, forced into marriage and labour as rewards for men. In her analysis, the treatment of women under the colonial government was not different from their treatment by African men.

Another area that shows the discrimination of women is in the area of education. Seidman (1984:422) notes the difficulties that both black girls and boys faced in accessing formal education in the colonial period in Zimbabwe. However, in this scenario, girls had fewer chances of receiving formal education. In cases that girls got into school, the curricula differed from that of boys (see Chapter 3). For Parpart and Staudt (1988) by limiting girls' access to education, the colonial officials were ensuring the female advancement was constrained. Traditional customs also impeded girls' access to formal education. Girls were never seen as permanent citizens in their families of birth. They were viewed as temporary citizens since they were going to be married. In this case, investing in girls' education was seen as a waste of resources since that education would benefit the families into which they would marry. As a result, boys' education was prioritised over that of girls. It is unfortunate that such attitudes persist even in contemporary Zimbabwe among certain cultural as well as religious groups.

This analysis would be incomplete if it would cast African women just as victims of colonialism. Sheldon (2016:7) observes that research on the colonial era exhibits tension between viewing women as victims and viewing them as powerful agents within their communities. It is true that the above discussed strategies by the colonial government in cahoots with African patriarchy restricted women's mobility and tried so hard to shut them out of the new economic space. However, it is also important to analyse how African women exercised agency by encountering and remaking those strategies to work in their favour despite the complex and shifting settings. Sheldon (2016:7) avers that some women found ways to progress and succeed in the face of blatant discrimination. As alluded to earlier, women and girls utilised the Native Marriages Ordinance in their favour. They rejected to be married to men who were chosen for them by their parents. The legal statute empowered them to challenge this oppressive custom of marriage by either reporting their parents or guardians to the colonial authorities or by running away from such marriages. They found safe havens in farms, mines, towns and mission stations. From

Sheldon's analysis, "the development of mining compounds, though designed primarily as male workplaces, opened opportunities for women to move from their rural homes, establish new marital and kin relationships, and develop new ways of earning an income" (2016:7). Some of these women and girls were able to pursue formal education at mission schools and later found decent employment for themselves. Even when they would get married, they usually found husbands from either school mates or colleagues at work. In such cases, they enjoyed some level of autonomy which the uneducated women would not enjoy because they were contributing financially to the upkeep of the family. When the Native Marriages Ordinance was amended in 1917, it empowered women and girls to sue their fathers and male guardians if they refused to give their consent to marriage when a girl indicated that they wanted to get married to a husband of their own choice. While colonial records indicate that coercion persisted after this legislation, they also show that women and girls utilised this law to force fathers and male guardians to give consent.

Barnes (1992) notes also that some women appear to have sought a level of economic independence for themselves in defiance of both the wishes of their male relatives and the laws of the state. For her, mobility was the key to this independence as women explored and developed socio-economic options. Barnes argues that not all groups of mobile women were acting against the wishes of their guardians. Some were supplementing men's income to the extent that disrupting their trade activities led rural patriarchy to voice its concern in support of the women (1992:598). The majority of women engaged in buying and selling. This is clear evidence that women managed to carve their own economic space within the colonial system. Geisler (2004) also argues that some women in urban areas participated in the economic space through prostitution and beer-brewing, practices which usually brought them into confrontation with the colonial administration. However, women were not recognised as key political stakeholders. Samanga & Matiza (2019:1), argue that while women could take part in some political activity in the pre-colonial period, this was generally disregarded by the colonial authorities, who turned exclusively to men when they established local political offices. Sheldon (2016:7) attributes this to the fact that the colonial agents were nearly always men who disregarded women and gave positions of authority to men.

The Home in Contemporary Zimbabwean Society as Gendered Space: A Critical Reflection

Studies on the home have largely been done by focusing on the family particularly as an anthropomorphic entity. Such approaches have encouraged scholarship to view the family among other things as a space of power relations (Pernau, 2003:9). While scholars who romanticise and argue that gender relations in pre-colonial Africa were complementary, they have been accused of failing to take note of the conflicting interests and the existence of power relations within the family. In other words, the home should not be perceived as a power free site. It should be understood as the first site that introduces new members of the family to the first infrastructure of power that is hierarchical and which eventually informs the power structures of society at large. Makiwane and Kaunda (2018:6) view the family as a microcosm of the macrocosm of the broader society and community which shapes the individuals for participation in society from an early age. This implies that the family context is significant for gender development in that it is responsible for the initial gender-related experiences that children incorporate in their gender concepts which results in shaping the influence of other socialising agents (Endendijk et al., 2018) such as the church, community and the state. If, therefore, the family is a small part within a larger whole of society, it follows that it is also shaped by society and the state to a greater extent. In other words, the family does not live in isolation but is a product of the society and the state within which it finds itself. Schmidt (1992:1) argues that:

> Gender relations within the household are among the most fundamental social relations. They are a crucial explanatory factor in any society. Unless we understand the interrelations between women and men, we cannot fully understand the structure of a given society, its history, political and economic systems or ideology.

As such, it becomes imperative to examine the role of the family as well as interlinkages with other social institutions in Zimbabwe and how historical periods may either maintain or shift its function particularly in the way that power relations are configured and reconfigured.

In this case, any discussion on the home as gendered space in contemporary African societies must take cognisance of the influence of the two preceding historical periods discussed above (pre-colonial and colonial). In other words, contemporary Zimbabwean society is to a greater extent a

product of the two historical periods. According to Seidman (1984:421), "pre-colonial society still has a strong impact on culture and customs especially on family structure and personal relationships" while colonial influence is evident in the introduction of new forms of gender ideology along with new economic relationships. I have already alluded to the fact that some of the legal instruments put in place by the colonial government provided empowerment opportunities to women particularly in challenging African patriarchy. Quite a number were able to run away and some sought shelter at mission stations where they were able to get formal education (Chapter 3 will provide a gender analysis of the curriculum taught). When Zimbabwe got its independence in 1980, it introduced a policy of universal primary education. McFadden (2005:5) views this policy as opening avenues for "girls to enter the public world of knowledge and begin to imagine themselves beyond the narrow patriarchal identities of motherhood and wifehood, roles that intimately tie their intellectual and social abilities to the social reproduction of families and communities." She further avers that "this entry by black women into the modern public spaces of neo-colonial society marked a dramatic turning point in their unstoppable sojourn toward the status of citizenship and entitled individuality" (McFadden, 2005:5).

While education enabled women to create a new identity for themselves, it also ensured that they acquired some semblance of power to participate in the making of decisions in their own homes. At times they could even make their decisions without consulting 'significant' men in their lives. The Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA) enacted in 1982 recognised women and men as full human beings who could make individual decisions. It rejected the pre-colonial and colonial notions of treating women as minors who always needed the guidance of men. The Sex Disqualification Removal Act (1985) removed barriers at the work place where women would get paid lower wages for the same work they were doing with their male counterparts. This implied that women and men got the same salary for the same work. While this went a long way in ensuring gender equality at the work place, it created huge challenges for women in the domestic arena. For example, when women started to assert themselves in home decision-making, this was met with cultural resistance. Men who allowed their wives to contribute to decisions pertaining domestic issues were chided in the public places as being under 'petticoat governments' (*kutongwa nemukadzi*). These perceptions were amplified after the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The conference

made the Women's Liberation Movement in Zimbabwe more visible. Manuh and Anyidoho (2015:19) note that in the cries of Beijing was a greater awareness of women's struggle for more space and voice. They further note that the term 'Beijing' held with itself a range of reactions to the fact of women's increased presence –from friendly teasing, to derision, to grudging and admiration. Men in Zimbabwe felt that this wave of women's liberation was threatening their authority and power within the domestic space. Phrases such as *tiri kutongwa neBeijing* (we are being governed by Beijing) became common. Such caricature got worse if the wife earned more than the husband. Hence, satire was used by men in order to cope with the idea of women being active decision-makers in the home. Literary text writers like Aaron Chiundura Moyo in *Ndabva Zera* (I have grown up) projected LAMA and the Beijing Conference as the major causes of family breakdown in Zimbabwe during that time. The resultant factor was the increase in domestic violence as well as divorce cases that arose as more and more men felt their power base threatened. In 2007, the government of Zimbabwe had to respond by enacting the Domestic Violence Act which was intended to deal with this scourge where the majority of women were victims. However, it is also noticeable that after the Beijing Conference, women gained some mileage in their struggle for recognition and autonomy in Zimbabwe. They also benefitted from other international conventions that influenced the birth of the Affirmative Action policy in Zimbabwe which called for among other things, the mainstreaming of gender in all national institutions and activities (see Chapter 4).

In order to understand the home as gendered space in contemporary Zimbabwe, I enlisted the views of women from diverse backgrounds. Such views are important in establishing the gender power dynamics at play in Zimbabwe's contemporary families and how this informs and shapes women's attitudes towards political participation in Zimbabwe at national level. Questions put across to women in the home sought to find out the following: (i) women's general experiences in the home, that is, if they contribute to decision-making both in their immediate and the wider family; (ii) their thoughts on women being treated as aliens both in their family of birth as well as the families they are married to; if they belong to any religious organisation, how the 'sacred' text is used to define gender relations in the home and (iv) their opinion on why they subscribe to these texts. The sample comprises rural, urban, peri-urban, single, married, divorced, self-employed, formally employed as well as non-employed women. A total of 15 women were interviewed individually and 10 in a

Focus Group Discussion (FDG). The women interviewed individually are coded using the alpha-numerical codes WH1-WH15. Those in the FDG are given alpha-numerical codes HFDG1-10.

In describing their general experiences, the study established that women's experiences are varied depending on their social standing. Most of the women who are unemployed indicated that they were not consulted when decisions are being made in the home. Machingura (2013:234) alludes to this fact when he argues that Shona traditional religion and culture have always been favourable to men. He further avers that men are the leaders, decision makers and possessors of power in the family unit. In this study, Interviewee WH9 to WH15 were rural women who felt that their voices did not matter when decisions pertaining to their own homes and that of the extended family were being made. Interviewee WH9 said:

> *Ha kana tiri sesu vamwe hatitomboverengwi. Dzimwe nguva unotozonzwawo nemakuhwa kuti baba vekwenyu vakaitira nanga chino nechocho. Kunyangwe pane chinoda kuitwa kana kutengwa pamusha, unongoerekana zvotoitwa kana mudziyo wotounzwa pamba. Zvese unenge uchingonzi ndini baba vemusha. Saka unotongoona kuti zviri nani kungotarira wonyarara.*
> (Ha if its some of us, we are not counted. Sometimes you only hear through grapevine that your husband did this and that for so and so. Even when there is something that needs to be done or to be bought in the home, you just find out when it is already being done or the bought property being brought home. In all this, you are told that I am the father of this home. So, you just see that it is better to just observe and keep quiet).

This theme ran through all the rural interviews done in Hwedza and Bindura. Interviewee WH14 reiterated what Interviewee WH9 said but added an ethnic flavor to her response. She said *"Aa Aa, mukorekore kubvunza munhu chaanoda kuita? Kuti zvadii uye kuti wamupei?"* (Aa Aa, a Korekore[5] asking someone what he wants to do? What would have happened and would you have given him). The issue of ethnicity often arises in Zimbabwe when discussing patriarchy. What comes out clearly is that the different ethnicities exhibit different patriarchies. While most of the ethnic groups are patriarchal, the Manyika are portrayed as being accommodative to women participating in decision-making in the home, though this power is accorded to aunts (*tete*) in the family.

Most of these rural women are not formally employed. They sustain their families through gardening and other agricultural activities. While some have their husbands formally employed in different urban cities and

5 Korekore is one of the ethnic groups found in Zimbabwe.

towns, they lamented the inadequate salaries which cannot sustain families. Those women whose husbands are not employed and live with them at home have to deal with various challenges, that is, living in poverty while at the same time being expected to submit to some kind of patriarchy that is failing to adequately fend for the family. Interviewee WH13 retorted "*Zvinorema shamwari kuti semukadzi unonzi hapana dhisizheni yaunoita, apa munhu haana chaainacho kuti ndifire yekuti ndibaba chete*" (It is difficult my friend that as a woman you are told you cannot make any decision yet the person does not have anything that I should suffer simply because he is the father only).

In order to have a comparative analysis, I sought the views of unemployed women in Harare. The responses from research participants show that in urban areas, some men do not consult their wives at all, while some are selective on what to consult. In the HFDG, Interviewee HFDG4 said she was not involved in any major decision in the home to the extent that the husband does even the shopping of home groceries[6]. She sarcastically said "*Ini changu kudya nekurara chete, panoti kufunga zvinoda kuitwa apo aiwa ndakazorodzwa*" (My duty is to eat and sleep, as for thinking about what needs to be done, I was given a rest). In trying to understand how she feels about the whole arrangement in her home, she just sighed; that sigh of resignation indicating that even though it pains her, there is really nothing she can do to change her circumstances. It appears to have been the feeling of some in the group evidenced by the way they nodded their heads in agreement. One of them (Interviewee HFDG8) added "*Zvinorwadza kubatwa kunge usipo, zvinobva zvaratidza kuti hauna kukosha*" (It pains to be treated as if you are not there, it shows that you are not important). Yet another one (Interviewee HFDG2) "*Kungova mukadzi kwakaoma murudzi rwevaShona, unoonekwa sechikorobho chinodiwa chete pakubvisa tsvina*" (Being a woman is a difficult thing among the Shona, you are seen as a mop which is useful only to remove dirt). For this woman, a woman becomes important when decisions taken by men have failed. The men then come back to them to ask what could have gone wrong. This was supported by one woman who is employed and is a wife of a pastor in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (MCZ). She said:

6 Buying groceries is often viewed as a woman's duty since the kitchen is defined as her turf.

> Most of the time, decisions are made without my consent. When his plans have failed that is when I am consulted to be part of decision-making. In other words, I am there to solve a crisis (Interviewee WH8).

On being asked whether she is consulted when the decision has to do with the extended family, she responded and said:

> Yes, at times I am consulted depending on the issues. At times, I am not consulted. I only know of the outcome of the decision later after the finalisation (Interviewee WH8).

Interviewee WH6 in concurrence with Interviewee WH8 said:

> *Pane zvimwe yes asi kazhinji handina chekutaura nekuti murume ukaona okubvunza anenge atopedza nezvazvo kukuudza kwangova kuti handingaiti ndakanyarara. Sekuti ukanzwa murume achiti unofungei nekuenda kumusha wobva watoziva kuti kunoda kuendwa ndekwako, asi kana kuri kwake unongonzi "mangwana muri kuenda kumusha". Haupikise.*
> (On some issues, yes, but in most cases I don't have anything to say because if you see a husband asking you, he would have finished about it, telling you is just like saying I can't do it in silence. For example, if you hear a husband saying what do you think about going to the rural areas, you have to know that it is your rural area he is talking about, but if it is his you are just told "tomorrow you are going to the rural areas." You can't refuse).

In addition, Interviewee WH7 said "sometimes I make contributions on what is needed in the family, but sometimes I have no control, the husband decides what he wants." Mary Tekwa Tirivanhu interviewed by Schmidt (1992:19) indicated that her husband made the major decisions in the hosehold because, "a woman was a woman, so she was supposed to obey her husband's instructions."

The study participants from the rural areas and those in the urban areas who are not employed also highlighted the challenge of gender roles. They alluded to the fact that they are burdened with domestic chores because of them being women. Almost all of them complained about how their husbands look on as they struggle to fulfil the culturally constructed duties without giving a hand. Such work is not always recognised because it is expected of every woman. The fact that it is not paid work, it is often regarded as if these women are not contributing anything meaningful to the upkeep of their families. As a result, these women pointed out that they are looked down upon and are treated as if they are not human. Some of them revealed that this has often led to physical violence at the hands of their husbands.

The situation seems to be slightly different when it comes to married and single women who have good jobs and are contributing meaningfully to the welfare of their families. Almost all of them indicated that they are consulted when decisions are being made in the family. However, some indicated that they can only make suggestions, but the final decision lies with the husband. For example, Interviewee WH4 said:

> I am not the decision-maker, but I am involved in the decision making process where I give advice on the implications of decisions that my husband makes. Most of the times I give suggestions and he gives the final say that we will have to abide by.

In the same vein, Interviewee WH2 said she is very much involved in decision-making in her family. However, when they fail to agree on a certain matter, it is the decision of the husband that carries the day. Another interviewee added "...women would need a diplomatic way of contributing their decisions so that their men would remain with the feeling of being respected or else they would not give a woman the chance to be contributing in decision-making" (Interviewee WH3). From the above three interviewees, it is clear that despite them being gainfully employed, these women contribute to decision making in their homes not as equal partners but as second-class citizens in their own homes. They also have to use diplomacy when making contributions so that they maintain the space of involvement open. Other than that, they can be shut out and this 'privilege' of being allowed to contribute can be withdrawn any time.

Interviewee WH5 is a single woman. She indicated that her marital status has given her the freedom of making her own decisions. From her perspective, her socialisation empowered her to meaningfully make decisions because her paternal grandmother taught her that she was not lesser than men. She was taught that she could participate equally with men in every domain of life. Interviewee WH5 raises a very critical point on how socialisation shapes the way women view their worth in adulthood. It can either make or break them as they seek full citizenship in society and this also relates to the field of politics.

The centrality of marriage in Shona culture was also highlighted by research participants. Every woman is expected to get married at one point in their lives. This accords them some respectability in society. At times this comes with consequences where women have to shelve their aspirations in order to fulfil this cultural expectation. Some research participants indicated how they were forced to forego their dreams. Interviewee WH4 lamented:

> As per societal expectations, women are considered successful if they get married and have children. So pressure forced me to abandon my life long dreams and as a first child, I got married early as expected and settled down.

Interviewee WH4 got married not because she wanted to, but culture pressurised her to do what she knew was expected of her. After marriage, she said:

> As a married woman I had to leave my job once to satisfy the needs of my in-laws. As a wife, I had to forego further education to cater for the extended family.

Interviewee WH4 brings out the predicament that most Shona women go through. She is a good example of women whose lives are decided by others, in this case, their families, in-laws and husbands. Instead of focusing on her vertical mobility in life, she was forced to shelve her aspirations in order to cater for the extended family. From her response, she shows that if she had her own way, she could have focused on empowering herself in improving her education qualifications as well as in staying in employment. She regrets having had to live for the aspirations of others. While Interviewee WH3 does not show any regret, she acknowledged that the cultural expectations of marriage where she is expected to be 'multi-purpose' overwhelms her. She shares the same sentiments with Interviewee WH1, WH2 and WH6. The three interviewees rejected the view that marriage in Shona culture gives one respectability. For interviewee WH2, marriage actually makes a woman a lesser being in the home and this can be a bit cumbersome on the woman. For her, being a working mother can actually worsen the circumstances as one is expected to be the 'donkey' of the home, that is, fulfilling all the expectations of marriage including conjugal rights despite one being tired. For Interviewee WH1 and WH6, after having done all the work, if they then tell their husbands that they are tired, it leads to physical violence. Hence, they are of the opinion that the current state of marriage in contemporary Zimbabwe projects women as objects despite all the legal instruments in place.

Interviewee HFDG6 and HFDG9 are widows and their experiences differ with those whose husbands are still alive. They feel that their respectability ended with the death of their husbands and society now looks at them as cursed for being widowed. They indicated that their greatest challenge emanated from the distribution of the estate of their husbands. Interviewee HFDG6 said that her male in-laws took everything that was deemed masculine and paid no regard to the fact the she also has male

children. For Interviewee HFDG9, her husband's sister demanded that they share the house in Harare equally so that she could rent out her share of the house. However, Interviewee HFDG9 used her marriage certificate to wade off these demands. In retaliation, the aunt usurped the portion of land that belonged to Interviewee HFDG9's husband in the rural areas. This has caused a rift in the family where her in-laws have cut all relations with her family. For these two women, being widowed has shown them the detriment of Shona customary practices pertaining estate distribution which marginalise widows. Scholars focusing on inheritance practices in Africa have established the various ways in which women are disinherited when they lose their husbands or fathers. Richardson (2004) and Cooper (2012) have highlighted the disinheritance of widows in Sub-Saharan Africa. Richardson (2004) argues that customary law regulates the distribution of land use, housing, land transfer in ways that largely excludes women from property ownership and inheritance. In the same way, Cooper (2012:651) avers that:

> In many Sub-Saharan African contexts, inheritance distributions are not commonly done in a formally legalistic way, but rather through immediate and intimate interactions among family members. The personal nature of such distributive practices can easily introduce controversy, in that claims to property rights arise from many different justifications.

To a large extent, this leaves widows vulnerable with no safety nets. The case of interviewee HFDG9 is tragic in that the aunt who is also a woman was at the forefront of disinheriting her sister-in-law instead of offering support. Zimbabwe has a dual legal system governing the process of estate distribution, that is, customary law and civil law. However, informal discussion with both lawyers and widows have shown that while legal systems are there, with civil law offering protection to widows, relatives of the deceased who are greedy often resort to customary law. The other loophole with civil law is that it does not make follow ups to ensure compliance, hence, most widows are forced to comply with customary law which often disenfranchise them.

Furthermore, professional married research participants highlighted how the majority of them continue to have authority in what happens in the kitchen. Unlike in the rural areas, the kitchen is part of the whole house in urban areas. One would expect those in such houses to be able to exercise authority in every room regardless of gender. However, research participants indicated that power and authority resides in either the father or the mother in specific spaces of the house. The influence of culture is seen

in according the woman authority in the kitchen because it has always been like that in Shona culture. Even when they have domestic helpers (commonly referred to as house maids in Zimbabwe), the majority of the women indicated that they safeguard that space so that their husbands do not interfere. On being asked why they are particularly protective of this space, most of them alluded to the fact that the kitchen is 'women's turf'. However, some of them were of the opinion that where a maid is employed, the wife in that home has to put boundaries between the maid and her husband. From their perspective, there exists the danger of the maid snatching away the husband if they are left to relate anyhow. Hence, in order to safeguard their marriages, interview participants who have maids in their homes indicated that they do most home chores for their husbands. For example, maids are not allowed to wash their husbands' clothes; when they are allowed to cook, the wives take it upon themselves to serve food to their husbands; the couple's bedroom is over bounce for the maid, the maid cannot seat in the lounge for as long as the husband and the wife are there. Above all, the maid cannot have any discussion with the husband. The wife is the intermediary between the two. What is interesting in this case is how the women put themselves in positions where they have to fight to safeguard their marriages. The theme that ran across the responses of the participants was '*vasikana vebasa vanokutorera murume wako*' (Maids can take away your husband'. It is as if the husband is an object which can be stolen without it fully participating. However, this is very cultural where women have been socialised to always fight for their marriages at times even when it is not necessary. Such socialisation always creates the impression that men are very important in women's lives to the extent that they can fight over them. Despite some of these women being educated and are gainfully employed, they think it is incumbent upon them to create spaces within the home where they think their marriages are secure.

All the women were agreed that these experiences of Shona women in Zimbabwe was a result of the cultural construction of women as aliens in their own homes (This theme was discussed above). However, they were all of the view that this is a mistaken view for various reasons. For Interviewee WH2, such perceptions leave women in 'no man's land'. She argues:

> The term '*vatorwa*' (aliens) is particularly painful. One leaves home to belong somewhere new where she is ever rejected as the term is used on her.

> In the event of trouble, going back home is out of the question as she is turned back to where it is presumed she now 'belongs'.

Interviewee WH3 stated an emphatic 'No' to the notion of women being regarded as aliens both in their families of birth and where they are married. She argued that women can act as the glue in both families as they exhibit their 'good' characters as daughters-in-law as well as aunts. For Interviewee WH4, women need to be treated as stockholders in the family so that their contribution to the family unity is not devalued by viewing them as aliens. This was supported by members of the HFDG who felt that women should not be treated as aliens but as key decision-makers in both families. Interviewee HFDG5 in the HFDG was of the opinion that married women are better off than divorced ones because they have some respectability in their family of birth. She indicated that as a divorced woman she is looked down upon in her family of birth and is completely silenced as her sisters-in-law feel threatened by her presence and is usually referred to as a 'returning soldier'[7]. She regards herself as an alien because she is treated as if she is not there (being absent in your presence). In other words, even when she is there, decisions are made on her behalf without being given the opportunity to air her views. For her, it is ironic that at times her brothers can actually call her married sisters to make a contribution to decisions that concern her, yet they do not give her a chance to say something. On being asked why she does not challenge that, she said "*vanoti musha ndewavo ini ndakatadza kuchengetedza wangu*" (they say the home is theirs, I failed to safeguard mine). In this case, this woman is treated as a nonentity because she is blamed for the breakdown of her marriage. As alluded to earlier, Shona culture places the burden of maintaining a successful marriage on women, hence they are blamed if anything goes wrong in the marriage. Thus, Manyonganise (2015) has argued that constructing women as aliens in both spaces results in the creation of exclusionary identities.

Following from the above, most of the women blamed religion and culture for their predicament in the home. Some even made reference to how Christianity (see Chapter 3) has contributed to their subservient position

7 This term is used country wide to refer to divorced women who come back to live at their parents' place. It depicts a woman who has failed in her own marriage and could be a danger to the marriages of her brothers. In such a case, whatever she tries to say is misconstrued for trying to be disruptive. Hence, such women are most of the times silenced.

in the home. Interviewee WH4 was of the view that culture and religion have constructed men as the heads of families and are not clear on what role women should play. In such cases, biblical texts are misrepresented as a way to mistreat women. Interviewee WH7 concurs with Interviewee WH4 on how the cultural construction of men as heads of families has turned women into perpetual subservience. For her, the Bible reinforces women's low status in the home by not only emphasising men's headship in the family but also describing women as mere helpers of the men. The call for women to submit to their husbands entrenches women's subordination in the home. Hence, all the women cited Ephesians 5:22-25 as one of the critical texts that are utilised to ensure women's subordinate status in the home. The biblical texts cited by the women are going to be discussed in Chapter 3 in order to avoid repetition. Interviewee WH2 and WH3 noted that socio-religious attitudes are very powerful in determining the status of women in the home. Interviewee WH2 argues that men being the 'custodians of culture' endorse the beliefs and practices that are aligned to their benefit. The HFDG highlighted the reference to culture as something that is designed to appeal to the abstract. It is like women are referred to something that is deemed unchangeable because it has always been like that, hence women are made somehow to feel guilty of challenging a belief or practice that gives them identity as a people. "*Ndizvo zvinotiita vanhu vechiShona*" (That is what makes us Shona people). It is important to take note of such attitudes as they inform us on how they shape women's attitudes towards political participation later in this study. It is important to note that not all women view religio-cultural dictates that subordinate women as bad. For some it has actually helped in maintaining peace within their homes. They shy away from disrupting the muddy waters of patriarchy. Interviewee HFDG10 in the HFDG said *"tikada kutaura nhuna dzevakadzi tinomutsa imbwa dzirere* (If we want to speak about women's concerns, we awake sleeping dogs). While her colleagues in the group tried to convince her that speaking out is the best to chart the way forward, she insisted that in her own home she has chosen silence for the maintenance of peace and harmony. Interviewee WH3, while admitting that submission is difficult at times, she said she has used it as a currency to get what she wants from her husband. She said "I have noted that whatever my request from my husband, if I submit and ask, all will be granted." In this case, submission becomes a subversive way of dealing with patriarchy. Interviewee WH3 plays the fool while at the same time exercising agency by negotiating with patriarchy in subtle ways. She

pampers patriarchy to get what she wants. Therefore, Pernau (2003:10) alerts us to the fact that submission is not always forced. Hence, we need to be receptive of instances in which women act primarily in solidarity with men as representatives of their families. For her, it would not be correct to interpret this as unwilling complicity because it would rob women of the possibility of choice. The danger in doing this would be to essentialise gender. In fact, Pernau encourages us to view this as agency.

The above responses can be said to be reflective of the experiences of Shona women within the domestic space in contemporary Zimbabwe. The marginalisation of women in decision-making in the home is evident though one's socio-economic status determines the degree of marginality. The responses show the pervasiveness of male-female hierarchy in Zimbabwean Shona society. For example, though urbanisation and industrialisation had been thought to have eroded the strength of patriarchy on African families, the narratives of research participants in this study attest to its resilience. I, therefore, disagree with Therborn's analysis that the power and authority of fathers (men) has disappeared in most African societies due to the weakening of their control of property, space and culture (2006:21). An empirical study carried out by Gudhlanga, Mafa, Manyonganise and Madongonda (forthcoming) on conflicting inheritance laws in Zimbabwe established that patriarchy is still very much alive and strong and that women continue to bear its gendered effects despite the enacted laws aimed at gender equality.

In this current study, the continued division of certain spaces within the home into masculine and feminine spaces entrenches both patriarchal control and a subordinated womanhood. More often, these attributes are transported into the public sphere and they shape how women and men relate, the public spaces they can inhabit as well as the amount of input that is expected of them in shaping the direction of socio-economic as well as religio-political processes. Pernau (2003:18) opines that after attention has been focused on the micro-structure of the family and on the way internal power relations are experienced and negotiated by the actors, both male and female, it becomes imperative to re-link the micro to the macro level and investigate the channels through which the role distribution inside the family assists the working of the larger system.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to make an analysis of the historical status of women in Shona society starting with the pre-colonial period to the present. This is crucial in understanding how women have historically been pushed to the margins by African patriarchy in the pre-colonial period, by both African and European patriarchy in the colonial period and by African patriarchy with the influence of European modes of control in the post-colonial period. The chapter rejects scholarly analysis that seeks to place all the blame for women's subservient position on colonialism while absolving African patriarchy. It challenged such analysis that seems to be steeped in romanticising the African pre-colonial past and presents gender as an invention of the West. Such nostalgia leads to an erasure of one's memory to the existence of gender as an organising tool in pre-colonial Africa. The presentation of how gender power dynamics played out during the colonial period showed the active participation of African patriarchy in coming up with legislation that was meant to control women. In fact, the colonial government found a willing partner in African patriarchy in controlling both women's mobility and sexuality. Despite the fact that meaningful economic activity was taking place at mines, farms, and urban areas, African chiefs, headmen, and older men supported the colonial government's efforts to restrict women to the rural areas. The chapter argued that this was meant to shut out women from a sphere that was crucial for their emancipation from both African and European patriarchy. While the legislation put in place was meant to ensure women's subordination to men, the chapter noted women's agency in asserting their right to get married to a husband of their choice. They were also empowered to sue their fathers and male guardians if they failed to give consent when a girl indicated willingness to get married to a husband of her choice. While some colonial records show that coercion persisted even after legislation, it was shown also how women and girls utilised this newly found freedom by running away from home. The chapter also highlighted how women resisted economic marginalisation during the colonial period by taking active part in the business of buying and selling. The gendered nature of the home in contemporary Zimbabwe was presented through the voices of various women. It established that regardless of socio-economic status, African women in Zimbabwe continue to face diverse challenges as the home has continued to be gendered space. The study also took note of the fact that concepts such as women submission and subordination among others are not always forced as some women willingly

accept the way power and authority are exercised within their homes. In fact, some women saw this as agency and I would call it subversive agency. The next chapter examines women within the religious domain of the church to establish their status therein. This is significant as it allows us to view the various levels of gender socialisation and how it eventually shapes women's political participation at national level.

3 | African Women and Power Politics in Church Institutions in Zimbabwe

Introduction

The previous chapter made a historical analysis of the status of African women in the domestic space in Zimbabwe starting from the pre-colonial to the contemporary period. This chapter reflects on the influence of religion in shaping attitudes towards women's leadership within religious institutions in Zimbabwe. The chapter also critiques the discrepancies along gender lines as well as the contestations around women's visibility in influential positions within religious institutions. It questions the continued socio-religious construction of women as incapable leaders which has sustained the heterosexist structures of subordination particularly within the church in Zimbabwe. The chapter further seeks to establish the gendered nature of beliefs and practices of religious institutions in Zimbabwe. I argue in this chapter that most contemporary religious ideologies in Zimbabwe reinforce women's perceived inferior position. The marginalisation of women from leadership positions is embedded in religio-cultural beliefs and practices and finds legitimation in biblical texts which are quoted within churches. Despite religious influences in subordinating women, the chapter examines women's agency in transcending some of these beliefs and practices in order to create new forms of gender relations within the institutions. In order to understand how biblical texts are used to subordinate women, this chapter captures the voices of Christian women as well as church leaders in Zimbabwe. Spivak is renowned for articulating that the poor and marginalised do not knowingly speak out because their voice is consistently muzzled by discourses of the powerful. However, Haddard (2004:5), in opposition to Spivak, argues that the poor and marginalised do speak, but probably in ways that are not easily recognised. By capturing Christian women's narratives, I privilege their voices in countering the narratives of church leaders who are mostly men.

Women and Religion / Women in Religion: A Contextual Analysis

Literature focusing on women and religion/women in religion is largely agreed that women in most societies occupy a subordinate place in most

if not all the religions of the world. Ruspini, Bonifacio and Corradi (2018) emphasise the subservient role that women occupy in religion. They argue that men have monopolised priestly and teaching roles of religion and excluded women both from the exercise of these roles and from the education that these roles require. In their opinion, despite most religions agreeing on the respect for women and their crucial role in family life as mothers and wives, they do not advocate emancipation in the sense of total equality with men. Ruspini, Bonifacio and Corradi (2018) are critical of the absence of women in the historiography of most religions. They argue that the study of religions and historical religious development was primarily the study of men's religion and of the elite males who shaped religions. In this case, Kinsley (2002) concurs and avers that the study of religions was mainly the recording for posterity of the religious experience of men through religious texts and traditions which were themselves largely the products of male authorship and systematisation. Klingorova and Havlicek (2015) make a discursive analysis of the status of women in religions of the world. They acknowledge that the role of religion in shaping gender relations is complex and it varies across time and space. They concur with King (1995) who argues that a critical analysis of the status of women in religion reflects their status in society as a whole. Klingorova and Havlicek argue that all world religions maintain the male social dominance within societal structures. They note that in these religions, the role of God, or a creator of a religion, is always taken by a male and the woman is primarily valued as a mother, especially as a mother to a son (2015:3). Historically, these religions have not provided spaces for the voices of women to be heard. Hence, while the religions acknowledge the role of women as mothers and wives, they do not promote the emancipation of women in the sense of total equality with men. Klingorova and Havlicek (2015:3) opine that "there exists a certain discrepancy between normative conditionality, which refers to what the given religion proclaims (equality of men and women before God) and practical conditionality, which involves the role of women in religious communities and state societies in terms of everyday life." This observation is very crucial because it shatters most of the defences created by religions as they try to justify how equal men and women are in these religions by pointing to sacred texts that advocate for equality. Klingorova and Havlicek's argument is that theory and practice are not always the same. They make two conclusions which speak directly to this study. First, they conclude that the relationship between religion and gender equality can be explained by

the assertion that societies with higher religiosity accept the authority of religious teachers who advocate a patriarchal organisation of society. Second, women who adhere to the dominant religions, might also not be inclined to take part in their society's public life, due to their upbringing and the social traditions surrounding them (2015:9).

Despite the anti-women attitudes exhibited in most religions, women constitute the majority membership in these religions. Scholarship on religion and gender has noted that most religions are patriarchal in nature (King, 1995; Walter & Davie, 1998). Scholars have also questioned why women choose to join religion that push them to subservient positions. Scholars in the fields of sociology, anthropology as well as gender and religion have proffered possible explanations to this scenario. For example, Gilligan (1982) cited in Walter and Davie (1998:646) found out that many women in the United States of America valued their churches for the social and emotional support which exist irrespective of the women's exclusion from formal power. These women were found to be more concerned with connection and relationship than with hierarchy and power. Walter and Davie (1998) opine that women are attracted to Christianity because of the low status in social life. They argue that "Christianity's proclamation that God loves every individual equally may be more immediately attractive to those who are not accorded respect in society" (1998:646). They, however, note that as they are inside the church, women find that they are even more deprived of status and power when compared with their male counterparts.

Miller and Stark (2002) are of the view that the way space is gendered differently for women and men is the cause for high religiosity in women. They castigate the gender-based division of labour that feminises family duties for women and masculinises workplace duties for men. For him, this produces higher levels of religiousness since religion falls under the general sphere of family matters. Miller and Stark (2002:1403) further argue that women's lack of social power influences their religiosity in a number of ways. First, a lack of social power leads to a sense of learned helplessness or submissiveness. Second, a lack of social power is associated with lower workforce participation, which has been seen as related to greater female religious participation. Third, women's subordinate social role could lead to greater religiosity as a means of comfort to compensate for blocked aspirations and mistreatment. Following on Miller and Hoffmann (1995), Miller and Stark attribute the difference in religiosity between men and women to physiological difference. They argue that

women are more religious because they are risk averse than men. For Muller and Hoffmann (1995), risk preference is related to religiosity. Muller and Hoffmann (1995) as well as Miller and Stark (2002) tried to explain away the role of socialisation to religiosity. In opposition, Collett and Lizardo (2009) argue that, these authors failed to explain the way socialisation influences risk taking in one's life. They criticise Miller and Stark for failing to take "seriously the possibility that risk aversion itself may be socialised and that different family backgrounds would thus be associated with varying distances between men and women in the risk-preference propensities" (Collett & Lizardo, 2009:216). Women's religiosity has also been associated with their desire to get what they want from religious affiliation. Woodhead, et.al, (2002:385) argue that "women's involvement in religious life has less to do with false consciousness than with the ways in which religions offer social spaces for the articulation and, in some cases, the realisation of women's desires." For example, within charismatic Christianity, Woodhead, et.al posit that space is created for women by offering them divine power as well as converting men to less macho postures. Once converted, some men take responsibility for their families and learn Christian virtues of love, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness which leaves women as major beneficiaries. Hence, both the home and the church become spaces in which women can place their fears and sufferings into the hands of God and fulfil their desires for a new life of divinely inspired power and love. In this case, women can sacrifice their desire for leadership positions for as long as religions offer them promises of nonviolence particularly within the home. This has made equality between men and women in most religious traditions more visible. Castelli (2001) notes that equality for women in many religious traditions remains contested throughout the world and Zimbabwe is no exception. I, therefore, move on to look at the way Christianity in Zimbabwe has and continues to shape patriarchal attitudes towards women.

In Zimbabwe, one cannot talk of Christianity but Christianities (Chitando & Manyonganise, 2011:78). Various Christian ecumenical groups have emerged over the years which claim supervision over different denominations. For example, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) oversees the activities of all catholic groups in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) superintends the protestant churches and some African Initiated Churches (AICs) which chose to affiliate with it; The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) houses all evangelical and some Pentecostal churches registered with it; Union for Development of

Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA) has some AICs under it; Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ); Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) brings together AICs and some Pentecostal Churches. The ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ are Christian groups that existed before Zimbabwe's independence while the rest were formed after independence. Some Christian organisations also emerged from the year 2000 when Zimbabwe plunged into a political and economic crises of unparalled proportions which have persisted to date. Some of these groups are the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA), Churches in Manicaland (CiM), Grace to Heal (GtH) to mention just a few. It is crucial to note that all these groups regardless of when they were formed, have had men as leaders and no woman has been accorded the chance to lead. The attainment of independence has not changed the gendered attitudes of these Christian groups.

During the colonial period, most women in Zimbabwe became Christians and were introduced to new forms of patriarchal control while old forms were reinforced. The previous chapter has shown how Victorian notions of domesticity were imposed on African women. The introduction of formal education to women was a welcome development. However, the curriculum of colonial education has been criticised for attempting to train women into being good homemakers, wives and mothers. For example, Zvobgo (1996) highlights the way the curriculum of most mission schools was gendered. Seidman (1984) highlights the fact that it was difficult for blacks to access formal education and when they did, girls were far less likely to receive it than boys. Furthermore, if they were enrolled in schools, girls were channelled into subjects that fitted Western gender ideologies. Seidman argues that Western visions of women as homemakers dominated curricula and educators ignored the important role Zimbabwean women played in agriculture. As a result, girls were forced to take their major subjects in domestic science rather than learning agricultural techniques. Montgomery (2017:227) is of the view that the gender-biased education provided by Christian missionaries is credited with isolating women in the domestic realm, severely damaging their public position and opportunities for empowerment, and providing one of the most critical determinants of persistent gender inequality in [Africa].

Schmidt (1991:737) posits that European missionaries exhibited strong gender prejudices. She explains how Jesuit missionaries at Chishawasha (Zimbabwe), while comparing girls and boys, complained that the girls

were difficult to handle because they were inconsistent, lacked concentration, were moody and anxious for attention. The missionaries also perceived the girls as completely lacking seriousness, both of mind and character. Due to this perception, the Jesuit missionaries rejected to let African women be employed as teachers or catechists on the grounds that "their characters make such serious occupation impossible" (1991:737). They argued that the "women were too ignorant, too volatile and featherheaded to allow them to be entrusted with such a charge" (1991:737). In any case, the missionaries thought that the women would not be listened to with any respect, even by fellow Africans. The missionaries went further to trivialise women's efforts which they said would be laughed at. In addition, missionaries were appalled by African women's sexuality. They viewed the standard of morality of African women to be excessively low and accused them of causing most of the infidelity that was taking place in mines, farms and urban areas. In such cases, the missionaries supported the colonial administration's legal frameworks that were intended for the domestication of women. On their part, the missionaries called for a strict observance of Christian marriage statutes. Barnes (1992) argues that civilised Christian marriages of British colonisers and the perceived 'uncivilsed' indigenous customary unions were at the centre of struggles for state power in the country. Summers (1999:80) argues that the Christian domestic marriage provided a safe new model for African men's authority. Summers further makes the proposition that African men used Christian marriage to neutralise suspicions of mission and government superiors while pursuing a modified form of patriarchal power and authority. In her analysis, Summers argues that Christian missions educated women and promoted domesticity as a way of developing a new Christian class (1999:91). Hence, the missionaries' insistence on marriage regulations beyond their emphasis on any other type of mission rules showed how committed they were to this type of family and form of domestically based control (Summers, 1999:91).

In order to enforce the notion of women as homemakers, mission churches encouraged the formation of women's groups. Such groups came to be known as *Ruwadzano/ Manyano* and was coined by the Methodist women. In Shona, the term '*ruwadzano*' means fellowship. In other words, the groups were meant for women to fellowship together. Missionaries had also seen this development as another way in which women could participate in the evangelisation process since none of the mission

churches ordained women at that point. The Movement started as the African Women's Prayer Union in South Africa and was later introduced in Zimbabwe (Manyonganise, 2016:87). These women were pivotal in the growth of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. Women from other church denominations later adopted the term to refer to their women weekly meetings. In contemporary Zimbabwean society, most church organisations refer to these meetings as '*China chemadzimai*' (Women's Thursday meeting). The reason being that most church denominations have set Thursday as the day these meetings are held. Gender scholars who have written on these women's groups within mission churches in Africa have raised concerns about the gendered nature of teachings by women to women. Writing on the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe (UMCZ), Chagonda-Banda (2014) critiques the booklet '*Rumano*' that was produced by senior women in this church for use by church women members of the *Ruwadzano Rwe Wadzimai* (RRW). Among other things, she highlights how the booklet emphasises the way women should maintain a certain type of behaviour so that they can be acceptable as Christian women. Hence, the women are expected to always fulfil their roles as managers of the home, making sure that the husband's clothes are well kept and that the children are bathed and dressed. A critical reading of Chagonda-Banda's critique reveals her dissatisfaction by the fact that the RRW booklet remains steeped in the past and has failed to make itself relevant to professional women who belong to the church group. She bemoans the way the teachings of *Rumano* strive to capture educated women and domesticate them for purposes of maintaining patriarchal authority in the society. Haddard (2004), however, perceives the *Manyano* Movement in South Africa differently. From a feminist perspective, she argues that women in the movement use this space to carry out practices of resistance consistent with the women's theological project. In her opinion, *Manyano* is a site where struggle, survival and resistance is to be found. For her, this struggle for survival is a resistance against the patriarchal, ecclesial and colonial forces of the missionary church. While Haddard views *Manyano* as space that offers women freedom from male leadership as well as dominant discourses of patriarchy, she fails to critique this space on how it is used to champion and reinforce the same dominant patriarchal discourses by religious women. Teachings are almost always centred on how women should aim to please their husbands as well as becoming good mothers and submissive wives. Hence, Bawa (2017) is correct in noting that during colonialism, religion (Christianity) played a

critical role in entrenching patriarchal notions of gender and inequality. This has continued to be the case in post-colonial sub-Saharan African churches.

