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Kudzai Biri

“THE WOUNDED BEAST?”

Single Women, Tradition, and the Bible in Zimbabwe



University
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Single Women, Tradition, and the Bible in Zimbabwe

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With a foreword by Joachim Kügler



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DEDICATION

*This is
a special dedication
to single women in the faith.*

Do not let singlehood destroy your purpose and destiny.

*In the midst of extreme pressure,
even when the heavens seem to be shut,
hold on to the Cross of Calvary!*



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GOD BLESS THE WOMEN*

May God bless the women for who they are.
Women are symbol of hope and strength.
Women are usually relegated to the background but
owe a lot to.
Think what women go through in raising their children.
And think of how society has unfairly treated them.
Women deserve more we give to them.
God bless the women.
In the middle of the night, I heard her pray so bitterly
and so softly yeah.
She prayed for her children, she prayed for their education
then she prayed for the man that left her
with the children yeah.
We praise heroes everyday but there are those whom we
forget to praise, the women of this world.
You see they do not run from anything; they stand and
fight for what is right.
Even when times are so hard, they are so cool, calm, and
collected.
They do not run from anything, they do not run from
responsibilities, they stand for what is right.

* A Happy Mother's Day song by the late South African Reggae icon, Lucky Dube. It captures the experience of single mothers, that range from desertion, raising children alone, lack of acknowledgement and appreciation from society but above all, they remain hopeful, resilient, and prayerful!

a woman without a man is like a  without 


a woman without a man is like a  without a 

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WHO THEN IS THE WOUNDED BEAST?

Foreword by Joachim Kügler

Patriarchal societies seem to have a transcultural characteristic of showing problems with single women. This cannot be a surprise at all, as the non-independence of women is the basic structure of patriarchy¹. Women are subordinated to men, they are lower than men; weaker, less powerful, less important, even less human. This is the key concept of patriarchy as it is found already in Israel and other Ancient Near Eastern societies. Therefore, a woman's place in the social world is defined by belonging to a man, to a lord. The first lord in a woman's life usually is her father – at least if she is born as a legitimate daughter in his house. The place of the father cannot be left vacant. Even if his female child is mature, she is envisaged to be unable to exist in a society without a male lord. Thus, if the father is missing, be he dead or absent in another way, he must always be replaced by another man. If the woman is not married, the man taking her father's place as her lord may be her uncle (a brother of her father), one of her brothers or one of her male relatives. If the woman is married, usually her husband becomes her lord. If the woman is enslaved, the slave-owner becomes her lord. Even if a woman is the daughter of a freeman, not kept in

¹ Although I cherish the ground-breaking work of Schüssler Fiorenza I hesitate to follow her proposal of using the term “kyriarchy” instead of “patriarchy” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2011). Of course, it is true that the system of men dominating women goes far beyond the rule of the fathers and also implies the rule of a lord/kyrios over persons that are not members of his family. Yet the father is the prototype of the masculine dominator and thus, in most societies the role of the “father” is the model for any masculine ruler, be it in church/religion or state. The power of Roman emperor Augustus found its best expression in the title “pater patriae” and even the pope, a man living in celibacy, is called “Holy Father” as he is head of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it makes sense to stay with the term “patriarchy”, I think.

slavery, she will never be really free. If she would be “free”, her freedom would be seen as loneliness, being helpless, not really existing in society. Thus, the basic characteristic of a woman’s life in patriarchal societies is that of having a male lord over her. Of course, this basic structure can be modified in many ways, but it is a common script linking all human cultures that focus on masculine domination, as Pierre Bourdieu (2001) called it.

In a sense, women never are adult persons. Just like children they always need a man to guide them, protect them, speak for them, decide for them. That is why patriarchal societies even tend to ignore or underestimate the problem of sexual abuse of girls. The difference between a person being young enough to be called a child and a person old enough to be called a woman is not that big. The only factor that makes a difference is the ability of producing offspring. However, there is no age, that enables a child or woman to say ‘no’ to the sexual desires of her lord, be it the father, the brother (cf. Stiebert 2016; Seifert 1997:175 ff.), the husband, the pastor, the teacher, or the office head. It is always the lord’s decision regarding when, with whom and how he will have sex². Only the rights and the power of other men can put restrictions on his sexual

² The biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife tells that even if the man is a slave his status is higher than the wife of the slaveholder. Joseph puts the woman into her place: *“Look,’ he said to his master’s wife, ‘with me here, my master does not concern himself with what happens in the house, having entrusted all his possessions to me. He himself wields no more authority in this house than I do. He has exempted nothing from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How could I do anything so wicked, and sin against God?’”* (Gen 39:8-9 NJB). The male slave representing his lord stands over the woman trying to share into her lord’s slaveholder-authority. Gender hierarchy beats slavery law: Joseph and the woman have the same lord. She cannot share into her lord’s authority as she is his property not his representative. On the other side the male slave is appointed as a vicar of his master’s property. Thus, he represents the masculine domination over all belongings of his master – only the master’s wife is exempted from this. Therefore, Joseph is not allowed to have sex with her. Yet she has no authority to command him having sex with her as she is (female) property of her (male) lord not sharing into the masculine domination of her master. Cf. Kügler 2019a:2-5.