Despite the gender inequalities that are prevalent in churches in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, women constitute the largest percentage of membership. Bawa (2017) has noted that women play crucial roles in churches in Africa. She argues that women "are well known to provide unpaid support and care work to churches as part of their assumed socio-religious gender roles as contributing members of the church (2017:2). In spite of this, Bawa observes the paradoxical role that churches in Africa have played in women's rights and empowerment. She argues:

> On the one hand, the church provides a space for women to organise and cooperate on almost all aspects of their lives in contemporary times. For instance, women's groups within churches have been known to provide moral support in times of difficulties, and offer opportunities for social activities (2017:2).

From Bawa's analysis, women in Africa's churches are instrumental as they utilise their inherent organisational skills. It is, however, surprising that while women possess important skills that are useful for the smooth functioning of the church, they are often denied leadership positions. The deployment of Bible passages has largely left women marginalised from leadership positions in most churches in Zimbabwe and beyond. The Bible has been used to ridicule, stereotype, demean, label, vulgarise, demonise, manipulate and fight against women's empowerment (Machingura, 2013:234). Most doctrines in Christian churches advocate that women should be hearers of the gospel and not preachers of the same. In other words, women should strive to learn in silence. Such perceptions automatically disqualifies women from seeking leadership positions in church. Such doctrines need to be critiqued to ascertain their influence in shaping perceptions about women's roles in the public sphere. Giorgi (2016:56) has alerted us to how women experience double exclusion from institutionalised religion which is dominated by male clergy as well as from public/political life.

'Learn in Silence': Women and Leadership in Church Institutions in Zimbabwe

Some informal and formal theologies focusing on gender relations within the church have emphasised that women should learn in silence and be hearers of the men within their institutions. Within the Zimbabwean context, the entrenchment of male headship and leadership is embedded in cultural repositories such as myth, folklore, proverbs etc, but these have found resonance in biblical interpretation. This, therefore, shows that religion is a major factor influencing the way gender is constructed in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular.

Interviews carried out in this study show that most Christian denominations deny women leadership positions through the deployment of biblical texts that are perceived as supporting the marginalisation of women. The interview questions sought to establish a number of issues from women members of churches as well as church leaders, namely; perspectives on women leadership in the various denominations in Zimbabwe, the biblical texts and religio-cultural beliefs and practices that are used to support the gendered views. The research participants were coded for ethical purposes in order to hide their identity. The women church members are identified with alpha-numerical code CW1 to CW8, while church leaders are given the code CL1 to CL5. Those that were interviewed in a Focus Group are given the code CFDG1 to CFDG10. The study found that out of the eight church women interviewed, only three (that is, CW3-5) held a position of leadership in their respective churches while in the CFDG, only two (CFDG6 and CFDG8) had a position of leadership. Of these five who held leadership positions, none was a leader of a church. All the church leaders are men. CW5 indicated that she is the deputy chairperson at her local Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA). In terms of her duties, she said that just like male leaders in her church, she attends to every issue that arises and she also conducts church services and ceremonies. CW4 is a member of the United Methodist Church (UMCZ) in Zimbabwe. She indicated that in her church, she has three leadership positions namely; Bible reader, Sunday school reader as well as Connectional Ministries section leader. As the Connectional Ministries Chairperson, she is responsible for overseeing the activities of the evangelism team, the Ruwadzano Rwe Wadzimai (RRW), Sunday school as well as the interface of church and society. She emphasised that this ministry is

the 'heartbeat' of the UMCZ. CW3 said she is a shepherdess and as pastor's wife she leads the women in the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church which is led by her husband. CFDG6 is a leader of the intercession group in the Glad Tidings Church (GT) while CFDG8 is a committee member in the women's ministry section of the Faith in God (FiG) Ministries. However, the male participants in this research held positions of power and authority within their respective churches. CL1 is an evangelist in the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church (JMACC). He indicated that as an evangelist, he is responsible for preaching, settling disputes among church members as well as providing counselling services. CL2 is a Priest in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and doubles as the Parliament Liason Officer (one who links Parliament and the church particularly the Heads of Christian Denominations (HOCD)). He is also the national chairperson of the Child Safeguarding Committee (CSC) which has the responsibility of crafting policies that protect children as well as lobbying communities for the protection of children. CL3 is a pastor in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFMZ). He said:

> My role is a spiritual one. I am the visionary for the assembly. I come up with work plans for the day to day running of the church and I delegate all spiritual work. I also provide counselling services to church members.

CL4 is a pastor in the Willie Zion Church of God. This an African Initiated Church. He indicated that as a pastor:

> *Basa rangu ndinongodzidzisa zvokururama, kugara kwakanaka kusina hohoho, kuti vanhu vagare zvakanaka, mugariro wako. Kuvaudza kuti Mwari anoda izvi nezvizvi.*
> (My duty, I just teach about holiness, peaceful living without disagreements, that people live well, peaceful co-existence. To tell them that God wants this and that).

CL5 is a church secretary in the Willie Zion Church of God. He indicated that his duties include data capturing, organising all church activities as well as teaching the church members about the constitution. As indicated by CL4, he presumes himself to be the spokesperson of God, as one who delivers God's will to his congregation.

Apart from the research participants stating the roles they play in their respective churches, I sought to find out if there were other women in their churches who occupy leadership positions. Responses show that women are appointed to lead in those positions where they either act as assistants to men in higher positions of leadership or lead in the women's groups where men do not participate. For example, CW4 said:

> In terms of the UMC leadership structure in Zimbabwe, the bishop who is a man is the leader. Then there is a male administrative assistant to the bishop. The third leader in the hierarchy is a woman who acts as the deputy administrative assistant to the bishop and the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference Connectional Ministries director. The role of the female leader here is to assist the bishop and the adiministrative assistant in running the UMC in Zimbabwe.

CW4 indicated that her church ordains women as pastors. However, in terms of percentage, men outnumber women pastors. The majority of women in her church are lay leaders (*gosa*). During fieldwork, I attended one of the church services of the UMCZ and could not ignore the passion that was exhibited by the woman lay leader. She organised the conduct of the service from beginning to end ensuring that order was maintained. She gives all announcements pertaining to that particular service as well as future activities lined up for that particular assembly. In addition, CL2 indicated that in the Roman Catholic Church, women can be appointed chairpersons in their parishes. He said since 1965, Vatican II gave the lay people their roles and women are considered lay people. Hence, in dioceses women are the closest advisors of the Priest. In addition, the nuns run some of the Catholic schools. He, however, said that women in his church are not ordained though at the moment the church has allowed that they can be trained as catechists, a role which traditionally was reserved for men only. This buttresses the observation made by Perales and Bouma (2019:325) to the effect that the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church does not differentiate male and female but women are not ordained to priesthood. CL1 said in his church, women cannot lead except in the women's departments. He said:

> Our church is slightly different. We don't call them leaders. They only lead women (*Vatungamiri vemadzimai*).

In this case, his church only respects women's leadership is so far as it is restricted to leading other women not men as well. From his standpoint, leading women is not real leadership. His views were also echoed by CL4 who reiterated that:

> *Mudzimai wangu mukadzi waMufindisi, asi haana simba rakaita serangu pakusimuka kuparidza pane vanhurume nepakunyengeterera vanhu. Asi vanogona kutungamirira vakadzi.*
> (My wife is a pastor's wife, but does not have the same authority as I have with respect to preaching in front of men as well as praying for people. But she can lead women).

Hence, in CL4's church women are not ordained to be pastors. Even as they lead other women, women leaders have to first have the green light to do so from the men. He argued "*madzimai anosvitsa shoko kudare revarume, isu togara pasi sevarume, kuratidza kuti masimba avo ari pasi pevarume*" (women bring their plans to the men's court, we then sit down as men, showing that even the women's leadership authority is subject to men's approval, *sic*). Pui-lan (2000:98) has argued that women's power and authority is not recognised and respected by male hierarchy of the church. This is due to the fact that in most cases, women are made to perform lay duties within the church. To this, Dube (2018) highlights the tension that arises between no ordination and ordination to lay ministry which implies that women are most of the time actually involved in church leadership without official status or payment. Women in lay ministry may not protest for the non-payment because they are used to their work in the home being unpaid for. In as much as they work for the home for free, such attitudes of working for God for free are transported from the home to religious spaces.

CL3 indicated that in his church, every assembly is run by a board of elders which consists of eleven members. Of these eleven, a woman can only occupy the treasurer position if she is competent enough. By competent, the woman should have trained as a professional accountant. All the other positions are reserved for men. If there is no competent woman (professional woman accountant), the board of elders can be a men only affair. He reiterated that the role of eldership in AFMZ is reserved for men only while women can only rise to the deaconess position. While his church ordain women as pastors, he indicated that it is the elders who have the final say. For example, in the province that he operates, out of thirty pastors one is a woman. Even then, he indicated that reports coming through are that the board of elders at the assemblies where women work as pastors are rejecting them. The reason is that they cannot fathom being led by a woman. He revealed that in his church, currently, three women pastors had passed the test to become overseers, but they were not appointed because the male pastors did not want to be led by a woman. The sentiments above were shared by almost all women research participants including in the CFDG except CW5 who said in her church, there are a lot of women who are leaders and occupy leadership positions in their capacity as pastors, bishops, overseers, apostles etc. In her opinion, this shows that her church respects and recognises women's leadership. She went on to give the example of the wife of the founder, Apostle Eunor Guti, whom

she says operates at the same level as her husband in preaching and planting churches across the world. The above responses are indicative of the fact that the ordination of women does not necessarily lead to the empowerment of churches since they can operate under a vicious patriarchy that resists female leadership. In a study of the Church of England, Fry (2021:66) observes that since women have been able to become priests, discrimination against women has persisted and legislation permitting male clergy to refuse to work with female priests if the male priests possess a gender traditionalist theology which perceives women's ordination as inappropriate has been put in place. He further argues that "when women were first ordained, a male priest with traditionalist gender values could arrange for their church to undergo a process that would either restrict the duties that women priests could undertake or prevent them from working there altogether." In this case, Naidu and Hoel (2013:6) note that despite the women-affirming and inclusive developments that is noticeable, women continue to be excluded and are absent from positions of religious leadership which visibly demonstrate that men continue to safeguard the leadership turf. Dube (2018:323) also notes that men make it difficult for ordained women to operate within the patriarchal church system. These attitudes find resonance with what is happening in CL3's church.

While the ordination of women in ZAOGA that is, CW5's church, which began in the year 2000, has been applauded as a positive development in correcting the gender imbalance in that church, Musvota (2021) has critiqued it. She argues that though in ZAOGA and AFM, women have constituted the majority of members since the 1960s, men are the ones who have had exclusive access to power. She argues that while women are now being ordained as pastors, the titles of 'apostle' and 'bishop' have remained unattainable for women. These have been a preserve for men. The only woman who has been given this title is the founder's wife, Eunor Guti who is now the second archbishop in the church. When this is analysed at face value, it would appear as if, it is aimed at recognising women's leadership potential, yet a closer analysis may point to the fact that Ezekiel Guti is playing church politics aimed at appointing his wife as his successor clandestinely. Informal discussions with members of ZAOGA have revealed the underlying power politics at play which is threatening to tear the church apart in the event that Guti dies. Men and women members of ZAOGA indicated that the appointment of Eunor Guti to this office was unconstitutional and has angered most senior male

members in the church who had hoped to assume this position at the point of Guti's death. On the other hand, the displeasure can be understood as resistance against a woman assuming such a powerful position ahead of the men in the church.

Research participants were agreed that what influences these gendered attitudes towards women's leadership roles in churches are traditional cultural perceptions as well as gender-biased biblical interpretation. For some of the church leaders, such bias is justified because every scripture is divinely inspired. CL3 argued that the way the Bible is interpreted has a great bearing on how society perceives women. He opined that most churches take guidance from the Bible and the way the Bible is utilised is critical. For example, as church leaders read the Old Testament books, they find that in Jewish culture there were few leaders who were women with men constituting the greatest number. In Jewish religious order, priests were men and no woman was a priest or levite. He further argued that even Jesus' disciples were men. In addition, "in our own culture, we have never seen a woman chief or headman up to national governance leadership." CL1 argued that the reason why women cannot lead in churches is the Bible. Though he was not sure of the exact biblical texts, he said "Though I am not sure of the verse, the Bible clearly states that a woman should just sit and listen to the men preachers and where she does not understand, she should get clarity from the husband." In trying to explain the relationship of the wife to her husband he said "the Bible says a woman must submit to her husband." CL2 places the blame on the Christian tradition which he said shaped contemporary church's attitude towards women. He argued that Jesus never ordained women and this practice was carried over to the Apostolic age. In this case, for him, the Bible gave men the mileage from the beginning. CL2 said:

> In the RCC, we are all born priests, but at different levels. By virtue of baptism, you participate in the priesthood of Christ namely as kings, prophets and priests. But for ministerial office, one has to be ordained. As of now, only men are ordained for ministry.

CL3 cited 1 Timothy 3:1ff. which says:

> ...if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...

For CL3, this biblical text defined and put parameters on who should lead the church. He argued:

> *Murume wemukadzi mumwechete. Hatina verse mubhaibheri inoratidza kuti pakasarudzwa vakadzi kuti vatungamire.*

> (A husband of one wife. We don't have a verse in the Bible which indicates that women were chosen to be leaders).
> Apostles and disciples were men. Women were helpers of Christ ministering to the men leaders with substance and services.

From CL3's perspective, women should aspire to fulfil supportive roles to the men who lead churches. For him, the fact that women are the majority in church but being led by the few men is a result of church tradition and African Traditional Religion. Both were greatly influenced by men, hence, unless they are changed the present scenario is going to persist. The above opinion shows the way Christianity has put emphasis on differences between men and women through the projection of men as inclined to leadership while women are shown to be nurturing and inert. Burke (2012:123) categorises Christianity as a gender-traditional religion and argues that it promotes the belief that men and women were created to fulfil different and complementary roles that tend to privilege the status of men. In this case, Pui-lan's observation in the Asian context is also true of the church in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. She argues that though women constitute the majority in churches, they are marginalised in the power structure of the church and the life of the congregation. For her, "colonial and patriarchal denominational polity reinforced by indigenous biases and taboos against women has consigned them to second class membership in the faith community" (2000:98). Oduyoye (1997/8:500) also argues:

> Since in the church in Africa, men and the clergy presume to speak for God, and to demand the obedience of women, it is not easy to experience God as empowering and liberating when one is in the church's ambit. Women experience God as the one who orders their subordination, who requires them to serve and never be served. God is the one who made them women, with a body deemed to be the locus of sin and impurity. God is experienced as source of women's oppression and Jesus as the author of exclusion of women from sacramental roles in the church. This is the God the Christian tradition wants women to love and obey.

In *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (1995), Oduyoye notes that "although the christian heritage of the biblical, prophetic denunciation of oppression has served Africa well, oppressive strands of the same Bible do reinforce the traditional socio-cultural oppression of women."

In giving reasons why women are not ordained in their church, CL4 and CL5 also appealed to the Bible. CL4 said:

> *Isu hatitsvaki kufadza vanhu, tinoda kufadza Mwari. Vakadzi vanoenda nechechi musango. Vanokurumidza kunyengerwa. Kunyengerwa kwacho kwakatanga naEva. Akanakirwa nezvinhu nyika ichibva yaparara.*
> (Us, we don't strive to make people happy, we strive to make God happy. Women take the church into the wild. They are quick to be deceived. Being deceived started with Eve. She enjoyed things and earth got destroyed).

In this case, CL4 places the blame for the fall of man on Eve whom he views as the temptress. He went on to argue that allowing women to preach in front of men would make men uncomfortable in sexual terms. Hence, from his perspective, women should stick to the rules put in the Bible. They should learn to ask their husbands at home if there is anything that they do not understand when at church. In concurrence, CL5 said they take all laws from the Bible. He took his Bible and read from 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 which says:

> Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under the obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

And 1 Peter 3:1ff which states "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives." From these biblical texts CL5 argues:

> *Murume ndiye akangogara angopihwa simba rekuti zvese zviri pasi pake. Mukadzi mubatsiri. Tiri mabhoyi enyu.*
> (The man has always been given the power that everything is under his dominion. The woman is a helper. We are your servants).

Due to the above texts, CL4 and CL5 were adamant that it has been established in the Bible that the man is the head, hence, women cannot lead in homes, churches as well as public institutions. In their opinion, the fact that women constitute the majority in church and men are leaders is insignificant because Jesus Christ came alone, but he died for everyone. Hence, for them the issues of numbers when it comes to leadership in social institutions is non-negotiable since the Bible is the blueprint which guides their activities. It is interesting to note that from CL5's perspective, the marginalisation of women from leadership positions both in the home and church is for the women's benefit. As I interviewed CL4 and CL5, CL4's wife was at home. I sought to observe her reaction to the utterances of her husband and CL5. First, I noted that the first thing she did when I arrived and introduced myself and the reason for my visit, she quickly

moved away from place where we were going to have the interview. When it became hot where we were seated, we moved to the shade of the house where the wife was now seated. As the two men responded to my questions, I, occasionally, looked at the woman to see her reaction. When our eyes would meet, she would give me a smile of dejection and helplessness. She never interrupted my interview. When I was through with CL4 and CL5, I intended to interview her, but CL4 said I could not do so before his approval. In my opinion, CL4 did this because I am a woman, hence, he wanted to prove a point that all women have to respect his authority no matter who they are. I requested for his approval and thought the two men would give me space to speak with the woman in private. They were not willing to do so. As a result, the woman finally quipped "*Zvamaudzwa nanababa ndizvozvo, isu sevakadzi hatina chatinopokana nacho* (What you have been told by the men is right, we as women, there is nothing we object to, *sic*). I could sense the effect of the silencing on this woman. She was not silenced only within the church, but even in the space that the church deems to be providing the women with voice, the silencing is further enforced. This woman dared not provide a different perspective to that already given by the men lest she be judged as not submitting to her husband. Kangwa (2017) makes a discursive analysis of the way patriarchy shapes gender relations. She argues that patriarchy has defined and influenced the position and roles of women in church and society. She notes how the Bible is being used to construct an oppressive image and role of women in church and society. She argues that "the church empowered men, who guarded that power to the exclusion of women in leadership positions in the church" (2017:42). It has been established in research that "churches that do not ordain women, or that keep women out of the pulpit and away from decision-making bodies (such as local church eldership and denominational structures) create and sustain potentially dangerous, gendered hierarchies of power" (Clifton, 2018:74).

Women participants in this study, those interviewed on women's status in the home and the church, like the church leaders emphasised that biblical texts such as Genesis 3:16, Colossians 3:18, I Corinthians 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22f which calls on women to submit to their husbands, 1 Timothy 3:1ff and 1 Peter 3:1ff as well as other biblical texts that look down on women have been used to subordinate them in their own homes as well as in the church. Women in the CFDG and CW8 felt that patriarchy in the home and at church gloss over dominating women and does not want to see them leading. From their perspective, men still want to feel

that they are in charge of women and cannot be led by them. The theme of male headship in the home and family ran through the responses of research participants and they felt that Shona culture has been endorsed by the biblical teachings which underline the subservient role of women in Shona society. Perales and Bouma (2019:325) note that in an environment where "male headship is emphasised, women are not to exercise leadership over men, lead men in worship or teach men in churches, and certainly not to be ordained to the priesthood." The women in this study lamented the collusion between religio-cultural beliefs and biblical texts that portray women's status in the home and church as that of supporting the men only. They highlighted that such biblical texts which find resonance with Shona culture have restricted them from accessing significant public places. In cases that they do, they find that expectations are raised that they need to first prove themselves yet such expectations are not raised for men. Longwe (2019:57) avers that the subordination of women in the church is an extension of the subordination of women in society. In her study of the Baptist Convention of Malawi (BACOMA), she notes that the pastor's wife does not enjoy the same freedom and privileges as her husband and other church workers. In the same vein, Clifton (2018:75) avers that the "Christian teaching about gender relations in the home- the assumption that men are meant to be the head of the home, and women are meant to submit to their authority- bleeds into broader church structures and cultures, especially because the man-female relationship is often delineated in terms of men's spiritual authority over women." Clifton's argument is crucial because it is instructive of how the three spheres in this study, that is, the home, church and the political sphere are entangled with each other.

A critical analysis of the above responses indicate that the gender power dynamics in church institutions revolve around two crucial points namely silence and submission. These two concepts have been used by male church leaders to ensure that women are marginalised from leadership positions. When one looks at those churches which argue that women are ordained as pastors, one finds that this role is almost a ceremonial one since these churches have other structures which control the activities of the woman pastor which are led by men. The AFMZ and UMC are cases in point. Pui-lan (2000:100) notes that many churches make use of Paul's injunctions that women should not speak in church nor exercise authority over men as instructed in first Corinthians and first Timothy respectively.

She argues that these texts are used repeatedly to reinforce women's inferiority and to deny them their rightful participation. Questions that may arise is why did Paul and the early church put emphasis on sidelining women from leadership in the church? This is a debate that still rages on. Writing from a feminist perspective, Castelli (1999:221) notes that questions relating to sexuality and gender are often referred to Paul, but these are most importantly questions about women's liturgical and leadership roles in congregations and religious communities. Biblical scholars have attempted an exegesis of the various New Testament texts that tend to stress silence and marginalisation. Such an exercise is beyond the scope of this study suffice to say it appears that different points of view appear to come out of biblical scholars' analysis. Ehresperger (2022) posits that feminist scholarship has demonstrated the social location and the cultural embeddedness of Paul and the Pauline literature. She argues that feminist interpretations of Pauline texts can broadly be categorised through thematic and structural approaches. Through the former, focus is placed specifically on women's issues and the intention is to uncover women's hidden voices and unveil arguments and strategies by which women are kept silent, rendered invisible, or marginalised by dominating hierarchical power structures. Through the latter, the rhetoric, power dynamics, terminology and metaphors in Pauline arguments are investigated. In this endeavour, religion and gender scholars have come up with divergent perspectives on Paul's theology on women with some accusing him of being incoherent. Three groups have emerged as a search for the understanding of Paul's attitude towards women continues. For example, there is a group that feels that Paul hated women because he was a product of a patriarchal Jewish society. Another group seems to posit that Paul advocated for gender equality because, for example, in Galatians 3:28, he blurs gender difference. The third group argues that Paul has been misunderstood by those who argue that his messages about women are meant to subordinate them. For this group, Paul needs to be understood from the perspective that he was responding to specific situations in various contexts, hence, his message was intended for specific recipients (Castelli, 1999; Casey, 2010:2). Castelli (1999:222) further argues that the letters of Paul were personal representing his personal perspective and opinion not the views of the early church. While this may be true, if accepted, puts biblical scholars into deep quagmire. For example, the whole Bible was written for a specific audience addressing specific situations by historians who had personal agendas. It would, therefore, become difficult to justify its

applicability to contexts outside of these environments. In my opinion, the argument of context does not hold water because the same anti-women attitudes are present in some Deutero-Pauline letters as well as Petrine epistles. What seems to be evident is that women inhabited an inferior position in the early church as well as in the eyes of the apostles. Most of the women mentioned in Paul's letters occupied supportive roles in the church.

Pui-lan (2005) wrestles with issues of gender in the Hebrew Bible. She argues that the history of Israel is punctuated with periods of colonisation hence the projections of power between the coloniser and the colonised. In her opinion, what now counts as Holy Scripture is a result of a complex history. Therefore,

> ...the Bible cannot be naively seen as a religious text reflecting the faith of the Hebrew people and early Christians. Instead, it must also be seen as a political text written, collected, and redacted by male colonial elites in their attempts to rewrite and reconcile with history and to reconceptualise both individual and collective identities under the shadow of empires (2005:8).

This is buttressed by Schussler Fiorenza (1999) cited in Pui-lan (2005:34) who argues that historical writings are rhetorical, serving particular political functions, and are not to be construed as "objective" or "value-neutral". In this case, the attitudes of church leaders presented above are derived from such texts which are taken in raw form and applied to the contemporary Zimbabwean context. Onunwa (1988:49) is of the view that Pauline's anti-feminist stance on husbands as head of families and women's basic roles as those of wives and mothers still prevail to a large extent in all church programmes. As a result of Paul's teaching, Onunwa argues that the church [in Africa] has carefully and consistently set a rigid example of the exclusion of women from administrative hierarchy (1988:50). As indicated by CL4 and CL5, they choose to obey the biblical text rather than people's gender ideologies which call for the church to observe gender equality. AICs remain a key source of African Theology. The attitudes of CL4 and CL5 prove Phiri's observation true that African Theology has marginalised women and women's issues (2000:18).

What is also apparent from responses of research participants is the propagation of a male-centred theology in their various churches. Porter (1993:487) observes that African Christian theological reflections have taken place in the context of the exclusively male image of God in the Judeo-Christian traditions. Porter finds such projections problematic in that they present men as possessing the image of God primarily while

women are regarded as relating to God secondarily as well as through inclusion in the male as their head (19993:488). Thus, Mwaura (2007:443) has castigated such theologies as prescribing and encouraging women's silence and subordination in church and society. In her analysis, churches that adopt these theologies embrace the household codes in the New Testament which prescribe silence of women and apply them literary in practice. Church leaders' views presented above seem to base their arguments on women's subordination to the fact that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, no woman was appointed to play a leadership role in issues of religion. Moreover, Jesus himself only chose men to be his companions in ministry. Gender scholars have found such arguments discriminatory. For example, Schussler Fiorenza cited in Jantzen (1998:16) argues that women were central to Jesus' early movement which leads Jantzen to conclude that women must have been "written out of history by the masculinist bias of the Greco-Roman world in which the New Testament was presented. Ruether (1985) questions why all church doctrine has used the doctrine of Christ to exclude women from full participation in the Christian church, yet for her, early Christology appear to be inclusive of women. For Ruether, such an attitude emanates from the fact that Christianity has for long perceived God as a male. She argues that Christianity

> ...has assumed that God represents pre-eminently the qualities of rationality and sovereignty. Since men are presumed to have these qualities and women not to have them, the male metaphor has been seen as appropriate for God, while female metaphors have been regarded as inappropriate. The Logos or Word which reveals the 'Father' therefore, also has been presumed to be properly imaged as a male (1985:325).

Van Klinken (2017:17) argues that "the assumed or proclaimed maleness of God is inherent to systems of power that benefit men and those who are able to pass as normatively male." Furthermore, Jesus has been presented as a man in order to fit the frame of a male God who sent him. For Ruether, these notions of the maleness of God, in turn, affected the Christian interpretation of the *imago dei* (image of God). Ruether rejects the exclusive male language for God, the view that males are more like God than females, that only males can represent God as leaders in church and society or that women are created by God to be subordinate to men and thus sin by rejecting this subordination (Ruether, 2002:3) cited in Hadebe (2016). African women theologians have also raised their challenges with the presentation of God as male and have argued this has contributed

greatly to the marginalisation of women in the church in Africa. Taringa (2004:174) critiqued African theological reflections that portray and emphasise the male image of God as problematic for African Theology. He argues that such reflections present a hierarchical structure which insinuates that God relates directly with men while women and children can only do so indirectly and through the mediation of the patriarchal class. He further argues that "since most African Christian theologies tend to present African concepts of God in the framework of the exclusively male image of God typical of the Judeo-christian tradition, the feminine image of God in Africa in general and among the Shona in particular is suppressed in patriarchal theology." Taringa then proceeds to list and explain some of the feminine terms used for God in different Shona ethnic groups. Among other terms, Taringa argues that among the Shona, God can be viewed as '*mhandara*' (virgin girl) and '*mbuya*' (grandmother). He, therefore, proposes that such feminine concepts call for an African theology that is less patriarchal (2004:176).

Other gender and religion scholars have also attributed the silence and invisibility of women in church hierarchy to the dominance of men in the presentation of Christian historiography. Phiri (2000) argues that the Bible was written by 'inspired' men within a patriarchal culture. She further notes that throughout the years, the Bible has been interpreted by male theologians who tended to make women invisible and presented them negatively. For Phiri, this resulted in the contribution of women to the missionary enterprise being downplayed. Hence, Oduyoye cited in Phiri (2000:18) posits that "we live on the same continent and belong to the same church, but the reality is that there are many Africas- the Africa of the rich and the Africa of the poor, the Africa of men who command and that of women who obey is experienced differently. Oduyoye's argument proves correct Mary Daly's accusation of Christianity which she sees as idealising for women in particular the qualities of a victim which glorify weakness and the passive acceptance of suffering (1973:77).

Ndadhinhiwa (I am fed up): Women's Religious Leadership, Subversion and Resistance

Earlier on, I discussed the *Ruwadzano/Manyano* movement as women's initiative to actively participate in church activities. The women's movement failed to satisfy all women, hence, those that felt alienated in mainline churches chose to join the African Initiated Churches (AICs) and later

the Pentecostal Churches. At the inception of these churches in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, they are projected as having provided empowering spaces for women. While Barrett (1968) describes AICs as places where Africans feel at home and Asamoah-Gyadu (1998) perceives Pentecostalism as places where women are fully accommodated, gender scholars have begun to refute both assertions. AICs and African Pentecostalism provide spaces for women to showcase their abilities in singing, prophesying and healing. However, as noted above, the influence of biblical interpretation as well as religio-cultural beliefs and practices have caused these Christian traditions to continue to push women to the margins. Mapuranga (2013a) has critiqued AICs and concluded that women occupy the peripheral spaces. Writing on African Pentecostalism, Manyonganise (2016) alludes to the fact that most pastors' wives in the New Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe have been relegated to lead the charity arms of their husbands' churches. Examples given were those of Ruth Makandiwa who heads the Agape Family Care in the United Family International Church; Beverley Angel leads the Hand of Mercy (H.O.M.E) in Spirit Embassy while Yasmen Java [used to] head the Heart in Service (HIS) in Kingdom Service (Chitando, Manyonganise & Mlambo, 2013:162-63). Manyonganise (2016) views such arrangements as emphasising the patriarchal ideology of women as carers and nurturers and continues to relegate women to the traditionally acceptable feminine roles. Pui-lan (2000:99) has noted that this is also instructive of the experiences of Asian women. She argues:

> Church women are often asked to fulfil stereotypical roles, such as keeping the altar clean, teaching religious education to children, helping in the kitchen or other secretarial and menial jobs. Religious women in some contexts are frequently asked to make the altar linens and vestments, care for the church buildings, provide for orphans and the homeless, teach catechism to children and play a subsidiary role to priests and bishops (2000:99).

Such marginalisation has pushed women to deploy their agency in either resisting, subverting or complying with patriarchy. Dube (2018) argues that throughout history, women have always found ways that subvert the structural exclusion that marginalises them from power in the society. For her, women have always found ways to create and operate in another space, outside of the boundaries and by the margins of both written history and culture. For example, historically, Zimbabwe's Mai Chaza of the Guta RaMwari church resisted the patriarchal dominance in religious spaces (Manyonganise, 2021:103). Her initiative has acted as a reference

point for most scholars writing on gender in mission in Zimbabwe and beyond as well as women seeking justification for more autonomy in the church. Christian women in Zimbabwe have opted for diverse ways in which to create pathways for their rising to leadership positions. Women in African Initiated Christianity who feel suffocated by patriarchy have sought ways to find breathing space. Oduyoye (1995:133) notes that in AICs, women are accorded space for greater participation. However, this prominence hardly guarantees them from not being excluded by men. Oduyoye attributes this to traditional taboos pertaining women's menstrual blood, lactating mothers, uncovered hair as well as not washing after sexual intercourse. All these are forbidden practices in AICs which cause women to be discriminated against. Hence, Edet cited in Mligo (2020:134) is of the view that while the Christian proclamation of human liberation and the equality of men and women is indeed good news for women, the teaching has remained largely theoretical than practical. Hence, in response, quite a number of women in AICs have, like their male counterparts formed their own churches. They have also established their own healing shrines where they practice faith healing and prophecy away from patriarchal control.

Within African Pentecostal Christianity, women's prayer groups have emerged some of which have evolved to become formidable Christian movements. These have challenged the religio-cultural construction of women as supporters of male-led churches. While some women who are pastors' wives have chosen to create women's groups within their husbands' churches, others have chosen to totally break away from the male-led churches. Mapuranga (2018:140) has called these 'ministries within ministries'. In her analysis, this has enabled women Pentecostal leaders to create, own and control their space. She emphasises the necessity to acknowledge the extent to which women have become subversive by taking over the structures that have been used to oppress them (2018:147). Manyonganise (2021:103) notes that:

> Within the Zimbabwean context, women in African Pentecostalism have to a large extent been relegated to supportive roles where they have to stand with a male figure who is usually their husband. It is usually the fame of this male figure that gives visibility and recognition to the women. In a bid to push beyond these boundaries, wives of NPMs founders have resorted to creating their own ministries within their husband's churches and create a niche that would enable them to be recognised in their individual capacities.

In Pentecostalism, such a development is not new. Anderson gives examples of pioneering women such as Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth, Carrie Judd Montgomery and Maria Woodworth-Etter, who during their time, were preaching in mass gatherings (Anderson, 2013b:94). In the movements to which Montgomery and Woodworth-Etter belonged, they were free to exercise their healing ministry. Anderson notes that they did so in independent organisations that Pentecostal denominations could choose to ignore if they so inclined (Anderson, 2013b:94). In Zimbabwe, some of the groups that have sought independence from male-led churches and have assumed an interdenominational structure are Victoria Mpofu's Women Weapons of Warfare, Florence Kanyati's Grace Unlimited Ministries, Patience Hove's El Shaddhai Ministries, Getrude Skumba's Mother2Mother Ministries, Memory Matimbire's Ndadhinhiwa Prayer Group and many others. All these are emerging expressions of Christianity that are being established by women (Nyawo, 2020:156). I have physically attended some of Kanyati's Grace Unlimited Ministries prayer sessions as well Getrude Skumba's online prayer sessions. My analysis of these two groups is that they are not a threat to patriarchy since most of their teachings urge women to comply with the patriarchal teachings in the Bible. Getrude Skumba's group is aimed at pastors' wives as well as women in ministry. The general understanding is that pastors' wives suffer in ways that are unique in that they are expected to give support and counsel to members of their churches, but they usually do not get support when they are in need of it. Hence, this group is there to offer support to pastor's wives in the event that they encounter challenges which they cannot share with those whom they lead. Most of these groups in Zimbabwe have not received individual academic attention except for Memory Matimbire's Ndadhinhiwa Prayer group. Manyonganise (2021) provides an in-depth analysis of this group. From a missiological point of view, she highlights the gendered notions of African Pentecostalism. She characterises Memory Matimbire and her group as exercising subversive resistance against patriarchal dominance in African Pentecostalism. Manyonganise makes a critical analysis of a particular message that was preached by Matimbire in South Africa in September 2018. Through her preaching, Manyonganise notes that she among other things:

> Derides Patriarchy by dissociating herself from a God that treats women as the 'other'." She rallies women to refuse the marginalisation that they face in the home, church and society as a whole. She reiterates that God knows no gender. As such, she calls on women to refuse the social construction of mothers as passive, ordinary and common. What Matimbire

> is doing is to call women from the socially constructed realms of goodness to that realm of self-consciousness. Matimbire's call is a refusal for women to continue operating from the margins and ushers them to challenge those who are at the centre but shutting the door on women (2021:107).

Memory Matimbire is also critical of the way women have been denied leadership positions in all facets of life. She, therefore, challenges African Pentecostalism to do a self-introspection and repent on the way it has treated women generally. In analysing her message. Manyonganise notes that:

> Matimbire makes a date with patriarchy and in direct confrontation, challenges the sidelining of women from leadership positions at every level. She declares that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is in women as well, thereby blurring gender difference. By telling the women that they can do it as well (in the same way that men are doing it), she questions the inferiority complex that religion and culture thrust on women. Hers is a call that encourages women to refuse to be spectators when men are making it in this life. It is common cause that the gospel of prosperity largely propagated in African Pentecostalism is gendered. Therefore, for Matimbire, women cannot continue to live within the shadows of successful men. While calling her members to pray until something happens, she instructs them to actively participate in the social, economic, religious and political spheres of their nations. They should aspire to be presidents, estate owners, businesswomen as well as land owners, preachers among others. These are spheres that have generally been dominated by men; and women who have dared ventured in them have been heavily ostracised (2021:108).

Manyonganise applauds Matimbire for her courage to confront the gender inequality that is pervasive in African Pentecostalism. She notes that Memory Matimbire calls for urgency beyond agency in making sure that the African Pentecostal message of salvation rewards women and men equally. Despite this positive evaluation, Manyonganise highlights two major challenges with Matimbire's preaching and religious activities. First, she argues that it is not clear how women are expected to implement Matimbire's message in challenging patriarchy in their own homes, the church and society at large beyond the rhetoric of sermons. Second, she observes that in some of Matimbire's religious activities, she appears to be promoting the whims of patriarchy which may mean that she has failed to completely break free from patriarchal tentacles. For example, she continues to emphasise marriage and motherhood as concepts of respectability for women (Manyonganise, 2021:113). Hence, Manyonganise calls for

the rebirth of African Pentecostalism so that it begins to cherish and respect the women within it.

In spite of the mentioned challenges, women like Memory Matimbire need to be commended for retrieving their voices in religious contexts where women's silences are celebrated. They contribute to more women speaking up. For example, after Kenneth Mutata, the current secretary-general of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) had his contract renewed, he posted on his twitter handle that he had had the blessing of seven church leaders through prayer. The seven leaders were all men. In reaction to this, Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda, the founder and Chief Executive of Rozaria Memorial Trust and former general secretary of the World Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) satirically quipped on Twitter:

> We need another blessing ceremony from the mothers and sisters in church leadership as well. You must receive the remaining 50% blessing...

Gumbonzvanda's satirical comment is telling; it is a subtle rebuke to the way leadership positions in church are male-dominated. She challenges the church to reconsider its leadership composition which virtually makes women invisible. She brings this discourse on social media as a way of highlighting the marginalisation of women from church leadership. Hers is a call to make male leaders uncomfortable in inhabiting spaces where women are prohibited. For her, such spaces do not bring full joy. Gumbonzvanda is trying to push the point that completeness is derived from the inclusion of both men and women in positions of leadership in the church. Other women have also begun to resist the biblical doctrine of submission. Within the context of Zimbabwe, the unjustified doctrine of submission is being resisted mostly by professional women, particularly because it was hinged on the assumption that men were breadwinners in families to which women have become active providers together with men. Pui-lan (2000:98) avers that as women participate in public life, they become aware of how religion influences their marginalisation in the home, church and society. From her analysis, such women have become vocal in rejecting the misogynist teachings of churches and patriarchal models of leadership. Pui-lan (2000:98) further notes how these women have started to advocate for equal partnership in God's ministry and have organised around issues to do with women's ordination, prophetic role for religious women, fuller participation of the laity in decision-making processes as well as greater representation of women in church synods,

conventions and ecumenical gatherings. Such a scenario obtains in Zimbabwe as well. For example, on 7 and 8 August 2014, I was invited by the Anglican Diocese of Harare to make presentations on gender and reconstruction theology at their Winter School. As a gender and religion scholar, I came face to face with the patriarchal nature of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe because all the clergy were men. I made my point of entry by questioning why they would invite a woman to speak to an all-men constituted clergy. I had wondered why they would want to hear about issues of gender and theology from a woman in the absence of Anglican women. Though I faced some resistance from some of the clergy, I pushed for the establishment of a gender desk in the diocese. I received feedback a year later to the effect that this was done. For me, these are small steps towards the full recognition of Christian women's humanity within the church.

A number of women academics within Zimbabwe have also become members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians herein named the Circle. The Circle was officially launched in 1989 under the leadership of Mercy Amba Oduyoye. It is instructive that it was launched within the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Decade of churches in Solidarity with Women, 1988-1998. Njoroge (2005) argues that this initiative helped to create awareness of women's theological concerns in the churches and theological institutions. For her, the initiative by the WCC increased forums where African women theologians, pastors, and leaders of churchwomen's organisations could develop their theological knowledge and voices. Throughout the years, Zimbabwean women theologians and men who are friends of the Circle have participated in Circle conferences and many other conferences called for by other organisations where they have presented papers highlighting the experiences of Zimbabwean women. Journal articles, books and chapters in books have been published to this effect. These theologians have in part given voice to the silenced women. They have continued to argue that women in Zimbabwean religious institutions deserve better and should be recognised within the hierarchy of the church in particular. Through the publications, religio-cultural beliefs and practices that dehumanise women have been interrogated and challenged. It is true that a lot still needs to be done for the publications to influence policy changes within the churches in Zimbabwe. However, the male and female students passing through universities and theological colleges in Zimbabwe who have interacted with

these publications have begun to ask questions about the way church hierarchy is structured. Since most of them are pastors in their respective churches, some of them have begun to initiate conversations around women's leadership in church. In June 2020, the ZCC ran a series of online workshops where they invited academics in the field of religion as well as church leaders to present papers to their clergy on the effect of COVID-19 on faith communities. I was invited to talk about gender and COVID-19. One of the things that I applauded the church for was the fact that, it had begun to feel uncomfortable with 'men-only meetings'. I argued that:

> For a long time, faith communities have been described as gender-insensitive as well as gender incompetent. It is encouraging though that we have begun to see them grappling with the destructive legacy of patriarchal styles of authority and subordination of women. They have begun to feel uncomfortable with among others, 'All-men's gatherings'. However, it is also because of the calls that gender activists and academics have been making demanding that there should not be anything for women without them (Manyonganise, 2022:239).[8]

Hence, it is at some of these spaces that as women academics, we exercise agency by highlighting critical women's issues which women cannot otherwise raise within their own churches. I have also started to provoke my colleagues in academia, to stop leaving their publications gathering dust on shelves, but rather to engage communities so that we translate research findings to practical action aimed at societal transformation. In this way, women's agency results in tangible results.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to engage with women and the power dynamics within religious institutions, but specifically within the church. It premised its arguments on the fact that religio-cultural beliefs and practices have relegated women to the margins of religious institutions. In discussing the church, the chapter argued that religio-cultural beliefs found resonance in gendered biblical interpretation where biblical texts are used to silence and invisibilise women. Through interviews with church women and leaders, the chapter established the various ways in which the biblical texts are central in denying women leadership positions within the

8 I was later requested to publish this presentation as a chapter in an edited book.

church. Even those churches that ordain women, research data showed that ordained women have to struggle with resistant patriarchy. In this case, we can derive some conclusions from this chapter. First, we can conclude that the Bible is a powerful resource in regulating gender relations both within the church and at home. The thread of gender inequality discussed in Chapter 2 ran through to the church and back again to church members' homes. This proves not only that these two spaces are gendered but that they greatly influence each other in (re)configuring gender relations. Hence, Walter and Davie (1998:646) are correct in their observation that women running away from oppression in the home to find comfort in church, find out that they have jumped out of the frying pan into the fire with little room to wriggle out. Second, we can also conclude that the church has marginalised women from leadership positions through the emphasis on silence and submission. The muzzling of women's voices have resulted even in women themselves feeling inferior, hence, the majority of women have resigned to fate. They do not challenge the status quo. However, the chapter also established that some courageous women have dared to subvert men's dominance in church leadership. In this discussion, pastors' wives particularly in African Pentecostal churches were shown to be forming women's ministries within their husbands' churches. Some like Memory Matimbire of the Ndadhinhiwa Prayer group were shown to have broken away from the tradition of creating ministries within ministries by forming a totally independent group. Such agency was applauded as challenging patriarchy within Christianity. Women in AICs were shown to be breaking away from men-led churches to forming their own and even establishing their own healing shrines. Random statements thrown on social media by women pertaining to the leadership of the churches were presented as agency as they bring this important discussion to unexpected platforms, but which reach a wider audience all at once. They help in raising consciousness within the Zimbabwean society. The chapter also highlighted Zimbabwean women theologians for playing their part in telling the Zimbabwean women's stories at various fora as well as through their publications. In the final analysis, the chapter called on these theologians to put community engagement at the core of their academic activities so that ideas are transformed into action for concrete results to be realised. In the next chapter, the study examines women and politics in Zimbabwe.