behaviour. Therefore, patriarchal cultures basically are *rape cultures* (cf. Stiebert 2020).³ The powerful man manifests his power by sexual domination, and this is not just a side-effect of masculine domination. Just in the opposite, the close connection with sexuality and power constitutes the core of masculine domination, as Michel Foucault (1978) points out in his ground-breaking studies on the history of sexuality. As masculine domination is a cultural system of symbolic violence, it tends to manifest itself in bodily violence. Rape is not an accident in this cultural construction but rather a kind of “sacrament”⁴ to establish the symbolic order by inscribing the message: “man dominates woman,” into the bodies of the dominated ones again and again.

In relation to decision-making, independence, sexual and other human rights, a woman never is an adult person in patriarchal systems. Neither her age nor a mature character nor supreme intelligence or a brave heart qualify her to play the role of an adult person in society. Without a male guardian or custodian, a woman cannot act in a radically patriarchal society. Thus, being single is a real problem for women in such a society. Although this “idealtypische” structure of masculine domination knows a lot of variations and exceptions in detail – e. g. patriarchy in Germany is not the same

³ Seifert (1997:185) rightly puts it: “Das, was wir aus feministischer Perspektive als sexuelle Gewalt gegen Mädchen und Frauen bezeichnen, beinhaltet für die Täter [...] ein intensives Erlebnis von Kontrolle, das Gefühl, Herr zu sein über Leben und Tod. Sexuelle Gewalt gegen die Tochter ist ein Kontroll- und Unterwerfungsritual, das Väter um des Machterlebnisses willen benutzen und mit dem Zweck, Macht zu spüren und Machtverhältnisse zu stabilisieren.“ – Translation JK: *What we – from a feminist perspective – are calling sexual violence against girls and women, on the side of the perpetrators is implying an intensive experience of control, the feeling of being lord over life and death. Sexual violence against the daughter is a ritual of control and submission which fathers use for sake of the experience of power, and with the purpose of feeling power and stabilising relationships of power.*

⁴ “Sacrament” here is defined as a performative sign which effects an embodiment of a symbolic order. Sexual violence, in this sense, has a sacramental quality as it not only is indicating the symbolic order of masculine domination but enacts this order and thus strengthens it.

in 2021 as it was in 1970,⁵ and the role of women in British monarchy is not the same now as it was in the 16th century⁶ – the basic structures are necessary to understand the specific problems we are struggling with in many areas nowadays. One cannot understand why conservative US-Christians support a president known as an adulterer and ‘grab-them-by-the-pussy-macho’, without understanding the tight connection between sexuality, power and religion constituted by the basic pattern of masculine domination which patriarchal theology will define as “God’s will” and “the divine order of creation”. The ‘macho’ adulterer may be a sinner, but he is a real man, capable to dominate, qualified to reign.

That is the same mechanism that leads female Christians in African churches to defend their church leader even after he was found guilty of child abuse and rape (cf. Zimunya & Gwara 2019). Although most Christians, of course, would think that he “should not do that”, one cannot contest the power and divine legitimacy of the “man of God” by kicking him out of his job or sending him to jail. Patriarchy often does not have more than lifting an eyebrow on sexual violence, and the reason is quite simple. Abusers and rapists may have gone “too far” but did they go in the wrong direction? The affirmative connection between sex, gender, power, and religion is the basic structure of masculine domination and therefore, acting along this guideline will never be seen as completely wrong.

In most cultural systems religion was and is playing a crucial role as an important ideological tool of masculine domination. Patriarchal religion defines a hierarchy where power runs down from

⁵ For example, in the year 1970, a wife needed the permission of her husband if she wanted to sign a contract for a job, which is not the case anymore.

⁶ For Elizabeth I it was impossible to marry without losing her right to reign. Only the absence of a husband made it possible that she was ruling as (a “virgin”) Queen. Some centuries later, Elizabeth II could marry. However, her husband was not allowed to bear the title “King”. In order to make it possible that his wife is a reigning Queen he had to be a mere “Prince”. If he would be King, she would not be head of state, not a reigning Queen, but a Queen in the sense of a king’s wife, a royal “first lady” as was her mother.

god/the gods as the supreme power(s) to the man as the representative of divine power and the woman as the object of this power. This kind of religious world is found in the canonical texts of Ancient societies (e.g. the Hebrew Bible for Judaism or Homer for Greek antiquity), but it is also found in most of religion-determined societies nowadays. Of course, for the history of Christianity the scriptures of the New Testament are of highest importance. There we find the Apostle Paul writing:

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman the man, head of Christ God. (1. Cor 11:3)

Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστός ἐστιν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.

Paul's Jewish-Christian concept (cf. Kügler 2019), of course, is different from pagan versions of this hierarchy as the Apostle knows only one God and he introduces Christ as an intermediate power between God and man. However, these variations do not affect the woman's place in this concept of world order. Her place always is the least one, the place of submission and being dominated. Woman is the one who has no one under her for whom she could be head. This conceives her as the counterpart of the other end of the pyramid; God has no one above him who could be his head. The dominated non-dominating is the opposite of the non-dominated dominator. Thus, 'woman' is most far away from 'God'. Being a woman is not only defined by being powerless, non-masculine, and dominated, but also by being non-divine, while the patriarchal religion defines 'God' as a masculine, powerful, dominating non-woman. In this kind of religious world order the woman is the perfect place for sin, associated with everything that is distant from God or against him.

Yet, the biblical tradition offers many examples of cracking and even transcending patriarchal patterns of thinking and believing. Biblical religion is not simply a reproduction of patriarchy. The same Apostle who wrote the above quoted verse also wrote,

- 26 Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
For you are all sons of God by the faith in Jesus Christ;
- 27 ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.
For every one of you having been baptized into Christ, Christ did you put on;
- 28 οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνα, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.
Neither is there Jew nor Hellene, neither is there slave nor free, not is there male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.⁷

This program of a non-gender structure of Christian church and full equality of all members through redemption is a true gender revolution in the patriarchal framework of the Ancient world. Far too radical for most of the Christian communities until nowadays. Yet it shows the ambivalence of gender-revolutions in the iron cage of patriarchal culture. If Paul wanted to declare Christian women as equal to their brothers in Christ, he had to declare them as somehow masculine. According to patriarchal tradition, only brothers could be fully equal to each other, while sisters had to subordinate to their brothers who represented by virtue of their masculinity the authority of the father. Thus, Paul had to call Christian women “sons of God” to declare them as fully redeemed in Christ, having the same rights and duties in the church as the Christian men. When Paul uses a masculine word to say that Christian women and men are “one” (V.28) in Christ this is not only a tribute to the fact that the church as the embodiment of the Messiah’s body is a male body as Jesus was a man. It is also a tribute to Hellenistic-Roman

⁷ It is widely accepted that Paul, in this passage, uses an ancient creed, which he adopted from his mother-congregation in Antioch. Most likely this text was spoken or sung in the context of the ceremony of baptism, interpreting dogmatically what just had happened in the rite of initiation. The precise differentiation between the pre-Pauline credo and the Pauline frame text, however, is disputed.

mainline culture which is unable to think of femininity as something positive, equal to masculinity. While the true man is the perfect version of *mankind*, the woman is a defective version of it. Therefore, everyone and everything that is female/feminine shows a certain deficit and is inferior to everything and everybody who is male/masculine. And so, in his time Paul had no option to express women's equality in Christ than to call them "sons of God". Granting them a masculine status was the only way then to promote women to the status of independent and honourable congregation members, fully equipped with the same rights as the masculine members. Will we nowadays find a way to gender equality without telling women they should become less feminine? How do we define male/masculine and female/feminine without saying that one is inferior to the other?⁸

This book on the status of single women in Zimbabwe manages to make clearly visible the precarious ambivalences of modern gender debates, together with all the sharp conflicts linked to the two competing functions of religion. Prof Biri goes deep into the details of different biographical situations and experiences of single women as well as into the many facets of socio-religious discourse about their status. Although it is a book about the situation of single women in one after-colonial, African society of the 21st century, many of the problems, attitudes and arguments in this discourse are repeating religious and cultural patterns of thought that are typical for patriarchal conflicts in many other cultural settings, nowadays as well as in former times. This is true even if some elements of tradition changed their function and meaning.

In the history of religion, the concept that a single woman, i.e., a woman lacking a male lord to guard and guide her, could opt for a divine lord as a substitute for an earthly guardian, usually func-

⁸ Parts of the spiritual tradition of Western Christianity may offer interesting insights in the "broken masculinity" of God and his "motherly" Christ. Even if it will not help to copy them, they can give an important space of freedom to think beyond the traditional gender stereotypes (cf. Kügler 2020).

tioned as a religious tool of liberation. Women could find consolation in this concept and gain spiritual strength which they needed to survive in a toxic environment. Single women could even use the idea of being bride or wife of a divine lord as a powerful means to escape or avoid the iron cage of patriarchal marriage. If a woman belongs exclusively to God like the Hellenistic-biblical widow⁹ Judith, or if single women had the divine *logos* as their husband-*kyrios* (as did the ‘old virgins’ in the Therapeutic Jewish community of Alexandria), or if young Christian women promised themselves as spouse to the Messiah Jesus (as did the young ‘widows’ opposed by the Deutero-Pauline author in 1. Tim 5) – all these women used a religious concept from the reservoir of patriarchal tradition to avoid the submission to a human lord and lead a respected, self-controlled life. Nowadays, this empowering function seems not completely lost (cf. Beck 2020) but the bride-of-Christ-concept sometimes seems to be more an instrument of submitting single women to the pastoral control of the “men of God” (cf. Biri 2013a).