4 | At the Grand Arena: Women, Religion and National Politics in Zimbabwe

Introduction

The intention of this chapter is to examine women's participation in the public sphere specifically in national politics. The previous two chapters have shown how women in Zimbabwe contend with patriarchy both in the home and in the church. This chapter extends this analysis in order to establish the influence of what happens in the home and the church in shaping gender attitudes in the public sphere. The chapter theorises women in national politics and locates the role of religion in shaping gendered attitudes in this space. It also makes a gender analysis of the liberation struggle in order to establish not only the role played by women, but also how the struggle produced other struggles such as the gender one. The chapter argues that the liberation struggle empowered women with courage to question their own oppression by patriarchy. Hence, they sought to not only fight for liberation from colonial rule but for women's liberation from patriarchy as well. Furthermore, the chapter intends to analyse the post-colonial treatment of women especially those that had participated in the war as combatants or as collaborators. This is crucial because it informs this study on the historical experiences of women in the political space in Zimbabwe. In order to do this, numerical data on women who occupied 'high' political offices at government level is provided. The intention is to try and locate the influence of religio-cultural beliefs and practices in political decisions and appointments. The chapter, therefore, engages with women in politics in order to understand how religion has been a key variable in their experiences in the political field. Engaging with women politicians is crucial because it allows them to 'speak' and provide concrete narratives that are useful in creating a gender-sensitive political model later in this study.

Women and/in Politics in Africa: Insights from Literature

Women are mostly marginalised in African political processes (Reeler, 2014:1). Such marginalisation can be traced back to the pre-colonial period. Chapter two has already shown how privileged women were able to participate in politics in some societies in pre-colonial Africa. However,

these were not many and cannot be representative of the majority of women who found themselves marginalised from political processes. The political field from pre-colonial times has been a masculinised one. Folktales and folklore depict war heroes as men. In Shona traditional literary texts exploring life stories situated in pre-colonial Zimbabwe such as Patrick Chakaipa's *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* (1958) and *Pfumoreropa* (1961), Solomon Mutswairo's *Feso* (1956), Giles Kuimba's *Tambaoga Mwanangu* (1968), Ignatius *Zvarevashe's Gonawapotera* (1978), Francis Mugugu's *Jekanyika* (1968), Eric Mavhengere's *Akanyangira Yaona* (1979) and many others, war protagonists are all men. In some of the texts, women are projected as weak, fearful and vulnerable victims requiring to be saved by the heroic men in the texts. The texts are a projection of how women were culturally portrayed as requiring to stay within the confines of the private spaces of the home which were deemed to provide them with 'safe' spaces (see Manyonganise, 2010) while men had to conquer any outside threats. Taringa (2019) criticises these traditional Shona novels for providing boys and men with heroic models while girls and women do not have such. For example, in *Jekanyika*, women are portrayed as objects of pleasure by kings and warriors in the battle field and can be given out as prizes for men's heroism. Hence, Chief Chipezvero offers her daughter to Jekanyika as a wife because of Jekanyika's heroism in the war fought against Chief Mupambawashe. In most of these literary texts, like *Karikoga Gumiremiseve*, women are portrayed as war booty or trophies. It could only take heroic men to redeem these women as shown in *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* where Marunjeya is saved by Karikoga. In instances where women performed heroic acts such as in Pfumoreropa where the hated Mambo Ndyire is killed by women and in Jekanyika where women act as envoys, their voice is often silenced and men speak on their behalf (Taringa, 2019). My reference to Shona traditional literary texts serve to show that political marginalisation of women in Africa is by no means a colonial invention. It needs to be understood within the prism of culturally defined gender roles that defined most African societies. Most of the above-mentioned texts are prescribed as literature texts at secondary school level in most Zimbabwean schools as well as in Departments of African Languages at institutions of higher learning. Their effect in socialising girls and boys differently cannot be overemphasised.

Colonialism occurred within a context in which women in Africa were generally shut out of political processes. In explaining the activities of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) in Zimbabwe, Schmidt (1992:36)

notes that women continued to be pawns as they were used as bargaining power either as hostages or as labour commodities by the colonists. One of the causes of the first Chimurenga in 1896 was the ill-treatment of women. Mutunhu (1976:62) alludes to the fact that many Shona women were subjected to sexual abuse by the white settlers who did not have their wives with them. The leadership of Mbuya Nehanda in instigating and commanding the uprising in Central Mashonaland was a clear indication of how spirit mediums (most of whom were women) played a religio-political role in Zimbabwe. Despite the defeat of the Shona in 1897, the figure of Nehanda remains legendary in Zimbabwe. A detailed analysis of Mbuya Nehanda as priestess and freedom fighter in Zimbabwe is going to be done later in this chapter. It suffices to say at this point that she inspired women in Zimbabwe to join the liberation struggle officially known as the Second Chimurenga. After the defeat of the Shona and the Ndebele in the first Chimurenga, the colonial government began to enact laws that negatively impacted on women (some of them have been discussed in chapter 2). Schmidt (1992:91) opines that in Zimbabwe, women's access to public life through religious roles such as their important role as spirit mediums who acted as key mediators in local disputes and authority figures in situations of natural disasters lost their political role in the clear separation between political and religious domains. Politically, women's legal status as minors, combined with their lack of access to land, housing and wage employment hampered the resistance against colonial rule. Geisler (2004:22) notes that the establishment of a male government under colonialism, and the depoliticisation of most women's issues in the private sphere came to be institutionalised in nationalist politics and postcolonial African states. The colonial government denied women the right to vote in electoral processes. Hence, White (2007:863) avers that African women's opportunities to express and act on their gender-specific grievances were hindered by their exclusion from public spaces as well as from early meetings of liberation organisations. Despite the discriminatory practices, Zimbabwean women found ways of joining the liberation struggle.

Various scholars have written on the role played by women in African liberation struggles in general and Zimbabwe in particular (Schmidt, 1992; Lyons, 2004; Geilser, 1995, 2006; Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000; Chung, 2007; Manyame-Tazarurwa, 2011; Manyonganise, 2015, 2016). Mama (1995:37) posits that in the whole of Africa, national liberation movements called for and relied on the active participation and support of women at

all levels of the anti-colonial struggle. Lyons (2004) has argued that the experiences of women in the war of liberation are varied. She, therefore, calls for a separation of narratives between women who fought in the struggle (women combatants) and those who remained in the country and supported the war through other means (these are commonly referred to as mothers of the revolution). It took long for the actual experiences of the war of liberation to be known. Soon after the war, the heroism of male fighters was celebrated for having brought independence. They were presented in history books as courageous, tenacious and brave. I remember very well in my primary school education, soon after independence, how our history books were full of male heroes and no women. The exaggeration of their war exploits was not easily picked by the young minds, but it was entrenched in them that the male guerrillas were never defeated. The Shona war novel did not help either. In secondary school, texts such as Gonzo Musengezi's *Zvairwadza Vasara* (1985), Charles Makari's *Zvaida Kushinga* (1985), Raymond Choto's *Vavariro* (1990), Vitalis Nyawaranda's *Mutunhu Una Mago* (1985) and *Paida Mwoyo* (1987) and many others are prescribed as literary texts for students taking Shona literature as a subject. However, they all depict men as heroes of the liberation struggle. They negate to recognise the role and experiences of women in the same war. Chiome (2007) castigates the writers of the Shona war novel for failing to focus on critical issues. From his perspective, literature of the early years of independence is conveniently silent about crucial aspects of the history of the war (2007:166). He argues:

> From the early 1980s to the mid-1980s, independence was celebrated through euphoric, nationalist, triumphalist literature. The excitement over the birth of a new nation created the illusion that the objectives of the revolution had been fulfilled and also that independence had one official definition and one official history. People believed that they were witnessing the creation of a social order which would do away with all forms of discrimination (2007:165).

In reference to the Shona war novel, Chiome argues that it:

> celebrates the history of a people that have suffered and died for independence. Freedom fighters are glorified as champions of freedom; their real inner motives for going to war are not explored…The works do not reflect the paranonia, power struggles and absurdities of the war (2007:165).

By trying to come up with a uniform narrative of the war, contradictory versions were silenced and at times denied when they were told. Chiome

has noted the failure of the Shona war novel to reflect on the actual roles of women in the war. Manyonganise (2015:121) observes that:

> the glorification of the liberation struggle at independence evidenced by the celebratory narratives might have served to obscure and silence the voices of thousands of young girls and women involved in the struggle. The fighters were received as heroes. The nationalist historiography became exclusive (talked much about the heroism of the boys of the bush at the expense of the experiences of women fighters and collaborators. Nobody wanted to tell a different story of what had exactly transpired during the war. If anything, the nation had to salute the sacrifices and heroism of the fighters. In this case, even rapists were celebrated as heroes of the struggle.

Therefore, the silence of the Shona war novelists about the atrocities of the war needs to be understood in this context where narratives had to conform to nationalist ideologies. In his analysis of the metanarratives coming out of the liberation struggle, Munochiveyi (2011:90) argues that soon after independence, there emerged dominant narratives of Zimbabwean nationalism which glorified guerrillas and their leaders as chief heroes and a homogeneous group of rural peasants. Munochiveyi opines like other scholars that authors of such narratives subordinated and silenced all other forms of struggle against the Rhodesian colonial regime, and reified the guerrilla war narrative as the only important in telling Zimbabwe's anti-colonial history. For Groves (2007:2) the liberation narrative has been constructed in a way that reproduces and reinforces patriarchal discourses. I have elsewhere applauded Freedom Nyamubaya's *On the Road Again* (1986) and Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* (1997) for problematising the war through questioning the violence that accompanied it. They broke away from the normative nationalist narratives of the Shona war novel writers (Manyonganise, 2015:125). Lyons (2004) avers that Nyamubaya's collection of poems evoke the pain, trauma of the war for Zimbabwean women. Therefore, Munochiveyi (2011:92) is of the view that when various perspectives are considered, "it is clear that Zimbabwe's nationalist history looks different when seen through the lens of multiple historical subjects; it certainly looks much more complex and holistic than those very early narratives that were based on, and authorised by a select group of political elites."

The story of the gendered power dynamics that shaped the liberation struggle has been critiqued from different perspectives (see Schmidt, 1992; Lyons, 2004; Geilser, 1995, 2006; Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000; Chung, 2007; Manyame-Tazarurwa, 2011; Manyonganise, 2015, 2016) as

well as many others. What comes out clearly from all the analyses is that men and women combatants experienced the war differently. While they had joined the war to fight racism, they were confronted by the evil of patriarchy both in Mozambique as well as at the war front. Women's resistance against the oppressive rule of the colonial government started well before they joined the liberation war. Dating back to the 1950s, women engaged in peasant and urban resistance alongside men engaging in acts of sabotage against symbols of colonial hegemony (Mudeka, 2014:85). In 1961, women belonging to the National Democratic Party (NDP) marched in Harare (Salisbury) against a proposed new constitution which they viewed as institutionalising racism. The 1961 constitution had created a parliament of 65 seats and allocated only 15 seats to black Africans while fifty seats were reserved for the whites (Charumbira, 2020:4). More than two thousand women were arrested. They refused to pay fines and insisted on serving their sentences. It was only after they were threatened with divorce by their husbands that some of them agreed to pay the fine and got released. This eventually led to the banning of the NDP. However, women had shown greater courage, resolve and commitment than the men (Charumbira, 2020). Hence, Bhebhe (1989) credits the women's actions for being the catalyst that brought the struggle to its militant phase.

In Zimbabwe, at the beginning of the armed struggle, women were excluded from active combat. They continued to play traditionally ascribed roles of cooking food and washing clothes for the male combatants. Later in the struggle, they started to be conscripted as baggage carriers for male guerrillas because they were not easily suspected by the colonial government soldiers. Robert Mugabe acknowledged that at the beginning of the struggle they had mistakenly relied on their conventional tradition which narrowed their concept of the struggle as one which only men could execute thereby excluding women (Charumbira, 2020:5). However, the demands of the war for more human resources meant that both ZANU PF and PF ZAPU could not ignore the role of women in the struggle for independence. Hence, as the need for more combatants increased, women began to be recruited as soldiers as well. In this case, Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:52) posits that in Zimbabwe, women's participation in the liberation army grew out of practical rather than ideological considerations. In concurrence, White (2007:869) argues that anti-colonial armies trained women as combatants out of desperation and necessity rather than out of enlightenment of feminist consciousness. All the same, Zimbabwean

women combatants proved that it was possible for them to execute the war in the same manner that men did. Mugabe commended the performance of the Women's Detachment for carrying war material from the rear as well as fighting on the front and become exposed to the enemies' bullets in the same way as men. From his point of view, women demonstrated beyond any doubt that they were as capable and deserved equal treatment both in regard to training and appointments (Charumbira, 2020:5). Women, therefore, challenged long held views about gender roles. They began to question their male counterparts for not taking part in roles such as cooking and washing which they expected women combatants and collaborators to do. While in Mozambique, they also began to challenge the custom of lobola which they perceived to be the genesis of gender inequalities among the Shona. A critical analysis of these demands shows that women's search for freedom from African patriarchy during the liberation war needs to be understood as a struggle within a struggle. Geisler (2004:13) argues that though African women had participated in the liberation struggle because of their desire to resist racism, the move itself challenged existing gender roles so deeply that it left women empowered to seek rights strategically linked to gender equality. They viewed their oppression as closely linked to the racial oppression that they and their men were fighting against. Hence, for them, the struggle against racial oppression needed to be accompanied by the struggle against women's oppression. The courage exhibited by the women in executing the war challenged cultural notions of women as peaceful, weak and vulnerable (Groves, 2007:3). Women who remained in Zimbabwe and supported the war especially in rural areas were depicted as 'mothers of the revolution'. They too found the struggle liberating from socially constructed roles. They challenged gender-based violence by reporting their husbands to the guerrillas who chastised them. Generally, by allowing women to join the liberation war, Zimbabwean political leaders likened national liberation with women's liberation. While acknowledging that the growing presence of women combatants led ZANU and ZANLA to address gender issues, Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:52) also notes that there is limited evidence to suggest that traditional gender roles were put aside in favour of military hierarchy. Manyame-Tazarurwa (2011) is of the view that although some women who became involved in the liberation struggle did elude patriarchal norms for that time, their positions were still circumscribed by men since they were mobilised through rather than against patriarchy. In fact, narratives from the war show that the agency

of women combatants was undermined as a result of increased vulnerability to gender-specific human rights abuses such as rape, torture, forced pregnancies, forced sex work and other forms of sexual harassment and discrimination perpetrated by enemy troops on one hand and their fellow soldiers on the other (White, 2007:868). In training camps in Mozambique, reports abound of women combatants being sexually abused and exploited by male commanders (Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 2000; Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006, Chung, 2007; Manyame Tazarurwa, 2011). The sexual exploitation of women highlights their overall subordinate position and undermined their roles as combatants (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:54). Female war collaborators (*Zvimbwido*) in the war front served the guerrillas through performing domestic tasks. They also stayed with the male guerrillas at their rural bases where they were expected to entertain them (*kuvaraidza vanamukoma*). Manyonganise (2015) critiqued this practice and argued that it exposed the young girls to sexual abuse. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:56) alludes to the fact that due to this practice, young women were at risk of having sexual relations both coerced and consensual, with male combatants. In this case, some of the parents who were killed for being sell outs had protested the sexual abuse of their daughters.

Despite the above-mentioned ills of the war, it was generally expected that Zimbabwean women would enjoy gender equality resulting from their participating in the war. However, the post-war period has been criticised for failing to produce touchable results for women. Geisler (1995; 2004) has aptly described the contradictory messages that the post-war Zimbabwean government conveyed to women. Many African gender scholars have lamented that the male political leaders reneged on their promises to accord women an equal status with men after the war. However, Lyons (2004) has questioned whether such promises were ever made. It would appear that in most cases, these were assumed and women lacked the tact to negotiate for such before the end of the war. Lyons (2004) views the first Women's League meeting held at Xai Xai by the ZANLA women in Mozambique in 1979 as providing the turning point for the national organisation and for women's liberation in Zimbabwe. While it may be true that the conference laid the foundation for women's oppression and marginalisation to be dealt with, it failed to change gendered attitudes towards women in independent Zimbabwe. In fact, Mugabe's address to the Women's League at Xai Xai leaves a bitter sweet taste in the mouth. One of the things he promised was his desire to constitute a Women's Detach-

ment with a female commander who would automatically become a member of the High Command of ZANLA. However, he seemed to think that the Main Wing had done women a favour by allowing the formation of the Women's League and emphasised its subordination to the Main Wing. By Main Wing, Mugabe meant the leadership of men. It is unfortunate that scholars have not questioned the absence of a Men's Wing which should also subordinate itself to the Main Wing. The absence of a Men's Wing is evidence that men in ZANU PF envisaged themselves to be the owners of the struggle and all the other departments had to subscribe to their dictates which could mean that statements of equality were hypocritical. In any case, most statements uttered by male liberation war leaders could have served as a morale booster for women to exert themselves during the war, hence, cannot be considered as indicators of change of attitudes about gender relations. These leaders could have assumed that the gender-neutral approach was only necessary for the war period. For them, after the war, it was necessary to revert to gender relations that existed before the war. For example, Robert Mugabe verbally sounded to be in support of women's emancipation, yet politically he manoeuvred to silence women with radical ideologies. Hence, Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000) argues that the definite role of women during the war makes it copiously clear that ZANU PF had hardly laid any foundation for a significant transformation of gender relations during the struggle. In her analysis, gender reforms were never on the movement's agenda.

Women Empowerment in Post-colonial Zimbabwe

During the 1970s, Zimbabwean women guerrilla fighters were hailed internationally as women who rose above traditionally subordinate gender positions in order to fight equally with men in the struggle for national independence (Tanya Lyons, 1999:305). However, Ranchod-Nilsson (2006) lays bare the ambivalent position occupied by women after the war in the new Zimbabwean state. She argues that while men and women had coexisted during the war, they could not as the new state struggled to chart a course for gender policy and practice. In her analysis,

> armed women combatants symbolised a double-edged sword. On the one hand, their training together with male combatants and their limited ascent within military and political ranks of ZANU/ZANLA suggested an end to women's oppression and new opportunities for women in an inde-

> pendent state. On the other hand, the presence of armed women combatants also presented a challenge to the patriarchal authority of senior African men (2006:58).

For Ranchod-Nilsson, these powerful images of women in the liberation war are common aspects of the often contradictory ways in which women typically represent the nation in nationalist movements.

In the new Zimbabwe, women ex-combatants faced new realities. While the boys (*vanamukoma*) were celebrated as they came from the bush, the girls of the bush were totally made invisible (Barnes, 1999:xvii). Zimbabwean society was not kind to women ex-combatants. They were stigmatised for having participated in the war which was traditionally perceived as a male preserve. They, therefore, ceased from being desirable and respectable women. Geisler (1995:552) and Chogugudza (2006:52) note that most parents did not want their sons to marry women ex-combatants because they could not be good wives. They were depicted as murderers and prostitutes. Even some male ex-combatants reneged on their promises to marry them because they were aware of how most women were sexually violated by several male combatants during the war. Shona culture places great importance on girls' virginity before marriage. With what was happening during the war, it was deemed improbable that women ex-combatants had managed to keep their virginity throughout the war. In Chogugudza's analysis, women ex-combatants experienced a lot of tension in their lives as they were considered both as heroines and unclean women (2006:52). Mama (1995) and Geisler (1995) allude to the fact that the majority of women who had participated in liberation movements in Africa withdrew from the political space when they discovered that the postcolonial state was a vehicle of male elite interests. Some of these women went to work in civil society organisations. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:51) posits that as the state became increasingly authoritarian, the locus of transformation shifted toward non-state actors, including local NGOs and regional organisations. The same is true for Zimbabwe where women's organisations emerged. These are discussed below.

Women and Governance in Postcolonial Zimbabwe

Chogugudza (2006:44) argues that while the liberation struggle in theory paved the way for the increased social and political involvement of women, the actual participation that would have achieved female emancipation was tightly constrained. For example, in 1980, only one woman,

Joice Mujuru was appointed into cabinet as Minister of Youth, Sport and Recreation out of 22 cabinet posts and in 1981 she became the Minister of Development and Women's Affairs. Out of a 100-parliamentary-seats, only 9 were occupied by women in 1980. In her tenure as the Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs, Mujuru pushed for legislation that would empower women. Bauer and Taylor (2011:338) note that though few women were brought into government at independence, major legal gains for women did follow independence in the form of new laws to redress past discrimination. Such laws would enhance women's status in society. I have already made reference to some of the laws in Chapter two. For example, the LAMA (1982) and the Sex Disqualification Removal Act (1985) (see chapter two). Other laws enacted were the Matrimonial Causes Act (1985) which gave women the right to property in marriage and changed the practice of automatically giving fathers custody of children in divorce cases; and the Labour Relations Act (1985) which provided that women would receive paid maternity and time at work to nurse their children (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:61). The ministry also led to the repealing of the Customary and Primary Courts Act (1981) through removal of judicial authority from chiefs and headmen. Mujuru managed to work with women's organisations and the Ministry of Justice in enacting these laws which were a result of wide consultation with grassroots women. While her openness to work with civil society in coming up with this legislation is applauded, it has to be noted that Mujuru became a Minister at a very young age and was coming from the war which she joined after having acquired very little education. For some civil society leaders, Mujuru used well-educated and well-informed women in these organisations to cushion her inexperience on how to run her Ministry. Some of the educated/professional women joined her ministry. It was because of this that they were able to push for such legislation that became the backbone of women's empowerment in Zimbabwe. However, Geisler (1995:556) notes that the professional women left this Ministry when it became apparent that there was conflation of the Ministry with the ZANU PF party particularly its Women's League. Mujuru who was head of both and later Sally Mugabe represented both. In order to curtail the strong influence of the Ministry in advancing women's issues, Mugabe abolished its ministerial status and made it a department within other ministries. Geilser (1995) traces the historical treatment of the women's affairs department until the time it became a department in the Political Affairs Ministry housed at ZANU PF headquarters. Geisler (1995) and Ranchod-

Nilsson (2006) posit that this arrangement was a form of check and balance to curtail the newly emerging 'power' of women in the political arena. Even the focus of this department is said to have then shifted from development issues to political mobilisation (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006). In a way, this resulted in the Women's League being associated with political violence at times against other women who were viewed as enemies. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:59) notes that decades after the formation of the women's ministry and the legal statutes put in place, the department became marginalised and the legal frameworks that had benefitted women such as LAMA were under attack leaving women to bear the burdens of increased rural impoverishment, the failure of earlier educational reforms and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. For example, LAMA had direct implications for the practice of lobola. While Mujuru had castigated the practice for being oppressive, she got resistance from within government. The provisions of LAMA were criticised for being unAfrican. For instance, the recognition of 18-year-old children as adults ursurped parental authority from parents who generally felt that at that age, girls were not capable of making their own decisions. Critiquing LAMA, Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:61) argues that while the statute, gave women the right to vote, own property, contract a marriage without parental or family consent, to become guardians of their own children and to initiate civil litigation, it failed to resolve contradictions in women's status created by the dual civil and customary legal codes. Apart from contestations around lobola, the other bone of contention revolved around a father's ability to sue a man who sexually violates his daughter outside of marriage (or without paying lobola). Such arguments were coming through because it was feared that after the operationalisation of the law, a breakdown of morality would ensue (Geisler, 2004:106). Hence, in 1989, the ZANU PF congress passed resolutions directing the government to review LAMA and align it with indigenous cultural values as well as raising the age of majority to 21 years. Other revisions were sought on the Maintenance Act so that it restricts the number of children to be maintained in case of divorce as well as on legal statutes governing the authority and power of chiefs in their jurisdictions. While at independence, these powers had been streamlined, the congress sought to argue for the restoration of chiefs' powers to deal with non-criminal cases in their areas of influence. In 1999, some ZANU PF MPs called for LAMA to be repealed. In the same year, the *Magaya vs Magaya* case put LAMA to the test. The Supreme Court judgement which denied Venia Magaya the right to her father's inheritance, challenged the

provisions of LAMA. According to Bauer and Taylor (2011:338) the Supreme Court overturned the LAMA when it ruled that "the nature of African society dictates that women are not equal to men and that women should never be considered adults within the family..." Thus, Ranchod-Nilsson (2006:61) notes that the Supreme Court decision severely limited women's ability to use LAMA to challenge practices thought to be discriminatory under customary law. On the other hand, while noting the rights accorded to women through LAMA, Essof (2013) argues that the Act afforded women superficial access to state resources while Makonese (2021:434) criticises it for failing to address the needs and rights of women at a practical level in their private or the public spaces. In her analysis, legislative efforts in post-colonial Zimbabwe to address gender equality and women's rights seemed half-hearted as their implementation was limited. Hence, in Zimbabwe, women failed to retain some of the early gains of independence. Ranchod-Nilsson (2006) attributes this failure to the consolidation of power by ZANU PF which was aimed at making Zimbabwe a one-party state.

Scholarship on gender and economic development has pointed to the gendered process of state formation in colonial and postcolonial Africa (Drew, 1995:1). This scholarship has focused on women's exit or withdrawal from politics due to their marginalisation by male-dominated states that ignore women's social needs. Drew (1995:2) further argues that African women's seeming withdrawal from politics has been explained by reference to the introduction often under colonial rule, of a public/private dichotomy in social relations which legitimises the construction of politics as a male domain and relegates women to the domestic sphere. As alluded to earlier, in reaction to their marginalisation in the political sphere, women moved to occupy spaces in civil society. Soon after independence, Zimbabwe saw the emergence of a woman's movement through the forming of women's organisations such as the Women's Action Group (WAG), the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau (ZWB), Msasa Project to mention just a few. For McFadden (2005:9) the women's movement was the first expression of women's demands for an autonomous identity. The women's groups sought to monitor government's commitment to enacted gender policies. I have already alluded to the fact that these women's groups worked together with the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs as well as the Ministry of Justice in coming up with legislation aimed at women's empowerment. In Ranchod-Nilsson's analysis, "the growth

and reconfiguration of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) sector and the growth of political opposition forces [have] gained up new spaces to address women's issues as part of a broader framework of social transformation. She summarises the focus areas of some of the women's organisations. For example, WAG was formed in 1983 in the wake of the first 'Operation Clean Up'. In this purported clean up, thousands of women in Harare and Bulawayo were detained indiscrimately by the state security accused of being prostitutes, vagrants and beggars who were not fit to inhabit urban spaces. Law, (2021:249) views the exercise as a "blatant effort to curtail women's autonomy in urban spaces." For her, the clean up operation demonstrated the uneasy coherence between colonial and post-colonial thinking regarding the 'appropriate' place for women in the nation. In response, WAG challenged the state and exposed the limitations of its nationalist ideology (Win, 2004:21). Ranchod-Nilsson notes that from its early protests, WAG expanded its focus area to address other women's issues including land rights, maintenance, guardianship and custody, inheritance, lobola and sexual harassment. By the late 1990s, WAG was actively working to educate women parliamentarians and other members of Parliament about women's issues (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:65). However, challenges arose when the organisation seemed to have been working to close with the government. Ranchod-Nilsson argues that there was conflation of the organisation with ZANU PF, especially when the then director, Selina Mumbengegwi accepted her appointment to the Constitutional Commission by government

The Zimbabwe Women's Bureau (ZWB) was founded in 1978 by black women academics, activists and black women in business. Its intention was to raise awareness about black women's issues. Focus was put mainly on rural women. Since it started during the time of the Rhodesian government, the group projected itself as a prayer group so that the government could not suspect it (Sylvester, 2002). After independence they carried out wide consultations with women in Zimbabwe in order to gather ther expectations for the new government, which findings were published in a book titled '*We Carry a Heavy Load* (1981). These findings informed the legal statutes already discussed. They also focused on training women farmers across Zimbabwe. ZWB also worked with women to establish the viable income-generating projects and later formed a training programme to transform the loose projects into registered co-operatives (Sylvester, 2002:239). During the rural survey, ZWB had found out that women were dissatisfied with their continued lack of land rights (Jacobs, 1983:41). Only

men were allowed to apply for land in the resettlement programmes. ZWB then lobbied government to change customary land tenure practices that were discriminating against women (Bauer & Taylor, 2011:338). However, the government refused.

Msasa Project was formed in 1988 as a response to violence against women particularly rape and domestic violence (Stewart & Taylor, 1995:79). Its aim over the years has been to address violence against women in various forms including psychological, economic, sexual and physical violence (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:64). Musasa Project has remained effective in responding to violence against women and girls and has partnered with other women's organisations, the police and lawyers. Another women's organisation that has worked closely with Musasa Project is the Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) which was formed in 1990. It gave voices to women across class and generational lines (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2006:64). In preparation for the Beijing Platform for Action Conference it produced a book titled '*Zimbabwe Women's Voices*' published in conjunction with the UN's Fourth World Conference on women and the NGO Forum in Huairoi, China (Osirim, 2003:165). For Osirim (2003) one of the major reason for this publication was that it enabled grassroots women's voices to be heard at the conference. The book created space for Zimbabwean women's stories of marginalisation and struggle to be heard both in Zimbabwe and beyond. There were other organisations that were formed but for purposes of space, they are not discussed in this study. Organisations that quickly come to mind are Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), Women in Law and Development Foundation (WiDAF), Girl Child Network, Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA), Women and Land Lobby Group (WLLG), Indigenous Business Women's Organisation (IBWO) among others. The study takes note of their contribution towards gender equality in Zimbabwe.

Achievements resulting from women's organisations' lobbying in Zimbabwe are notable. For example, Zimbabwe became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1991 and ratified it in 1997. This led Zimbabwe to adopt the Affirmative Action Policy in 1995. Through this policy, the government aimed at eliminating discrimination against marginalised groups including ethnic minorities and women. Hence, on the education front, entry points for women getting into higher education were lowered. I studied for my Master's degree from 1995 to 1996 at the University of Zimbabwe.

When I came back for my postgraduate studies in 1995, the whole University of Zimbabwe was abuzz with the concept of affirmative action. Being a woman, it was mistakenly thought I had qualified for further studies through sympathy and not merit. It became a burden for me and my female friends to always defend ourselves. Hence, while the policy intended to deal with issues of gender equality, it in a way projected women as less capable and can only make it if expectations in any field were lowered. By demanding more from men and less from women in the name of equality was disastrous. Even women who were more capable than men were perceived as having benefitted from the policy. Hence, during my time as a postgraduate student at the University of Zimbabwe, most women and girls would emphasise that they came to pursue their academic dreams through non-affirmative action. They did not want to be associated with a policy that in a way threw 'underserved' favours at women. Subsequent research done on the policy showed mixed feelings towards it. The Affirmative Action policy was introduced in other areas as well including politics. However, even then, the policy has been criticised for reifying rather than alleviating gender differences (Geisler, 2004:35). The general argument has been that women should endeavour to get into positions on merit and avoid receiving the positions at the mercy of men.

Buoyed by the success of their lobbying which had resulted in the adoption of the Affirmative Action policy, the women's movement in Zimbabwe attended the Beijing Platform for Action conference with hope and vigour. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action Conference in a way gave impetus to the women's movement in Zimbabwe. Its emphasis on action and not rhetoric was crucial. The conference had called for the removal of all impediments hindering women to participate fully in all aspects of life. On the political front, the Beijing Platform for Action called for women to participate in key decision making as full and equal partners with men. It called for women's access to political power as fundamental not only as a demand for social justice and democracy, but also as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account (Geilser, 2004:12). After the Beijing Platform for Action Conference had taken place, I got interested in researching on the women's movement in Zimbabwe. My dissertation for my Master of Arts in Religious Studies degree focused on the women's liberation movement in Zimbabwe trying to establish whether it had managed to change traditional cultural attitudes towards women. I critiqued (at that time) the elitism of the women's organisations that were in existence. While leaders of the women NGOs argued that they were

engaging with grassroots women, my fieldwork established that most rural women and those in high density areas of Harare were not aware of the existence of such groups. My recommendation then was for the women NGOs to dump their hotel meeting venues and bridge the gap that existed between these groups and grassroots women (see Manyonganise, 1996). Van Eerdewijk and Mugadza (2014) note that in the 1990s, women's organisations in general increasingly questioned economic policy, became more critical and developed a stronger orientation towards human rights and the law. Among other issues, their advocacy focused on participation and governance. McFadden (2005:10) applauds the various conferences that were attended by women in the women's movement for stimulating the use of the law as a tool for development, provided the language of gender and development as well as gender mainstreaming.

'Is the struggle worth it': Doubts Creep into the Women's Movement

The challenges that the women's movement in Zimbabwe faced led to despair. Essof explains the feelings of women in the movement by 2001. At a meeting held on 8 February 2001, the women asked pertinent questions. For example,

> Some questioned whether Zimbabwean women's organising actually constituted a movement and called for a stockpile in quantifying its concrete achievements. Others suggested that the movement had been so weakened ideologically that it was merely propping up and perpetuating the patriarchal status quo that it was trying to overturn. Muted voices recognised the movement but saw it as weak and dismantled (2013:ix).

While Essof (2013) validates the questions, she explains the predicament in which the movement found itself. She notes that patriarchy in Zimbabwe had reconfigured itself and political will to meaningfully address gender inequality diminished rapidly and was replaced by a desire to regulate and control women in both private and public spheres. Women's organisations were accused of being anti-revolutionary and cultural discourses cast them as feminist. Feminism was then projected as anti-nationalist and pro-imperialism. In chapter two, I indicated that the Beijing conference was viewed as the biggest cause of divorces in Zimbabwe as women claimed their rights. Essof notes that as Zimbabwe plunged into socio-

economic challenges in the 1990s, women's organising was made difficult. The state itself became hostile to gender discourses which resulted in women activists becoming targets of state-sponsored violence (Essof, 2013:x). Resultantly, a lot of women activists withdrew from their activism and this weakened a number of women's organisations. Others refocused their areas of operation from politics to non-political ones. However, the coming in of a strong opposition political party, the MDC, in 1999 opened political spaces for women. This also invigorated the women's movement. Between 1999 and 2000, the women's movement formed an alliance with the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) to lobby for a home-grown constitution. Win (2004a) explains that it had become apparent to organisations fighting for women's rights and democracy that the major problem hindering their progress was the constitution. The Lancaster House Constitution needed to be changed. In 1999, a Women's Coalition (WC) was formed as a complementary body of the women's movement. The coalition was intended to push forward women's demands around constitutional change (Win, 2004:24). In order to counter the NCA move, the government also formed a Constitutional Commission (CC) and co-opted some members of the WC and the NCA. When the MDC was formed, some members of the WC and the NCA joined it. According to Win (2004a:24), this caused a crisis within the WC and the wider women's movement. The division in the movement became clear at the time of voting in a referendum called for by government for the constitution in 2000. The government and the CC campaigned for a 'yes' vote while the NCA and the WC wanted people to reject the draft constitution. The WC felt that the CC had not consulted enough and there were fears of people's contributions being doctored by the CC. The government lost the vote. This emboldened civil society that it was possible to defeat Mugabe's government. However, for the women's movement, fissures had been exposed. When evaluating the movement in 2004, Win (2004a:25) saw a movement in disarray as a result of the events that happened during the 2000 constitutional process. Win (2004a:25) further argues that "while the members of the WC were united in demanding that women's rights be enshrined in a new constitution, the WC was less united on how this was to be arrived at." McFadden (2005) explains the gendered power dynamics that were at play as the WC allied itself with the NCA. Positively, she notes that the alliance with the NCA moved women's politics to a more centrally visible position within Zimbabwean politics. She is, however, quick to note that the alliance revealed the fractures and underlying differences

between individuals and groups making up the women's movement specifically in terms of their relationship with the state. In her analysis, the women's movement "lost its autonomous identity and the ability to respond as a political force that was primarily concerned with women's interests and claims." In terms of the WC's relationship with the NCA, she argues:

> The Women's Coalition never really exercised any actual power within supposedly national democratic platform; and in addition to serving as the gender-mainstreamed token of the NCA and having to deal with gender issues, it was simply swallowed up in the dominant, male-dominated agenda and strategies of the NCA (McFadden, 2005:15).

In other words, for McFadden, the WC failed to project itself as an equal partner in the alliance to the extent that it was taken as an appendage of the NCA. She laments the way the WC was used by the NCA to further the interests of patriarchy. She argues:

> Initially, a very strong woman activist served as the chair of the NCA, giving the impression that the NCA was a gender-sensitive platform. While one cannot dismiss the impact this had on women's sense of political worth in the society generally, particularly during the period of the constitutional referendum and just after, in the longer run it has become clear that having a woman at the helm of the NCA was a brilliant move on the part of a fundamentally patriarchal, male-dominated structure to successfully mine the energies and agencies of women and of their movement (McFadden, 2005:15).

When evaluating the women's movement in 2005, McFadden (2005) like Win (2004a) saw a movement in the "doldrums –ideologically and in activist terms." She was worried about the silence of the movement when *Murambatsvina* happened. While for her, it could have been a "tactical retreat in the face of brutal and unrelenting state repression" she saw the need for the movement to make a feminist analysis of the consequences of teaming up with male-dominated structures in the struggle for social justice. For Win (2004a:25) the lack of a clear set of non-negotiable principles guiding the WC, other women's coalitions and the women's networks in Zimbabwe contributed in large measure to the paralysis in the women's movement at the turn of the millenium. The enactment of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) as well as the Access to Information and Public Privacy Act (AIPPA) in 2002 greatly constrained the work of the women's movement. In most cases, they were forced to narrow the scope of their activities and advocacy strategies. Some organisations were banned from implementing activities in parts of the country while others

faced suspensions (Van Eerdewijk & Mugadza, 2014:16). In addition, Win (2004a:25) notes that the other challenge in the movement is that of individual relationships of some activists with the state. Such observation is critical since the state has at times been accused of 'planting' security agents within the movement to monitor their activities. In most cases, this has seen increased incidences of political violence against women in the movement. Hence, after the 2000s, many women activists left the country both for personal and financial security and also because they felt exhausted by intense organising and needed time to recover (Eerdewijk & Mugadza, 2014:15). This largely affected women's organising. In a polarised political environment, women's organisations focusing on politics and campaigning against political violence also emerged in this period. Some of them are Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA), Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCOZ), Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU) among others. For a clear historical background of each of these groups (see Gudhlanga, 2013, Van Eederwijk & Mugadza, 2014). Due to generational shifts, other women's organisations led by young women have proliferated in Zimbabwe's socio-political space. Young women feel that the old generation of women does not represent their interests neither can they articulate them clearly. But it also has to do with gate-keeping by the old generation women who continue to deploy failed methods of engagement with patriarchy in both the private and public spaces. Some of the groups being led by young women are Katswe Sistahood, Sexual Rights Centre/Pakasipiti, Zimbabwe Young Women's Network for Peacebuilding, Institute for Young Women Development, Nhanga etc. What is clear though is how women continue to create avenues that ensure that they have spaces for participation through lobbying and advocacy. The coming in of young women is crucial for their voices to also be heard in the public sphere.

On the Road Again: Women Return to National Politics

Despite the challenges of the women's movement in Zimbabwe enunciated above, the women's movement needs to be commended for mobilising women back into political activism and participation. While women opted out of politics due to disillusionment with the patriarchal state, their interest got stimulated by the women's movement and a formidable opposition. Even within their own political parties, women began to demand a fair share of the political space. Geisler (2004:9) observes that "in Africa,

where women were said to have opted out of politics throughout the 1980s and patriarchal power structures were found to be hostile towards the entry of women into politics, they managed to force their way into the almost exclusively male-domain with amazing speed and determination." She attributes this to the organising and lobbying for gender equality by women non-governmental organisations as well as the demands from international, continental, regional and national protocols. The study has already shown that Zimbabwe is a signatory to CEDAW. In addition, Zimbabwe is a signatory to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). As a member of the African Union (AU), Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Maputo Declaration (2003) which is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA). In the Southern Africa Region, Zimbabwe is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Hence, it is a signatory of the SADC Gender Protocol which it signed in 2008 and ratified in 2009. All the protocols and declarations affirm the need for gender equality across societal sectors. The Maputo Protocol implores African states to take affirmative action through the adoption of laws and policies to combat all forms of discrimination against women and girls. It also called on states to take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling legislation and other measures (Ramtohul, 2020:2). The SDGEA was adopted by the AU Assembly in 2004 and it called for member states' continual action toward achieving gender equality and reinforcing their commitment to international and regional women's rights instruments. The SADC Gender Protocol provides that member states endeavour to ensure that fifty percent (50%) of decision-making positions in all public and private sectors are held by women including through the use of affirmative action measures by 2015. In 2010, the AU launched the African Women's Decade (2010-2020). In this decade, the AU implored member states to adopt a grassroots approach to gender equality through the acceleration of implementation of already existing instruments and frameworks to women empowerment. Particular attention was to be paid to the AU Assembly's focus on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE). In order to respond to the international, continental and regional expectation, the Zimbabwe 2013 Constitution is clear on gender equality. Section 17 of the Constitution

speaks about gender balance. In this case, the state is expected to promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society and in particular

(a) the state must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabweean society on the basis of equality with men.
(b) the state must take all measures, including legislative measures, needed to ensure that (i) both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level and (ii) women constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under [the] constitution or any Act of Parliament.

Through this constitution, Zimbabwe adopted the quota system in the 2013 and the 2018 elections. A Gender Commission mandated to among other things promote gender equality in all spheres of society was also constituted as a result of the 2013 constitution.