As, in the cultural setting of patriarchy, sexuality is the most bodily manifestation of masculine domination, all single women like Judith, the “old virgins” or the “young widows” were forced to abstain from having sex with a man – at least officially.¹⁰ That is why this kind of women’s liberation – well-known in Christian history through many centuries¹¹ – hardly will be accepted as a role-model

⁹ Beck (2020:17) correctly points out that many societies make no difference between widows and other single women. Thus, the words which usually are translated with “widow” (i.e., a woman who lost her husband) were used by the languages of biblical times, like Hebrew (‘*almanah*), Greek (chēra) and Latin (*vidua*), to define any woman lacking a masculine lord. Etymologically these words have to do with “emptiness”, “lacking something”. The general use of these words for any woman without man make us find young “widows” in early Christianity, women who never were married but declared themselves “widows” and “promised to Christ”.

¹⁰ We do not know how much secret sexual activity the strict control of family, church and society ever allowed.

¹¹ Powerful women like Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila and many others more could play their important role in Christian history only by avoiding

by the majority of single women nowadays.¹² Claiming for their right of having a fulfilling life in all dimensions of human needs, they challenge traditional Christian concepts of sexuality. The more their voices are heard the more they can push their churches and the societies they are living in towards the development of sexual theory and practice beyond submission, violence, and reproduction. Only if Christian communities manage to develop a concept of sexuality as a manifestation of love between free and equal partners, they will find a way of honouring the single women among their members.

Therefore, it is my wish that this book, written by my dear colleague Kudzai Biri in her time in Bamberg as a research scholar of the German Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, may find many readers who are willing and able to listen to the prophetic voices of single women.

Finally, a word on the title picture of this volume. It is a detail of Artemisia Gentileschi's (1597-1654) impressive painting "Judith Slaying Holofernes"¹³. Her art often focuses on women known from the biblical tradition, women showing strength in dangerous situations like Jael, Bathsheba, Susanna, Esther, Mary Magdalene, and the most prominent example, the widow Judith. The figure of Judith is highly ambivalent. On the one hand she is the ever-praying holy woman trusting in God, living in perfect piety and chastity,

being submitted to an earthly husband. Only as a bride of Christ they could find the freedom of studying, teaching, preaching, travelling and so on. Although churchmen always tried to put them under their control, these active and influential women could do much more than any wife depending on a human husband.

¹² Of course, the celibatarian way of life is highly estimated in religious tradition of the Catholic and Orthodox churches but the number of women who find it attractive to live a nun's bride-of-Christ life is not too high, neither in Europe nor in Africa.

¹³ See the full picture on page 14. Cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Slaying_Holofernes_\(Artemisia_Gentileschi,_Florence\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Slaying_Holofernes_(Artemisia_Gentileschi,_Florence))

while on the other hand she is a “killer lady”, using her sexual attractiveness to get access to the enemy, saving her people by slaying the evil man. In the eyes of patriarchal culture, she is a female saviour and hero, doing something manly for her people, at the same time she incorporates basic fears of masculine dominators. What if Holofernes would be me? What if I would be killed in a moment of weakness by an insidious beautiful woman who turns my bed from a place of pleasure into an execution site? In the life of many women, single or married, these fears are a normal part of their life as in patriarchal rape-cultures the bed can always turn into a dangerous place of violence and death. Artemisia herself survived rape, torture, and public humiliation. If and how these experiences were influencing her art is a matter of fierce debate.¹⁴ Anyway, Artemisia’s Judith seems to act in cold blood, killing the enemy in the same attitude as she would slaughter a chicken for lunch. She does, what needs to be done, without showing emotions like fear, anger, sadism, or vindictiveness.

In patriarchal cultures, the single woman often is seen as a dangerous ‘wounded beast’, threatening the patriarchal order. Yet, the ambivalence of the Judith figure can put the question of ‘who is the beast?’ in a new way. Who is the perpetrator and who is the victim? The killing single woman or the dominant man Holofernes being killed? And, most important, how can (common) Holofernes-violence be stopped so that (exceptional) Judith-violence is no longer necessary?

¹⁴ Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artemisia_Gentileschi.

1 | THE WOUNDED BEAST...

Introduction

On 7 September 2018, the state newspaper *The Herald*, had an advertisement which read:

“Singles Alnight (sic) *Ndadhiniwa*. Operation *Munhu Wese Ngaaroorwe*. Strictly for singles: Genesis 2vs 18 (Daughters of Virtue).

(Singles All night. I am fed up. Operation everyone must be married. Strictly for singles: Genesis 2vs 18)

The above excerpt is from the ‘Daughters of Virtue Ministries’ advertisement on all-night vigil for single women. The ministry is led by Prophetess Memory Matimbire. What is catchy and important on the advertisement is the wording itself, “Operation *Munhu Wese Ngaaroorwe*”! (Operation everyone must be married). It is important to give a brief attention to “operations” in Zimbabwe that can shed light on this advert on ‘operation’ in order to capture the attitudes and perspectives towards single women. Operations that are carried out by security forces in Zimbabwe are not a daily activity. They are carried out at crisis moments in order to curb a perceived serious political-economic or social problem that can endanger the nation. They are crucial as they herald a problem that requires urgent attention to bring the situation to normalcy. Examples of operations in post-colonial Zimbabwe by the security forces include Operation *VaMugabe mu Office* that was carried out on 27 June 2008. This operation was meant to ensure that the former President Robert Mugabe (who had been in power for more than three decades) be restored in office after an electoral defeat by the opposition party. It meant a serious crackdown on opposition parties by all means at the disposal of the ruling regime which culminated in bloodshed as Mugabe unconstitutionally clung to power.

Operation *Murambatsvina* (Clean-up/Restore Order) (26-11-2005) was a police-led operation of ‘massive urban clean-up’ to eradicate illegal dwellings. The so called ‘illegal houses’ were destroyed in order to retain the sanity of the capital city. It was regarded as a gross violation of human rights and had negative effects on women and children, who suffered the worst blow. However, it proved the hidden political agenda of the ruling regime that saw the urban centres as a big threat of electoral defeat, therefore, masterminded the plan to destabilise people and frustrate the support of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) of Morgan Tsvangirai.

“Operation *Hakudzokwe*” (Operation no one will come back) in Chiadzwa Diamond 2008, was meant to clear out illegal diamond miners/looters in the area. This followed a national outcry that the diamonds from Chiadzwa were benefitting only a few elite individuals. Both ground and air force security forces carried out a joint operation leading to a successful closure of all illegal mining activities in the area. Outside these two operations are many other operations that cannot be given space here. What is significant in all the operations are that they point to a challenge and need for urgency. Hence, this necessitates a serious probe and interrogation in relation to the ‘operation’ on single women. It heralds:

- **a crisis at hand:** the crisis is a threat to the socio-economic and political fabric of the nation. The crisis deserves a concerted effort to immediately normalise the situation. When ‘criminals’ endanger the nation, operations by security forces are needful. The above information on operations in Zimbabwe, paves a way to glean on an “operation” that relates to single women; an operation to get them married! Is single hood illegal, a problem and dangerous such that it deserves the society or nation’s attention? Are the single women endangering the body of the Church, the society, and the nation? It can be presumed after inference from the history of operations and developments that when such an operation relates to single women as exhibited in the above advert, singlehood appears to be a serious threat and problem.

An operation spearheaded by a Pentecostal women's ministry, by a female leader at the apex of the ministry but not the single women themselves who declare that they are fed up with the life of single hood and they must marry. The significance of this decree from above should not escape scrutiny in the whole equation of gender contestation and politics in which single women find themselves at a lower moral and power pedestal. Are the female leaders providing security services to safeguard the Church from the danger of single women? It gives a glimpse of the Church's perceptions on single women and also the gender politics at play within the women's forums, outside the domain of perceived male dictators and oppressors. Does this signify a retrogression from Frahm-Arp (2012) claims that in South Africa, Pentecostalism open new space for the acceptance of singlehood, or it affirms Gilbert (2004) 's claim that Pentecostalism is a religion often founded by women who usurp their place? This opens doors of inquiry into the realities of being a single woman in Church and society and scrutinising the authors of discourses and their impact on single women.

- **The urgency it carries-** it is a must for all single women to be married. Something appears to be at stake. And the question is: is singlehood a mode of self-expression that is completely strange to Pentecostal Churches and is it something historically deviant and a dissident status such that the single women are viewed as 'a festering finger' endangering the fabric of marital life therefore, all must be married?

- Also, **singlehood is viewed as transitory** where exit is a must (Lahad 2017). If exit fails, what are the impediments and implications relating to social justice for the single women? Also, is it a testimony to the complex religio-cultural challenges of singlehood that hinge on the interpretation of the Bible in Pentecostalism, seeing the reference to Genesis 2:18 that authenticate the advert? All these thought-provoking questions point to the complex views, perceptions and attitudes towards the discourse surrounding the well-

being of single women and emanate from tradition and the interpretation of the Bible.