The above instruments and others not stated were instrumental in creating some space for women's political participation across Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Africa witnessed the rise of women to higher political offices. For example, Joice Mujuru became the vice president of ZANU PF in 2004 and of government of Zimbabwe in 2005, Thokozani Khupe became the vice president of MDC-T in 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the president of Liberia in 2006, Joyce Banda served as vice president of Malawi from 2009 to 2012 and as president from 2012 to 2014, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim became the president of Mauritius in 2015, Sahle-Work Zewde became the president of Ethiopia in 2018, Mutale Nalumango is the current vice president of Zambia and currently, Lynette Karenyi-Kore is one of the three vice presidents of the Citizens Coalition for Change in Zimbabwe. Some countries have steadily moved to realise the 50-50 representation in parliament and government. For example, Rwanda became the first country in Africa to exceed the fifty percent representation of women in Parliament. The percentage of women in Rwanda's parliament stands at 61.3% (Ramtohul, 2020:4). Ramtohul (2020) also notes that after Cyril Ramaphosa's election to the South African presidency, he appointed an equal number of women and men into his cabinet which is critical for achieving long lasting equality and stability. However, in Zimbabwe, the availability of equitable laws has not always guaranteed their application (Geisler, 1995:547). For example,

Maphosa, Tshuma & Maviza (2015:128) note that despite the existence of the above stated supportive instruments, Zimbabwe has not fared well in governance. From 1980, the number of women in political positions in parliament and cabinet has always fluctuated. The table below captures this reality.

Table 1:
A Gender Analysis of Women in Parliament from 1980 to 2018

Year	Women's seats	Total seats	% Women
2018	85	270	31.48
2013	85	270	31.48
2008	30	210	14.29
2005	20	120	16.67
2000	14	150	9.33
1995	22	150	14.67
1990	21	150	14
1985	8	100	8
1980	9	100	9

Source: Africa Democracy Encyclopedia Project. N.B. Out of the 270 total seats, 60 were reserved for women. The seats contested for were, therefore, 210.

The above data shows that Zimbabwe failed to reach the 50-50 representation in parliament both in 2013 and 2018 despite ratifying the SADC Gender Protocol as well as documenting this need in the 2013 Constitution. A gender analysis of the results of the Zimbabwe 2018 elections is very telling. For example, only 274 out of 1959 local government seats and 26 out 210 parliamentary seats were competitively won by women. The proportional representation policy enabled the number of women to rise a little but falling short of the expected level. Hence, Dube (2018) argues that the reality behind the 2013 elections lustre of progress was always more questionable than it seemed. In 2018, WIPSU noted that female nominees made up less than 15% of the candidates that stood for the National Assembly (Dube, 2018). In the senate, out of a total of 80 seats available, 35 were won by women in the 2018 general election which represents 44 % of the total seats (Gender Links, 2020). Women have also been

underrepresented in government as fewer women have been appointed as ministers. See table below:

Table 2:
A Gender analysis of women in government as cabinet ministers from 1980-2018

Year	Number of Women in Cabinet	Number of Men in Cabinet	% Women in Cabinet
2018	6	14	30
2013	3	23	11.5
2008	5	31	13.8
2005	3	17	15
2000	6	24	20
1995	2	20	4.5
1990	3	26	10.3
1985	2	24	7.7
1980	1	21	5

Source: Figures collated from different newspaper articles.

The numbers show inconsistences throughout the years as they always fluctuate when it comes to women in political positions. There are doubts about women's political representation in 2023 because if the constitution is not amended, the quota system is not protected by law beyond 2018. Made (2015:23) notes that in the run-up to the 2013 general election, there was resistance to affirmative action by political parties. This was confirmed by Robert Mugabe's appointment of only three women ministers in his 2013 cabinet. When confronted by the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe, he defended himself by charging that women needed to do better in elections for them to be eligible for cabinet posts. From his point of view, there was nothing abnormal about having 'just' three women in the 26-member cabinet. In his opinion, "there were not just enough women to choose women ministers from" (Dziva, 2014:n.p). He argued:

> Education is for all now. It is mixed. The yield is the same. It is no longer necessary for us to have affirmative action, it is free for all. Let women contest alongside men without any preferential treatment (Mhofu, VOA News, 12 September 2013).

Mugabe's statement exposes the hypocricy of the Zimbabwean government towards women's empowerment and gender equality in politics. He

made a mockery of all the international, regional and national legal instruments requiring a fifty percent women representation in political as well as other decision-making bodies. What became clear is that signing papers does not always translate to practical action especially in the absence of political will. Makonese (2021:436) argues that it is difficult for any country to achieve gender parity in parliamentary representation without affirmative action and quota systems in both electoral laws and the constitution. For her, quota systems require enabling and supportive legal and constitutional framework. Hence, it may be that without a legal instrument to support the quota system in 2023, political parties may dump the policy altogether. This would be an unfortunate development because it puts Zimbabwe into a retrogressive path where women have to fight all over again for opportunities which they thought they had managed to get. As shown in the discussion above, the trajectory of history for women in politics in Zimbabwe has been a case of 'so near, yet so far'. Their vilification as undesirable bodies in the political space is likely to intensify as they fight to remain present in the political space. This has been their historical experience; which experience may be a permanent feature if models that are gender-sensitive to women's political participation are not adopted in Zimbabwe. In the next section, I turn to examine the societal perspectives on selected women in politics in Zimbabwe. This is crucial as it enables us to analyse practical examples of women's experiences in political processes in the country.

Perspectives on Selected Women in Politics in Zimbabwe

The vilification of women in politics is not peculiar to Zimbabwe. Such practices are prevalent in other countries and continents as well. Gender scholars focusing on women and politics have highlighted such gendered practices in different contexts. Caroll (1994, 2003) and Schreiber, (2008) have made arguments showing the underrepresentation of women in American politics. For Caroll (1994:1):

> the failure to raise questions pertaining to the representation of women has stemmed in part, from sex stereotyping. The domination of politics by men has been viewed as a natural extension of the sexual division of labour within the home and the family has been seen as the reason for their relative absence from political positions.

The significance of Caroll's argument lies in her ability to link men's dominance in the home as replicating itself in the national electoral political

processes. The same arguments have been made on women in politics in the European and Asian contexts. In Nigeria, Andrew (2019) makes a similar observation and he avers that women are not interested in politics due to a number of factors such as marital status where if one is married, they are expected to focus on home-making and religio-cultural beliefs which do not permit women to make contributions to legislative issues. Writing on the Kenyan context, Okoth (2020:90) notes that there is limited participation of women in Kenyan politics due to the social division of labour, the rigid dichotomisation of the public and private spheres as well as the social construction of the political realm as a man's domain. In his analysis, women's marginalisation in political participation is often read as natural, historical, and therefore, inescapable. Across Africa, it is very surprising that wives of presidents did not dare contest for the presidency against their husbands. Chogugudza (2006) argues that the concept of leisured wife as proof of 'gentility' explains why most wives of African leaders did not compete to ascend the social and political ladder at the same time as their husbands. Daring to do that would have been misconstrued as not only challenging their husbands for political office but as challenging the husbands' headship in the home. Historically, women have been assumed to share the political views and preferences of their husbands and fathers to the extent that their representation in the political sphere has not been viewed as an issue of major concern (Carroll, 1994:1). However, in Africa, wives of presidents and other powerful men have created their own political spaces through deriving authority from their husbands. Mama (1995:39) interrogates the 'First Lady' phenomenon in Africa and argues that these women have arrogated themselves the right to represent and lead women. She then questions the democratic character of this form of gender politics which she calls 'femocracy'. For Mama (1995:40):

> femocracy is an undemocratic female power structure which claims to exist for the advancement of ordinary women, but is unable to do so because it is dominated by a small clique of women whose authority derives from their being married to powerful men, rather than from any actions or ideas of their own. Femocracies exploit the commitments of the international movement for greater equality while actually only advancing the interests of a small female elite, and in the long-term undermining women's interests by upholding the pratriarchal status quo. In short femocracy is a feminine autocracy running parallel to the patriarchal oligarchy upon which it relies for its authority, and which it supports completely.

Mama's observation aptly describes the Zimbabwean situation (see a discussion on Grace Mugabe and Auxillia Mnangagwa below). It is important though to note that at times femocracies are unable to sustain and defend themselves in the face a weakened patriarchal power from which they derived their authority and in the face of resistance from those that usurp power from the weakened head of state. The Zimbabwe 2017 coup is a case in point see discussion below). Mudiwa (2020) notes that even women who embody the femocrat are not actually shielded from interrogations of the propriety. In this study, women who have dared patriarchy in the political terrain in Zimbabwe are presented as a way of showing not only their subversive resistance but the menacing response of patriarchy against them. The study argues that the strategies employed by men are intended to put daring women 'into their rightful place', that is, kicking them out of the political space into a domestic one. Apart from the women selected for this study, there are other women who participated in politics in Zimbabwe notably, Sheba Tavarwisa, Ruth Chinamano, Victoria Chitepo, Shuvai Mahofa, Julia Zvogbo, Oppah Muchinguri, Susan Tsvangirai, and many others. To leave them out of this selection is not to trivialise their contribution, but one study cannot possibly cover every woman in Zimbabwean politics.

Mbuya Nehanda: Zimbabwe's Legendary Religio-political Heroine

A reconstruction of who the first Nehanda was has been told through oral tradition, hence, scholarly presentation of the same varies. The original Nehanda was Nyamhita who was the daughter of the first Munhumutapa, Nyatsimba Mutota around 1430 (Chiwa, 2020:23). In support of Chiwa's point, Bertho (2018:104) explains that "the original Nehanda was a 15th century Shona princess cited in Portuguese sources." Bertho does not mention the king, but highlights that she was a sister to the king who founded the Munhumutapa Empire. These two accounts are different in that Bertho seems to say Nyatsimba Mutota was the brother to the first Nehanda while Chiwa regards Mutota as the father to the same. These are some of the challenges we face when we depend on oral transmission of history or records that were produced by people who relied on translation. From oral tradition Mutota ordered his son, Matope who was Nehanda's half-brother to perform an incestuous ritual in order to gain overall power and control (Beach, 1998:27). After the performance of the ritual, Matope

became very influential to the extent that he chose to give a part of his land to Nyamhita. Beach (1998:27) is of the view that the incest ritual between Matope and Nehanda gave supernatural validation to the power of the Mutapa state in general. Nyamhita is believed to have possessed great spiritual powers and was said to have disappeared into a mountain that bears her name, *Gomo raNehanda* (Nehanda's Mountain) (Mazama, 2014:n.p). Nyamhita has been regarded as a woman who equalled her brother in strength, wealth and influence (Chiwa, 2020:18). In Oboe's opinion, "the myth of Nehanda as a powerful ancestor spirit concerned with issues of land appears to be connected both to stories of mythical autochthonous ancestors and to socio-historical circumstances surrounding the Mutapa kings in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (2010:130). Hence, Charumbira (2020:39) is of the view that "understanding the historical context of the [original] Nehanda within the powerful politico-economic entity of Mutapa helps us understand why the legacy of the [second Nehanda] endured."

Charumbira (2020:39) makes a linguistic analysis of the name Nehanda and determines that the name might have been spelt 'Ne Handa' or Nehanda' or 'NeHanda' as this explanation signals two things: Ne- and Handa, rather than the current Nehanda now linked with one person, Charwe. After her death, Nyamhita became a Mhondoro (a powerful royal spirit) and lived through her human hosts for a period of 500 years after the time of her physical death (Chiwa, 2020:24). The Mhondoro are lion spirits who have a direct line to Mwari/Musikavanhu (Chiwa, 2020:18), the Shona god. Her spirit has chosen women to be its host throughout Zimbabwe's history. Beach (1998:28) alludes to the fact that Nehanda's spirit possessed a number of mediums. Even in present Zimbabwe there are women who claim to be possessed by the spirit of Nehanda. However, Lan (1983:34) posits that "Nehanda is believed to have two distinct equally genuine traditions of mediums, one in the Mazowe region near the capital, Harare, the other in Dande." This is proof to the fact that "the Nehanda legend has been preserved within the narrative of an African Kingdom's imperial centre and handed down as a powerful female spirit determined to live beyond the fog of history" (Charumbira, 2020:39) eclipsing both time and space. In this study, I focus mainly on the Nehanda of Mazowe area.

The most well-known embodiment of Nehanda was Nyakasikana Charwe (Chiwa, 2020). She was born into the Hwata dynasty which ruled the area around Mazoe Valley from about 1760 until British colonisation in the

19th century. The Hwata clan belongs to the eland (Shava/Mhofu) totem which makes Nehanda a *Chihera*. Women belonging to this totem are known to be assertive, courageous and militant. The year of her birth is projected to be 1862. She became the medium of the royal spirit of the renowned rain goddess Nyamhita Nyakasikana (Charumbira, 2020:39). In *Women Creating Zimbabwe* (2007), it suggested that Charwe was married with two sons, but the husband is unknown. Beach explains that:

> She was a daughter of Chitaura, a younger son of Shayachimwe, who founded the Hwata dynasty in the upper Mazowe Valley in the late eighteenth century. By 1896 the Chitaura name was held by her brother with whom she lived, though she was considered more important than him. She married and had two daughters and son, but the name of her husband is not recalled.

It is clear that there are disparities on Charwe's children. The above two accounts are striking by their variances. Other oral traditions show that Kaguvi was Charwe's husband while Lan (1983:34) opines that Chaminuka was Nehanda's brother. The other noteworthy variation is the time when Charwe got possessed by the Nehanda spirit. *Women Creating Zimbabwe* (2007) points to 1894 while Beach (1998) sets 1884 as the time of possession. It, therefore, becomes a challenge to reconcile the two perspectives. Nehanda is referred to as Mbuya or Ambuya (Grandmother) Nehanda or just Nehanda, which shows the respect that she is rendered. However, Beach (1998:29) is of the view that the title 'Mbuya' which is associated with the name Nehanda to have been in connection with a later medium in 1959. Chiwa (2020:25) avers that Nehanda Charwe had a village of her own and often performed rituals of land fertility to appease the Shona God. She argues that, "this gave her power beyond all others due to the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda being considered one of the highest and most powerful of the Mhondoro" (2020:25).

The figure of Mbuya Nehanda has resisted removal from African history. She has continued to be an elevated figure and a role model for both African men and women who desire to resist not only the West's, but also the black elite's neo-colonial agenda. She has become a mythical figure within Zimbabwe's political history whose name is evoked to disparage both colonial and neo-colonial threats. She is well-known for her leadership during the Shona Uprising against colonial rule in 1896 to 1897. The rebellion has commonly been referred to as the first Chimurenga and was first triggered by the Ndebele with the Shona following suit. Her role in the uprising has been discussed by various scholars from quite a number of

disciplines. Charumbira (2020:39) avers that Charwe initially welcomed the new Europeans thinking that they were after gold and other material resources and would return to their countries. Other scholars view her welcome as having been influenced by Chaminuka's prophecy that people with no knees would come and end the Ndebele raids on the Shona. Hence, she may have seen their arrival as the much anticipated redemption from these raids. To her disappointment, the Europeans had come to stay and started to confiscate land and introduce retributive taxes on Africans. Hence, the 1896-97 uprisings were based on resisting the enforcement of hut tax, forced land removals, and forced labour among many atrocities and prejudicial practices that were foreign to the Shona (Chiwa, 2020:25). She was also aggrieved by H.H. Pollard who had become the Native Commissioner for Mazoe in 1895. According to Beach (1998:33), Pollard's levying of tax and forced labour as well as his use of the sjambok became intolerable. She is recorded in history as having co-organised and co-led the rebellion with Kaguvi in Western Mashonaland and Mukwati in Matabeleland. Kaoma (2016:57) notes that spirit mediums were central through their traditional authority in mobilising people to take part in the revolts against colonial rule. According to Mazama (2009:446) the spirit mediums successfully conveyed to their people that Mwari unequivocally condemned of the white presence and actions and commanded that the white people be removed from the land. Hence, Kaoma (2016:57) views Mbuya Nehanda's role as having been simultaneously political, social and religious like most spirit mediums of her time. She is said to have told her people not to fear bullets because they were bound to turn into water by the time they hit their hides. She invoked the Shona God as having been on their side in the rebellion. Oboe (2010:130) argues that since Charwe had inherited the various aspects of legends about Mbuya Nehanda, she could draw on ancient indigenous traditions to motivate resistance to the white settlers who were appropriating African lands for themselves and she played a great role in the organisation of the anti-colonial struggle thereby becoming a symbol of the liberation effort. At the early stages of the uprising, the Shona and the Ndebele recorded some victories on the battlefield Mazama (2009). Unfortunately, they were both defeated when supplies ran out as well as due to inferior weapons and they surrendered. When the rebellion failed, Mbuya Nehanda was the last to be captured (Lan, 1983:34). Despite the defeat, one of the most notable aspects of the rebellion was its reliance on African religion through the leadership of the *Mhondoro*. Kaoma (2016:77) argues that though the first Chimurenga

failed to reclaim the colonised lands, it sent a positive message to colonial authorities about the disruptive nature of African religions. From his point of view, the colonial government was afraid of the influential role of the Mhondoro in African politics. Hence, they sought to send a clear warning to the indigenous people by the way they punished Mbuya Nehanda and Kaguvi.

In March 1898, she was tried and sentenced to death. She was found guilty of having ordered the killing of Pollard who she hated of his cruelty against her people. While awaiting death by hanging, Catholic missionaries tried to convert her to Christianity. She rejected conversion until her death. Charumbira (2002:n.p) records two incidences which were recorded by Father Francis Richartz narrating his encounter with Mbuya Nehanda. In the first, he said:

> To Neanda I did not speak until evening, in order to avoid a scene, though I had a long and quiet talk with her, which made me even hopeful. However, when in the evening about 6 o'clock, I saw her again and in the presence of Victor, who tried his best to persuade her to listen to me, I told her that she had to die the next morning, she began to behave like a mad woman. She took her blankets and wished to leave the cell, and when told to remain and keep quiet, she refused and said she would never endure to be locked up. When I saw that nothing could be done with her, I went away with Victor and Neanda began to dance, to laugh, so that the warders were obliged to tie her hands and watch her continually as she threatened to kill herself.

In the second report, he explained:

> On Wednesday April 27 [1898], I made another attempt to speak to Neanda and bring her to a better frame of mind, but she refused, called her people and wanted to go back to her own country, Mazoe and die there, and behaved as she had done the night before. When I saw that nothing could be done with her, the time for execution having arrived, I left Neanda and went to Kagubi who received me in good disposition. Whilst I was conversing with him, Neanda was taken out to the scaffold. Her cries and resistance when she was taken up the ladder, the screaming and yelling on the scaffold disturbed my conversation with Kagubi very much, until the noisy opening of the trap door upon which she stood followed by the heavy thud of her body as it fell, made an end to the interruption.

I find Father Richartz report to be very ironic. It is surprising that someone is being hanged and he takes her death as a positive end to her 'interruptive' cries and screams. He does not show any sympathy or empathy to her. He trivilalises her fears of death by presenting them as one with a

mental illness. From Charumbira's analysis (2002:n.p), this explanation is centred on Father Richartz as one who tried to convert a hard hearted black woman. However, Mbuya Nehanda exhibited a defiant attitude towards the British government by refusing to accept a foreign religion through giving up her own. For Charumbira, there was a lot to lose if Mbuya Nehanda had accepted conversion to Christianity. She argues that by accepting another's rites of passage which sought domination over one's own, would have been nothing short of spirit murder- a murder of one's ancestors (2002:n.p).

During trial, Mbuya Nehanda warned her killers that death was not the end of her resistance to colonial rule. The famous statement '*Mapfupa angu achamuka*' (My bones shall rise) is said to be her last words before her death. Lan (1983:34) observes that "a powerful and prolific oral tradition grew up around her name, her part in the rebellion and, especially, the last moments of her life; her refusal to accept to convert to Christianity, her defiance on the scaffold, her prophecy that 'my bones will rise' and win back freedom from the Europeans." Hence, her resistance and defiance provided an ideological rallying point for liberation war fighters as well as the postcolonial state. After her death, her spirit is said to have continued to possess other mediums, mostly in the north of the country (Beach, 1998:28). It is not very clear what happened to Mbuya Nehanda's body. It is believed that both Mbuya Nehanda and Kaguvi were buried in a secret place in order to avoid particularly Mbuya Nehanda's followers from claiming that her bones had arisen in fulfillment of her prophecy (Beach, 1998). Her head is said to have had been taken to Britain and efforts to have it returned to Zimbabwe are being pursued by the current Zimbabwean government.

The phrase '*Mapfupa angu achamuka*' was used to justify Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Oboe (2010) notes that the phrase inspired the Second Chimurenga. For Lan (1983:6) the phrase inspired another important reincarnation of Nehanda during the Second Chimurenga whose voice strategically united the traditions of original ancestors directly with the First Chimurenga. Tarusarira and Chitando (2017:11) note that Nehanda and Kaguvi "became patron saints of the Second Chimurenga, with indigenous spirituality enjoying a revival." The memory of Charwe continued to be linked to the theme of resistance particularly the armed struggle which began in 1972. The name of Charwe who was now known as Mbuya Nehanda became a symbol of resistance and an inspiration to the nationalist movement. For Bhebe and Ranger (1995:24-26), the guerillas were

celebrated as Mbuya Nehanda's risen bones, hence, a fulfilment of her prophecy. As a result, Christiansen (2004:55) observes that "the continuity of the struggle against colonial oppression was established through a focus on a continuity of cooperation between the resistance movements and the spirit mediums. Bertho (2018:104) says that Mbuya Nehanda's spirit was invoked by the freedom fighters through song and ritual and they considered themselves her followers in the Second Chimurenga against colonialism. Through song, her last words before she was hanged were vocalised in order to appeal to the supernatural as guiding the war. One of the songs is *Mbuya Nehanda kufa vachitaura shuwa* (Grandmother Nehanda sure died declaring).

Thus, Mbuya Nehanda became an inspiration for the liberation war fighters. They perceived themselves as answering to the clarion call by the legend to take up arms and liberate Zimbabwe. When addressing the Women's League in Mozambique in 1979, Mugabe indicated that Mbuya Nehanda had been the first heroine and martyr who had led a national army in a national struggle for independence. From his perspective, Mbuya Nehanda had not only showcased her exceptional leadership qualities, but had also deployed her spiritual powers in ways that commanded respect from men. She became the inspirational figure for guerilla girls and women to actively fight in the Second Chimurenga. According to Mudeka (2014:85) the ZANLA (armed wing of ZANU PF during the war) leadership "aligned female guerillas's exploits with those of the venerated woman warrior and priestess, [Mbuya] Nehanda," in recognition of the role she had played in the First Chimurenga.

Many literary writers in Zimbabwe since the 1970s have drawn upon the 1896/7 uprisings as inspirational for their work (Lyons, 2004:78). Notable works are Solomon Mutswairo's *Feso* (1957); Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* (1993). Mutswairo's Feso catapulted the legend Nehanda from ethnic history and memory to national myth, bound together with the figure of Nehanda Charwe (Charumbira, 2020:43). Chigidi (2009:44) argues that *Feso* contains a political protest poem of Nehanda Nyakasikana in which the poet appeals to the guardian spirit of Mbuya Nehanda to come and rescue her people from slavery. From this poem, lyrics were created which depict Nehanda as a sacred ancestral spirit (*mudzimu unoyera*). However, after a critical analysis of Mutswairo's presentation of Mbuya Nehanda in Feso, Charumbira (2020:44) derides it for its idealisation with African masculinity. She castigates Mutswairo for valorising masculinity by in-

voking a "Nehanda Nyakasikana devoid of her femininity and womanhood, a goddess without a female culture around her". Zeleza (2007:17) commenting on Vera's novel *Nehanda*, argues that Vera attempts to "evoke the mood of the times, to capture the spiritual clash of civilisations, the immorality of colonial conquest and the righteousness of the resistance against it, to recast Mbuya Nehanda in the compelling archetypal grandeur and poetry of myth rather than the mundanity of the historical biography."

Mbuya Nehanda has been remembered in ways. She has had roads named after her. For example, in Harare, the road which was formerly named Victoria Street in the colonial period was named 'Mbuya Nehanda' (Mamvura, 2021). In addition, formerly Lady Chancellor Hospital was named Mbuya Nehanda Maternity Hospital after independence. Collier (2022) views this as exemplifying her prominent freedom fighter image.

Was Mbuya Nehanda a heroine or villain: Interrogating history?

While Zimbabwean society basks in the glory of Mbuya Nehanda's heroism, some scholars of history such as Beach (1998) and Bertho (2018) have questioned it. Beach opposes the historicity of the heroism of Nehanda-Charwe. He argues that Mbuya Nehanda was an innocent woman who was unjustly accused. For him, Mbuya Nehanda was a scapegoat, accused by both whites and other Shona men (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2005:7). For Beach, the whites were looking for a way to publicly display revenge, while African men wanted to escape death by hanging (Beach, 1998). It is amazing though that Beach does not explain why of all the women in the Mazoe area, these men chose Mbuya Nehanda if she had not led the uprising. He only premises his argument on the fact that during trial, Mbuya Nehanda did not accept that she had organised the Uprising in Mashonaland and that she gave orders for the murder of Native Commissioner, Pollard. A number of scholars have dismissed Beach's argument (Charumbira, 2002; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2005; Chiwa, 2020). Charumbira (2002:50) argues that Beach's analysis "seemed intent on taking down a heroine than providing a real understanding of not just Nehanda-Charwe, but African women in the 1890s generally and those in the resistance movement to colonial rule specifically." From Ndlovu's analysis, Beach's intention was to destroy the heroism accorded to Mbuya Nehanda and to create a picture of an ordinary African woman who fell victim to the calculations of both

African and white men. Beach's argument from Ndlovu-Gatsheni's analysis is that Mbuya Nehanda's heroism is a construction of nationalist politicians who were desperate for ideological ammunition to connect the liberation struggles to the pre-colonial history and primary resistance. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) rejects the notion that Mbuya Nehanda can be representative of pre-colonial African women in Zimbabwe. For Chiwa (2020:26), Beach's assertion of Mbuya Nehanda's victimhood is a way of weakening her significance in the events that transpired between 1896 and 1897. In other words, Beach could not fathom that a woman could have such authority as to command men to resist oppression. Chiwa (2020:26) views this as an act of delegitimising Mbuya Nehanda's impact as well as an act of erasure. From Charumbira's perspective "the biggest hole in Beach's argument about Nehanda-Charwe being a victim of gender bias lies in the fact that he did not consider the larger canvas of women and gender history before and during the uprisings" (2008:104). In pursuant of the same argument, Dawson (2011:148) argues that Beach misses the point by choosing to focus upon the figure of the woman possessed by the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda rather than what spirit possession actually meant to the Shona. She argues:

> By dismissing the significance of this possession because it is safest, Beach places a Shona religious figure into an incongruous western context, thus failing to explore how Nehanda influenced, led, and legitimised Shona society...Focusing solely on Charwe the woman misses key elements of Shona culture (2011:148)

Bertho (2018) also queries the authenticity of the Mbuya Nehanda heroic account. Her contention is that there are no records that emerged soon after the rebellion which indicate the significant role ascribed to her. The little about her which was recorded is, from her analysis, not enough to justify the heroism being bequeathed to her. However, Ranger (1977) records Lawrence Vambe alluding to the fact that the story of Mbuya Nehanda's colonial resistance was commonly being told in Chiweshe where he grew up. In her opinion, Mbuya Nehanda rose to prominence from the 1950s as a "literary myth, through songs, novels and poetry, and has progressively come to symbolise a collective union and a collective identity." She then concludes that Mbuya Nehanda is nothing more than a creation of the second half of the twentieth century and was established as the leader of the Zimbabwe rebellion, at the expense of other known figures like Chaminuka, Kaguvi, and Lobengula among others. It is the strength of her prophecy and martyrdom which made her stand above the

rest (Bertho, 2018:107). Although she acknowledges that the figure of Mbuya Nehanda generated an alternative way of thinking about colonialism and decolonisation, Bertho opines that Mugabe reworked the Nehanda myth in order to promote a Zimbabwe with a mostly Shona identity fighting against the Rhodesian colonial power (Bertho, 2018:111). For her, "liberation in 1980 brought a standardisation of the Nehanda myth and the construction of an official narrative which displaced others such as those of the Ndebele groups" (Bertho, 2018:111). Dodeman and Raimbault (2018:xiv) commenting on Bertho's argument, opine that "Nehanda's ideology role in the construction of the Zimbabwe nation in the nineteenth and twentieth century shows how the institutionalisation of a revolutionary and subversive figure paradoxically leads to the geographical mapping of an elusive myth." However, from my perspective, it is regrettable that Bertho wants to reduce the figure of Mbuya Nehanda just to a myth created to forge a common identity during the liberation struggle and officialised in the postcolonial state. Unless I misunderstood her argument, it is not clear whether she questions the historicity of the role played by Mbuya Nehanda during the 1896-97 uprisings. Surely, if Bertho accepts that Mbuya Nehanda existed as a historical figure, but thinks that she was only made prominent by her last prophecy and death without trying to establish what led to these events, we are bound to question her objectives. Bertho, like Beach, aims at misrepresenting the role that was played by Nehanda because she is a woman. She ignores the fact that if she failed to get records (which Beach used) on Mbuya Nehanda from whatever library she sought them from, it does not obliterate the historicity and worth of what she did. The Africans who began to write about Mbuya Nehanda in the 1950s must surely have depended on oral tradition since it was tough for them to get significant education in the early years of colonisation. Hence, it follows that the Mbuya Nehanda who became mythologised is a historical figure who became prominent because of her gallant deeds. The failure of Bertho to get 'enough' recorded accounts need to be blamed on those at the time who monopolised methods of recording history who in my view might have sought to expunge the figure of Mbuya Nehanda from history because, after all, it might have been very humiliating for them to have been challenged by an African woman.

The Dismembered is (Re)membered: The Memorialisation of Mbuya Nehanda

In 2021, Mbuya Nehanda was memorialised when her statue was unveiled in Harare. However, the process of memorialisation was not a smooth one. The first statue had presented the figure of Mbuya Nehanda as a young and cheerful woman with a bulgy body. Some sections of the population criticised such 'distortions'. They wanted a statue of Mbuya Nehanda whose image they find in colonial history textbooks where she is depicted as an old, frail, tired and hopeless woman. A question that arises from this rejection is: Why is patriarchy terrified by strong, energetic and intelligent young women? A gender analysis of the outcry that arose after the unveiling of the first statue can only demonstrate one thing, that is, a Nehanda that is powerless, frail, tired and old is acceptable to patriarchy because she is not intimidating. In fact, she can be hired easily to act like it. For example, she can act and speak on its behalf. While I ponder on this question, others saw her memorialisation as a positive development for women in Zimbabwe. Mahomva (2021) saw the place of memorialisation as vital. The statue of Mbuya Nehanda was sited at the intersection of two roads named after Samora Machel and Julius Nyerere, African heroes who supported Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Mahomva argues that having the statue of Mbuya Nehanda who is a heroine of Zimbabwe's landmark armed resistance at this heroic junction named after Africa's two liberation icons (Machel and Nyerere) immortalises Nehanda not as a gigantic figure of the Chimurenga but as a forerunner of Pan-Africanism. Paradoxically, the memorialisation of Mbuya Nehanda occurred at a time when the ruling ZANU PF government was harassing young women politicians who belong to the opposition party, then MDC Alliance (MDC-A, now Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC). It is tragic that the persona of Mbuya Nehanda as woman legend of Zimbabwe has failed to unite Zimbabweans because the ZANU PF Party has cartelised her. They have invoked her name whenever they face electoral defeat and Robert Mugabe, the former Zimbabwean president used to take an oath using her name. For Charumbira (2020:48) "by turning an archetypal figure and heroine of resistance into the exclusive property of the dominant nationalist party, the party and government were simultaneously micromanaging the legacy of the popular figure." Therefore, it is clear that the memorilisation of Mbuya Nehanda is not evidence of the appreciation of what women can offer in Zimbabwean politics. Rather, her name is valuable in advancing patriarchal political interests.

Sally Mugabe: The Mother of the Nation

Sally Mugabe was born Sarah Francesca Hayfron on 6 June 1931 in Accra, Ghana. She married Robert Gabriel Mugabe in April 1961. She had a son, Michael Nhamodzenyika with Robert Mugabe. The son died in December 1966 from cerebral malaria. In the political arena, Sally is believed to have supported her husband's rise to the leadership of ZANU PF. Scholars writing on her political life have lauded her loyalty to Robert Mugabe till her death. Magaisa (2017:n.p) succinctly puts it as follows:

> To say behind every successful man there stands a woman is probably an overused cliché. But there is none more suitable to describe the relationship between Robert and Sally. She was there when he entered the fray, she was there too when he languished in Smith's jails and she was right beside him when he ascended to the throne as the first Prime Minister of the newly independent Zimbabwe in 1980.

Chung (2007:183) traces Sally's political life to Ghana where as a teenage activist, she was politically active during Kwame Nkrumah's time. She describes Sally Mugabe as a single-minded woman who was characterised by her absolute dedication to the liberation of Zimbabwe. In 1961, she was one of the women leaders who led women to demonstrate against a proposed racist constitution. During the liberation struggle, she was instrumental in sourcing for cloths and sewing machines which were used to sew clothes for Zimbabweans in refugee camps in Mozambique as well as freedom fighters in the frontline (Chung, 2006). This led her to be seen as a concerned and compassionate mother of the revolution, an image she carried even after independence (Magaisa, 2017:n.p). Hence, she is revered as the authentic 'Amai' Mugabe (Mother Mugabe). In 1978, she became the deputy secretary for women's affairs in the ZANU PF Women's League with Joice Mujuru heading it. She became the secretary general of the Women's League in 1989.

After the liberation struggle, she desired that every Zimbabwean woman get an education and a job. From Chung's analysis, Sally Mugabe perceived women's economic independence as crucial and without it she did not see total freedom for women. As such, she spent most of her time working with the vulnerable groups of society, that is, the lepers[9], prostitutes and orphans. Her founding of the Child Survival and Development

[9] She became patron of the Mutemwa leprosy Centre in Mutoko.

Foundation needs to be understood in this context. Through the foundation, she was able to send quite a number of orphaned and vulnerable children to school. Hence, she was seen as the 'Mother of the Nation'.

Depictions of Sally Mugabe as the mother of the nation is indicative of how Zimbabwe conceptualise nationhood. Magosvongwe (2020:136) explains that in Shona culture, amai (mother) is "reflective of fundamental principles that make the universe of the Shona home, including its virtues, beliefs, norms, values, taboos, privileges and spirituality." In this case, the nation is conceived as one big family with a father, mother and children. In this case, Robert Mugabe became the father of the nation with Sally Mugabe as its mother and Zimbabweans as children. Within such a set-up, each member is expected to fulfil the culturally constructed gender roles. For most Zimbabwe, Sally Mugabe was a role model of a cultured wife and mother. Hence, she accepted her role as a cultural moulder of prostitutes as well as carer and nurturer of lepers, orphans and vulnerable children in Zimbabwe. She fit within her culturally constructed role as a husband supporter at all times. She is portrayed as a helpmate who stuck to the public performances expected of a first lady and her philanthropic work was in the realm of the domestic (Mudiwa, 2020). Even when her husband cheated on her with his secretary, Grace Ntombizodwa Marufu, she continued to stay by his side. She harboured no ambitions to challenge him openly neither to be his vice nor for the leadership of ZANU PF. In the eyes of many Zimbabweans, Sally Mugabe was the voice of reason in Robert Mugabe's life. In other words, she was the power behind the throne, thus, fulfilling the cultural construction of African women as possessors of invisible and unofficial authority. In recognition of her service to Zimbabwe, a suburb, Sally Mugabe Heights and a hospital, former Harare hospital now Sally Mugabe Hospital have been named after her.

Despite all the positives in her character, some Zimbabweans sympathise with Robert Mugabe for cheating on Sally Mugabe due to Sally's failure to give him children. Mugabe justifies this betrayal on the fact that his mother was constantly complaining that she would die without holding his child. Magaisa (2017) views such justification as feeble and selfish. He appears to insinuate that it was Sally's fault that he engaged in the extra marital affair because she could not satisfy his mother's wish. Hence, Sally Mugabe becomes a victim of her loyalty to a form of patriarchy that deserts women when it fails to get what it wants. Narratives from Fay Chung and Margaret Dongo (who were close friends of Sally) tend to show that she was bitter towards Robert Mugabe because of this betrayal of

trust. As scholars, we can only depend on these unofficial reports for us to understand Sally Mugabe's feelings. In a programme 'People of the South', when interviewed by Dali Tambo on 2 May 2013, Robert Mugabe indicated that when Sally Mugabe found out about Grace Marufu, all she wanted to know was whether he still loved her to which he replied in the affirmative. Chung (2006) suggests that towards the end of her life, Sally Mugabe wanted to leave her husband for Ghana. This could point to the resentment she had for being forced into a polygamous union. In this case, marriage becomes an institution where even the perceived politically powerful women find themselves at a crossroads of whether to stay or leave. It shatters their dignity and confidence while in public, they pretend to be in sync with their husbands. Sally Mugabe is the prototype of such women who despite occupying high political offices, are not immune to what 'ordinary' African women experience in their different social spaces, that is, the need to subordinate oneself to the whims of patriarchy and to suffer silently due to its excesses. From Magaisa's analysis, though Sally Mugabe's story is one of a great figure in Zimbabwean history, it resonates very well with the experiences of ordinary women in Zimbabwe (2017:n.p). For example, though she was the first lady of Zimbabwe, she was as vulnerable to patriarchy like any other woman. In exercising her agency, Sally left all her assets for her relatives in Ghana. Eyewitnesses indicate that when Mugabe heard this, he went mad throwing chairs in the air and breaking window glasses in the process.

The scourge of corruption haunting Zimbabwe did not escape Sally Mugabe. In the 1980s, through rumours, she was accused of having benefitted from the Willowgate scandal where senior government officials were buying cars at a low price from a government controlled car assembly and sold them at exorbitant prices. It is also indicated that at one point she was caught at the airport trying to smuggle an equivalent of one million United States dollars from Zimbabwe to Ghana. When confronted she indicated that it was her right to do so. Nonetheless, she was made to leave the money behind. Despite all this, she was accorded the highest honour at her death. She eventually became the first woman to be buried at the Heroes Acre, Zimbabwe's shrine where those deemed to have fought in the liberation struggle are buried. Hence, this was a way of recognising her political credentials both before and after Zimbabwe's independence.

Margaret Dongo: The Rebel

Margaret Dongo is an ex-combatant of the Zimbabwe liberation struggle. She joined the struggle in 1975 at the age of 15 in Mozambique where she trained as a guerrilla fighter as well as a medical assistant. Her liberation war name was Tichaona Muhondo. She says one of her aims for joining the struggle was to liberate women in Zimbabwe from the bondage of slavery imposed on them by patriarchal culture. She is on record saying that women were ill-treated in the liberation struggle. In her opinion, the truth about how women suffered during the struggle for independence has never been told. She often explains how the male combatants used to rape women with the assistance of women commanders. She indicates that women commanders would call young women combatants to a parade where the beautiful ones were then selected to offer sexual services to male commanders. After the war, she was the youngest member in the ZANU PF Central Committee. In her interview with Trevor Ncube (host of a programme titled 'In Conversation with Trevor which premiered on Youtube) on 8 August 2022, she narrated how male members in the Committee disregarded women. For example, she was at one time asked by one male member of the Committee to make tea for her. In other words, this male member saw himself as wielding more power over her to the extent that while they were attending a meeting in which they should have been equals, this male member thought it was his right to instruct her to perform the culturally defined roles for women, that is, making tea for the 'important men'. She said she refused and the male member was quick to label her as rebellious and uncouth. From her analysis, the anger of this member was misplaced because she was not there to make tea for anyone but to attend a party meeting. Such behaviour by male politicians exposes the gender power dynamics that exist in the political space in Zimbabwe. In the 1990s, she championed the cause of former freedom fighters who had been neglected by ZANU PF (Mlambo, 2005:21; see also Meredith, 2009:n.p).

Margaret Dongo was the first woman to openly challenge Robert Mugabe's rule. In the 1995 elections, she had lost the ZANU PF primary elections in Harare South to Vivian Mwashita, who was her close friend. She then chose to stand as an independent candidate. When elections were held, she lost the election. However, she contested the result in court and won the seat after a re-run. When asked by Trevor Ncube if she had contested because she had prior knowledge of how ZANU PF rigs elections, Dongo answered in the affirmative, but also added that some of the people

who had participated in the rigging provided evidence which was crucial for her case in court. She always mentions how proud she is that she is the first and only person to challenge vote rigging successfully in Zimbabwe. Meredith (2009) views Dongo's victory as a small one when compared to the oppressive machinery that Mugabe had created. However, from his analysis, it provided a new voice to speak out on behalf of the voiceless. When she got into Parliament, she chaired the Local Government Portfolio Committee and was known for her outspokenness. She often appeals to Mbuya Nehanda as her greatest inspiration and contests the view that in comparison to women, men make great leaders in society.

In 1999, as an independent parliamentarian, she became famous for calling all men in ZANU PF 'Mugabe's wives' because they feared to challenge him for the presidential post as well as reprimand him when he was wrong. In her interview with Trevor Ncube, she indicated that she now regrets saying this not because it disrespected Mugabe, but because it denigrates women. However, when located within the Shona cultural context, her statement is indicative of the way women are expected to agree and comply with the decisions of their husbands. In such a case, Dongo's allusion is not far from the truth. Hence, her rant made a lot of men in ZANU PF very uncomfortable to the extent that Solomon Mujuru threatened to shoot her. That day she was accompanied to her home by a motorcade as a safety measure by the speaker of parliament then. What she had said was taken as an insult which implied that the men were weak, subservient and dominated even sexually by Mugabe (Rutherford, 2019:633).

Joice Mujuru: The Guerrilla Woman Soldier Turned Villain

Joice Mujuru was born Joyce Runaida Mugari on 15 April 1955 in Mount Darwin, a district in Zimbabwe's Mashonaland Central Province. She joined the liberation struggle at the age of 18 in 1973 and was trained as a cadre in Lusaka, Zambia. Her Chimurenga name was Teurai Ropa (Spill Blood) She was married to Zimbabwe's first army general Solomon Mujuru, whose Chimurenga name was Rex Nhongo in 1977. She became the commander of the Chimoio camp in 1974 (Masiya & Maringira, 2017:11) and in 1979, she was elected the secretary of the Women's League with Sally Mugabe deputising her. She became the second woman to sit in the Central Committee of ZANU PF in Mozambique together with Sheba Tavarwisa. Hence out of 33 Central Committee posts, only two were given

to women. After the war, she was appointed a Minister of Women's Affairs and Community Development, the youngest one for that matter in Robert Mugabe's first cabinet. During her tenure in this portifolio, she is credited for putting in place legislation that was meant to empower women such as LAMA (1982) and others already discussed above. Thereafter, she held many other portifolios as government minister. In 2004, she was elevated to the post of Vice-President of ZANU PF and government, a post which she held until her expulsion in 2014. EverJoyce Win (2004) warned that the elevation of Joyce to the presidium was no cause to rejoice. She alleged that in 1998, at a Salvation Army women's meeting, Mujuru had asserted that there was no such a thing like equality between men and women and that those calling for it were failures in life. Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000) also alleged that Joice Mujuru castigated women who had chosen to advance women's cause through non-governmental organisations for not only doing nothing, but also working against the ZANU PF's Women's League. For Win (2004b), throughout her tenure in government, Joice Mujuru had not spoken once in favour of women. Her silence is evident especially during the Gukurahundi Massacres as well as post-2000 political violence in which women were the majority of victims. Win views Mujuru as having fitted very well within patriarchy both in her party and government. She argues, "*Mujuru murume pachake*" [Mujuru is a real man] she can stay with the boys. Christiansen (2007:88) views Joice Mujuru's elevation to the position of Vice President as Mugabe's way of dealing with [succession] struggles that surfaced in his political party. He also needed to pay attention to the restlessness that began to show in the Women's League on women's marginalisation from top leadership of the party. For example, at a women's conference held in December 1999, the women's league had demanded that they be part of the presidium failure of which they would boycott the ZANU PF congress. Mavis Chidzonga, who was a member of the league said "We are demanding that a position be given to a woman for every three positions that goes to a man in the party at all levels" (Machipisa, 1999, n.p). The women failed to succeed in their demands in 1999 and from Mavis Chidzonga's analysis, it was because men in the party did not support their idea. In fact, they were angry that women had made such a demand. She lamented that historically, women have been used to mobilise votes for the party, produce children and sing praise songs for the men. Despite their failure, Chidzonga warned the men in ZANU PF that they should expect more demands from the women because unlike the Women's League of the past, theirs now

had educated women who knew their rights. Hence, Mujuru's elevation needs to be seen as a way of pacifying the agitated women by Mugabe and was not a result of his conviction that gender equality was a necessity.

Before her being haunted out of ZANU PF, she was presented as a heroine who in 1974 had downed a British helicopter during combat. This narrative was changed in 2014 when she fell out of favour with Robert Mugabe as well as a faction which opposed her ascendancy to the president's post. This faction termed 'Lacoste' was led by Emmerson Mnangagwa but it used Grace Mugabe to engineer the expulsion of Joice Mujuru from ZANU PF. It was alleged that Mujuru herself led a faction commonly referred to as 'Gamatox'.

Hence, in 2014, when it became obvious that Joice Mujuru, one of the Vice Presidents to Robert Mugabe who was then the president of Zimbabwe was the clear successor, a plot was hatched to stop her. She was then accused of all sorts of things; from plotting to overthrow the President through witchcraft to prostitution and corruption. The state alleged that it had gathered evidence against Mujuru through surveillance. However, on closer analysis, one comes to the conclusion that the major reason for this was that she was a woman. Tendi (2016:208) has illuminated how the gendered nature of surveillance practices reinforces patriarchal national politics. Mugabe demanded to know why a woman (for that matter) wanted to succeed him (see Manyonganise, 2015). Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube (2015:129) argue that "the fact that the President said "for that matter..." betrays all the efforts his government [had] made in an effort to bring about gender equality in political participation." From Mugabe's perspective, it was inconceivable that a woman could fathom to become a state president. Mugabe's sentiments are viewed by Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube as suggesting that women should not aspire to be leaders. I have commented elsewhere that Mugabe's statement:

> ...seems to suggest that women are not human enough to warrant the highest office in the land. From a gendered perspective, the bastardisation of Mujuru's position has shown that a woman who dreams about becoming the president of Zimbabwe is, dangerous to patriarchy and if dangerous, then they are put in their place (Manyonganise, 2015:36).

For Mugabe, Mujuru was not qualified to be President. Mujuru was, therefore, subjected to verbal and emotional abuse and threats to actually harm her physically were made while Mugabe described her as too simplistic to be the President of Zimbabwe. As a result, fearing for her life,

she absconded the ZANU PF Politburo meeting that was held before the December 2014 Congress and she was eventually fired from the Party. For Maphosa, Tshuma and Ncube "this signified the end of the ZANU PF career of a woman who epitomised women's fledging political influence" (2015:149). It is important to note that the demise of Joice Mujuru was spearheaded by other women, Grace Mugabe and Oppah Muchinguri. Grace Mugabe was at the forefront though. This was used as an excuse by men in the various strata of social life and was seen as reinforcing the view that 'a woman's enemy is another woman'. What seemed to evade these men was that for any oppressive system to survive, it always recruits from the oppressed so that the oppressed become its mouthpiece. In other words, patriarchy was simply closing the door to any possibility of a woman leading the nation while hiding behind other women who were willing to be used as pawns in this political game. Mujuru's fall, however, is very telling of the gendered nature of politics in Zimbabwe. Nhongo-Simbanegavi (2000) makes a crucial observation that most women who made it to high political positions in ZANU PF were closely connected to male leaders in the party. Hence, Joice Mujuru's ascendancy to leadership has been credited to her husband, Solomon Mujuru. Tendi (2020) has dubbed Solomon Mujuru as the kingmaker in ZANU PF. With Solomon Mujuru around, it had become obvious that Joice Mujuru would become the next President of Zimbabwe. Hence, in order to weaken her prospects, Solomon Mujuru was 'eliminated' in a mysterious fire. This left Joice Mujuru vulnerable politically. While this analysis may be viewed as problematic as it presents women with no patriarchal support as weak and powerless, it reflects the true nature of the political space in Zimbabwe. Joyce's political career was destroyed within days. Although she later formed her own political party with those she was ousted, People First, it was heavily infiltrated by the Central Intelligence Operatives. She vied for the presidency in the 2018 elections, but did not win. She went under and has given up politics opting to concentrate on farming. Hence, to a large extent, her ouster killed the dream of having a woman as a president of Zimbabwe. It was a dream so near, yet so far.

Grace Mugabe: Husband Snatcher, Motor-Mouth and Loose Canon

Grace Mugabe was born Grace Ntombizodwa Marufu on 23 July 1965 in Benoni, South Africa. She hailed from Chikomba district in Mashonaland

East province of Zimbabwe. She was a secretary in Robert Mugabe's office and later became Mugabe's secret mistress. In 1990, she gave birth to a daughter whom they named Bona after Mugabe's mother who was highly regarded as the Mugabe matriarch. After a run-in with the media outlets that had broken the story of Robert and Grace Mugabe getting married secretly both traditionally and in a civil court, a wedding between the two was finally held in August of 1996. By then, Grace had two children, Bona and Robert Junior with Mugabe. The fact that Grace had accepted an intimate relationship with Robert Mugabe while Sally was alive earned her the nickname 'husband-snatcher'. She was perceived as Mugabe's 'small house' or more crudely '*hure*' (prostitute). As a result, the generality of Zimbabweans who sympathised with Sally did not have any respect for Grace. While not condoning what Grace Mugabe did, I also see her as a victim of patriarchy at the work place. It was common during those days for women to be sexually abused by their bosses if they wanted promotion or to keep their jobs. I find it possible that the '*tanga wandida syndrome*' (first love me) was deployed by Robert Mugabe leaving Grace with no option.[10] Unconfirmed narratives indicate that she was still married to her husband who was a member of the army, the late Stanley Goreraza with whom she had a son, Russell Goreraza. In order to pave the way for the marriage, Mugabe posted Stanley to a diplomatic post in China where he lived until Mugabe was removed from power in 2017. When he was interviewed by Dali Tambo in 2013, Robert Mugabe indicated that he was not attracted to Grace Mugabe. In order to fulfil his mother's desire to have grandchildren from him, he decided "to make love to her" because she was the one who was in close proximity to him. Such a description is insulting particularly to the persona of Grace Mugabe who in this case is projected as a child-making machine. Magaisa (2017) find the statement by Mugabe very ironic in that he views Grace as nomore than a baby making machine for him and a factory for the transmission of genes. What this implies is that if it was not Grace, it could have been any woman deemed to be close to him.

While Sally was cherished for her modesty, Grace Mugabe was loathed for her lavishness. Due to her perceived extravagance, she was nicknamed 'Gucci-Grace', 'First Shopper' and 'Dis-Grace' which implied her love for fashion labels while the rest of Zimbabweans languished in poverty. According to Meredith (2009:n.p):

[10] The practice is still rampant in Zimbabwe today.

> Grace gained a reputation for being interested in little other than shopping, clothes, and jewellery. She was a shallow woman, possessing none of Sally's vivaciousness or her real concern for charitable cause.

For the greater part of her marriage to Robert Mugabe, Grace lived a private life. She did not indulge herself in politics focusing mainly on bringing up their three children, Bona, Robert Junior and Chatunga Berllamine. However, in 2014, she entered into the political fray. It is largely thought that it was the old age of Mugabe that nudged her to enter into politics. For many Zimbabweans, the reason she got interested in politics was to protect her luxurious life and the riches she had looted from the citizens of Zimbabwe.

Cassim (2014) argues that Grace entered into politics with a bang and her entry was to change the face and trajectory of Zimbabwean politics. Once she got into politics, she started to attack Joice Mujuru, who was then the Vice President to her husband. She accused Mujuru of practising witchcraft against the Mugabe family. Furthermore, she was accused of extortion as well as immorality. In order to buttress this point, video 'evidence' was produced. At one rally, Grace called on Joice Mujuru to resign. At a rally in Bindura, Grace lambasted Mujuru for being '*Zimuroyi rekuDotito*' (the witch from Dotito) in reference to Mujuru's rural home as well as 'Comrade 10%' in reference to the accusation that she demanded 10% kickbacks from private companies. After the 2014 congress, Mugabe fired Joyce together with other ministers who were perceived to have been fighting in her corner. In July 2014, Grace was nominated to be the ZANU PF's Women's League chairperson. Magosvongwe (2020:137) observes that the expulsion of Mujuru from ZANU PF was well orchestrated to coincide with Grace Mugabe's ascendancy into ZANU PF's echelons of power as chairperson of the Women's League. She then went on the rampage, attacking everyone who was deemed to have aspirations to take over from Robert Mugabe. Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa replaced Mujuru as the second vice president of both the party and government. However, it was not long before Grace Mugabe started to attack him as well. She started the 'Meet the People' rallies where at every turn, she embarrassed Mnangagwa publicly. Due to her 'uncontrolled' mouth, she was nicknamed 'Motormouth and 'Loose Canon'. She hypocritically denounced factionalism in ZANU PF, yet she was supporting the Generation 40, popularly known as G40 faction. She further demanded that she be regarded as 'Amai' both in the party and the nation at large. It is important to note that unlike Sally who was regarded as a 'Mother of the

nation' by the people, Grace Mugabe demanded that she be accorded this title. She was aware that Zimbabweans within and without ZANU PF despised her as a 'husband snatcher' and would not naturally accord her that title in its truest sense. In order to entrench her authority within ZANU PF, she forcibly invited different groups of people to her Mazowe farm where she had established an orphanage and a school. Those that turned down the invitations or failed to show interest in her projects were vilified and publicly humiliated. It was not long before the slogan '*Munhu Wese kuna Amai*' (Everyone to the Mother) was formulated and Grace herself always stated that '*Ndini mai venyu*' (I am your mother). Buses from the Zimbabwe Passenger Company as well as party cars had Grace Mugabe's face emblazoned with this slogan. Biri (2020:149) makes an analysis of the slogan and argues that it carries multiple meanings. First, she says it reveals the battle between two dominant factions in ZANU PF namely, G40 and Lacoste. Second, the slogan needs to be seen as a protest and a challenge to the existing political order that has been built on oppressive gender norms. In Biri's analysis, the slogan can be understood as a "quest to re-engage women in politics that had been disengaged by the ushering in of colonialism and a reconfiguration of motherhood never imagined in post-colonial Zimbabwe" (2020:149). I perceive the slogan as revealing the inadequacies of her leadership. She failed to come up with a political identity that is free from her being a mother. Her political identity was closely linked to that of her husband. Hence, people who were fed up with her husband could not accept her political bid for the presidency.

'Cyclone Grace': Disruption of Zimbabwe's Political Waters

Grace Mugabe's entry into politics disrupted the political waters in Zimbabwe. As the 'cyclone' rampaged Zimbabwean politics, male politicians warned Mugabe to stop his wife. When Mugabe failed to restrain his wife, it was widely believed that he wanted to pave way for his wife to succeed him as the President of Zimbabwe. Jabulani Sibanda who was then the national chairperson of the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association denounced Robert Mugabe for trying to perform a bedroom coup on ZANU PF by propping his wife and declared that political leadership is not sexually transmitted. Her intensified attack on Mnangagwa earned her the nickname 'Cyclone Grace'. She had exceeded the point of no return. Hence, it became obvious that Grace was headed for the presidium post.

This rattled not only men in ZANU PF, but the generality of Zimbabweans as well. Hence, she became the subject of discussion in Zimbabwe. In the midst of the debate, Grace at one rally asked "They say I want to be President. Why not? Am I not Zimbabwean?" From a gender perspective, this is a critical question. It points to the genderedness of Zimbabwe' political space. Grace Mugabe casts a shadow on the restrictive perception of citizenship when it comes to women and political participation and leadership. She in a way is rejecting such narrow definitions of citizenship which are meant to contain women within prescribed spaces while denying them access in others. Grace Mugabe's question is a call for Zimbabwe to rethink its conceptualisation of citizenship when it comes to women`s political participation and leadership. In order to deride women in politics, the 2017 coup that deposed Robert Mugabe from power was premised on the argument that the coup leaders were trying to stop Mugabe from creating a family dynasty but moreso to stop Grace from becoming the president of Zimbabwe. For Mudiwa (2020) the code name of the coup 'Operation Restore Legacy' suggested not just an intervention in factional politics, but a restoration of male leadership in the party. Hence, from 2017 to date, Grace has been blamed for causing the downfall of her husband. Magosvongwe (2020:138) quotes one of the WhatsApp messages which was circulated when Mugabe was deposed from power. The message said:

> Grace Mugabe joined politics in November 2014, and immediately became ZANU PF's Women's League secretary. Exactly three years later in November 2017, ZANU PF fired her, and that marked the end of her three-year-old political career. Akangoti ga ga ga mupolitics (she was in politics briefly)... But within those three years, she had done what no other political veteran managed to do. She got VP Mujuru fired. She got VP Mnangagwa fired. She got her own husband, President Robert Mugabe fired, then she retired.

Other messages warned women not to interfere with their husbands' jobs (*kubasa kwababa hakuendwi, munodzingisa baba basa* (stay away from your husband's work place, you will cause him to be fired)). Biri (2020:158) critiques this statement and argues that it smacks of patriarchy and advances the assumption that the place of a woman is within the domestic space. However, to blame Grace for the succession mess caused by Mugabe is to absolve patriarchy of being incapable of doing wrong while placing the blame on women's laps. Such blame feeds directly into the narrative of a patriarchal society that for every wrong thing, women take the blame (Ta-

ruona, 2020:151). Grace Mugabe was blamed for having become too ambitious for her gender. In order to compete with Mujuru, she was alleged to have forced the University of Zimbabwe to award her a doctoral degree which earned her the title 'Dr Amai'. A critical analysis of the drama that played in Zimbabwe's political arena after Grace's entry into politics indicates the vulnerability of women in this space. Definitely, Grace would not have done this without Robert Mugabe's approval. He was the president and husband to Grace. Taruona (2020:151) argues that:

> Mugabe was the beneficiary of his second wife's public performances which could not happen without his endorsement. His silence while she attacked his comrades was a tactical strategy to eliminate them and so continue unchallenged as party leader.

She was made the public mouthpiece of a patriarchy at war resulting in her character being shredded in all media as well as private and public discussions. I have elsewhere analysed an article that was published by the Guardian newspaper in 2015. I highlighted that in December 2015, the Guardian newspaper wrote that what was horrifying many in Zimbabwe was the possibility of a perpetuation of the Mugabe dynasty. It also noted that the possibility for Zimbabwe's first female President, and only the fourth in Africa does not in any way inspire the bulk of the people. Simba Makoni was interviewed by a journalist from the Guardian and had this to say about Grace Mugabe:

> She is completely crude and rough. She behaves like a gangstress. She is quite demeaning of motherhood. She is destroying decent womanhood.

He added:

> President Grace Mugabe is not only possible, she is likely. But she is worse news than Robert Mugabe because at least he has the intellectual capacity to comprehend things and disregard them. Grace has no capacity so she will be very mechanised.

Another unnamed woman interviewed said:

> I think she is quite toxic. She comes across as vapid and totally uncouth without a bit of finesse about her. She's got no political nous at all. Robert Mugabe has been successful because he keeps his enemies close to him; she throws them away.

Simba Makoni and the nameless woman need to be understood as representing the thought patterns of many people in Zimbabwe. While Makoni saw the prospect of Grace Mugabe becoming the President of the Republic, he took it upon himself to caution the people of Zimbabwe about the

perils of such a presidency. From his point of view, if people had grumbled about Robert Mugabe's dictatorship, it was going to be worse under Grace because she did not have the intellectual capacity to be in such a position. Pitting women's intellect against that of men is not new and it has been used to sideline women in Zimbabwean political space for too long mainly because of what the anonymous woman calls absence of 'political nous'. Makoni also sees Grace's entry into politics and her aspirations to become national president as belittling to motherhood as well as rescinding 'decent' womanhood. He is trying to take us back to the social constructions of who a good woman is: one who is passive, submissive, quiet, unambitious etc. By comparing Grace to Robert Mugabe, the two interviewees have succeeded in putting across the general sentiment that women should always live in men's shadows when it comes to politics. While for Mugabe, Joice Mujuru was too unsophisticated, for Simba Makoni, Grace was stupid. Such imageries are very telling because they appropriately capture the way women's political participation has been constructed in Zimbabwe which obviously finds its roots within most religious institutions (Manyonganise, forthcoming). It is, therefore, not surprising that Grace was compared to the biblical Jezebel (1 Kings 21) (Magosvongwe, 2020:137). It was unfortunate, though, that Grace Mugabe was used to fight and destroy other women's political careers on behalf of the men who were behind her. However, after paving the way for the powerful men like Mnangagwa, she also suffered the same fate. Patriarchy used and dumped her. Her character unsettled patriarchy. Biri (2020:155) avers that Grace's "bragging was read as indecency and lack of submission, which is conceived as a mark of motherhood whether in private or in the public sphere." Grace dared to challenge patriarchy publicly despite the consequences. From Biri's analysis:

> The traditional socialisation of subservient femininities was challenged by Grace Mugabe. She not only stepped into the domain configured as a space for men that requires prowess and stamina, but also challenged both men and women and called them to obedience and subservience (2020:156).

This generally made her to be resented as one who was too talkative, mad and immoral among other derogatory terms. In the opinions of the generality of Zimbabweans, her disappearance from the political arena after the political fall of her husband serves to show that she was not her own person. Biri (2020) makes a critical analysis of what can be deciphered from Grace Mugabe's entry into politics in Zimbabwe. First, she notes that the negative labels that were given to Grace are a sign of a society that

is not ready for a robust challenge against patriarchy and a new configuration of motherhood. This confirmed that Zimbabwe is not ready for female leadership. Second, Zimbabwean society wants us to regard her entry as disastrous because she stepped into a male dominated space and imposed herself on male constructed roles. Third, Grace Mugabe failed to show women's competence in political leadership and to prove that it is possible for women to assume multiple identities that are not necessarily restricted to motherhood. Such perceptions were echoed by people who were interviewed by Brown (2017). Darliton Tsikada indicated that Grace Mugabe proved that "women have got a lack of mind" hence no woman can lead Zimbabwe. Margaret Dongo was afraid that all women would be likened to Grace Mugabe which would be an unfortunate comparison.

Thokozani Khupe: The Loser

Thokozani Khupe was born on 18 November 1963. Her political activities started in the labour movement. For example, in 1987, she was an official in the Zimbabwe Amalgamated Railway Union (ZARU). She was then elected as the secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions' Women's Advisory Council and lateralso became a member of the General Council. When the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed in 1999, she was one of the women seconded to the party together with Paurina Mpariwa and Kumbirai Kudenga by the labour movement. Hence, she played a key role during the formation of the formidable opposition party in Zimbabwe. She was then elected as the National Executive member taking care of the Transport, Logistics and Welfare portifolio. In 2000 and 2005, as an MDC member, she became the Member of Parliament (MP) for Makokoba constituency in Bulawayo. As an MP, she became a member of various committees. The MDC split in 2008 forming two parties namely MDC-T led by Morgan Tsvangirai and MDC-N led by Welshman Ncube. Khupe chose to go to the MDC-T and in 2008, she beat Ncube for the Makokoba constituency. When the Government of National Unity was formed in 2009, she became the deputy Prime Minister until its dissolution in 2013. In 2005, she was elected the Deputy President of the MDC-T, a post which she retained in 2014. Before the death of Morgan Tsvangirai, rumours swelled that he had fallen out with Khupe. It was widely believed that Tsvangirai's elevation of Nelson Chamisa to be the third Vice President was an indication that he had chosen him as his suc-

cessor in the event of his death. Hence, soon after Tsvangirai's death, despite Khupe being the rightful successor according to the MDC-T constitution, Chamisa wrestled the post from her. At Morgan Tsvangirai's funeral wake, she was beaten by MDC-T youths. The youths even attempted to burn the hut in which she had hid. Makonye (2021:38) observes that Khupe became vulnerable to attacks by MDC thugs and hooligans assaulting her as a hapless woman trying to realise her self-actualisation as leader of the opposition in Zimbabwe. The conflict between Chamisa and Khupe led to another split with Khupe retaining the MDC-T party while Chamisa led the MDC-Alliance. Khupe contested the presidential elections in 2018 and managed to get 45626 votes while Chamisa got 2 147437 votes (ZEC, 2018). After the 2018 elections, Khupe was seen to be too close to ZANU PF. She joined the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD) which was put in place by ZANU PF as a platform where different political parties would come together to dialogue on Zimbabwe's issues. She was seen a couple of times in the company of Mnangagwa. At one point, she visited Mnangagwa in the company of other politicians to see the various projects at Mnangagwa's farm. She fed fish at the farm and this was interpreted to mean that she was not an opposition leader but a ZANU PF project which earned her the name ThokoZANU.

During her tenure as the leader of the MDC-T, she recalled MPs who were elected under the banner of the MDC Alliance claiming that they were members of her party. Her argument stemmed from the fact that the MPs had been seconded to the alliance by MDC-T. Questions were raised why she had contested as an MDC-T presidential candidate if her party was also a member of the alliance. With the assistance of the courts as well as other members who had defected from the Alliance back to MDC-T, such as Douglas Mwonzora and Morgan Komichi, she took the MDC-T headquarters and MPs who felt their positions threatened also defected to her party. While she was basking in the glory of having weakened Chamisa and his party, Douglas Mwonzora was plotting to become the President of the party that she led. In December 2020, at an MDC-T congress, Douglas Mwonzora was 'voted' the President of the party. When Khupe realised how she had been cheated and protested the electoral process, she was beaten by Mwonzora's supporters. No one paid attention to her protests. She was later given the post of vice president of the MDC-T. In 2022, another conflict arose between Mwonzora and Khupe when Mwonzora decided to take away the MDC Alliance name from Chamisa in order to contest in the 26 March 2022 by-elections. The by-elections were a result of

the recalls of MDC Alliance MPs by Khupe. By adopting the MDC Alliance name, Mwonzora was accused by Khupe of having fired himself from the MDC-T party. This conflict resulted in the two firing each other from the party. Khupe, while still maintaining that she was the leader of the MDC-T party later announced that she was joining Chamisa's party (by then Chamisa had changed the name of his party to Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC)). When she was finally recalled from Parliament by Mwonzora, she played the gender and ethnic card. For her, she was in this political predicament because she was not only a woman but a Ndebele as well. Throughout all her political struggles, she was branded a prostitute. After her expulsion from parliament, she embarked on a campaign which she called the 'Beat the pot campaign'. I requested her to comment on the significance of this campaign and she explained:

> The Beat the pot campaign signifies the anger of women as a result of the treatment they are getting from men particularly those in power. Women are saying the Executive, the legislature and the judiciary must stop discriminating against women based on my experience because as women we are being suffocated and we can't breathe.[11]

In this response, Khupe attempts to capture the lived realities of women in politics. She aptly captures the fact that all the arms of government, that is, the Executive, legislature and the judiciary work against women's participation in politics. This may be due to the fact that all of them are dominated by men. Her use of metaphors of suffocation are indicative of how the political space in Zimbabwe does not provide women with comfortable spaces for participation. Hence, women who dare to enter into such space run the risk of their breath being drained to the point of suffocation or even death.

Khupe's allegation that she had been recalled because of her gender received negative reactions from Zimbabwe. The late political commentator, Alex Magaisa on his Twitter handle said:

> This is funny. Khupe who got into Parliament after the recall of another MP is unhappy that she's being recalled? The same person who took the place of another woman is complaining of discrimination against women because she has been recalled? (02/02/2022).

[11] This is an allusion to the way George Floyd, a black man who was killed by a white policeman in the United States of America in May 2020.

Another person by the name Tinashe MBE on Twitter said:

> Wait, Dr Thokozani Khupe is saying her being recalled from Parliament is somehow because she is a woman. Mmmmmm, I stand to be guided but let's not abuse this whole issue of 'gender'. The recall is purely on the basis of politics not the other issue she is now bringing up (02/02/2022).

Yet another said:

> If she had a shred of respect, she would retire from active politics, unprincipled woman! She has embarrassed my whole gender and no sane woman would claim her as a champion of our causes. Running to the UN, Please sit yourself down (Rutendo Munyaka, Twitter, 02/02/2022).

In addition, Melody Chakatsva (who is suspected to be Nick Mangwana, the government's communication and publicity secretary) said:

> Politics is a specialised field. Besides brute force, you also have to be a strategic thinker and sometimes damn lucky. @Dr Thoko Khupe has neither. She might have earned credits for being brave during the Mugabe years. But it ends there. My advice to her is to know when to quit (02/02/2022).

All the above comments are touching on Khupe's character as a politician. She is depicted as one who misuse the gender card when it suits her. She is also characterised as one who lacks political astuteness and the only way out for her is to quit politics.

Despite the above comments, Thokozani Khupe's political journey warrants a gender analysis. She was tricked by patriarchy in more ways than one. For example, when it became apparent that in the event of Morgan Tsvangirai's death, she was going to be the MDC-T acting president, Tsvangirai appointed two unelected vice presidents in disregard of the party's constitution. He possibly secretly anointed his preferred successor, judging by the letter which was produced after his death. Hence, the violence that she suffered soon after Tsvangirai's demise was resistance against her ascendancy to the highest office in the party. Despite her insistence on following the party's constitution, she lost the battle. As a woman, she lived in Tsvangirai's shadow for too long to the extent that she failed to read the genderedness of politics in Zimbabwe regardless of political affiliation. She was only important in so far as she could play that supportive role to Tsvangirai. Mwonzora and Hodzi (2021:6) attribute Chamisa's success to grabbing power from Khupe as a result of cunningness, skill and grand scheming. It points to the fact that Khupe lacked these and her gender cannot be removed from this failure. In trying to exercise her agency, she fell victim to the whims of both ZANU PF and

Douglas Mwonzora. ZANU PF warmed up to Khupe because it wanted to use her to destroy the MDC as a political brand. Khupe might have lacked the courage to go the distance required by ZANU PF. Hence, it brought in Mwonzora. To a certain extent, Khupe validates the traditional notion that outside of patriarchal support, women cannot make it in politics. She failed to sculpt her own identity as a powerful woman in politics. What makes her case a complicated one is that she had recalled other women some of whom were Ndebele from parliament. A director of a women's organisation in Harare enunciated Khupe's dilemma very well. In her analysis, Khupe wanted to 'mother' both men and women in her party by playing peacemaker. She argued:

> Khupe took a maternalistic role. She wanted to be 'Amai veparty' (party's mother). In politics you can't play 'mother hen'. You need to be a Margaret Thatcher 'Iron Lady'.

In her analysis, Khupe failed to read that in politics success comes not by following the rules of the game, but by going against those rules when necessary. This raises critical questions about the deployment of motherhood in the political space. By deploying motherhood, Khupe exposed her weaknesses which her opponents were quick to exploit to their advantage. For example, this director revealed that in the first case, when Khupe failed to agree with Chamisa on the way forward after Tsvangirai's death, she sought to follow the MDC-T constitution and rectify any anomalies. However, Chamisa went for the jugular and expelled her from the party while at the same time mobilising the party structures against her. In the second case, when Khupe and Mwonzora were at each other's throat, Khupe wrote to the speaker of parliament asking him to allow them to sort their issues as a party. However, when Mwonzora wrote to the same speaker, he gave him instructions to recall Khupe from parliament. Hence, from this director's point of view, women who want to make it in politics need to play men at their own game. Khupe herself made an analysis of how patriarchy was at the the centre of her expulsion from Parliament. For example, when the MDC split in 2005, Parliament recognised both formations. However, in 2022, Parliament chose one formation over another, Khupe argued:

> Two men split in 2005 and they were allowed to co-exist by Parliament…A woman and a men split in 2022…the speaker of Parliament then decides to favour Douglas Mwonzora over me without even considering calling both parties to the table for discussion. Truly speaking, this is glaring evidence of inequalities, discrimination and victimisation.

In this regard, Khupe felt that a male Speaker of Parliament chose to support another man in the fight between a woman and a man.

Furthermore, it was difficult for women to feel sorry for Khupe or for the parliamentary women's caucus to speak on her behalf because she had also victimised other women.The director referred to above revealed that during her dalliance with ZANU PF, she had direct access to both the President of ZANU PF and government as well as the speaker of Parliament. However, once her usefulness was over and she was recalled from Parliament, that access was closed. For this director, it is beyond comprehension, why Khupe allowed herself to be used to this extent. However, this should not be very surprising in a society with deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs and practices. She became a victim of a society that objectifies women and dumps them once their worth is deemed over. The 'Beat the pot campaign' which she initiated was criticised for furthering the sociocultural construction of women's space being in the kitchen. The symbolism of kitchen utensils were seen as entrenching the 'housefication' of women. Many people wondered why she did not use this campaign to show that women too can successfully participate in the public space through honking car horns as men do. Beating pots was seen as depicting women as weak since the noise of beating pots itself is not strong enough to disturb or frighten patriarchy. Hence, her rejoining Chamisa's party is seen as admission that she lost to patriarchy and is willing to make peace with it by subordinating herself to serve it.

Auxillia Munangagwa: The Pretentious and Corrupt First Lady

Auxillia Mnangagwa was born Auxillia Kutyauripo on 25 March 1963. In 1981, she worked for the Ministry of Manpower and Development. In 1982, she joined politics and was able to get into the politburo in 1992. She married Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa in 1984 as his third wife. She was by then working for the Central Intelligence Organisation. After Mnangagwa became the vice president, Auxillia became the MP for Chirumanzi-Zibagwe constituency, a role she left after becoming the first lady of Zimbabwe. Soon after the 2018 elections, Auxillia Mnangagwa started to present herself as a philanthropic person engaging in charity work. In order to present herself as a down to earth woman, she was published in government linked media cooking traditional dishes with rural women and at times using cow dung as polish in rural homes. She founded the

'Angel of Hope' Foundation and has partnered with a number of institutions of higher learning to engage with communities in various areas. Many scholars have pointed out the fact that Auxillia seems to desire to reinvent the concept of 'Mother of the Nation'. For example, Saidi (2018:n.p) argues:

> The media, extensively reported her philanthropic gestures; and images of her visits to public hospitals, children and old people's homes, female prisons. In her visits to children and old people's homes for instance, she donated food items and played with the children with some infants clung to her back in the traditional *Amai* fashion.

Mudiwa (2020) views Auxillia Mnangagwa's theatrics as suffused with gender politics as she labours to present herself as a traditional wife in contrast to Grace Mugabe. In Mudiwa's analysis, she goes to great lengths to prove that she does not intend to usurp her husband's power, but seeks to restrict herself to traditional duties of the first lady. However, like Grace Mugabe, Auxillia Mnangagwa is viewed as only one of Mnangagwa's many mistresses with whom she had children. For example, when the Herald newspaper reported that Auxillia had called for three days of national prayer and fasting against COVID-19, Jonathan Moyo (former Minister in Mugabe's government) chided "Auxillia Mnangagwa is not the mother of the nation, but one of Mnangagwa's wives" (Jonathan Moyo Twitter, 21 January 2020). Grace Mugabe had described Emmerson Mnangagwa as a womaniser during her 'Meet the People' rallies'. For many in Zimbabwe, Auxillia was only able to be publicly acknowledged as Mnangagwa's 'official' wife because of her CIO background and also because Mnangagwa wanted to present himself as a family man without which his grip on the ZANU PF party and government would be weak. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the two ceased to live as husband and wife a long time ago and have only agreed to present a united face in public mainly for political mileage. Reports of such a kind are peddled because Zimbabwean society treasures a woman who is known to perform her wifely duties well. While Auxillia desires to present herself as different from Grace Mugabe, the independent media has cautioned that she may be going down Grace's route if not worse. For example, in July 2019, in a leaked audio, she was heard shouting to a Military Intelligence Operative, Samson Murombo, in which she alleged that he was monitoring her movements. She charged:

> Just tell me what you want from me Murombo because you cannot spy on me. It is almost a year and I have been quiet. Why are you spying on me?

> This matter will not rest. I am coming to your office, it is better you pull out your gun and shoot me (Munhende, 2019).

Her rants were seen as pre-empting a possible coup on her husband by the military. Hence, the general public seem to think that she is pretentious and lacks credibility as a 'Mother of the Nation'. Mnangagwa himself warned her wife not to follow in Grace Mugabe's footprints. Ncube, Nyambi and Mangena (2022) view this warning as indicating that "Mnangagwa [imagines] politics as a space for men and one that his wife was not expected to engage in." Hence, Auxillia needs to avoid being too ambitious unless if she wants to suffer the same political fate that befell Grace Mugabe.

Auxillia has also been presented in the media as corrupt. She was embroiled in the COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and drugs scandal. When this scandal happened, she was in control of Natpharm (a pharmaceutical company controlled by the government), which was mandated with the procurement of medical supplies for the pandemic. The company embroiled in this scandal, Drax, had Delish Nguwaya as its frontman. Journalists were able to link Nguwaya to Auxillia and her sons. This was despite the fact that they had all refused to acknowledge this relationship. She was also named by the Daily Maverick as part of a cartel that smuggles gold out of Zimbabwe (Ford, 2021). A cursory view of comments on Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp messages show that Zimbabweans in general do not take her socio-political activities seriously. They accuse her of presenting a false image of her real self. Like Grace Mugabe, she has been accused of crossing boundaries to interfere in spaces where her authority should not be.

The MDC Trio: The Abduction Fakers

The MDC Trio represent the young women politicians in Zimbabwe. The trio comprise Joana Mamombe, Netsai Marova and Cecilia Chimbiri. The term 'The MDC Trio' refers to these three young women politicians who belonged to the Movement Democratic Change Alliance (MDC Alliance) before its evolvement to the current Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC). It came about when the three were part of a group of youths who demonstrated against the government in 2020 when the country was on COVID-19 lockdown. The intention of the demonstration was to bring to the attention of the authorities how they had failed to provide safety nets to the

vulnerable during the lockdown (Mangena, 2021:87). They were then arrested, abducted and sexually assaulted possibly by state agents. In order to understand their experience, there is need to examine their political activities. Of the three, Joana Mamombe was the most famous. She was born Joana Ruvimbo Mamombe on 18 June 1993. She joined politics as a student leader at Chinhoyi University of Technology. In 2018, she contested in the MDC-A primary elections for the Harare West constituency against Jessie Majome. In an interview with Zigomo (2022) she indicated how she not only faced resistance from men within the party but older women as well. Both felt threatened by her entry into party and national politics. Despite the hurdles, she won both the primary and the contest against other contestants in the national elections. She became the youngest MP in the whole of Zimbabwe. While she acknowledges the challenges of patriarchy as a hindrance for young women in politics, she also highlights the challenges that older women pose. In her interview with Zigomo, she raises pertinent questions about women competing against each other. She brings to the fore challenges of generational differences and expectations. Zigomo (2022:11) views Mamombe as a victim of Shona culture which calls on elders to be revered, respected and honoured. In Shona culture, it is a taboo to challenge elders who are considered to be more competent than the young. In Zigomo's analysis, "in politics, age-associated norms continue to be instrumentalised to limit the advancement of highly qualified young women into higher levels of leadership within party structures" (2022:11). For her, the intersection of gender, age and cultural norms present significant barriers for younger women in politics. This, however, is not applied when it comes to younger men in politics. Some Zimbabweans reject the leadership of Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa on account that he is old and prefer Nelson Chamisa because he is young. Chamisa himself is known for declaring that 'the future is young', but maybe for the men and not women.

Despite the fact that Joana and her friends were abducted and sexually assaulted by suspected security agents, the police arrested them for faking the abduction and torture as well as violating lockdown regulations. They have been jailed several times for various allegations. The question that arises is why the state is so fearful of young women politicians? It may be that young political activists appeal more to the youth in Zimbabwe. When discussing Mbuya Nehanda, I alluded to some of the reasons why young and vibrant women are threatening to patriarchy. In Zimbabwe, women constitute about 52 percent of the whole population. It follows that young

women are in the majority when compared to young men. I have argued elsewhere that the way Joana Mamombe, Netsai Marova and Cecilia Chimbiri have been treated by the state is indicative of how the political space in Zimbabwe is gendered. My argument is premised on the fact that when the demonstration for which they were arrested took place, both young women and men were present. It then boggles the mind why only these three were arrested, later abducted and sexually assaulted. Mangena (2021) analyses the arrest, abduction and sexual assault of these three young women by the state. She notes how the demonstration itself shows the young women's political agency. Despite the fact that women in Zimbabwe are placed at the margins of political participation, the three young women moved from the margins to become the centre of the demonstration. The physical and symbolic violence that ensued reveals the way political violence is masculinised in Zimbabwe. It was men who were used to punish the three. The state in its masculinised form chose to misrepresent the facts and alleged that the stated experiences of the three were falsified. Mangena (2021:90) decries the fact that the state chose to treat the three as criminals and not survivors of violence. Tony Reeler quoted by Natasha Joseph (2020:48), commenting on the three young women's persecution avers that "the attack on women, especially involving sexual violence served as a warning to women" [and] it reinforces ZANU PF's patriarchal politics.

Throughout their incarceration, the MDC Trio, have gone through various forms of violence including verbal violence (see Mangena, 2021). Mangena (2021:94) argues that this is meant to confine young women in the private space of the home so that they do not become troublesome in the political space. When Joana Mamombe sought to delay her prosecution due to mental health challenges caused by the experiences she went through when they were abducted, the state first refused saying she was in good health and could stand trial. When a mental health doctor (selected by the state) confirmed that she was not in a good mental state and that she could not stand trial in that condition, the state then moved on to demand that she be recalled from parliament on grounds of mental health. This clearly shows that Joana and her friends are being punished for their political activities and nothing else. The masculinised state wants to remove them from a space which it deems 'masculine'. Scholarship on gender and COVID-19 have noted how the pandemic has been weaponised by the state leading to shrinking democratic space especially for women (see Mangena, 2021; Mohee, 2021; Manyonganise, 2022). The

sexual and physical abuse of young women in politics point to the way their bodies become sites of struggle for women's exclusion from politics.

Fadzai Mahere: Nyembesi

Fadzai Mahere was born on 30 July 1985. She is a lawyer and currently the Citizens Coalition for Change spokesperson. Her entry into active politics is not clearly known serve that she was very outspoken during the '#ThisFlag' movement which was championed by Evan Mawarire in 2016. She protested the introduction of bond notes[12] by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe. In 2018, she contested the Mount Pleasant parliamentary seat as an independent and lost to an MDC Alliance candidate, Samuel Banda. She joined the MDC Alliance in June 2019 where she became the secretary for education but was later moved to the communication and publicity department where she became the party's spokesperson. She assumed the position with vigour giving life to a department that appeared to have been in slumber. This frightened ZANU PF which then started to give her names such as 'Nyembesi'. On 26 June 2020, George Charamba (the Presidential spokesperson) who by then was known by the moniker, Jamwanda 2 on twitter referred to Fadzai as 'Nyembesi'. Fadzai then protested arguing that George Charamba had used the term to refer to her as a *hure* (prostitute). The term itself is Ndebele and it means 'tears'. Hence, George Charamba refuted Mahere's claims that he had used the name in relation to Mahere's sexual character. For Mahere, the use of the term by Jamwanda revealed his misogynistic and toxic attitude towards women. Mahere has tried to make use of online media to push back patriarchal resistance to her political activities. However, Ncube (2020) notes that even in the virtual space, women politicians have also faced sexist and misogynistic harassment by men. In 2022, she had a fall out with Jonathan Moyo (former minister in Mugabe's government) and Edmund Kudzayi (former Zimbabwe papers editor appointed then by Jonathan Moyo). The two accused Mahere of being a home wrecker alleging that she had caused the collapse of a businessman's marriage. Fadzai Mahere sued Kudzayi for US100000. The case is still pending. Allegations of this nature are not new within Zimbabwe's political space. They are meant to tarnish

[12] Bond notes refer to the currency which was introduced in Zimbabwe in 2016 when the US dollar became scarce. The government claimed that this currency had the same value with the US dollar. However, this was proved to be untrue as time went on.

the image of women political activists considering that Zimbabwe as a patriarchal society places great importance to women's sexual dignity. The same expectation is not put on men politicians. Grace Kwinjeh (2022), a former MDC-T political activist, called the attacks on Mahere by Moyo and Kudzayi diabolic and unfortunate, but she also noted that this is a result of a deeply entrenched patriarchal society in which powerful women who have a voice suffer incredible attacks in order to cow them to silence.

'The Political Space is a Jungle': Voices from Zimbabwean Women Politicians

Theorising the political space in Zimbabwe as a jungle points us to how concepts of power are deployed in ways that disenfranchise women. The use of the 'jungle' as metaphor help us to understand that in politics, it is the fittest who survive, otherwise the weak are devoured in whatever way possible. Lung (2018:2) argues that metaphors "are not just a means of communication, but weapons that can be used to project power." From her point of view, they help us to communicate and clarify complex ideas and processes. According to Kendall and Kendall (1993:154):

> The jungle is thick with chaos. There is an overriding perception of danger and being imperilled at every turn...Those stranded in the jungle metaphor are constantly on the look out for what may be the next danger to befall them.

In order to understand the experiences of women politicians in Zimbabwe, I sought the views of some of them.[13] My questions to these women sought to find the following: (i) their positions within their political parties and/or government; (ii) their challenges in the political space; (iii) whether religion has any role in informing their experiences; (iv) what they think should be done to make women comfortable in political participation. The women politicians were coded WP1 to WP5. These women hold various posts in their political parties. WP1 is a civil servant who said she is not allowed to declare her political interests, but she actively participates in the political activities of ZANU PF in Wedza. WP2 is councillor

[13] It was not easy to access the women politicians. I got in touch with quite a number, but only a few granted me permission to interview them. The same goes for Women's organisations dealing with women in politics. It is my fervent hope that the few that were interviewed offer us a glimpse of what women go through in the political space in Zimbabwe.

in Bindura under the former MDC Alliance now CCC. WP3 is secretary general of the MDC-T now MDC Alliance under Douglas Mwonzora. In her tenure as member of the MDC under Tsvangirai, she was an MP for Mufakose in 2000 and 2005. In 2009 she was appointed the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare. During the conflict between Chamisa and Khupe, she stayed with Chamisa for a while before she joined Khupe's MDC-T. WP4 purports that she is the current president of the MDC-T.[14] WP5 is a provincial administrator for CCC in Mashonaland Central and lives in Bindura. Her role requires her to administer the political affairs of the party in the province. All the women politicians depicted the Zimbabwean political space as a jungle where only the fittest can survive. Various themes came out of my interviews with these women. I proceed to present these below.