In summation, singlehood is not a cherished status. The citation and deployment of Genesis 2 theologically justifies and authenticates a negative attitude towards the status. The failure to fulfil the supposed God's mandate (to be a helper to a man or to be married) is read as a challenge for the 'born again' single woman, therefore, corrective measures are sought. The single woman appears to be a threat in every facet of life; the socio-economic, political, and religious fabric of not only the Church but the whole society. Falling out of the marital home (if she divorces/was divorced), 'husband snatching', seducing the man of God, gold digging at married men and sexually loose morals all constitute an emergency that can be construed as a national disaster, a 'festering finger', disturbing the Church and society's stability (Biri 2019).

In the light of the 'operation', I content that while men remain the oppressive identified enemies in gender struggles for equality, recognition and inclusivity, the role of women should not be underestimated, downplayed or ignored in discourses on gender and specifically singlehood. As gathered from most single women (see Chapter 3), married women have regularly been identified as at the service of patriarchal structures which end up marginalising single women in the Church and society. Single women are deemed unfit in comparison to married women in positions of authority and moral status and are rendered suspect by virtue of their singlehood. I do not intend to defend men, for they remain the architects of patriarchy, but women seem to be positioned in the fore-front and hence, publicly visible. Therefore, the above excerpt is significant as it provides a glimpse of the perspectives and attitudes towards single women and the role of women in Zimbabwean Pentecostal Churches that are dealt with in the preceding chapters.

My interest in the plight of single women was triggered by the fact that they constitute a big membership in Pentecostalism and have some commitment in their Churches. They devote significant time

to the Church at the same time have the burden for their children, some who are deserted by a husband who is not a responsible father. But are they acknowledged, and do they have a voice? Their voices have been silenced by discourses of patriarchy, gender, and culture. This implies that, under the influence of such discourses, single women either seldom know how to speak for themselves or if they know, do they have the platform to express themselves? How do single women see the Bible? To be a single woman (defined loosely in this book to refer to women without a husband because of varied reasons), widowed, divorced, separated or any other category denotes experience, specific experience from the other. How then do the experiences relate to cultural underpinnings and at the same time Biblical perceptions? How does the deployment of biblical scriptures, interpretations and sermons stigmatise and obstruct single women and how do the single women negotiate the terrain of marginalisation and exclusion in their daily realities?

The Shona culture (the dominant ethnic group in Zimbabwe) remains significant in informing and shaping the interpretations of the Bible with regards to singlehood in Pentecostal Churches. Most Pentecostal Christians continue to operate within the matrix of the “African map of the universe” (Kalu 2008), instead of strict adherence to the Bible itself by reading from the Bible, they often read into the Bible or invent scriptures (Gifford 2009) that authenticate prevailing perspectives towards single women. Thus, it brings in the question of the interaction between Christianity and Shona indigenous religion and culture, how they have handled the complicated conversion status of single women as they read, interpret and act the Bible, which is at the centre of everyday life in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this book is a critical engagement of the discourses of singlehood in Zimbabwe in relation to the interpretation of the Bible in a specific Shona cultural context.

My earlier studies on Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe have suggested that the interpretations of the Bible have the capacity to either

disempower or liberate single women. This book examines the cumulative and long-standing traditions and implications of singlehood among the Shona and how the Pentecostals have negotiated the traditions in their Churches. It covers single women in their diversities and the women have marital histories that range from the divorced, the widowed, those who have never been married, the 'separated/deserted' and those in dilemma of not knowing the whereabouts of their husbands among the different categories. While their experiences are diverse, the common denominator of suffering, stigmatisation, exclusion and marginalisation in various degrees and levels justify my approach of broadly dealing with the discourse from a multi-dimensional approach. The single woman is unique. The attention she gets from the society and in the Church, whether positive or negative is unique because she is a single woman. The term 'discourse' refers to a form of language use, or ideas and philosophies. As a form of language, discourse attends to who is using the language and how, why and when the discourse is produced as a communicative event, a verbal interaction (Ridj van Dijk 1997). It is therefore, important to attend to cultural, contextual and individual stories of single women that are mediated in the language, the ideas and philosophies and how they are negotiated within Pentecostalism.

White (1991) points out that the stories determine and shape individual lives, the cultural and personal narratives and that certain narratives become dominant over other narratives. The dominant narratives prescribe the preferred and customary beliefs and code of conduct in a particular culture. The narratives of the dominant culture are imposed on people of marginalized cultures. The narratives have influenced people to find meaning in particular life events and also put others at the periphery. Therefore, I undertook a comprehensive contextualized understanding of how single women are perceived in the Church and how they perceive themselves because of the importance of their experiences within a dominant culture. Culture and religion, as institutions, have prescrip-

tive powers, that are not easily opposed (Makwara 2016) and Pentecostalism bestows unquestioned authority and power on leaders who are viewed as living saints (Akinwale 2004).