'Whores and Witches': The Sexualisation and Demonisation of Women in Politics in Zimbabwe

The sexualisation of women in politics is not unique to women politicians in Zimbabwe. Globally, women in politics have suffered from being objectified as sexual objects within the political space. This includes women in countries that are often regarded as developed and progressive. Funk and Coker (2016) note the prevalence of women's objectification and sexualisation in the United States of America's political space. A book edited by Iwanaga (2008) focuses on obstacles and challenges for women's political participation in Asia. In Africa, the challenge of women in politics' sexualisation is rampant. Focus on sub-Saharan Africa shows that the practices in noted in all regions, that is, West, East, North and Southern Africa. Hence, Zimbabwe is no exception. As such, all the women politicians alluded to the fact that they are perceived as prostitutes by society in general as well as the men in politics. For example, WP3 said that women who make it in politics "*vanonzi ipfambi uye kuti vanenge vapinzwa nevarume*" (are said to be prostitutes or that their entry was enabled by men, *sic*). What this implies is that women on their own cannot make it in politics. In an opinion piece on 15 March 2022, Fadzai Mahere narrated her

[14] It is difficult to hide the identity of this woman politician. I have already dealt with this woman's political activities on selected women politicians. I do not wish to repeat what I have already dealt with.

experiences as a young woman in politics. She explained that she has experienced prejudice as audiences ask about her marital status instead of her policies. She said "I am told I should get married and have children." Mahere's experiences are embedded within a Shona society whose culture accords respectability to women who are not only married but have children as well. Hence, women in politics are not spared from this expectation. Mahere is not the only one to experience this sexualisation. Joana Mamombe was accused of being Nelson Chamisa's 'side-chick'. When Khupe fell out with Chamisa, she was labelled a prostitute. During her good relationship with ZANU PF, she was referred to as 'Mnangagwa's prostitute'. Grace Mugabe was called a prostitute, not only '*hure raMugabe*' (Mugabe's prostitute), but rumours were circulated that she had had sexual relationships with men in both politics and business named above. Ncube (2020:29) argues that Grace became a whore in the public imagination the moment she decided to decouple from her husband and present herself as an independent and active political agent. At the height of her political rallies, she was mocked for having been suffering from sex deprivation since Mugabe was advanced in age and was viewed as having been failing to satisfy Grace sexually. On social media, Zimbabweans suggested Grace's viciousness could be dealt with if she could be given a young man to have sex with. Such suggestions are never made when men behave in the same way. During the coup, placards were raised with declarations such as '*hatitongwe nehure*' (we cannot be ruled over by a prostitute) and 'leadership is not sexually transmitted'. Commenting on the sexualisation of Grace Mugabe, Magaisa (2017) observes that it is the experience that most women politicians go through within the Zimbabwean political space. In his analysis, sex is deployed within the political space as a tool of domination, control and discipline of women. He was appalled by the fact that the same is not said of male politicians who might have done worse things than Grace Mugabe. Joice Mujuru was also called a prostitute and a witch when she was accused of trying to remove Mugabe from power. While before this, she was respected for being 'Amai Mujuru', this respect vanished in thin air when she threatened patriarchy. She had to be cast in bad light of being immoral and unworthy of being a mother. Thus, Ncube (2020:26) is correct when he argues that women in Zimbabwe are projected in diametrically opposed frames. For example, he notes that when their roles suit patriarchal dictates, they are referred to as 'mothers', but once they seek to foist themselves as active political subjects and destabilise male-domination, they are called 'whores' or 'witches'. As

noted by Geisler (2004:173) politically ambitious and outspoken women politicians [are] ridiculed, taunted as prostitutes and constantly questioned about their abilities to cope with their roles as politicians, wives and mothers. The 'prostitute' label functions to limit women's participation and ascendance within political institutions (Mudiwa, 2020). Hence, for Magaisa (2017), the sexualisation of women in politics needs to be understood as an instrument and assertion of masculinity and power over women. Chitando (2020:11) concurs with Magaisa and argues that:

> While it is true that Grace Mugabe's behaviour was reckless and bordered on the insane, it is difficult to imagine such a courageous and ambitious young woman fitting comfortably in the highly patriarchal Zimbabwean political environment where women continue to struggle for a political voice.

For Ncube (2020:29) the sexualisation of Grace Mugabe shows the fact that women and men in Zimbabwean politics are not held to the same moral standards, if anything they are expected to safeguard and maintain a certain level of respectability and domesticity. Hence, for him, the 2017 coup was meant to put Grace Mugabe in her rightful place, away from the public sphere and politics. Ncube (2020:29) further avers that the military intervention was nothing but a "defence of phallocracy and patriarchy which had been defied by a woman who knew not [that] her rightful place was in silent domesticity and being content with the ornamental object a [poor] old man." Ncube outlines the genderedness of space in Zimbabwean society in general and the Shona in particular. In a discursive analysis of gender and politics, Krook (2017:74) posits that "societies around the world have associated men with the 'public sphere' of politics and the economy and women with the 'private sphere' of home and family." Hence, for her, women are interlopers in the "male" space of politics, giving rise to various forms of hostility toward female leaders. In this case, the sexualisation of women politicians in Zimbabwe serves as reinforcement of spatial inequalities in a patriarchal state. Ncube (2020) views this sexualisation as speaking to the manner in which women politicians are framed within a patriarchal gaze which disregards their leadership qualities and potential, [but] instead objectifies them along gender lines. As such, Grace Mugabe needed to be controlled because she was becoming too powerful (Magaisa, 2017) particularly for the men in ZANU PF who began to suffer from 'castration anxiety' (Moore, 2018). Sakhile Sifelani-Ngoma, the then director of WIPSU argued that the push back against

Grace [was] really a pushback against women in the public affairs of Zimbabwe (Brown, 2017). Commenting on patriarchy in ZANU PF, Geisler (2004:173) explains how women have to deal with powerful male gatekeepers who favour the Women's League type of women politician and try to block the career advancement of those women they consider as deviating from that ideal. She further notes that in 1999, Mugabe was disillusioned that the appointed women's leadership in the Women's League had a majority of unmarried women.

The sexualisation of women has been met with stiff resistence by women politicians. For example, after Chamisa's supporters referred to Khupe as 'hure' (prostitute) as she exited the Supreme Court on 23 May 2018, Priscilla Misihairambwi responded accordingly. She was outspoken in her response to the sexualisation insults against Khupe (Makonese, 2021:448). On 14 June 2018, she went to lodge Khupe's nomination papers as a presidential candidate at the High court wearing a sweater with the words '*Hure*' and 'Me too'. Makonese (2021:448) views this as a strong and effective protest action. For Makonese, Misihairambwi's actions also symbolised defiance more broadly and the fact that female MPs should stand up for the rights of other women despite men's often violent reactions. When interviewed by the Chronicle on 15 June 2018, Misihairambwi said "You call us names but that will not intimidate us or stop us from participating in politics." She vowed that women would continue with politics even if they were called names. Misihairambwi had read between the lines and understood that the sexualisation of women in politics was meant to push them out of this space. Hers is a show of defiance in the face of a hostile patriarchy which is bend on ascribing a particular form of decorum on women in politics. By standing in solidarity with Khupe, Misihairambwi showed that it is possible for women in politics to stand together in pushing back patriarchal victimisation in the political space. Through embracing the title '*hure*', she disarms and silences patriarchy; for it cannot continue to utilise the term to insult women when women have shown that they are comfortable with it.

Political Violence as a tool of Exclusion

Violence against women politicians and grassroots women who are active patricipants in politics is common around the world. The inter-Parliamentary Union and the African Parliamentary Union (2021) note that in most cases, the violence cases go unreported. Kishi and Olsson (2022) report an

increase in political violence targeting women in West Africa and expounds on the different forms of violence that women suffer. Meintjes (2007) discusses the prevalence of political violence in South Africa and argues that this is a result of patriarchal power relations in the public sphere. Thomas, Masinjila & Bere (2013) make a comparative analysis of the prevalence of political violence in South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe which is evident that Zimbabwe is no exception to this violence. The women politicians interviewed also criticised men for using violence against women who want to participate in politics. Zimbabwean politics has deployed physical, social as well as symbolic violence which have to certain extent scared women from political participation. The media in Zimbabwe is awash with stories on how women politicians are to a large extent profaned for merely being courageous enough to venture into traditionally perceived 'male' space. This could explain why the political participation of women in Zimbabwe since independence has been limited (Manyonganise, 2019:174). WP5 indicated that she was a victim of political violence. She said:

> *Ini ndiri mumwe wevakashungurudzwa nekuda kwezvandinoita kubato rinopikisa. Muna 2008, ndakaputsirwa French door iro* (pointing to the door). *Handirigadzirise because ndinoda kuti chive chirangaridzo chezvandakapindana nazvo. Mhirizhonga yakadai inenge ichinzi titye kuita zvematongerwo enyika but hatimiri.*
>
> (I am one of those who experienced violence because of what I do in opposition politics. In 2008, this French door of mine (pointing to the door) was destroyed. I will not get it repaired because I want it to be a reminder of what I went through. This violence is meant to deter us from participating in national politics, but we will not stop).

WP3 noted that political violence makes the political environment hostile for women to actively participate. Hence, a lot of women who lack the courage withdraw into private spaces in order to protect themselves as well as their families. This was supported by WP4 who herself has suffered physical violence from men in her own party. WP1 also noted the prevalence of violence against women in politics and alluded this occurrence to the way men feel threatened by women.WP4 noted that generally, women in politics in Zimbabwe have encountered politically motivated violence which is deployed as a weapon to deter them from occupying high political offices.

However, others felt that men's use of violence against women in politics is causing women to adopt the same violence against their contestants regardless of gender. For example, the director of a woman's organisation

shared a conversation she had had with a woman MP from ZANU PF on how she manages to negotiate her way in a patriarchally muddied political space in Zimbabwe. She said the woman acknowledged that in ZANU PF like any other political party, women find the political space very challenging. However, she disclosed that she found out that if she wanted to survive, she also had to play it 'dirty'. Hence, once she hears that there were people who were speaking ill about her, she now has a group of boys whom she sends to deal with the culprits. She said:

> Women in ZANU PF are quiet but cunning. Far from 50-50 representation, politics *ndedzedhudhudhu* (politics is by nature violent). I spoke to one MP who is very cunning. *Ane vakomana vake vanorova* any disgruntled members (she has her boys who beat disgruntled members).

In a way, this woman politician deploys violence in order to survive in the political space. What is interesting in this case is how she makes use of violent masculinities to subdue political opponents. In concurrence, WP2 said she has deployed her boys to spy on her behalf. In order to deal with violence, the boys act as her shield and they protect her when she visits her ward. Hence, WP1 also complained about women using violence against other women. While the use of violence to counter violence is not acceptable, the women have resorted to play men at their own game in order for them to survive politically.

The use of violence as a tool to intimidate opponents in Zimbabwe dates back to the war of liberation. Violence was deployed by both the colonial government soldiers as well the liberation war guerrillas. The foundations of a post-colonial Zimbabwe are steeped in violence. Kriger (2005) has shown how from 1980, ZANU PF has been surviving through its use of violence against perceived 'enemies'. Such violence was intensified after 2000 when ZANU PF felt threatened by the MDC. When ZANU PF was defeated in the Parliamentary and Presidential elections in 2008, it 'manipulated' the results so that a run-off could occur. The period prior the run-off witnessed violence of unimaginable proportions. People perceived to have voted for the MDC were killed, mutilated, beaten and gang-raped. A research done by Aids Free World (2009) indicates the genderedness of the sexual violence during this time. In most cases, the victims of violence were infected with the HI virus. Manyonganise (2016; 2017) gives a despcriptive analysis of the way women in Zimbabwe experienced violence during the 2008 political upheaval. What comes out clearly is how among the various forms of violence deployed, sexual violence targeted women who were actively participating in politics or whose husbands

were active members of the MDC-T. Such violence was meant to act as a tool to remove women from the political space and to shame their husbands for having a wife who had been sexually violated by other men. In most cases, women were dumped by their husbands once they found out that they had been gang-raped. Some husbands deserted their wives and have not been seen since 2008 (see Christine Tinorirashe's case in Manyonganise, 2016b). Zengenene and Susanti (2019) researched on violence against women and girls in Harare. They found out that "political violence among other ills has marked Zimbabwe's political landscape. Some of the women interviewed revealed how they were gang-raped in front of their children. These women understood in no uncertain terms that the sexual and physical violence is meant to scare them from political participation. Bardall et.al (2018:13) observe that the threat of 2008 continues to cast a long, dark shadow on women's political participation in Zimbabwe. This has been exacerbated by the large usage of social media in Zimbabwe where women politicians are subjected to cyber-bullying.

Financial incapacitation to fund campaigns

Scholarship on gender and politics has established that there is a close relationship among gender, political financing and political participation (Democratic Audit, 2014; International IDEA, 2015; Murray, Muriaas & Wang, 2021). International IDEA (2015:10) notes that the impact of political finance on equitable gender participation and representation in politics has been discussed broadly as one of the contributing factors to the unequal participation of men and women in electoral processes. Murray, Muriaas and Wang (2021) argue that gender gaps in resources make it easier for men than women to fund their own campaigns for office and run as candidates. In this study, the issue of financial constraints was raised as well. Lack of sound financial resourses that can sustain a rigorous political campaign causes a lot of women who desire to actively participate in politics to easily throw in the towel. WP3 argued:

> *Pamaresources apa pane nyaya. Zvine dambudziko.* (On the issue of resources, there is a story. There are a lot of problems). Women are responsible for the family. Hence, first and foremost, they want to ensure that their families benefit before channelling their financial resources to politics.

In addition to this, WP2, most women politicians do not have transport resources which can enable an effective campaign. Such challenges for

her, cause people to look down on women. Even after getting into offices, their visibility within their constituencies is very low which then result in people who voted for them to lack trust in them. Moreover, people expect certain assistance from their political representatives. However, women politicians fail to offer such assistance due to their financial standing.

Marital impediments

The demands of caring and nurturing families were stated as challenges that impede women's participation in politics in Zimbabwe. Women politicians have to balance politics with family obligations (Machingura, 2011). The women politicians protested what they viewed as continued cultural expectations that women should be central to taking care of children and the needs of family members in the home. This was explained as not only restricting their activities within the home but their mobility outside of the home as well. While men can afford to be away from home for longer periods of time or attend night meetings at will, married women are constrained by their own need to ensure the safety of their families as well as the fear to endanger themselves through attending political meetings at night. Even when they want to attend these meetings or travel from home for political activities, WP3 said "*varume vavo havazvitambire* (their husbands don't condone it), yet in order to make it in politics, "one needs to be available everytime thay are called to duty." Machingura (2011) observes that some men do not tolerate women who spend most of their time outside the domestic sphere attending long meetings with their male counterparts. Women interviewed by Bardall (2018) raised the same issue where most husbands prefer that they participate in politics instead of their wives. WP3 asked me to analyse why in most cases women who are active in politics are either single or divorced. For her, it is because, politics require the 'I don't care' attitude which married women cannot afford to exhibit. The social construction of a married woman who is 'homely', 'calm', 'quiet' and 'collected' work against women's desire to be politically active. They fear societal demonisation. Society in general regard politics as anti-family.

Men, Masculinities and Politics

The concept of masculinities is contested. However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:830) argue that despite the contestations, the issues raised

by the concept are topical in current struggles about power and political leadership, private and public violence among others. By definition, "masculinity is what any given society accepts as features associated with the male gender and expressions of maleness" (Uchendu, 2008:3). Connell (1998) notes that masculinities are multiple and hierarchical. In this case, masculinities are categorised into different forms such as hegemonic, subordinated, militaristic, violent, complicity, etc. Scholarship on the study of African masculinities has focused mainly on hegemonic masculinities. Connell (1995:77) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." Sweetman (1997:3) avers that the concept of hegemonic masculinity emphasises that many variations on the concept of masculinity exists within and between societies. Hence, Ammann & Staudacher (2021) are of the view that masculinities are not fixed male identities but are fluid and sometimes contradictory. In their analysis, ideas, practices and experiences of masculinities are negotiated among diverse actors and they change over time and space. Uchendu (2008:9) notes that notions of masculinity enhance and accord privileges to one gender while disadvantaging the other. In Uchendu's analysis, the African state is masculine (2008:16). Hence, reflecting on masculinities in the political space is important (Abrahams, De Mori & Knauss, 2020:7). Van Klinken (2007) notes the significance of analysing the intersection of masculinity with other categories of identity and power. Abrahams, De Mori & Knauss (2020) argue that by its [current] nature, politics around the world is a space dominated by 'strongmen'. Hence, for them, a critical study of masculinities has to take into account that notions of gender circulate and interrelate in complex arrangements of power and larger social systems of domination one of which is patriarchy.

Gender scholars have begun to focus on men and masculinities mainly in the field of critical men's studies to see how these manifest as they interact with other social concepts. For example, Chitando (2020) observes that scholars focusing on critical men's studies have been keen to identify the role of religions in promoting male dominance in society. In his analysis, these scholars have also explored the patriarchal assumptions behind most of the world's religions, alongside exploring how this has led to the exclusion of women from leadership in religious communities and society at large. Hence, this study recognises that work on patriarchy especially

on hegemonic masculinities in Africa in general has been covered in other areas such as religion. For example, Chitando (2007) and van Klinken (2016) have focused on religion and masculinities in Africa in relation to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Key in their studies is the need to transform the prevalent dominant masculinities for gender justice. Van Klinken recognises that (i) masculinities are informed by and embedded in complex social, economic and cultural realities and (ii) religions reinforce patriarchal masculinities and unequal power relations (2010). Notions of power are evident in both Christianity and politics. Anderson cited in Kaunda (2018:20) has criticised African Pentecostalism in particular for not only overemphasising uncritically adapting African religious notions of power (which to larger extent is appropriated into African politics). It is in this vein that Kaunda critiques the way Pentecostal Christianity has engaged with African politics/politics in Africa through the deployment of biblical texts. What Kaunda neglected to do though is to broaden his critique so that it also examines the gendered aspects of these notions of power and how they find resonance in the political arena. For this study, women politicians interviewed pointed out the challenge of hegemonic masculinities in the political sphere. WP1 said:

> In ZANU PF, men influence women's structures. They want to influence who should constitute membership. They do it in a cunning way. Hence, there is no independence for women to determine their political destiny.

WP3 explained her own experience as the MDC-T/MDC Alliance was preparing for their congress in 2022 (the congress is yet to be held). She alleged that before the congress:

> *Varume vanotanga kuzvipa zvinzvimbo zvine basa. Kana vaona kuti ivo vave nazvo vozouya kuvakadzi kuti pane izvi zvasara zvisina basa, munoda chipi?* Men first choose and apportion themselves important positions. After seeing that they now have the important positions, they then approach women and say 'out of these that remain which are less important, which one do you prefer?

WP5 agreed with WP3 when she explained that certain positions are earmarked for women, yet for other positions, they are seen as incapable. Tendai Mavetera, the youngest ZANU PF woman parliamentarian echoed the same sentiments on HSTv on 17 March 2022 when she stated that men in political parties get the best posts, yet women have to consult for whatever post they want to occupy. The director of a women's organisation echoed the same sentiments when she said:

> Women are the foot soldiers in their respective political parties. They set the core structures of the parties. However, the 'boys' have a propensity of the love of power and money. They are not afraid of suspending their constitutions for power and money.

Tendai Mavetera reiterated this view, when she opined that the political landscape in Zimbabwe is compromised in a gigantic way. She argued that while women do the mobilising and campaigning, when it comes to decision-making positions, they are not there (HSTv, 17 March 2022).

The above perspectives expose the way hegemonic masculinities are deployed in the political arena in Zimbabwe. Bardall (2018:15) notes that in Zimbabwe, rigid notions of masculinity make it difficult for men and women to work together in politics. The interference by men in women's wings of political parties is meant to ensure that men's proteges are elected to their preferred positions. Such women are promised favours such as appointments through the women's quotas. These women are then used to further the interests of patriarchy. Women politicians interviewed by Bardall (2018) lamented that the attitude towards quotas is harmful for women because it decreases their political legitimacy and makes them 'puppets'. Interviewed women argued that the quota system is not good enough because women appointed through this system are viewed as proxies for men and are projected as lacking political agendas of their own. Geisler (2004:174) argues that "parties have not appreciated their female members setting their own agenda particularly when it clashes with the party line, and gender has never been a favourite subject for party whips." Many women politicians who would benefit from a gender quota interviewed by Geisler (2004:35) believed that being elected in this way considerably decreases their credibility towards their male colleagues, which renders their positions even more difficult. Tendai Mavetera views the quota system as confusing, because its implementation is obscure. She is even sarcastic about the term 'quota'. She said "the name itself, it's just a quota…" versus the 50-50 required political representation. It seems she is afraid that the term 'quota' could be mistaken for 'quarter' meaning 25% representation. For Tendai, this could lead women MPs to be perceived not as 'full' but 'half' MPs. She argues that it is a deterrent for women who want to compete for political office because the term implies that the women who benefit under this system are not voted for, they are just appointed by men. Mama (2013) argues that the quota system has sometimes been subverted by men who want certain women on political

positions so that they champion these men's interests. Commenting specifically on Zimbabwe, Makonese (2021:436) argues that while the quota [system] component is increasing women's representation in parliament, the way it was understood fails to provide for the effective participation and representation of women in the National Assembly. In her opinion, the system was a clever strategy by the political elite (mainly men) to include women in a way that presents little challenge to their entrenched advantage in competitive parliamentary positions. In the 2013 elections, men often reminded women that they had given them enough seats through the quota system, hence, women were not allowed to make more demands towards equal representation, but had to be grateful to the men for their benevolence. For Makonese (2021:445) such views and attitudes at the leadership level result in fanning negative perceptions among the citizens about women who go to parliament through the quota system. For example, since 2013, Zimbabwean twitter users have adopted the hashtag '*wakavhoterwa nani*' (who voted for you). Dube (2018) notes that in 2013, women who went to Parliament through the quota system were derided as 'BACOSSI' MPs in reference to the 2008 Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention programme. These products were mocked as being substandard.

It is also true that men in politics ask for sexual favours from some women who desire to make it in politics. Women interviewed in Zimbabwe by Bardall (2018) alluded to the fact that sexual bribery is widespread as many women are told plainly that they must have sex with party leaders to advance or gain a nomination for a candidate position. This results in most women politicians being coopted by men thereby effectively silencing them from speaking against women's marginalisation not only in politics but other spheres as well. Geisler (2004:24) argues that the coopted nature of women's politics has meant that many women, privileged to have access to the state, have (ab)used their position to discredit progressive women's aspirations and to entrench women's subordination. In such cases, having women in political positions but disempowered to advance the gender ideology of equality is useless. African gender scholars have criticised the cosmetic presence of women in positions of authority but devoid of power to influence positive gender relations. Mama (2005) describes the act of merely adding women in to political institutions without transforming the political culture, the patriarchal values and gendered roles as 'entryism'. She argues that entryism does not address the patriarchal values and the gatekeeping tendencies within governance institutions.

Competition among Women

Generally, women both in and out of national politics were deemed to be jealous of each other. The director of a women's organisation interviewed pointed to lack of consensus among women as the elephant in the room for women's rise to higher political offices. In concurrence, WP1 said:

> *Vakadzi vanodzikisirana pachezvavo. Vakadzi havadi kuvhoterana. Vanosapota varume kuti vapinde pamabig posts.*
> (Women look down on each other on their own. Women do not want to vote for each other. They support men to get to big posts).

The director of a women's organisation interviewed reiterated the lack of support and solidarity among women. She indicated that even the women's caucus in parliament is ineffective due to women politicians not supporting each other. In her analysis, even the quota system has pushed back gains made on the gender front in politics since most women now wait for the quota system and avoid competitive politics. She was critical of women politicians who sell out when men dangle a carrot to them. For example, she explained that Priscilla Misihairambwi was at the forefront of drafting the alternative quota system. When POLAD was put in place, they had all looked up to her to advance women's cause on this platform. However, before they knew it, she was appointed ambassador to Sweden by ZANU PF despite her being in the opposition. This director argued that it was purely out of selfish interest that Priscilla accepted this appointment. For patriarchy, it was a way of pushing out critical women's voices from the political space so that men could do what they want with no meaningful resistance. The issue of women not supporting each other is now a tired argument. More often, it is proffered without necessarily investigating the root cause of such attitudes. However, an honest analysis shows that women's socialisation particularly on the African continent has consistently taught women to be submissive to men. In most African societies, men are leaders and are considered to be stronger than women. Women are depicted as weak. Hence, WP1 argues that "women don't believe in other women being leaders." The response of the director cited above also reveals the mistrust between the women's movement in Zimbabwe and women politicians. Geisler (2004:31) alludes to the fact that the support for women candidates at election time has [historically] not been translated into long term mutual support networks. She argues that once they are elected into office, women politicians have remained suspect to the women's movement, even if they have been drawn from their own ranks. The other challenge is how women politicians who are in office

suddenly become mute on women's issues despite some of them using gender equality as their trump card during election campaigns.

Religion as an impediment

In the final analysis, I sought to understand how religion shapes women's attitudes towards political participation from the view of the women in politics. The women politicians were agreed that religion plays a critical role in shaping societal attitudes towards women's political participation as well as in ensuring that the political space is safe/not safe for women. For example, WP2 lamented the fact that culture and the church are prescriptive of how women should carry themselves in public. WP1 made allusions to Ephesians 5:22f and argued that it oppresses women. She said:

> Biblically, women are supposed to be submissive, and should not lead men. From the beginning Adam was created first, it seems as though it is a given that men should lead from what the Bible says. But we should change that.

WP2 contends that Ephesians 5:22f is oppressive to women and it places women in a very difficult position concerning political participation. In her own words "*vakadzi tiri parumananzombe nekuda kweverse iri*" (women we are in a fix because of this verse). WP4 views religion as worsening women's plight by demanding that women subordinate themselves to men. For her, biblical texts that emphasise that women must subordinate themselves to their husbands justify the perception that women belong to the kitchen and therefore, cannot lead. The same sentiments were echoed by both women in the home and women in church. For example, WH5 while alluding to the fact the biblical texts calling for women's silence and subordination have not affected her perception of what she needs to do in politics, she agrees that women in her community have been greatly affected in terms of their perceptions on political participation. She said:

> Personally, they have not shaped me because I do not believe in them. However, they have shaped the community I live in and they have not yet reached a stage of accepting female political leaders. The November 2017 coup in Zimbabwe was against Grace Mugabe's rise to high positions in politics. Khupe was not accepted hence, Chamisa was put in to cover that gap.

WH5 brings to the fore, the general resistance in Zimbabwe against women's leadership in politics be it at party or national level. I have already discussed the way gendered attitudes were displayed in making sure Grace Mugabe and Thokozani Khupe were stopped from assuming leadership positions in both ZANU PF and MDC-T. Such attitudes have caused women in general to be disinterested in politics. Most women in the home and Church indicated that they were not active in politics because religion has always taught them that they cannot be in 'front of men'. In other words, they cannot accept positions that would cause them to exercise authority over men. Some are not active in politics because their church traditions teach that politics is a secular exercise and Christians need to avoid it. In such cases, both men and women in these churches do not take part in voting since they believe that political leadership is enthroned by God. The literal reading of Romans 13 make them believe that it is not necessary to take part in political processes.

WP5 is of the view that religion in general causes fear in women to the extent that they shy away from political participation. She indicated that as an active woman politician, she has since stopped going to church because church leaders view women in politics as having gone against what the Bible teaches about 'good' women. She said she has been told a multiple times that:

> *Kana wada zvekunamata, woita zvekunamata, kana wada zvenyika, woita zvenyika. Ini ndakasarudza kuita zvenyika saka ndakambomira kuenda kuchechi. Chikuru ndakaudzwa kuti zvandiri kuita zvemaslogans hazvifambirani nechiKristu.*
>
> (If you choose religion, practice religion, if you choose politics, do politics. I chose politics, so I have since stopped going to church. I was told that the sloganeering that I do does not go hand in hand with Christianity).

WP5 brings to the fore critical issues that remain on the separation of religion and politics. Zimbabwe's former President, Robert Mugabe always rebuked the clergy for straddling in the political space yet for him, they needed to stay within their restricted space of the pulpit. Scholars writing on religion and politics in Zimbabwe have challenged this view (Chitando, 2013; 2020; Manyonganise & Chirimuuta, 2011; Manyonganise, 2013, 2016, 2022; Tarusarira, 2016, 2020). Manyonganise (2022) observes the conflation of religion and politics in Zimbabwe when she argues that political leaders play religion to gain religious capital while religious leaders play politics to gain political capital. Chitando (2005:230) ar-

gues that "the use of religious rhetoric in political propaganda is reinforced when ruling party officials appear in public with church leaders." For him, this constant interaction between political and religious leaders lends legitimacy to politicians. In most cases, political and religious leaders are male, which helps in reinforcing the idea of political and religious leadership being a men's affair. Zimbabwean women interviewed by Bardall et al (2018) explained that their pastors dissuade them from running for political office arguing that as women, they would put their churches into disrepute. WP2 explained that some church leaders do not want women who actively participate in politics. Bardall et al's research participants further revealed that even traditional leaders (who are mostly male) often exclude them as preferred political leaders in their areas of jurisdiction. In a discussion with a colleague, she highlighted that the church in Zimbabwe is generally silent in shaping women's political participation which for her, emanates from the fact that women's participation in church in terms of leadership is also limited. She noted that patriarchy in church hinders women's participation in political spaces at the national level. Hence, WP5 is convinced that:

> *kupolitics bhaibheri harishandi.* Politics is different from what the Bible teaches. *Hazvifambirani* (In politics, the Bible does not work. Politics is different from what the Bible teaches. They do not walk together).

Such views are dangerous particularly for religious women who yearn to actively participate in politics. The fear of being ostracised by both their traditional and church leaders often lead them to withdraw from the political space. Women in the home interviewed alluded to the fact that the only way they participate in politics is through voting because it is secret.

Conclusion

This chapter examined women's political participation at the national level in Zimbabwe. It highlighted the role that women played in the liberation struggle. The chapter exposed the inadequacies of post-colonial nationalist ideology which placed men at the center of nation-building and relegated women to domestic spaces. The women's movement was shown to have played crucial roles of lobbying and advocacy despite the numerous challenges it faced in Zimbabwe. Data presented has shown some of the women's experiences in the political space in Zimbabwe. A number of conclusions can be drawn in this chapter. First, it is clear that the liberation struggle raised the consciousness of women about the need for

women's liberation, but failed to sustain that narrative beyond the war. Second, the historiography of the liberation struggle erased the contributions of women and valorised the exploits of men. Third, the post-colonial nation of Zimbabwe has, since independence in 1980, become masculinised and has consistently pushed women to the margins of political participation. Fourth, the political terrain in Zimbabweans is male-dominated and men continue to shut women out of political spaces through a number of strategies such as the sexualisation of women, the deployment of hegemonic masculinities, and political violence among many others. Fifth, the availability of international, regional and national instruments advocating for gender equality in political processes have failed to pressure the masculinised state to bow to these demands. In fact, the Zimbabwean state has shown that it is possible to disregard the many declarations and protocols with no consequences at all. For example, it became clear in this chapter that it is possible to put down on paper the necessity of affirmative action, but it is another also to declare that the policy has actually overstayed its welcome within the same year of having put it in the Constitution. Sixth, the role religion plays in shaping societal attitudes towards women's political participation cannot be ignored. In fact, religio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as biblical texts have been shown to be at the centre of women's marginalisation in political processes in Zimbabwe. Notions about women's place in politics are embedded in patriarchal ideologies and religious beliefs about the place of women in society. In this case, challenging culture and religion becomes imperative if women want to participate in political processes at the same level with men. The next chapter, therefore, engages with the gendered religio-cultural attitudes hindering women's political participation in Zimbabwe. Such engagement is crucial as it exposes the attitudes of male religious leaders as well as society towards women's political participation and leadership.

5 | Women and Political Exclusion in Zimbabwe: An Engagement with Dominant Biblical and Religio-cultural Gendered Attitudes

Introduction

This chapter builds on the previous three chapters which examined gendered politics within the home, religious institutions (such as the church) and national governing institutions. In this current chapter, the study engages with religio-cultural perspectives from religious leaders in order to ascertain how these are pervasive and grossly entrenched within Zimbabwean society. Such attitudes, this study argues, are at the centre of women's exclusion from active political participation as well as from occupying high political offices. In order to establish the pervasiveness of religion in shaping gendered political attitudes in Zimbabwe, this chapter problematises the utilisation of the Bible as a political text. This should enable us to locate the views of church leaders within political discourses that prioritises one gender over another in ways that disenfranchises women. I am aware that studies on women's exclusion from political processes have been done from a variety of angles in Zimbabwe. However, most of these studies focused on bringing out the voices of women, but not backed by the voices of church leaders. The result has been that we are left with the understanding of women's experiences but not how these are a result of the way the Bible is deployed by church leaders most of whom endeavour to perpetuate the patriarchal gender ideology which perceives women as the 'other' in all political processes. The chapter, therefore, seeks to challenge the gendered utilisation of the Bible which results in the exclusion of women from governance structures in society starting from the home to national level.

The Bible in Africa

Arguments on how Christianity came to Africa remain contested and are beyond the scope of this study. I agree with Sanneh (1989) who argues that the arrival of missionaries in Africa, while crucial for the growth of Christianity in Africa, was also closely linked to European imperialism and colonialism. Dube (2016) argues that the European countries brought Christianity to sub-Saharan Africa in a colonial context and planted it in

different indigenous cultures. As a result, in the memory of African people, the Bible is tied up with colonial history. In Zimbabwe, missionaries actually accompanied the Pioneer column which was the first group of colonisers making it very difficult for Africans to distinguish the two groups. In other words, missionaries with the Bible sanitised the colonisation of Africa. In fact, it has been argued that when missionaries came to Africa, Africans had the land; they asked Africans to close their eyes to pray and when they opened their eyes, missionaries had the land while Africans had the Bible. The Bible, therefore, is linked to land and dispossession (Musa, 2016). Hence, the Bible is a controversial document in Africa (Gifford, 2008:203).

Despite the controversies surrounding the Bible, it remains a popular text among Christians in Africa. Many scholars are now agreed that the Bible has ceased to be regarded as a foreign book as it has become an African text (Chitando, 2012; Gunda, 2012; Machingura, 2012; Mwandayi, 2012). Masenya (1999:229) argues that the Bible continues to play an important role in the spiritual lives of many Christians today primarily because it is regarded as the authoritative and unquestionable word of God. Gunda (2015:18) argues that the strength of the Bible lies in the fact there is a community behind the text, a community which consents to its authority. Chitando, Gunda and Kuegler (2013) expound on the importance of the Bible in Zimbabwe. I cite them at length.

> The Bible is one of Zimbabwe's most popular texts. Its value can be seen in how some people swear by it in ordinary conversations, "*Bhaibheri kudai*!" (I swear with the Bible). It is regarded as a repository of sacred truth and its invocation is designed [to] finalise argument. The Bible provides solace to those in mourning and its promises are recalled to students writing examinations. 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 (2013:10).

Machingura (2012:221) concurs with the above view and argues that the closeness of the Bible to the hearts of many Zimbabweans makes Zimbabwe a *de facto* Christian state. However, Christian traditions in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular utilise the Bible in non-homogenous ways.[15] For example, in mainline churches the understanding and use of

[15] For a detailed discussion on the various Christian traditions in Zimbabwe, see Manyonganise (2016).

the Bible is generally assumed to be a book of revelation which the preacher must explain and apply (Gifford, 2008:206). Since most mainline churches in Africa have their headquarters in Europe and the United States of America, their use of the Bible is perceived to be controlled from outside in one way or the other.

Gunda (2014) makes a discursive analysis of the place of the Bible in AICs in Zimbabwe. He argues that the Bible is central in AICs' understanding of the nature and demands of God which makes its interpretation a critical component of the churches. In his analysis, for AICs, the Bible is scripture, the word of God as well as the law of God. Hence, for Gunda (2014:147-148) AICs' "approach to the Bible coupled with the tangible activities of the Spirit through prophets is what keeps the Bible alive, sacred and central, giving credence to their claim to be "biblical Christianity"." Gunda's analysis covers those AICs which emerged because of a perceived abuse of the biblical text by missionaries and which sought to make the Bible an African text. For these AICs, it was possible to infuse Christianity with cultural doses without appearing to be syncretic. Dube (2016:149) avers that "African oral cultures were pervasive "scriptoratures" (oral literature of sacred texts with religious content), that were embedded in the memories and members of African communities as compared with the biblical text, contained between two covers and dependent on readers." For Dube, the African oral canon is read with the biblical text with the Spirit as the agent of empowerment (2016:149). However, other AICs sought a total break from the Bible altogether. In Zimbabwe, the Johane Masowe and all its variations abandoned the use of the Bible as they sought to have a direct link with the God of the Bible through the Holy Spirit. It is true that the founder of this church, Shonhiwa Masedza (Johane Masowe, 1914-1973), perceived the Bible to be an oppressive text, but it is also true that he perceived the Bible to have been communicated to the people of Israel by God through His prophets within a specific context and time. It, therefore, followed that the same God should be speaking to His people across nations even today. For the Johane Masowe Christians, to depend on the Bible is like someone consuming food left overnight (*kudya munya*) yet there is a way for one to have fresh food. In this case, at all their gatherings, 'prophets' in their churches give instructions which they claim to be receiving from God in real time. Hence, they rely on what we can term the 'oral Bible' through the directive of the Holy Spirit (*Tsanangudzo dzeMweya*) instead of the written one. Musoni (2022) argues that *Tsanagudzo dzeMweya* is a total package that includes visions,

dreams and the historical oral narratives regarding the call of Johane Masowe, as an African apostle. For Musoni, *Tsanangudzo dzeMweya* effectively replaces the Bible. Therefore, the Johane Masowe church is a good example of African Christian churches which have managed to dispense of the written text but still maintain the semblance of African Christianity.

Writing on the Pentecostal tradition in Africa, Gifford (2008:206) notes the distinctive use of the Bible in the Pentecostal churches. He observes that the Bible is a performative and declarative tool in Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism believes in the inerrancy of the Bible. For them, it is the inspired, spoken word of God and is "the all-sufficient guide for doctrine and practice" (Clark & Lederle, 1991:138). In fact, the word of God is Jesus himself, hence, as one confesses it, they are connecting to "the word that became flesh." The Bible is regarded as containing information concerning God's nature and will, but the mere reading of these facts does not in itself constitute a revelation from him, as a revelation must be accompanied by an encounter (Clark & Lederle, 1991:143). While Pentecostal Christians rever the Bible, they also recognise the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Clark & Lederle, 1991:147-148). It is the Holy Spirit who empowers them to preach, teach, heal, perform miracles and prophesy among other activities. While performing all these duties, Pentecostals demand that they be tested against the content of scripture. This shows that the Bible is regarded highly in this Christian tradition to the extent that they have been referred to as 'People of the Book".

African gender scholars have questioned the role the Bible plays in the oppression of women in Africa. Dube (2016) argues that it is needful that African Christianity fully investigates the way gender affects its members and structures of the African Church. This should help in ensuring that its message of salvation, redemption, healing and deliverance from negative powers is realised by all members within. Dube (2016) cautions us not to approach any discussion on gender, Bible and African Christianity simplistically. She argues that such a discussion brings to the fore new cultural constructions that produce other complex categories of gender for three diverse reasons namely, (i) the Bible is a Jewish book that models different gender constructions according to their cultural, religious and economic understanding, (ii) the Bible is a collection of sixty-six books written or compiled over two millennia, thus presenting conflicting gender constructions and (iii) African Christianity especially sub-Saharan is

not uniform but a product of the collision of modern European Christianities brought by different denominations. As such, gender perceptions in the various Christian denominations may differ but also overlap. For example, while most scholars on African Pentecostalism have highlighted its democratic character in allowing everyone to participate in worship, Dube (2014) questions whether this democratic worship translates automatically to gender equality. She argues that Pentecostalism embraces gender justice while at the same time endorsing gender oppression. For her, this is apparently framed by their two streams of biblical belief that intersect and dissect into different directions in endless circles (Dube, 2014). For Dube (2014) the space between the Word and the Spirit is where the perpetual battle of gender oppression and gender justice is fought (Hackett, 2017). Anderson (2013b) notes the various ways in which Pentecostalism everywhere uses the Bible to subordinate women. He locates this within the wider background of their conservative churches that encourage the literal reading of Paul's injunction that women must not be allowed to teach or have authority over men. Within the Kenyan context, Mwaura and Parsitau (2008) observe how Pentecostal churches uphold codes in the New Testament that prescribe the silence of women and apply them literally in their practice. They argue that "women's roles are circumscribed by a literalist biblical interpretation of their roles and functions, a closer examination of their place in the churches reveals certain handicaps and paradoxes. Hence, for Masenya (1999:236) the Bible is not an innocent book because it can both be oppressive and liberative especially for women. In relation to women, Masenya makes critical observations about the way the Bible has been abused in gendered ways on the African continent. She notes that (i) the abuse of the Bible continues to manifest itself in the persistent unequal power relations between men and women and (ii) the Bible can easily serve to nurture injustices while its faithful women adherents continue to be encouraged to focus on the spiritual (2009:140). With this, Masenya asks a very pertinent question: Why do African[a] women continue to cling to a book which men have been using to perpetuate their oppression and marginalisation in the name of God? I will come back to this point later in this chapter.

The realisation of the centrality of the Bible in Africa led the University of Bamberg through the New Testament Chair held by Professor Joachim Kuegler to start the Bible in Africa Studies (BIAS) together with African biblical scholars like Masiiwa R. Gunda in 2009. This led to collaboration between African and European biblical scholars. The intention was to

establish the way the Bible intersects with other topical issues in Africa. At the time of writing this chapter, volume 32 of the BIAS series had been published while volumes 33 and 34 were in print which shows that this endeavour is progressing well. Among the volumes already published which speak directly to this study are: The Bible and Politics in Africa (volume 7), The Bible and Violence in Africa (volume 20) and The Bible and Gender Troubles in Africa (Volume 22). As alluded to earlier, my volume adds to the discourse by examining the intersections of religion, gender and politics specifically focusing on Zimbabwe. It, therefore, becomes imperative that I consider the way the Bible is used in political discourses in Zimbabwe.

The Bible in Africa has been an important political resource. Gunda and Kuegler (2012) note that religion in general and the Bible in particular remains a political resource in many predominantly Christian nation-states in Africa. As alluded to earlier, the Bible is closesly linked to the colonisation of Africa. However, in Zimbabwe, when the church sought to break free from its entanglement with the colonial government mainly due to the excesses of government, it used the Bible to rebuke political leaders. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, despite Robert Mugabe's insistence on the separation of religion and politics, ecumenical bodies have deployed the Bible to reprimand the government for misgovernance, corruption, and failure to uphold the rule of law through pastoral letters in which biblical passages are cited. The Bible has also been cited to legitimise political leadership. For example, when Mugabe was in power, it was alleged by some Christians that he had been appointed by God to lead Zimbabwe. Hence, he was referred to as 'Angel Gabriel'. Such biblical allusions are made to legitimise political leaders who overstay their welcome in powerful political offices. While Zimbabwe is acknowledged to be a multi-religious society (Manyonganise & Mhuru, 2022), the Bible continues to be the primary text for oath taking in courts and parliament. Holding the Bible in one hand and raising the other hand, the phrase 'so help me God' is taken to mean that one stands by the truth as dictated by the Christian text. Church leaders are invited to pray and preach at presidential inaugurations, rallies, state funerals among other activities. At the moment, Zimbabwe is in the middle of two aspiring presidential candidates who use the Bible for their individual political interests. For example, Emmerson Dambudzo Mngangagwa, the current president avows that 'the voice of the people is the voice of God' while Nelson Chamisa, party president of CCC runs his presidential campaign under the

#GodIsInIt. A number of scholars have interrogated the intersection of religion and politics in Zimbabwe specifically Christianity and politics (see Tarusarira, 2020; Chitando, 2013, 2020; Manyonganise, 2013, 2016, 2017, 2022). I do not wish to repeat this here. Within this study, it became apparent that the Bible is central in regulating gender relations in the political space to the extent that it determines who occupies which office. As I present responses from church leaders, it becomes clear that biblical texts coupled with African religio-cultural practices are powerful tools for women's exclusion from high political offices. Hence, the church in Zimbabwe needs to answer to the charges of being an institution that acts as referee in the political marginalisation of women.

The Church on Trial: Guilty or Innocent?

Chapter four went to great lengths in explaining that among the reasons for the 2017 coup that deposed Robert Mugabe was the issue of Grace Mugabe who was perceived to have done '*chisionekwi*' (strange things never seen) in challenging political patriarchy. When Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa was campaigning for the 2018 general elections, he visited the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC) as was always done by his predecessor. The leader of this church had some advice for the aspiring president pertaining to the position of women in politics. He advised him that according to biblical scriptures, women in Zimbabwe should never be allowed to become leaders of the country or lead their husbands who hold high political office. An evangelist of JMAAC alleged that Robert Mugabe had not listened to the advice of Mutumwa Noah Taguta, their leader. The evangelist said their church does not allow women to overrule their husbands like what happened to the former President. Likening Robert Mugabe to Samson and Grace Mugabe to the biblical Delilah, the evangelist alleged that Robert Mugabe surrendered his power to Grace which led to his fall. Such utterances inspired this study. I argue herein that public officials and religious leaders cannot get away with careless appropriations of the Bible (Gunda, 2010:31). The use of the Bible in this regard becomes contentious, hence, the need to engage church leaders in order to find out how their use of the Bible has informed ways in which men and women in Zimbabwe should participate in politics. There has not been a deliberate effort in looking at how religion, in particular, biblical scriptures have been used to engender identities in political participation in Zimbabwe. As part of my fieldwork, I sought to find

out if the church in Zimbabwe in its generic sense share the views exhibited by JMAAC. Relating to political participation, I sought to find out (i) ways in which the Bible and/or religio-cultural beliefs and practices work as hindrances to women being either political actors or leaders in high political offices, (ii) whether it is possible that the Bible/religion can be used to promote women's leadership in the home, church and society, and (iii) possible ways of reading the Bible in liberative ways for women so that they become active agents in decision-making across the board . The same questions were also answered by women in the home, church and politics. First, I present church leaders' views on this matter.

Resistance to Women's Political Leadership: Church Leaders' Voices

The responses of church leaders showed that there is resistance to women's political leadership with justification from biblical texts. CL1 totally rejects the idea of women participating in politics as well as holding high political office. He said:

> *Nyaya inotangira pakuti* the man is the head of a woman (The story starts on the fact that the man is the head of a woman. The door to national politics is automatically closed.) *Ndipo patinotangira chaipo, ha ha ha* (That is where we start from (laughs). We are Christians and we are following the Bible and it is within the same Bible that things are said.) *Tobva tatovhara. Hakuna kumwe kwatichaenda futi* (We close (the Bible). We can't go anywhere again).

CL1's response shows that for him, the hierarchical gender relations structure espoused by Paul is the be all and end all of what must be followed even when it comes to political participation. He alludes to the fact that if the man is the head of the wife in the home and church, nothing should change when it comes to political participation and political leadership. He detests women's political participation in Zimbabwe and avows:

> What is happening in Zimbabwe is wrong because they want to fit in the global village, but in actual fact this cannot happen in Zimbabwe. It is a taboo. If it happens that a woman is allowed to lead this country, it won't last. So basically this is rhetoric to please certain masters somewhere. They pretend not to see what is written in the Bible. They know what is written therein.

In the same vein, CL4 and CL5 agreed that it is anathema for women to participate in politics and worse still to seek political leadership. CL4 argued:

> *Isu kutenda kwedu pane zvekudenga vakadzi havagoni kutungamira mukereke. Kunyika chaiko (gave an example of Samuel) tsvimbo yeushe inopihwa murume. Exodus 29* (it was not clear how this text was relevant to the discussion). *Mubhaibheri chaimo maisaverengwa vakadzi. Vana vaJacob aive nevana 12, asi varume chete. Pamwana wechi12 kuna Hebrew ndipo panobva Pauro weIvangeri.*
> (Our faith on the things of heaven, women cannot lead. Even in national politics, the rod of rulership is given to a man. Exodus 29. In the Bible, women were not considered/counted. Jacob had 12 children, only sons. The twelfth son, in Hebrew, that is where Paul of the gospel came from).

In order to buttress the point of CL4, CL5 added:

> Jesus chose twelve disciples. *Hapana mukadzi aivapo*. Acts 2, replacement *yaJudas murume. Hazvibude kuti mukadzi anoti anoda kuita mukuru wenyika.*
> (Jesus chose twelve disciples. There was no woman. Acts 2, Judas's replacement was a man. It won't succeed that a woman says she wants to be a national leader).

From the responses of CL4 and CL5, it is clear how biblical texts are loosely thrown around to convince people against women's political leadership. CL4 and CL5 belong to AICs or Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe, some of whom deny women access to the Bible. In this case, the Bible becomes a man's text. The high illiteracy among women in these churches also serves men well. They can read the biblical text dangerously without strong criticism from the women within. As I engaged with them to explain the relevance of Exodus 29, it became clear that they were not sure how the text can be used to deny women either political participation or political leadership, but they were adamant that the fact that Moses was told to take Aaron and his sons to be priests shows that God abhors women's leadership. These are personal allusions made to the biblical text but given out to women as commandments. Hence, CL2 is of the view that women's socio-cultural socialisation and the way the Bible is interpreted have served to shun women from political participation and political leadership. CL3 explained that the majority if not all men in politics are Christians, hence, they are bound to implement what the Bible says about women in the political turf. He said:

> *Bhaibheri ndiro rinotaridza kazhinji maprinciples anotevedzerwa nemapoliticians. Ndiro foundational text. Ethics dzeconstitution nemapolitical parties,*

> *they borrow from the Bible. Zvinonyanyoipa pakuti tine mapoliticians ari zvakare vakuru vemakereke vakaita sa Reverend Muzorewa, Sithole, iyezvino Pastor Chamisa*. All these tend to borrow their principles and ethics from the church. The church is a platform. AFM *ikati hatidi mudzimai ivo vakaisa mukadzi*, they lose out. (The Bible is the one that shows in most cases the principles that are followed by politicians. It is the foundational text. Constitutional ethics of political parties, they borrow from the Bible.) This is made worse in that we have politicians who were/are church leaders as well like Reverends Muzorewa, Sithole and now Pastor Chamisa. All these tend to borrow their principles and ethics from the church. If AFM says we don't want a woman (as a political leader) and they put a woman (to contest), they lose.

CL3's response is revealing of the tragedy of the misuse and/or abuse of the Bible in informing how men and women should interact in the political space in Zimbabwe. By making the Bible so central in determining gender relations in the public sphere, women who aspire to be leaders are resented. CL2 reinforces this point when he indicated that then women who aspire to make it in politics are regarded as devoid of reputation. "*Mukadzi akadzikama haaswere achiita zvakadaro*" (A well-collected woman cannot spend the day doing such things). For CL2 this points to two issues, (i) politics is depicted as a dirty game, hence, women of integrity cannot be found in such a filthy space, (ii) politics is male space because they are able to navigate through its dirtiness. We can also deduce the danger of having figures straddling in both the religious and political space. Reverend-cum politicians tend to bring within the political space religious restrictions for women, something like 'as it is in church, so it is in politics'. CL3 argues that they impose religious ethos in politics. The critical point from CL3 is how the church determines who eventually occupies positions of political leadership depending on their attitudes towards women and men. Turning a blind to the church's gender choice leads to political losses. As such, political parties that desire to win pay attention to the demands of the church membership to reject women's political leadership in favour of men.

The responses of women in the home, church and politics were varied showing a lack of consensus among women when it comes to women's political leadership. What came out clearly is the place of the Bible in this whole matter. For example, WH2 indicated that she is conflicted on this issue. For her in as much as she wants to see women in leadership, her understanding of the Bible on women makes her undecided. This view was echoed by the majority of women interviewed individually and in the

two focus group discussions. A few had differing views. WH3, CW2 and CW4 were of the view that the interpretation of biblical texts is the problem. CW2 argues that headship as enunciated in the Bible does not deny women to lead in other places like work places and politics. For her, women's submission is called for in the home and church, but not national politics. The example of Deborah was given by all the women as a good example of a woman who was a political leader. However, WH4 insinuated that though Deborah, as a political leader was so powerful, she would submit to her husband at home. I was surprised where she got this information from because the biblical text does not tell us Deborah's home arrangements. This woman is, therefore, reading her own experiences, cultural expectations and what people say about powerful women in Zimbabwean society into the text. A lot of times, powerful women outside of the home are told that once they get to their home gates, they should remove *jasi rekubasa* (the work jacket) and put on *jasi rekumba* (the home jacket) implying that these women cannot exercise the same authority and power in the home. Once in the home, they need to submit to their husbands. It is unfortunate that women are not taught how this is practically possible. Such teachings present a paradox for the women who are expected to put on different faces depending on context, yet the same expectation is not put on men. Men can be powerful in the home, church and national politics without anyone putting demands on them. It is very problematic when people read into the text that which is not written, but what they feel has to be done from their socio-cultural experiences. This then bring us to ask whether the same Bible and/or religio-cultural beliefs can be useful tools for women vying for political office.

'The Bible is Sacrosanct, Do not Temper with it'

Most of the church leaders were of the view that the Bible is the unchangeable Word of God, hence, it cannot be changed to suit the needs of a few individuals who feel that is is oppressive in certain aspects pertaining to women. For these church leaders, there is no way that the Bible can be used to promote women's leadership in the home, church and national politics. In this case, reading it in liberative ways is out of the question. CL1 responded thus:

> Umm ha, I don't think we can do that. We cannot talk of politics in the church especially to women. Because the moment we start talking about politics, national politics require women to be leaders, which is contrary to the Bible and the church's doctrine that women should not be leaders.

CL1 refuted the need for finding liberative ways of reading the Bible for women. He argued:

> The liberation is there in the Bible. I don't know *kuti* (about) which liberation are you talking about. The Bible is already clear about what is supposed to be followed. The Bible has social order. Order iyoyo (That order) each level *ine* liberation *iyoyo* (each level has that liberation).

In concurrence, CL4 was more radical. He said:

> *Nhau inotanga kushata pakuti kutungamira mudzimba. Maverse andakupai pamusoro apo, asi tikamadzima. Hutungamiri hwemumba hunosiyana, mai vanoraira vanasikana*
> (The issue becomes difficult on the leadership in the home. The verses that I gave you above, unless they are deleted. The leadership in the home varies. The woman advises the girl children).

Hence, for him, there is no way that the way the Bible is read can be changed. He argued:

> *Bhaibheri zvarinonetsa harina achashandura. Hatiite zvatinoda. It has to be followed, kunze kwekuti ranyorwa patsva. Iri rakanyorwa nekufemerwa, saka kufemera kunenge kwochinja. Ndiri mumba kudai, ndini musoro wemba. Kana ndiri pamba pababa vangu, baba vangu ndivo musoro wemusha. Tave mucommunity, sabhuku munhurume. Tozoti councilor aite munhukadzi atonge varume vese ava hazvibudi. Ndopainofira tsoro yacho.*
> (What is difficult with the Bible is that no one can change it. We don't do what we want. It has to be followed, unless it is written anew. This one was inspired, so the inspiration would also change. When in the home like this, I am the head of the home. If I go to my father's home, he is the head of the family. When we are in the community, the village head is a man. Then we say a councilor should be a woman to rule over all these men, it does not come out well. That is where the game dies).

The above responses are indicative of the way the majority of church leaders understand the Bible; for them it is the unchangeable word of God. What it says has to be followed without question especially from the AICs. It is not, therefore, by chance that politicians frequent these churches when it is election time. Most male politicians know the doctrines of these churches and how they favour men over women. Such visits are not innocent but are meant for these churches to understand who to vote for. CL4 and CL5 reiterated that in their church they do not encourage their members to vote for women when it comes to public office because it is against the Bible. This supports WP1's observation that "*kuchechi ndiko kune electorate*," (the electorate is at church) so politicians go where the electorate is to gain votes. She further argues that even those that do not use the

Bible have found culture resonating well with their teachings on women's position in society. When offering the option of changing his attitude if the Bible is rewritten, CL4 knows it is something that is not acceptable among Zimbabwean Christians. Banana (1993)'s suggestion for the Bible to be rewritten was met with anger and resistance. WP1 reveals that the church in Zimbabwe does not only use the written Bible but also the oral one, what I call in this study 'the Bible of culture'. Despite it being unwritten on paper, it plays a critical role as reference to regulate gender relations. More often, we hear statements like "*tsika dzedu dzinoti…*" (our cultures say this…). Hence, we can see that there are actually different "Bibles" when reflecting on gender politics in Zimbabwe. Both the Bible (in written form) and the "Bible of Culture" justify patriarchy and women's marginalisation. Both Bibles are presented as unchallengeable, therefore, unchangeable. The Bible of culture depends largely on gender socialisation. Chitando (2019:20) acknowledges the fact that the effects of gender socialisation run deep in most African societies to the extent that women themselves can view it as abhorrent for them to accupy leadership positions. CL1 and CL4 allude to men's home headship as divinely ordained and as automatically extending to public offices. From Chitando's analysis, such claims are a result of a combination of conservative readings of the Bible and indigenous strands of patriarchy (2019:16). He, therefore, argues that the "church in Africa's struggles with 'gender troubles' associated with the idea that God has crowned the man as the head of the family are related to the refusal or inability to accept women's inherent equality with men (2019:17).

Having listened to the responses of church leaders, I became eager to establish if women in the home, church and national politics shared the same view about the Bible. I asked them if they were given the choice, it would be possible that they could disregard the biblical texts that impose subordination over them. It was interesting to note that out of all the women interviewed only three indicated that they would never go against the Bible. Most women indicated that they just ignore such texts and move on with their lives. WH3 and WH4 were clear in their position. WH3 said she would never go against God's command while WH4 argued that "I can never go against these verses and I will do what God says even if my partner does not, Jehovha will richly bless my efforts." WH2 indicated that she would do what the Bible says as a way of maintaining peace. It is interesting to note that for WH3 and WH4, the Bible is unchallengeable. It is sacrosanct and like the views of the church leaders above, has to be

followed to the letter. The conventional teachings on curses and blessings raised by WH3 need to be noted. For her, obedience to the 'word' brings blessings, hence, she cannot do anything to the contrary. The binaries of heaven and hell where those that obey the 'word of God' are assured of heaven and vice versa serve to pressure women into submission and not question oppressive biblical texts. They are made to endure the pain in anticipation of a better life in the hereafter, yet men can enjoy the good of both worlds. CL3 notes how church leaders take advantage of such texts to ensure that women do not contest patriarchal power at home, church and society.

However, CL3 and CL2 shared the opinion that it is possible for the Bible/religion to promote women's leadership in homes, church and society at large. For CL3, there is need to create a conducive environment to empower women for leadership positions. This is possible by first dispelling the many myths that are peddled about women's leadership capabilities. For example, many men especially in his church feel that they cannot work with women in the church board. This is then taken to mean that women cannot lead in all societal structures. At the same time, CL3 felt that women exhibit certain weaknesses which make society doubt their leadership potential. For example, whenever something gets bad when women are in leadership, they are quick to blame men of looking down on them because they are not a man. Hence, apart from the Bible prescribing gender hierarchy, women tend to show that they cannot handle top leadership pressures. He argues also that when reading the Bible, context is very important. From his perspective,

> *Bhaibheri rakanyorwa in a Jewish context. Isu tinofanira kurinzwisisa in our context. Moses wrote the first five books. Aivawo nepfungwa dzake. Jewish culture yaikoshesa varume. Tiine bhaibheri tinofanira kuva nemamwe maonero.* (The Bible was written in a Jewish context. We must understand it in our context. Moses wrote the first five books. He had his own opinions. The Jewish culture favoured men. We must have different perceptions).

The argument of CL3 is that it is possible to read the Bible in liberative ways by making it relevant in our context in terms of both space and time. These views were echoed by WP2 who indicated that the Bible is an old document which was written for women who used to stay at home, but now women go to work (formal employment). Hence, both the written and the oral Bibles should be relevant to the time and space within which they are read and said respectively. CL2 shared the same view, but added that making reference to women who performed important roles in the

Bible can serve as examples of what women can do when they are accepted as leaders at every level. These views were shared by the majority of women who felt that though the Bible cannot be changed, a different way of reading it can go a long in projecting women positively. However, WP2 felt that the reading of the text should not change. In other words, it should be read as it is, but its interpretation should be done in ways that enhance the humanity of women as well as their needs in life. CW4 supports this view as she argued that the church needs to teach people to properly interpret the Bible and understand it.

Women too should lead? – Contradicting Women's Voices

While the majority of church leaders felt that women's leadership in the home, church and national politics was out of the question, women were divided on what kind of leadership women can offer and where it ought to be practiced. The most conservative women were of the view that women cannot lead in the home and church, but can only be allowed to lead in national politics because it is an area that is not regulated by the Bible. For example, WH4 argued that women should stick to their 'godly' assigned roles in the home, church and society so that they do not feel as if they are being denied to lead. For her, it is an abomination for them to aspire to lead in what she called 'theocratic institutions' (in reference to the home and the church). In her opinion, the structure put by God was to women's benefit, so they should not contest it. Most women in this group claimed that men's headship is 'Godly' ordained. I had an issue with the term 'theocracy' and whether these women understood its meaning. When I probed further particularly in the HFDG and CFDG, it became apparent that the women mistook 'men's rule' for God's rulership. For them, when men are in top positions particularly in the home and church, it automatically meant that God was the ruler in both spaces. I needed to understand where such teachings came from, and women subscribing to this idea indicated that they receive such messages from their church leaders during Bible study sessions in their respective churches. Earlier on, Masenya (2009) questioned why women remain comfortable conforming to a text that men have used to subjugate them. The answer is clear. The responses above show that women in churches to a greater extent lack the art of biblical interpretation. At times they submit themselves to church leaders who have never received critical theological education. To answer Masenya's question, it would be prudent to say both

trained and untrained male church leaders have presented the Bible to African women in threatening ways in order to fulfil their patriarchal goals of dominating women. In the minds of most women, the Bible was written by God himself. In most cases, only scholars of religion are aware that the Bible is a product of canonisation whose parameters were set by human beings who were men for that matter. I remember very well in 1993 while in university, I attended a women's meeting in Harare. The pastor's wife of that church had just started attending theological college and was ecstatic about it. She read from the Book of Hebrews before highlighting the anonymity of the author of this book. While for some of us, it was common territory, those not well acquainted with biblical studies were offended. How could a pastor's wife say the author was unknown, yet they had all along known that Paul was the writer? This was an eye opener for me. These women had listened to their pastors but had never bothered to read the text themselves. As they were grumbling after the meeting, I asked to read Hebrews Chapter 1 with them. I then requested them to tell me where it was written that Paul was the writer. They were equally shocked because they had assumed that Paul was the writer. The result of assumptions is that lay readers of biblical texts do not apply critical thinking but consume whatever they are fed. Many a time, church leaders take advantage of women's ignorance of biblical texts to impose their own understandings of scripture as it pertains to gender relations. Such teachings are readily accepted by the unsuspecting women.

Other research participants felt that in the home, there is no need for women to lead but co-lead with their husbands and brothers as equals. However, the church and national institutions should open up spaces for women to assume leadership. For WH2, there is need for a critical reading of the Bible so that we can unlock and reverse the trap of subjectivity that women find themselves in. It was, however, not clear how the co-leading would be achieved. How do these men give up the patriarchal dividend so that they share power equally with women? The sharing of power between men and women is very attractive, but achieving that in a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe is a mammoth task. However, Chitando (2019:20) makes a declarative statement to the effect that if there is any need of a head at all, "men and women are heads of families."

The third group felt that women should be allowed to lead in all spaces. After all, they have been leading in homes where husbands are irresponsible, as single mothers and as widows. In church and the nation, women

are the majority, hence the need to have more of them in leadership positions. For this group, it is not far-fetched to imagine Zimbabwe being led by a woman president. WP1 argued that while the Bible is a critical text in Zimbabwe, people are now made aware of equal rights, thus, people now favour human rights discourses more than the teachings on submission and silence propagated in the Bible. As such, it is possible to have a woman president because the presidential office recognises no gender. All it needs is a leader of a country who is able to represent every citizen. Such views were echoed by women in this group. For these women, the deployment of positive femininity is crucial in order to inspire women to aspire top leadership positions in all areas. Valorising the work that women like Deborah, the Queen of Sheba, Esther as well as the women that served Jesus and those instrumental in planting churches in the Apostolic period would give women the confidence they need to lead.

Judgement Passed: The Church is Guilty!

A clear reading of responses of research participants brings us to the conclusion that the church in Zimbabwe is guilty as charged. Chitando (2019:13) argues that across cultures and in different historical periods, the church has had a significant say in the gender order mainly on how men and women should relate in society. In his opinion, the church has grown into a powerful social institution, with the power to have a voice on how society must be organised. It has appealed to the written Bible as well as the Bible of culture and used them as tools for the exclusion of women from key decision-making positions. As an institution, the church has excluded, marginalised and stigmatised women who take up leading roles within the church itself (Chitando, 2019:20). The church through the use of both Bibles, influences gender relations in both the private as well as the public sphere. However, the appeal to the Bible to exclude women from being political actors as well as from top political leadership in Zimbabwe cannot go uncontested. From Gunda's perspective, a response needs to come from the critical engagement with the Bible, to show the dishonest and selfish interests that lie behind such uses of the Bible (2010:34). Thus, theologising politically requires that there be a re-reading and re-interpretation of the biblical text in ways that make hegemonic masculinities in political spaces redundant. In protest against the use of the Bible in politics, Gunda (2012) calls for the de-biblification of the public sphere in Zimbabwe, though in my opinion, we are still far from this

happening. This is important because as already shown, Christianity in Zimbabwe in general has largely failed to be accommodative to women leadership and this is seen as justifying the vilification of women who seek political participation or even dream of occupying high political office. To a large extent, this has led to many of the women's potentialities and capabilities remaining untapped. The recognition of women in politics and their ability to be effective leaders can go a long way in ensuring gender equality in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, this would go a long way in contributing to both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Zimbabwe's development agenda (Agenda 2030) aimed at achieving middle income economy status by 2030. For this to be a reality, coming up with a gender sensitive and gender-inclusive model for political participation in Zimbabwe becomes imperative.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to engage with gender discourses of political participation in Zimbabwe by focusing on the use of the Bible, both written and oral. The chapter highlighted the way the Bible is used in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Its centrality was shown to be the inspiration behind the formation of the Bible in Africa Studies at the University of Bamberg. From the data presented, a number of conclusions can be made. First, the Bible as a written text is significant in determining and informing gender differences in political participation. When combined with the Bible of culture, women's fate in decision-making processes is sealed as both favour men over women. Second, the Bible is viewed as above reproach, whose content is unquestionable, hence, what it says cannot be changed. Third, the church, through its deployment of both Bibles, is guilty of the marginalisation of women from decision-making positions at home, church and national institutions. In such a case, there is need to contest such misuse and abuse of the Bible so that women cease to be treated as the 'other' in their homes, church and country. The next chapter, therefore, suggests a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive model for political participation in Zimbabwe.

6 | 'Nothing for Us Without Us': Towards a Gender-Sensitive and Gender-Inclusive Political Model

Introduction

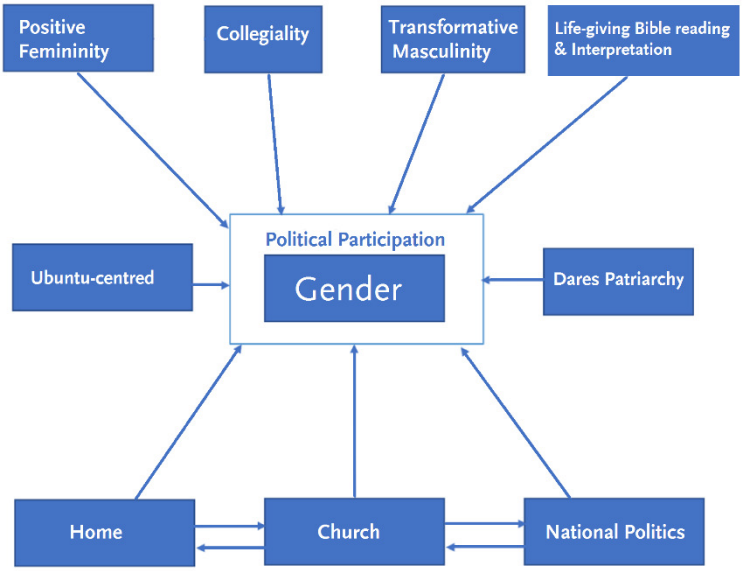
One of the objectives of this study is to argue for the adoption of a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive political framework for political participation in Zimbabwe. This chapter engages the African Womanist Approach to come up with a suggested gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive political framework. The study has noted the various ways in which women are marginalised, discriminated against and stigmatised as they push for opportunities to contribute to decision-making from the home up to national governance processes. There is ample evidence presented that the vilification of women and their bastardisation finds expression in biblical texts as well as African religio-cultural beliefs and practices. In this case, the written Bible and the Bible of culture are critical tools for the marginalisation of women from either participating in politics or occupying key political offices. The study is cautious not to present the African Womanist model as the panacea to women's marginalisation and vilification in political processes in Zimbabwe. Gender scholars like Jacobs (2013:28) have noted that no amount of theory will address the unmet needs of women in Africa. The study, however, argues that the adoption of relevant models can go a long way in opening up spaces for women so that they can engage in political processes equally with men. Such models need to be courageous enough to call religion to account for the many ways it has influenced gender relations in both the private and the public sphere. In this case, in the endeavour to come up with a more gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive model for political participation in Zimbabwe, the findings of this study inform this chapter.

The Need for a Gender-Sensitive and Gender-Inclusive Model for Political Participation

The study has shown the gendered nature of political participation in Zimbabwe. Chapter 2 explored the status of women in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa in general and Zimbabwe specifically. It en-

gaged with different scholarly perspectives on the existence of gender relations in pre-colonial Africa. The study made an intentional choice to support scholarship that recognise that gender was a crucial social organisation tool in pre-colonial Africa. Thus, I rejected views that blame colonialism for bringing the notion of 'gender' to Africa. I further argued that colonialism found a ready and willing partner in reinforcing African women's subordinated status. In this case, post-colonial Zimbabwe (may be as the rest of Africa), has carried forward the patriarchal views about women as the subordinated 'other'. Chapter 3 focused on the status of women in religion, precisely on the church in Zimbabwe. It highlighted the various ways in which women are marginalised and excluded from church leadership due to justifications taken from biblical texts which also find resonance in African religio-cultural beliefs and practices. The chapter argued that though women are the majority in the many Christian traditions in Zimbabwe, they are absent at the top echelons of power. Hence, the few men in church make decisions for the many women within. As one church leader puts it, "Jesus, a single person, died for the salvation of millions of people." From his perspective, the few men in church are entitled to lead the many women by divine sanction. Chapter 4 focused on the experiences of women in politics in Zimbabwe from the liberation struggle to the current period. It privileged the voices of women in national politics in order to understand how religion impedes their activities in politics. Chapter 5 engaged with gender discourses of political participation focusing on how the Bible and African religio-cultural beliefs and practices are key determinants of the preferable gender in politics. Having presented all this data, I argue that an African Womanist Model for political participation is a necessity in a context such as Zimbabwe. Such a model calls for gender-sensitivity and gender-inclusiveness in the political spaces of the home, church and national governance institutions. The model has the following features.

Diagram 1:
An African Womanist Model for Political Participation in Zimbabwe[16]



Placing Gender at the Centre of Political Participation and Political Leadership

This study has shown that the home, the church and national governing institutions do not exist independent of one another. The links among these three institutions in influencing each other on gender relations are too obvious to ignore. Hence, An African Womanist model for political participation recognises the interconnectedness of the three institutions. Writing on South Asia, Kumari (2012:78) notes that, it becomes clear that the greatest obstacles to women's political participation exist in family structures and the social valuation of women. Prior chapters in this study

[16] While the study used African Womanism as a theoretical framework, the model was informed by Clenora Hudson-Weem's Africana Womanism.

have shown how the family structures and national governance institutions find justification to block women's political participation in religion specifically from the church as well as religio-cultural beliefs and practices. The study has shown how male power is institutionalised, embedded in the political, economic, and religious organisations of society and is, therefore, legimated as authority (Schmidt, 1992:20). In this case, an African Womanist Model for political participation and political leadership cannot do anything but place gender at the centre. For a long time, women have been on the table and not at the table. Shingi Munyeza, renowned Zimbabwean businessman and pastor in Faith Ministires, commenting on the role of women in succession plans for political parties argued that when women are not treated as equals, they derail the succession plan (Munyeza, Twitter, 11 October 2020). He opined that in Zimbabwean politics, women's role has been one of objects and means to an end. Hence, women ...

> will play those roles (of stifling the process) if we do not put them in the right place, our women will play bad roles. If we put them in the right place, our women will play progressive, developmental, posterity roles. Now, the reason why we have had chaos in both our political divides both the ruling party and opposition parties is because we sought to misplace the role of women. We are harvesting pain and sorrow and agony because women as they are misplaced, they will also cause chaos.
>
> They will cause trouble, but when we place and recognise them and acknowledge their role in society and in transitions and successions, we will be winners. Generations will remain established because women have their place to play. Insulting them, abusing them, marginalising them will lead us into yet another succession crisis. In our succession, we have insulted women, we have abused them. In some cases, there are things that we have said about women in politics –we have found them to be objects, a means to an end. Their role is not to be participants but to be those who can be used to play certain roles and be discarded. Women are equal to men as they should be, but in our politics, we have not done that. We have minimalised, abused, marginalised and misunderstood them (Shingi Munyeza, Twitter, 11 October 2020).

Shingi Munyeza tries to capture the reality of the Zimbabwean political context. What I do not agree with him is projecting Zimbabwean women as vindictive. He also fails to see the role of religion in Zimbabwean politics, although he is a church leader. I, however applaud him as a man for being able to enunciate Zimbabwean women's political experiences the way he did. In a tweet posted by UN Zimbabwe on 9 December 2020, Shingi Munyeza argued:

> Women are always on the table and not at the table. That means they are agenda and not discussants. I am advocating that women be in politics, business and civic society equal with men.

The UN Zimbabwe was running a campaign in support of women in politics in Zimbabwe. Hence, at the end of this tweet they captioned @shingimunyeza is #Withher: Are You? Such a campaign was meant to mobilise and lobby men to support women's participation in politics. In support of bringing women at the table, Kumari (2012:80) is of the view that when women are present at the table, policies change to reflect women's preferences. Win (2004b:n.p) posits that women are now aware that unless they are present and participate equally at decision-making tables, their needs will not be adequately met. In other words, an African Womanist Model for political participation empowers women to reject anything for them without them. They should be at the table where decisions about them are being made. As such, Kantola and Lombardo (2017:325) advocates for a women and politics approach which places the focus of analysis on women's presence, roles, actions, interests, needs, rights and voices. They argue that a women and politics approach tends to make inequality immediately visible by showing who is in power. The approach has the strength of providing factual evidence for policymakers about statistical patterns of inequality, as well as arguments for activists about who is represented in the institutions and whose voice is heard in policy making. However, while a women perspective makes inequality immediately visible through numerical evidence, it does not necessarily go beyond providing numerical indicators of inequality to challenge less visible unequal structures and norms of male domination and female marginalistaion that shape political phenomena such as decision-making. In most cases, patriarchy has justified itself by the number of women in Parliament and Senate without considering their access to decision-making power. For example, when Hakainde Hichilema, the President of Zambia was asked on 01 October 2021 about issues concerning women's participation in his new government after winning the general elections, his answer was "the deputy president is a woman, speaker and deputy speaker is a woman, minister of health etc. However, his answer does not answer to questions of equality. In Zimbabwe, on August 2021, President Emmerson Mnangagwa appointed Moses Mhike as permanent secretary for the Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development. Moses Mhike was replacing Melusi Matshiya who was also a man. Considering that permanent secretaries are operation managers of

Ministries, it shows that though the minister is a woman, she is just but a place holder. Zimbabweans castigated this appointment as a mockery to the empowerment of women. While the appointment of a woman as minister to this ministry was applauded, people were not oblivious to the fact that the permanent secretary is the one with vested power.

Scholarship on gender and political participation in Africa has noted that there has been a notable improvement in women elected to parliament (Gaynor, 2022). However, contestations around whether women bring the desired change exist. Within the Zimbabwean political space, there has been discussions on how elected women quickly forget about representing women's interests. Chapter 4 noted that women's NGOs accuse women politicians of not living up to women's expectations. They are accused of quickly forgetting why they were elected as they start to enjoy the 'benefits' of political office. Hence, this proposed model focuses on empowering women with practical not theoretical authority and power. Existing political structures in Zimbabwe are patriarchal. The mistakes that have been happening is to expect change while simply inserting women in these patriarchal structures. This study proposes the dismantling of patriarchal political structures of power because they are selfish, violent and discriminatory. Women working in such structures are forced to conform to patriarchal dictates, almost always to the detriment of other women since patriarchal structures hinder them from championing issues of concern to women. Kwinjeh (2022) calls on women to brace up and dismantle the exhausted patriarchal model of liberation, whose mentality is to view women as a dispensable other. It is, therefore, not enough to have the presence of women in politics while gendered structural inequalities remain. It is, in fact, problematic to have women present in political structures, yet, like Margaret Dongo is quoted as saying in this study, women are expected to perform domestic roles like making tea for the men. There is, therefore, need to rebuild gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive political structures in which both women and men political actors are cherished and respected. Such structures need to be attentive to women's voices. Domingo, et.al (2015:1) explains this clearly when they argued:

> Voice, decision-making and leadership are understood as elements of women's empowerment. They encapsulate women having the power to express their preferences, demands, views and interests, to gain access to positions of decision-making that affect public or private power and resource allocation, and to exercise influence in leadership positions. Women's voice, leadership and decision-making power may be present

at the household, community and national level, and be individual or collective.

Following from the above, it therefore, follows that the demolition of patriarchal structures should start from the home up to national level. Women's presence in the construction of new political structures that are gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive needs attention. I have already alluded to the need for listening to women's voices when they are present in traditionally male-dominated spaces such as politics. Nadar (2019) opines that it is not important to be concerned about the 'act' of speaking and not the 'content' of speech. Hence, Kwinjeh (2022) suggests that we dismantle, build new pillars and a new value system that respects women and their choices.

The Deployment of Positive Femininity and Womanhood...

This study has shown that African women perform subordinated roles in the home, church and society in general in areas to do with leadership and decision-making. Using the analogy of George Floyd who was choked to death when a policeman in the United States put his knee on Floyd's neck, Parsitau (2021) likens this to the experiences of African women who, as a result of oppressive patriarchal structures groan in faith and gasp for breath in all sectors of the society. For Parsitau, Floyd's call for freedom from suffocation resonates very well with the longstanding sense of throttling felt by many African Christian women in respect of their socio-religious experiences in their quest for among other things religious and gender justice. With no solution in sight, oppressed and subordinated femininities and womanhood always pray at the altar of the oppressor. They grin at the oppressor with the expectation of getting reprieve and recognition. Foucault cited in Kumari (2012:80) argues that individuals internalise oppressive social norms to become self-limiting and self-disciplining. In this case, many a time, oppressed women normalise their condition as fate. Moreso, for Christian women, it is divinely sanctioned. However, Oduyoye (2001:11-14) has called us to approach the biblical text and African religio-cultural beliefs and practices with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Oduyoye agrees that the Bible is a depiction of other people's cultures which may have certain aspects that are not life-giving to women. Hence, both African culture(s) and the Bible need to be approached with caution. To deploy positive femininity and womanhood is to question oppressive African religio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as biblical texts. It is

to reject normative appropriations of biblical texts as well as religio-cultural beliefs and practices. Hence, this model recognises that the Bible is both oppressive and liberative. So are African religio-cultural beliefs and practices. Hence, the model searches for biblical texts and African religio-cultural aspects that cast women in positive light. This should equip women to exercise agency in political spaces. The study has already shown how women in the three institutions under study negotiate, subvert and resist oppressive patriarchal structures. What this shows is that women within patriarchal systems are not perpetual victims. They are able to push beyond patriarchal control using both subtle and confrontational ways. For a long time, women have failed to use the many platforms where they have opportunities to meet as women to equip each other to challenge patriarchy in homes, churches and national politics. The Thursady meetings, kitchen parties, baby welcome parties among others have been used to teach women to conform to patriarchy. Within political parties, the women's departments have allowed patriarchal control. In all this, established opinion is that women's activities should be largely conducted within the private sphere of life, and their contribution to society is measured in terms of their actions as wives mothers, sisters and daughters'-in-law (Kumari, 2012:92). While for the African womanist, mothering is a key concept, its utilisation in politics needs to be critiqued. Women need to develop the stamina that is required for them to survive in politics. There may be need to find ways of dealing with the cultural attributes of a mother such as caring, soft, loving etc. Manyonganise (2021) shows how Memory Matimbire, in her bid to confront patriarchy in African Pentecostalism deploys militancy. She deploys positive femininity through the use of the story of the Zelophehad daughters (Numbers 27:1-11) to show that God is not rigid when it comes to gender relations. The Zelophehad daughters were women who challenged Jewish patriarchal inheritance laws. They refused to be disinherited on the grounds of their gender, but commanded Moses to go back to God to relay their dissatisfaction. God's answer "the daughters of Zelophehad are right" (Num 27:7) speaks to all women in Zimbabwe in particular who feel suffocated by oppressive patriarchy in the home, church and the nation; it is an answer that attests to the fact that oppressive cultural laws cannot only be challenged but changed. If God is a flexible God, an African Womanist model for political participation challenges the rigidity which we find in Zimbabwe in the way the written Bible and the Bible of culture have been used to disinherit women in political spaces. God's flexibility in Numbers 27:1-11 leads us

to the conclusion that all the oppressive biblical texts cited in this study by church leaders and women are not cast in stone. They require women who have the courage to challenge them so that the church and society can have a paradigm shift in the way they treat women who desire to be at the table in the home, church and society. This is possible when women drop mantles of being weak, passive and common to being strong, active and aggressive. It is common knowledge that patriarchy is threatened by militant femininities, hence, an African Womanist Model for political participation cannot pamper patriarchy in the hope that it will willingly surrender. If anything, an oppressive patriarchy should contend with radical femininities. Hence, women in the home, church and society should devise subversive strategies to read the different Bibles in their own liberative ways in the way that Matimbire does. While small battles are set to be won through this strategy, the focus is not on battles. Women's agency is aimed at winning the war of gender inequality. Until women and men come together and affirm that women's marginalisation is wrong, that violence against women is wrong, in fact that every evil against women is wrong, women need to continually devise new ways of subverting and resisting patriarchal oppression. In this case, it is envisaged that the deployment of positive femininity and womanhood would see an increased representation of women in politics. For Kumari (2012:81) an increase of women representation in politics lessens the stereotyping of women and leads to the creation of new role models for women in public life.

... Rests on Collegiality

Following on the above, an African womanist model for political participation rests on collegiality among women. In my interview with WP3, it became apparent that collegiality is crucial in the political space. First, when Thokozani Khupe and Chamisa failed to agree on a succession route after the death of Morgan Tsvangirai, WP3 had to make an intentional decision to support her. Hence, she left MDC-A to join Khupe's MDC-T. She alleged that when she was appointed the secretary-general of the MDC-T, Khupe tried to twist her arm to recall young women Parliamentarians like Joana Mamombe to which she refused. I needed to understand why she stood her ground and she explained that it was detrimental for women to recall each other from Parliament considering that their numbers are already low. In the case of Joana Mamombe, it was strategic

that she remained in Parliament because recalling her would have resulted in confrontation with the youth, specifically young women in Zimbabwe. Earlier discussions in this study on the way Joice Mujuru was treated by Grace Mugabe and Oppah Muchinguri attests to the fact that collegiality is a desirable virtue in politics. Without it, patriarchy takes advantage to create confusion and enemity among women for its own benefit. For example, ZANU PF pitted Margaret Dongo against her best friend Vivian Mwashita. The importance of collegiality is also seen in the fact when Khupe was recalled from Parliament, she sought solidarity from women's organisations in Zimbabwe. She also mobilised women in Bulawayo to participate in the 'Beat the Pot' campaign. This, therefore, shows that when women are victimised by patriarchy, they seek comfort and assistance from other women. Her failure to get meaningful assistance and support from women's organisations as well as women's parliamentary caucus was due to the fact she had, during the time she had power, also recalled other women. Therefore, collegiality is imbedded in a genuine community of shared values that are rooted in justice. Hence, an African Womanist model for political participation encourages solidarity among women based on fairness and justice. It is aimed at creating a community of women who are equal and a community in which the voice of each woman matters. Domingo, et.al (2015:3) are of the view that women's organising with other women around shared interests builds their capabilities for voice and influence. In their analysis, the experience of group cohesion and solidarity can contribute to self-affirmation at the individual and collective level, give support and legitimacy to gender equality agendas and enable women to exert the collective power needed to shift gender norms (2015:3). As a concept, collegiality is performative. For example, the way one member of a community acts can indicate whether they belong or not. In this case, collegiality exposes the extent to which performance involves interactions not only among individuals, but between individuals and institutions (Laurie, 2005:124). As such, women with strong bonds among themselves have to agree on the way and under which terms they relate to men in their homes, churches and political parties. Thus, collegiality extends to men who are willing to partner with women. Gaidzanwa (2006) avers that women have to build strategic coalitions with men, working out compromises that they would otherwise not make if they constituted a critical mass in their political parties. From her point of view, the need for coalitions with men is unavoidable and demands skill

so that women do not lose out on their own agendas. The African Womanist Approach as a theoretical framework encourages the journeying of women and men together towards women's total liberation from patriarchy. Partnering with willing men results in the cooperation between men and women in Zimbabwe in working towards gender tolerance within the political field.

... Dares Patriarchy

This study is anchored on the argument that for women in Zimbabwe seeking political participation and political leadership, patriarchy is the elephant in the room. Kumari (2012:80) argues that women are called upon to operate within the parameters of patriarchy when they engage in politics. For Kumari, the frameworks within which women must act inherently favour men since the value system that underlies the structures is based on male characteristics which results in women being prevented from being able to act as equals within the political sphere. Kwinjeh (2022) avers that throughout generations, Zimbabwean women who take the lead into Zimbabwe's dangerous politics, risking their lives always do so at a huge cost of patriarchal backlash. The above attributes of an African Womanist Model for political participation equips women in Zimbabwe and beyond to dare patriarchy without fear. In this case, women in Zimbabwe need to challenge the widespread toxic patriarchal assumptions within Zimbabwean politics as well as mobilise more women to occupy different spaces/posts at different levels. The study has shown that the home, church and national institutions are male-dominated and that this domination is embedded in religio-cultural and biblical texts. The violence prevalent in Zimbabwe's political culture is meant to frighten women away from the political turf. Within the home, some women who are assertive have been subjected to domestic violence by husbands, fathers or brothers who feel threatened. Within the church, such women have suffered from both social and symbolic violence. The refusal by some Christian traditions to ordain women symbolises their desire to keep women in subservient positions. Chapter 4 is clear on how women in national politics have been vilified and bastardised and how political violence is used as a tool to intimidate women from political participation. Political violence is used as means of drawing boundaries and making exclusions (Connell, 2005:83). In such cases, patriarchy in all these places needs to be confronted. Confronting patriarchy entails challenging hurtful forms

of masculinities within Zimbabwean society which, as shown in this study, are in most cases exhibited in the country's political culture (Manyonganise, 2016:289). Hence, an African Womanist model for political participation problematises the very notion of women's political participation as daring patriarchy or disrupting the perceived 'normal' religio-cultural social order. Yet also, the model seeks to implore Zimbabwean society to view women's political participation as necessary as it develops the country towards a gender-equal society.