Only those who are in higher positions have a voice and power over single women and this derives from a culture and religion that give higher privileges to the marital status over and above singlehood. It is, therefore, important to identify and be aware of discourses that invade single women's space and how they dis/empower them. This book demonstrates the different world of reality that single women live and struggle to conquer territories to establish their true identity. The "ethic of caring" that characterizes black feminist epistemology (Collins 2000:262) is deficient in most Pentecostal Churches. The tenets of this ethic of caring centre on emphasizing the uniqueness of the individual, value of emotions with communication and the power of empathetic interpolation. My argument is that the challenges of single women are a continued manifestation of the unresolved challenges emanating from the interaction between the Pentecostal gospel of 'othering' and the indigenous African spiritualities, particularly on the status of a single hood. Re-configuring womanhood and subsequently singlehood in Pentecostalism seem to present complex challenges. This proceeds from the realisation that Pentecostalism as a global phenomenon exhibits traits that are localised in various contexts and versions (African Pentecostalism) but at the same time continue to pay allegiance to biblical traditions. Thus, leaving some gaps that need to be addressed.

The discourses on singlehood are not new and are varied and complex, often generalised (Frahm-Arp 2012, Kalu 2008, McCulley 2004, DeWitt 2014, Soothill 2008, Lahad 2017) or contextualised (Gilbert 2015, Biri 2013, 2019, Parsely 1990). Various questions underlie these studies. Among the broad questions of inquiry into the welfare of single women, the following stand as important ones; to be a human being means to belong to a particular community

and the single women form part of the community, but do they belong? Does entry into singlehood reduce women's socio-economic status and puts them on the way to poverty? Does entry into singlehood compromise their health and wellbeing of their children? How do the society and Pentecostalism and their collage of culture read the template of being a single woman, especially having a marital history of divorce? Is she seen as a hero, a champion or a failed person in society and does the theological standpoint of single women correlates with that of the other congregants in their Churches? All these questions find detailed attention in the following chapters as I engage and unravel critically the experiences of single women in Pentecostal Churches in Harare.

The Background

Whenever, a paper on single women is presented, dialogue ensues and arguments, disagreements even with emotions follow. I realised, in depth fieldwork and critique have not yet been done and in most cases, people rely on the myths that have been handed down from generations concerning single women/mothers. This research was necessitated by many years of research and participation in events in different Pentecostal Churches both in the rural areas and cities in Zimbabwe, especially in my Church which has a powerful single women's ministry. The sermons, teachings, and exegesis of biblical scriptures in my Church triggered a lot of questions on the role and status of a woman as designed by God. As I climbed the academic ladder, inevitably altering my socio-economic position, I faced serious challenges and had experience of how different categories of Pentecostal women struggle to navigate and bargain with patriarchy in a complex and contested social and cultural context.

I became a single mother and tables turned in my life. My personal experiences and the life histories of other single women based on

oral narratives, captured my imagination and I sought deeper engagement with singlehood as purveyed in Pentecostalism. Songs sung in social single women's forums often triggered memories of their experiences, comforted them in some instances and often giving some of them hope for the future. The role of scriptures and culture came to the fore as they discussed, reflected, commented on their past and projected into the future.

Are the scriptures and tradition doing good for the single women and are they liberated and empowered to face their world? To establish single women's ministry is one thing and to alter perspectives and attitudes towards single women is another thing. The contradictions that I witness as a member, the exclusion and marginalisation and the claims of inclusivity and all-embracing in the Pentecostal Churches were incompatible. It triggered interest in my academic studies to set on course a research on single women in Pentecostalism, to identify the problems, the forms of oppression, the source of the oppression and possible solutions. Contrary to long held opinions in the public space on gender and power relations (struggles between men and women), this research takes on a paradigm shift by exposing how most single women identify both men and women as chief architects of their marriage failure and their continued suffering both in the Church and society.

While there is consensus of voices on the role of the ex-husband in the breakdown of marriage, or failure to be married after they were impregnated (minus those who have never been married) the underlying negative influence of other women came to the fore. Mother in-laws, aunts, friends, work mates among others are implicated as either directly or indirectly involved negatively in their personal lives. Apart from the quest to establish the role of women in contributing to the marginalisation and exclusion of single women there is also a dilemma with the emergence of multiple identities. For example, as an African woman, a University lecturer, single mother and a born-again Christian who strives to live up to my faith and at the same time to uphold the indigenous cultural and ethical values, I found real challenges in negotiating all these