... Reinforces the Need for Transformative Masculinities: Men too can come down

Chapter 4 has shown the challenges of hegemonic masculinity in that it justifies the subordination of women and the domination of men who are perceived as weak. It in fact legitimises patriarchy. Connell (2005:68) argues that masculinities are inherently relational in that without femininity, there would not be the concept of masculinity. The history of masculinity and its interaction with femininity has been one of oppression. Connell (2005:82) argues that the structures of gender relations are formed and transformed over time. What this entails is that any form of masculinity existent in any society is not permanent. They are continually configured and reconfigured. This means that in the need to reconfigure hegemonic masculinities to transformative ones in the political space in Zimbabwe, equal participation of women and men can be made possible. Chitando gives a very good example of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10. In his analysis, though Zacchaeus was a short man, he was not short-sighted. Zacchaeus did not allow his physical condition or status to stand in the way of his desire to see Jesus. He climbed up the tree, saw Jesus, but Jesus did not leave him there. He instructed him to come down for he was going to dine with Zacchaeus in his house. Chitando (2013:54) argues that:

> the story of Zacchaeus defies the dominant ideas regarding a man in his society. He is acutely aware of his limitations and takes steps to overcome his situation. More critically, Zacchaeus negotiates the crowd that is preventing him from achieving his goal of seeing Jesus: he meets him and they have a conversation.

The encounter with Jesus made Zacchaeus to do a self-introspection regarding his cruelty and abuse of office which led him to steal from the poor. Chitando (2013:54) explains:

> Upon meeting Jesus and reflecting on his life up to that point, Zacchaeus realised that he could not continue on the same path. It is vital for men in our families, churches, institutions, communities, nations and the world to realise that they should change radically. They must be willing to give up all the unfair benefits that they enjoy.and to justly deal with women, children and other men who hold lower positions. Zacchaeus promised to give half of his possessions to the poor and to compensate those he might have cheated by paying back four times the amount. Thus, men need to 'give up' many things if women and children are to experience justice.

Chitando raises critical points through the story of Zacchaeus. First, African masculinities have the potential of identifying their own limitations as well as the power to decide on how to deal with them. Second, African masculinity has found support and justification from African socio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as the church through the deployment of biblical texts. Hence, an encounter with Jesus as many of the men, church leaders and male politicians claim to be Christians, should lead them to self-introspect particularly on the way they have dealt with women in the home, church and national governance processes. Third, self-introspection alone is not enough. Practical repentance is required where African masculinities relinguish the patriarchal dividend they have enjoyed in political spaces across the divide. Connell (2005:82) argues that:

> to speak of a patriarchal dividend is to raise exactly this question of interest. Men gain a dividend from patriarchy in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command. They also gain a material dividend.

From Connell's analysis, men have more access to financial resources than women and they are much more likey to hold state power. He further argues that men are ten times more likely than women to hold office as Members of Parliament. In this case, Connell (2005:83) is of the view that the politics of masculinity cannot concern only questions of personal life and identity. He argues that the politics of masculininty must concern questions of social justice. Social justice for women in this case demands that men give up the unfair political benefits they have been accruing because women were not at the table. I strongly argue that the Zacchaeus story is a good example of the fact that it is possible for patriarchy to come down and sit at the table for a fruitful discussion with women on how to relinquish the patriarchal dividend. This can lead to the opening of political spaces for all. In one of his presentations with the Lutheran World Foundation, Chitando (date unknown) noted that at times, African masculinities will not self-transform. When confronted with the suggestion of

giving up the patriarchal dividend, African masculinities may go into protective gear. However, this is a patriarchal strategy to reject to come to the negotiating table. Chitando suggested that even then, we need to bring men to the negotiating table even if they can be kicking and screaming. Hence, a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive model encourages Zimbabwean society to give up toxic masculinities and adopt transformative ones which recognise the humanity of women. Gokova (n.d:46) makes that following declarative statement: Men ought to change, men can change and men must change.

Transformed masculinities are ashamed of misnaming women political actors. They cease to use a moralised sexuality discourse to disgrace women who seek political office. In fact, transformed masculinities are not ashamed to be gracious to women. In many of his presentations on transformative masculinities, Ezra Chitando has always declared that "if being a man means I should use violence against women, then I would rather not be one." Gokova (n.d:45) explains this concept when he says:

> Refusing to be a man is a concept that expresses our collective desire to create an image of manhood that does not depend on or tolerate the oppression, exploitation and abuse of women in our society. If the passive and arrogant reaction to the women's call of reason is part of the definition of manhood, then we refuse to be men. If the existence of men depends on proving the greatest, dehumanising and destructive behaviour, then we refuse to be men...If power relations between men and women in our society remain the monopoly of men, then we refuse to be men.

Hence, transformed masculinities in the political field are ashamed of using rape, coerced and consensual sexual favours from women, corruption, vulgar language against women. Within the home, transformed masculinities stop to treat women as purchased objects that they own. They understand that marriage rests on partnership rather than hierarchies of power. When it comes to decision-making, there is no need for women to spend time scheming on how they can be allowed to contribute. As equal partners, decisions ought to be made by both. Transformed masculinities are not comfortable within religious institutions to have all-men boards while at the same time discussing issues that affect women. It is abhorrent to have men preaching and teaching all-year round, while women are listeners and hearers. Hence, transformed masculinities reject the false notion that men possess certain knowledge which women cannot comprehend. Such narratives project men as rare commodities which women

should seek after. Without sounding polemic, men's and women's existence is intertwined. It, therefore becomes imperative for both genders to acknowledge this interdependence. The study acknowledges the work of Padare Men's Forum which focuses on transforming masculinities in Zimbabwe, but still insists that more needs to be done in changing patriarchal attitudes in political spaces.

... Is Centred on Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an African ethic which stipulates that one's personhood is deeply embedded within their community. It is centred on the maxim "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (Zulu/Ndebele) "*munhu munhu nekuda kwevanhu*" (Shona) (a person is a person through other persons). In other words, individuals are located in a community and they are constantly in a dialogical relationship with the community. For a person to be regarded as a person, they must exhibit aspects of *unhu* (humaneness) without which they are viewed as not being a person (*kusava munhu*). In this case, Ubuntu is in essence a relational concept which emphasises good relationships with respect for human dignity as the ultimate goal. When viewed in this way, it would reflect an ethic that is aimed at embracing everyone in the African community. However, scholarship has begun to question the genderedness of the ethic. Oelofsen (2018) goes to great lengths in trying to defend Ubuntu and present it as egalitarian. She premises her argument on the idea that a good relationship requires equality. Hence, for her, African societies which tolerate the subordination of women are acting against the essence of Ubuntu. However, Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014:85) argue that the way Ubuntu is presented presupposes gender-neutrality which shows that the ethic does not pay attention to gender issues such as gender-based violence and discrimination. They argue that the relational and communitarian idea of personhood indicates that it is in fact a gendered notion. In arguing this way, they reject Amadiume's (1987) proposition that gender in pre-colonial African societies was fluid and complementary and not hierarchical and oppressive. This study has already critiqued Amadiume's point of view and accused it of propagating cultural nationalism. In relation to Ubuntu, Manyonganise (2015) engages with its ambivalence in the area of gender relations. She argues that Ubuntu itself needs redemption from patriarchal control in the way it has treated women. Through an analysis of Shona sayings and

proverbs, Manyonganise, shows that the ethic is both oppressive and liberative. It is, therefore, possible to draw insights from the liberative aspects of the ethic to inform an African Womanist Model for political participation in Zimbabwe. Research participants in this study have noted the religio-cultural beliefs and practices that militate against women's political participation. However, within Shona sayings and proverbs, there are indications that Ubuntu requires that there be consideration of the welfare of other people's feelings as individuals relate in communities. Manyonganise (2016) explains the various proverbs and sayings from Shona culture that show the importance of women. In this study, I concentrate on those that can be used to ensure gender equality in the political arena. Some of these are:

- *kugara hunzwana*
- *Ushe madzoro hunoravanwa*
- *Makudo ndemamwe musi wenjodzi anorwirana*

Chimuka (2008:112) explains that the *kugara hunzwana* proverb acknowledges that the guideline of personal relationships outside the family circles and friendship in the Shona tradition finds expression in living together amicably in shared understanding. This applies even in homes. In concurrence, Mandova (2013:362) avers that the Shona place so much importance on harmonious living. When located within gender relations *kugara hunzwana* is premised on compromise not domination and silencing. As an Ubuntu tenet, *kugara hunzwana* does not mean that oppressive patriarchal structures are not challenged. It actually calls for the opening up of space so that power differentials and injustice are interrogated, challenged and discarded. Ubuntu emphasises fairness in human dealings. What this entails is that gender inequality is detrimental to harmonius coexistence. In this case, this model puts emphasis on interrogating sociocultural systems that dehumanise and marginalise women in political processes. It argues that gender equality in political institutions brings harmonious living in homes, churches and nations.

The other proverb that is relevant for this study is *ushe madzoro hunoravanwa* (Kingship takes turns). The Shona concept of leadership is based on responsibility and accountability. Traditionally, it was expected that leadership is rotational rather than permanent. This is applicable to gender relations in political spaces. Men in most homes are breadwinners and may earn more in cases where their wives are gainfully employed. Most domestic violence cases are a result of such scenarios where men

abuse their wives because they are financially dependent on them. However, in a volatile economic environment such as Zimbabwe, such husbands may wake up to their companies closing down and without notice they find themselves depending on their wives. The *ushe madzoro hunoravanwa* proverb cautions those in power today to remember that such positions are not permanent. Like rugs, they can be pulled from under their feet without notice. It would be traumatic to expect mercy from a yester-year victim. Zimbabwe has, therefore, witnessed a rise in divorce cases as women take vengeance on previously abusive husbands. In national politics, men need to understand that "*rimwe zuva gava richadambura musungo*" (one day the fox will break the trap). Kwinjeh 2022 has already shot the salvo "Zimbabwean women, *takajaidza makudo neanokamhinha*" (Zimbabwean women, we allowed even lame baboons to do as they wish). In this case, an African Womanist Model for political participation proposed in this study (i) encourages women and men to share power equally, taking turns to occupy high political offices and (ii) cautions men not to be comfortable as they inhabit oppressive systems of power because once the fox breaks the trap, it may be late for constructive engagement and dialogue. This is by no means a threat, but a warning that men cannot continue to take women for granted while expecting them to cheer and ululate as they safeguard political space as 'male turf'. Chenjerai Hove cited in Geisler (2004:105) bemoans the marginalisation of women in politics in Zimbabwe and how they are made to celebrate men's political exploits. He argues:

> The only pain I have is to see women of my country in politics not as serious politicians, but as dancers, praise singers to the glory of the male politicians. They sing and dance, they kneel and make offerings in the manner of the traditional women of the village, paying homage to the glory of men...

Geilser has dubbed these women, 'airport women'. They are never in the aeroplanes, but always at the airport to 'send off' and 'receive' the men who are always on 'serious' political business. But for how long can this continue? The Shona idiom, "*rimwe zuva gava richadambura musungo*" cautions us that victimhood is not a permanent feature of the oppressed, for one day they will breakdown the shackles of oppression at times when the oppressor least expects it.

Makudo ndemamwe musi wenjodzi anorwirana (baboons are of the same species, on a day of calamity/danger they fight for one another) is another proverb that applies to gender relations in the political space. It speaks

specifically to women who seek active participation in politics. The section on collegiality above emphasised women networking as women for a common goal. It is common that where a group of people meets, there is bound to be challenges of power emanating from people coming from different backgrounds in terms ethnicity, class, religion, interests, political affiliation among others. In most cases, patriarchy has taken advantage of these differences to foment conflict among women to its own benefit. The study alluded to how Grace Mugabe and Oppah Muchinguri were pitted against Joice Mujuru as well as Thokozani Khupe recalling other women from Parliament. Such actions are against comradeship in the political space. Like the proverb above, an African Womanist Model for political participation declares "women are of the same species, when patriarchy threatens their existence, they fight for another, in one corner for a common cause- survival in political spaces. Priscilla Misihairambwi has already proved such amity in respect to Thokozani Khupe's sexualisation by MDC-A members. Kwinjeh has criticised women for being silent when patriarchy in political spaces is victimising one of their own. She, therefore, encourages women to break the culture of silence and to stand with each other when one is in danger. Therefore, in unison, women should form strong bonds that enable them to unanimously call out men who are sexist and gender-blind in political spaces.

... Calls for Life-giving Readings and Interpretation of the Bible

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 in this study have shown the centrality of the Bible in the home, church and society at large especially in national politics. A critical reading of the responses from women across the divide as well as church leaders has shown that there is a tendency to try to explain or justify biblical texts that seem to sanction the exclusion, discrimination and oppression of women (Parsitau, 2021). While this is the case, listening carefully to the women as well as church leaders, it is apparent that none of them wants to discard the Bible. The Bible remains 'sacred', though some women have the courage to ignore the oppressive texts. However, they have called for life-giving readings and interpretation of the biblical text specifically for women. Some of the research participants referred to the Bible as 'an old document' while others called it 'a book written for the Jewish people'. New ways of reading and interpreting the biblical text become necessary for it to remain relevant in contemporary contexts.

It may not be enough to simply call for life-giving readings and interpretation of biblical texts without giving direction on how this can be done. For purposes of creating spaces for women to actively participate in politics and/or seek high political office unapologetically, this study proposes the contextual reading of biblical texts. In the academy it is referred to as Contextual Bible Study (CBS). West (2013) provides the historical development of CBS and this study does not wish to repeat it suffice to indicate that it emerged in liberation theologies. For West (2013:45) the CBS revolves around the See-Judge-Act cycle. West (2013:45) explains that the 'see' moment involves social analysis in which organised communities of the poor, working class, and marginalised analyse their reality. The social analysis in this study is the marginalisation of women in political spaces in Zimbabwe. The judge moment critiques the reality from the perspective of a critical reading of the Bible. In the case of this study, we can ask the following question: What does the God who hears the cry of the oppressed say about the reality of women's marginalisation from decision-making processes? The Act stage is where the impact of the CBS is deduced. According to West (2013:46) the impact of any CBS lies in the actions that a particular community decides to take as their response to the 'see' and 'judge' moments of the CBS process. It is the community that should come up with the action plan though the facilitator can assist where necessary.

Nadar (2009:390) describes CBS as an interactive study of specific texts in the Bible, which brings the perceptions of both the context of the reader and the context of the Bible into dialogue for the purpose of transformation. Nadar (2009:391) urges us to pay attention to the role of the 'ordinary' or 'untrained' reader and the 'intellectual' in the process of contextual bible study. Moyo (2014) aptly explains this approach as follows:

> As a brainchild of liberation theology, Contextual Bible Study is an interactive reading of biblical texts. The facilitator uses the process of See, Judge and Act in setting and preparing the CBS. During the CBS session, the facilitator also creates a safe and sacred space so that the social/cultural context of the reading community interacts creatively with the social/cultural context of the writer. The aim is to raise awareness of the reading community's concerns in order to work toward transformative justice and change.

Nadar (2009) indicates that CBS as a method of biblical interpretation aims at transformation and liberation. CBS in Nadar's opinion, begins with the context and experience. It then analyses the context in dialogue

with the biblical text and at the end tries to communally find ways of engaging in the struggle to overcome oppression and suffering. In sketching the contours of CBS, Nadar provides what she calls the five Cs namely community, context (of the reader), context of the Bible (Criticality), critical dialogue and raising awareness (Conscientisation) and transformation (Change). CBS takes community seriously because it is within the community that interaction and participation takes place. Since CBS is facilitated, it requires voices and opinions of all who participate in the study (Nadar, 2009:391). For Nadar, the active involvement of Bible study participants withdraws the power from the pastor or Bible Study leader and distributes it to all Bible study participants by empowering them to question, critique, debate and arrive at logical conclusions. In this way, CBS is a tool which empowers those who are not often given spaces within a church setting to articulate their views (2009:391). Nadar explains that reading the Bible in the community helps to overcome the challenge of the power imbalance that is created when interpretation is left in the hands of a single all-powerful individual. Context is CBS's point of departure. At the level of criticality, the intellectual plays a key role. Bible study participants try to derive meaning from a biblical text whose context is Jewish and try to find its relevance in theirs. At this level, participants are allowed to ask questions that are beyond the text. The level of conscientisation calls for the facilitator to read the Bible with rather than for the participants. West (2013:45) encourages facilitators to read the text with the participants because ordinary readers need to participate in a critical engagement with scripture. Nadar (2009:394) argues that the fact that worldwide the Bible is being deified and used as a textbook, it becomes imperative to rouse people out of their 'false consiousness'. To do this, Nadar challenges biblical scholars to stop talking to themselves while people continue to live and die by the very texts which they spend their lives arguing over (2009:394). The last stage is that of change. Nadar explains that this level allows participants to chart the way forward after the Bible study. It provides space for participants to take action that will alleviate their suffering. Nadar (2009:394) argues:

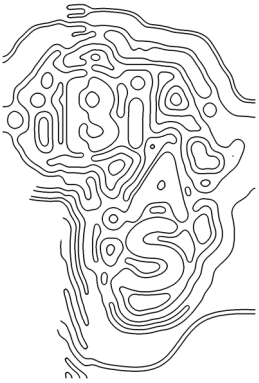
> Change and transformation must be a constant goal. Transformation happens on various levels. On the one hand, the ways in which we read the Bible is transformed- we learn how to read the Bible not only in a way that is liberating and inclusive, but also in a way that stays faithful to who we are in our contexts. On the other hand, it is also transformative in that it is hoped that the Bible study can transform us to such an extent that it spurs

> us into action for change and justice, in a world that is often unjust and not willing to change.

In the context of this study, asking questions why women are marginalised from the political space, at home, church and national level should kickstart the required change.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to argue for the adoption of a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive political framework for Zimbabwe. Through the engagement with the key tenets of the African Womanist Approach, the chapter presented an African Womanist Model for political participation in Zimbabwe. The key elements of the model were identified and explained. The chapter highlighted that such a model would go a long way in ensuring that women become a critical part of both political participation and political leadership in Zimbabwe specifically through challenging dominant religio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as oppressive biblical texts.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7 | SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Introduction

The previous chapter argued for the adoption of an African Womanist Model for political participation in Zimbabwe. Drawing insights from African womanism and borrowing from Africana womanism, the chapter presented a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive African Womanist Model for political participation. This chapter summarises the entire study, draws conclusions and suggest a way forward.

Summary

As the study draws towards a conclusion, it is important that we have a review of what has been done so far. In chapter one, we introduced the study by mapping the field of religion, gender and politics. The chapter began by locating the study within its relevant fields namely; Women's Studies as well as Gender Studies with a special focus on how these fields intersect with religion and politics. It also noted that within the field of Religious Studies, the study can be located within the Sociology of Religion paradigm as well as the Women's and Gender Studies in Religion. The interaction of religion and gender in the realm of politics is central in this chapter. Hence, the chapter theorised politics in a bid to understand its gender dynamics. The argument put forward in this chapter is that we cannot discuss the political without making reference to issues of power. Throughout the sub-themes in the chapter, the division of spaces into private/public is central and greatly noted as one that is helpful in understanding the marginalisation of women from active political participation. Utilising the feminist argument that the personal is political, the chapter supported the call for a definition of politics that encompasses power relations within the private sphere of the home and family including religious institutions. In other words, it is crucial for us to consider the various societal structures that support male dominance for us to understand how these shape unequal gender opportunities in political participation at the national level. Thus, gender and politics scholars argue that the roots of this enduring male domination in politics are complex and profound, hence, the need to challenge the overrepresentation of men and the reflective gender blindness in politics. In laying the ground for such a challenge, the chapter examined the concept of citizenship starting from those

spaces that are traditionally viewed as 'private' moving on to the public spaces. The argument on this theme is that questions around women's citizenship within the family and religious institutions such as the church require further probing because they point us to how women are socialised for national political participation or lack thereof. For example, feminist scholarship on citizenship has critiqued the issue of the exclusions produced through the application of a restrictive notion of the 'political', built on the rigid separation of the public and private spheres. This, therefore, shows that citizenship is a gendered concept which influences women's political participation more importantly because the private/public space dichotomy is laden with power inequalities. It in fact produces and reproduces gendered spaces. This gendering of space, it has been argued, has specific material consequences for people's daily lives, their mobility as well as their sense of identity. The study of gendered spaces in the context of political participation opens new possibilities of perceiving the everyday socio-cultural as well as religio-political dimensions. The chapter then theorised the relationship between religion and gender. The intersection of religion and gender constitutes a central theoretical and methodological framework to address issues of inclusion and exclusion, production of difference and the complicated power relationships in societies This analysis is crucial for us to understand the gender power dynamics in political participation. Furthermore, the chapter examined the relationship between religion and politics. The argument here is that religion influences politics in so many ways. In this regard, it is only prudent to say that in doing so, religion brings with it its baggage of gender inequalities to the field of politics. After the theorisation of the key concepts in the study, the chapter provided the context of the study, its aims and objectives, methodological considerations, the theoretical framework as well as the structure of the book.

Chapter 2 focused on women within the social institutions of marriage, kinship as well as the family. It provided an analysis of how African women are acted upon by the politics manifesting itself in the home as well as how they navigate it. The chapter engaged with literature that presents different view points on the status of women in the pre-colonial period. It noted that four schools of thought emerge from literature. One school of thought dominated by non-African scholars presents African women as oppressed, domesticated and helpless. The second is the school of thought made up of some African scholars who reject the existence of gender in African societies before colonialism. The third group holds

mixed views about the status of African women during this period. For this group, while women were largely marginalised, some of them particularly those from aristocratic families held some power and authority. They give examples of women who acted as queens ruling kingdoms, some were warriors etc. The fourth group comprises both African and non-African scholars, who cautions African gender scholars against distorting history. For this group, while colonialism brought in new forms of patriarchy, it did not introduce concepts of gender relations in Africa. They argue that gender had always been an organisational tool in pre-colonial African societies. For them, colonialism found a gender-structured society in Africa and what it did was to reinforce it as well as introducing new forms. This study adopts the fourth school of thought because it views gender relations that prevailed in pre-colonial Africa and the colonial period as having a notable influence in contemporary Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. The chapter traces the societal positions of women from the pre-colonial, colonial to the contemporary period. It presents the contestations in scholarship pertaining women's citizenship within the home. Such an analysis is meant to enable us to locate Shona women's position within the home as well as the politics that guides it. In other words, the chapter rejects the widely held view that in Africa, colonialism brought with it the subordinated position of women. Rather, the chapter argues that colonialism reinforced the gender culture of most African societies, Zimbabwe included, while at the same time it introduced new gender perspectives. A presentation of women's voices in contemporary Zimbabwe is done in order to show how the home remains gendered space as a result of both the pre-colonial and the colonial periods. In order to justify this perspective, I engage with concepts of women as aliens (*vatorwa*) in families in which they marry as well as families of birth as forcing women to be in 'no man's land'. The other concept which I engage with is that of the *Musha mukadzi* adage, which this study problematises as both empowering and disempowering. It echoes sounds of domesticating women while at the same time trying to recognise the crucial place that women occupy within the home. In dealing with the home in contemporary Zimbabwe as gendered space, the study enlisted the views of women from diverse backgrounds. Results from the field indicate that women experience patriarchy in different ways. The common theme emerging from findings is the problem of the socio-religious construction of men as heads of families which largely causes the marginalisation of women with the home in terms of decision-making. The chapter also

notes that women in the home exercise agency in negotiating with patriarchy.

Chapter 3 reflected on the influence of religion in shaping attitudes towards women's leadership within religious institutions in Zimbabwe. It questioned the continued socio-religious construction of women as incapable leaders which has sustained the heterosexist structures of subordination particularly within the church in Zimbabwe. The chapter made a contextual analysis of women in religion/women and religion in order to understand the status of women in religion in general. From the engagement of scholarship on gender and religion, the chapter showed that women in the religions of the world occupy inferior positions and this is replicated in the wider society. In fact, the chapter argued that women who are very religious may not take active part in public life as they try to adhere to the patriarchal religious teachings of their religious leaders. Hence, the chapter problematised women's higher religiosity in the face of their marginalisation in religions. Scholarship that has tried to answer these questions was shown to place the blame on women's exclusion from social power. For example, the chapter indicated that women turn to religion as a way of coping with the loss of power in homes and work places. In any case, most women are unemployed formally, hence, they spend most of their time participating in religions. The chapter then discussed the way the church in Zimbabwe, from its inception, socialised women to accept inferior positions through emphasising the significance of their roles in the domestic space. It further critiqued the education curriculum that was introduced by the colonial government and showed its genderedness. Missionaries were shown to have had negative attitudes towards African women. As a result, the chapter argued that such attitudes persist in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in the church. Even in churches that ordain women, it was shown that such churches establish parallel patriarchal structures that wield more power than the women pastors. A critical engagement with research participants enabled the chapter to establish that biblical texts that enforce women's silence in church and demand women's submission have been the basis for women's exclusion from not only leadership positions but authority in the church. The depiction of God and Jesus as male exacerbates the situation. Despite women's marginalisation from leadership, the chapter noted that women in the various Christian traditions in Zimbabwe are exercising agency through participating in women's groups such as Thursday meetings as well as starting their on

ministries. Memory Matimbire of the Ndadhinhiwa Prayer Group was given as a case in contemporary Zimbabwe. Reference was also made to Mai Chaza who founded her own church. In this case, the study argued that women in religions employ different strategies to negotiate, subvert, resist and confront patriarchy in the church in Zimbabwe.

In chapter 4, the study made an in-depth analysis of women in national politics. It extended the analysis made in chapters 2 and 3 in order to establish the influence of what happens in the home and the church in shaping gender attitudes in public sphere. A historical analysis of literary texts was made in order to show that women have always been treated as the 'other' in political processes going back to pre-colonial times. In this case, the chapter argued that colonialism reinforced this marginalisation. The laws passed by the colonial government were shown to have had the intention of barring women from the public sphere through controlling their mobility as well as depicting them as legal minors. The chapter further engaged with women's resistance against colonial rule and the role they played in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. It highlighted that women contributed immensely to the struggle both as combatants, collaborators and supporters. However, the chapter noted that despite these sacrifices, the history of the struggle invibilises women while valorising the exploits of male combatants. In order to justify this argument, the chapter critiqued the post-war Shona novel writers and accused them of political amnesia as they ignored women's exploits and struggles during the war. In addition, the chapter noted that women's sexual experiences during the struggle have not been acknowledged. It went further to show the various ways in which women were pushed to the margins of political leadership and participation to their own disillusionment. As a result, the chapter showed that women found solace in women's groups. These groups, it was shown, through the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Community Development which was headed by Joice Mujuru, pushed for the enactment of laws that would improve women's status in Zimbabwean society. The chapter also discussed the various international gender conventions and protocols which aided the inclusion of gender issues in Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution. Historical quantitative data of women elected to Parliament and appointed to Cabinet was provided. Based on this, the chapter argued that without political will, conventions, protocols and constutitions are but just papers which can be ignored. This then led the chapter to present women figures who have participated actively in politics in Zimbabwe in order to show their experiences emanating from how society

perceives them. These perspectives were supported by women in politics in contemporary Zimbabwe and their views on how religion has shaped their experiences in the political arena were presented. The chapter showed that through agency, women in politics have been resilient in their struggle against patriarchy in national politics.

Chapter 5 engaged with biblical gender discourses of political participation. The chapter sought to establish the prevasiveness of religion within political discourses of political participation. It problematised the use of the Bible as a political text in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. The chapter challenged the gendered utilisation of the Bible in political spaces. After engaging with responses of church leaders in conversation with women's responses, the chapter established that the church in Zimbabwe is guilty of not only shaping gendered attitudes on women's political leadership and political participation, but of being the hidden hand directing these in political spaces.

Chapter 6 proposed the adoption of an African Womanist Model for political participation in Zimbabwe. It presented the key elements of such a model. First the chapter recognised the home, church and national governance institutions as critical interdependent institutions forming the base of the model. The chapter went on to place gender at the centre of political participation in this model. The key elements identified in this model are: the deployment of positive femininity and womanhood, collegiality, daring of patriarchy, reinforcing the need for transformative masculinities, Ubuntu-centred and it calls for life-giving readings and interpretation of the Bible. An in-depth analysis of these elements was given in this chapter.

Conclusions

The study on the role of the Bible and religio-cultural beliefs and practices in Zimbabwe's political spaces leads us to draw the following conclusions:

The church in Zimbabwe has been an accomplice in the way women have been treated in the home and national institutions such as politics. In fact, it is the church that influences gender relations in these spaces. Maluleke (2009:33) sums this up in his critique of African Theology when he says:

> Time and again African Theology has been caught napping when it comes to issues of women. This means that, by and large African Theology has been at peace with the patriarchy inherited from both Western and African cultures. The logic of patriarchy has been so internalised that even when

> dealing with similar issues of dehumanisation, oppression and exclusion, African theologians have not been able to make the connections. Ideologically, spiritually, therefore, African theology has remained has remained largely beholden to the supremacist ideas when it comes to gender relations.

Hence, for women seeking to be included in decision-making processes in the home, church and national governance institutions, religio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as oppressive biblical texts are the cause of their exclusion and marginalisation. The study proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the exclusion of women does not start with their being barred from the Presidency or high political office, but begins with the biblical definition of the man as the 'head of the house'. It, therefore, follows that if the President is the head of his family, questions are raised as to how a woman can become the 'head of the national family'? As stated by church leaders in this study, once church doctrine subscribes to the notion of male headship, it becomes detrimental for any political party to field a woman as a presidential candidate. The party loses before the contest begins. It, therefore, becomes clear that religion influences gender identities in politics. It is, therefore, not far from the truth that the church in Zimbabwe in its generic sense is a fertile ground for the production and reproduction of gender inequality which is expressed both physically and symbolically. Therefore, Kumari, (2012:91) is correct in noting that strong patriarchal traditions, coupled with religious and socio-cultural norms are the crucial factors holding women back from active participation in politics. This observation is crucial because Chapter 4 has shown that religious beliefs at times militate against constitutional expectations as well as international and regional conventions and protocols. Hence, there appears to exist a distinction between written policy and its implementation. As long as constitutions, conventions and protocols remain on paper with zero or half-hearted implementation, they are nothing but rhetoric.

The study also concludes that space in never gender neutral. Chapter 2 has shown that the home is gendered space. There is a tendency in contemporary Zimbabwe to create space within space. Within one house, rooms are divided into women's and men's spaces. This serves to entrench hegemony because women tend to claim traditionally acclaimed spaces such as the kitchen. Men are habitants of more powerful spaces. In such cases, major decisions are made in those powerful spaces while women are busy with their feminine duties of caring, cooking, washing

among others. Chapter 3 has also shown the way church space is gendered. Christian women are made to focus on traditional roles which bring home to the church. Hence, they are made to concentrate on sweeping, cleaning and decorating church buildings as well as fund raising for the church. When it comes to preaching, most churches allow women to lead Sunday schools, because women are traditionally viewed as carers and nurturers of children. AICs interviewed in this study vehemently declared that no woman is allowed to stand in front of men let alone to lead a congregation. Chapter 4 showed the various ways in which national politics is gendered space. Despite women mobilising for political parties, the study showed that they are less likely to occupy executive top posts or cabinet posts. Engendering space can contribute to the creation of more room for women in male-dominated spaces, decision-making included.

Having listened to the responses of women and church leaders, the study also concludes that the way the Bible is appropriated in political discourses is not helpful. Gendered readings and interpretation have been death-giving to women in Zimbabwe. Throughout the study, reference was made to biblical texts that emphasise silence and submission as influencing women's attitudes towards political participation. Most women interviewed in both Chapter 2 and 3 indicated that they are not active political participants except that they vote at election time. Hence, they do not attend political meetings such as rallies because of the way women are expected to carry themselves in public as prescribed in biblical texts and socio-cultural beliefs. Two of the women actually indicated that their church doctrines do not allow them to participate in politics with the belief that God chooses leaders for nations. One of the findings of this study has been that such appropriation of biblical texts cause women to withdraw from political spaces in the home, church and at national level. As a result, another conclusion arrived at in this study is the need for contextual Bible readings and interpretation in Zimbabwe. In this case, constituting formal organisational structures that focus on training men and women in Contextual Bible Studies is a necessity. This may assist in changing men, women and church leaders' gendered attitudes towards women's political participation. It would help for Religious Studies scholars in Zimbabwe to take a leaf from the UJAMAA Centre for Community Development in South Africa, where biblical scholars like Gerald West have been carrying out contextual Bible studies with lay readers of the Bible. The conservative stance of AICs leaders in this study calls for the establishment of such an organisation. This would go a long way in ensuring that the Bible as an

African text is utilised for transforming society. When I interviewed the AFM in Zimbabwe pastor, he actually suggested that it is possible for gender and religion scholars to visit his congregation and do Bible study with both men and women. He indicated that the issues raised during the interview were very pertinent though the church has not paid attention to them. Bridging the gap between academia and communities through CBS in this case becomes siginificant.

The use of affirmative action through the quota system, though noble remains problematic. The study showed that the quota system has its own challenges of projecting women as lesser beings than men. Both men and women showed contestations around the concept. It, therefore, calls for the concept to be revisited. Gora (2020) called for the system to be regulated. He suggests that women getting into Parliament through this system should be subjected to a vote where women only contest. The director of a women's NGO interviewed for this study indicated that most women are now running away from competitive politics waiting for the quota system. Gora also suggests that age limits be set for women who prefer to use the system to get to Parliament. This would ensure that new faces come rather than have the same faces all the time. The general sentiment coming out of both women and men is that if women want to be in national politics, they should fight their way up.

The study also concludes that women have not been permanent victims of political marginalisation in the home, church and society. They have come up with ways of negotiating, subverting and resisting patriarchy in these institutions. Some women in the home have deployed submission as a subversive tool to circumvent patriarchy in the home. In the church, women have used multiple strategies some of which have been stated above. However, others have abandoned diplomatic ways and have chosen the confrontational path. Memory Matimbire discussed in this study has chosen to use the pulpit as confrontational space against patriarchy in the church. Despite patriarchal resistance, women in Zimbabwe have maintained their presence in national politics. Women's persistence in demanding space at the decision-making table is making patriarchy uncomfortable. Hence, the demonisation, the violence in all its forms against women and the vilification of women in politics need to be seen as a response of a wounded beast that has been dared – Patriarchy.

The study concluded that useful information had been elicited from research patricipants to justify the proposition of an African Womanist Model for political participation. Women research participants explained

the various ways in which they are treated as the 'other' in their homes, churches and national politics. They were able to identify the Bible as well as religio-cultural beliefs and practices as tools that are used to exclude them from decision-making positions in the three institutions. Church leaders interviewed for this study justified women's inferior status in these institutions by appealing to the Bible and 'culture'. Gokova (n.d:46) argues that society, culture and religion are no longer sufficient excuses for men to insist on playing gender roles that depend on the subordination of women. Hence, the majority of women in this study as well as some church leaders suggested ways in which women can be part of the centre so that they can also actively participate in political processes in the home, church and national politics. The study argued that the adoption of such a model would make the political space in these places gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive. As a result, more women would engage in decision-making processes at all levels for the betterment of Zimbabwean society.

Way Forward

- The study suggests the constitution of an organisation that engages lay readers of the Bible through CBS. Such engagements would encourage men and women to read the biblical text critically. It would also open up spaces for CBS facilitators to introduce extra-biblical sources to lay readers of the Bible in order to equip them to critique both the written Bible and the 'Bible of culture'.
- Political parties are urged to use religion constructively in gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive ways. A responsible utilisation of religion such as Christianity and African religio-cultural beliefs and practices calls for a discarding of rigid ways of reading the written Bible and the Bible of culture. As the world changes, the retention of of religio-cultural practices and attitudes that demean women is detrimental for national development. It serves the interest of a few patriarchal elite at the expense of the majority, most of whom are women.
- Men and women in Zimbabwe are encouraged to strive for equality in the home, church and society because this is good for all. Inequality breeds anger, resistance and violence. Hence, fulfilling

all conventions, protocols and the national constitutional provisions is imperative. This calls for political will at national level. Paying lip service to agreed protocols and conventions results in all other sectors ignoring the same. The study also makes a clarion call on the church in Zimbabwe to establish gender desks. Such desks would respond to cases affecting both men and women in the home and the church. This would also equip the church with the necessary skills to influence gendered attitudes in society at large. The gender desks would also go a long way in recovering the voice of the voiceless so that their voices too can influence church policy specifically on issues to do with gender justice. Gender desks would ensure that the church takes seriously the hurts that domestic arrangements and their violence bring (Oduyoye, n.d). In this case, the church cannot afford to be dead to the context in which it serves (Oduyoye, n.d).

- Women elected to political offices should desist from exhibiting signs of amnesia once in office. Most of the negative attitudes towards women politicians by women stems from the fact that once in offices, women politicians tend to serve and advance patriarchal interests. Women voters expect effective representation from elected women politicians. Win (2004b:n.p) explains women's expectations from elected women politicians. She argues:

  > But we have also learnt that it is not enough to simply want to be there. It is no longer sufficient just to talk about balancing the numbers. Those of us in civil society who are called upon to support women in leadership, need to know why we are supporting them. I do not want to work with radarless women who seem to think that politics is a value-free science or those who abuse office. What we need are women who will use their leadership positions to liberate themselves and other women. Trading on their biology alone is not good enough. I am angry with the kind of women who at every other time in their lives forget they are one of us, and remember their vaginas when it suits them.

  Win's disillusionment with women who use women to vote for them and quickly forget about them once in power is shared by many women. In this case, women in positions of political power in the home, church and society need to champion women's causes by demanding that patriarchal structures in these institutions are dismantled for the good of all genders. In their analysis of Rwanda, Abbott and Malunda (2016:562) note that despite the

high political representation of women in parliament, this has not translated into legislative gains for women. In fact, women in Rwandan parliament toe the party line and rarely mobilise around issues that concern women. At times, they even vote for legislation that reduces legal protection for women or eliminate women-friendly policies (Abbott & Malunda, 2016:562).

- Following from the above and arising from Joana Mamombe's experiences when she challenged Jessie Majome in the MDC-A primary elections, more research is required to establish ways in which young women politicians have to contend not only with oppressive African patriarchy in political spaces, but with dangerous femininities as well. Focusing on patriarchy exclusively leaves dangerous femininities thriving in political spaces in Zimbabwe.

Acronyms

ACCZ	Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe
AFMZ	Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe
AICs	African Initiated Churches
AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
AIPPA	Access to Information and Public Privacy Act
AU	African Union
BACOMA	Baptist Convention of Malawi
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CBS	Contextual Bible Study
CC	Constitutional Commission
CCC	Citizens Coalition for Change
CEDAW	Elimination of all Discrimination against Women
CiM	Churches in Manicaland
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
CSC	Child Safeguarding Committee
EFZ	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GT	Glad Tidings
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
FiG	Faith in God
GtH	Grace to Heal
HIS	Heart in Service
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HOCD	Heads of Christian Denominations
HOME	Hand of Mercy
HSTV	Heart and Soul Television
IBWO	Indigenous Business Women's Organisation
ICT	Information Communication Technology
JMACC	Johane Marange African Apostolic Church
LAMA	Legal Age of Majority Act
MCZ	Methodist Church in Zimbabwe
MDCA	Movement for Democratic Alliance
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-N	Movement for Democratic Change-Ncube
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai
MP	Member of Parliament

NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PF ZAPU	Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union
POLAD	Political Actors Dialogue
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
RRW	Ruwadzano Rwe Wadzano
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
SDGEA	Solemn Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa
UCMCZ	United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe
UDACIZA	Union for Development of Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe Africa
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
YWCA	Young Women Christian Association
WAG	Women's Action Group
WC	Women's Coalition
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCOZ	Women Coalition of Zimbabwe
WiLDAF	Women in Law and Development Foundation
WILSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa
WIPSU	Women in Politics Support Unit
WOZA	Women of Zimbabwe Arise
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZAOGA	Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa
ZCA	Zimbabwe Christian Alliance
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZIICC	Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches
WLLG	Women and Land Lobby Group
ZWB	Zimbabwe Women's Bureau
ZWLA	Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association
ZWRCN	Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network

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CFDG5, Church woman, Harare, 13 February 2022
CFDG6, Church woman, Harare, 13 February 2022
CFDG7, Church woman, Harare, 13 February 2022
CFDG8, Church woman, Harare, 13 February 2022
CFDG9, Church woman, Harare, 13 February 2022
CFDG10, Church woman, Harare, 13 February 2022,
HFDG1, 28 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
HFDG2, 36 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
HFDG3, 34 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022,
HFDG4, 45 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
HFDG5, 43 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
HFDG6, 45 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
HFDG7, 39 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022

HFDG8, 40 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
HFDG9, 54 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
HFDG10, 55 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
Interview with a women's organization director, 11 February 2022
WH1, 47 year-old woman, Harare, 25 February 2022
WH2, 50 year-old woman, Harare, 26 February 2022
WH3, 52 year-old woman, Harare, 26 February 2022
WH4, 53 year-old woman, Harare, 26 February 2022
WH5, 49 year-old woman, Harare, 26 February 2022
WH6, 30 year-old woman, Harare, 27 February 2022
WH7, 34 year-old woman, Harare, 27 February 2022
WH8, 47 year-old woman, Harare, 27 February 2022
WH9, 35 year-old woman, Wedza, 22 January 2022
WH10, 40 year-old woman, Wedza, 23 January 2022
WH11, 45 year-old woman, Wedza, 24 Janury 2022
WH12, 33year-old woman, Wedza, 25 Janury 2022
WH13, 50 year-old woman, Bindura Rural, 29 January 2022
WH14, 48 year-old woman, Bindura Rural, 29 January 2022
WH15, 51 year-old woman, Bindura Rural, 31 January 2022

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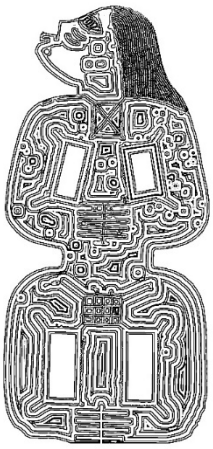

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Dominant religio-cultural discourses on political participation have deployed biblical texts in ways that have shaped Zimbabwe's political terrain to be gendered space. BiAS 35 argues that the challenges women face in their endeavor to participate fully in politics in Zimbabwe are not only embedded in culture, but have also been reinforced by the way biblical interpretation pertaining to women's public roles has been done. The study shows the influence of the Bible in shaping gender relations, even in 'non-religious' areas. This volume, therefore, seeks to open up more political space for women by examining how the everyday is suffused with politics, that is, politics as affecting interactions between individuals and groups thereby facilitating women's participation in politics at all levels.

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