identities that are bundled in me. While I cannot be absolute but the challenge of how to negotiate multiple identities in a globalised world within a dominant localised culture remains a daunting task not only to me, other single women but to most (African) women. The general assumption is that conversion to Christianity translates to the abandonment of the tradition and shunning indigenous spiritualities as the Bible becomes the guiding manual in one's life. While it cannot be disputed that the Bible is a living book in Zimbabwe, Pentecostal claims of a "complete break from the past" (Meyer 1998) and discarding the "African map of the universe" (Kalu 2008) remains questionable and subject to research in different contexts. Relating to gender issues, the adage that: "I am not born in Africa, but Africa is born within me", aptly captures the real experiences and dimensions of patriarchy that women in general and single women respectively experience in their day to day lives. The social degradation that single women experience, name-calling, accusations and the contempt are harsh realities that they face in Africa regardless of their conversion to the Pentecostal faith.

When I felt I had all the energy and space to exercise or unleash my potentials, I often met hostility, from men who thought I was "too independent" and straddling into men's territory and threatening them through 'unexpected behaviour' and that I embodied a 'challenging character.' Also, I would get serious opposition from other women who sometimes disapproved of my actions, not through any word but actions displayed outright disapproval leading to my isolation. The premise of the disapproval is that how can a single woman, without a man behind, excel more than them, she can be a central figure of admiration and consequently pose chances of being pursued by their men. As such, the choice of bulldozing on often left me towering above women that surround me but with the prize of isolation, exclusion, and often false accusations, all meant to bring me down to the level relegated for other women. This created a strong resilient character in me. I, therefore, sought to establish whether I was alone in this difficult journey of singlehood or something was amiss in my life such that I needed

to consult and engage with other single women. This gave birth to an in-depth research that produced this book. It engages different categories of Pentecostal single women in Harare (applicable in many African contexts), but at the same time also pays attention to the “enduring heritage” of the indigenous spiritualities. There are many examples of Pentecostal denominations and ministries in Zimbabwe that run single women’s ministries. Gender issues are well documented, and this includes the interpretation of the Bible in different Christian Churches which has been challenged. But this book specifically calls for a re-reading and re-interpretation of the Bible, an in-depth critique of the different categories of single women, the resilience of culture, the images that are perpetuated and their impact on the health and well-being of the single women. What do the hidden histories of pain and marginalisation reveal about pastoral care and Biblical interpretation in Pentecostalism? How can single women inform power structures regarding their experiences of stigmatization and marginalisation? Above all, if singlehood is a plague, is marriage mandatory?

My previous studies show how married women are encouraged to submit to their husbands in keeping with the ideal Proverbs 31 woman (a woman, mother, and wife) and asking questions to their husbands at home (1 Corinthians 14:35). Zulu (1998) points to certain rhetoric of empowerment that is found in sermons and teachings on submission. However, because there is no male figure to submit to and ask at home for single women, it generated the impetus to focus on single women to see if there is sensitivity to their status. The vibrancy of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe had given me hope on curbing the abuse perpetrated against women in general and specifically single women. Yet, as an insider, I witnessed the cultural knots that Pentecostalism seems to have failed to untie to fully liberate and empower single women from deeply entrenched stigma and stereotypes. In fact, Pentecostal Churches seem to have inherited the stigma from the indigenous culture. The sermons appear to marginalise single women further by cultivating an ethos of suspicion on the perceived evil agenda of single women. Thus,

engaging the Bible and establishing the discourses on singlehood reveal the complexity of negotiating the Bible within a specific cultural terrain that has adherents whose faith remains deeply anchored in their traditions.

De-mystifying traditional conceptions of single women

The study population consists of single women in different Pentecostal Churches in Harare. Harare is significant because as the capital city it is inevitably the centre of sophistication, modernity and at the same time the centre of vibrant competing Pentecostal Churches and ministries. This sophistication and modernity in Harare as the marketplace of Pentecostalism provides fertile ground to establish whether this has affected the reading and interpretation of the Bible by single women. The single women have been exposed to urban aesthetics but at the same time there are multiple factors at play including the indigenous spiritualities that have remained resilient in the believers' day to day affairs (Kalu 2008, Biri 2013). Single mother families have been associated with negative child outcome and poverty (Makwara 2016, Zulu1998). Needful to note are views, theories and models that have been developed in studies of single women. The "deficit theory" views single-parent families as "broken" and somehow doomed to develop problems, engenders guilt in divorcing parents and blame from others. This pervasive view seems to have restricted the growth of knowledge about success in single-parent families. The insights from Zulu show that understanding the strength of these families is useful for researchers and all other stakeholders to deal with and to transcend beyond cultural rigid boundaries that prescribe views about them.

Also, the 'sympathy model' has been advanced and single women are viewed as objects of sympathy. In Zimbabwe, the 'sympathy model' must be challenged because of decades of economic hardships. Even those in marriage struggle and in some instances single women are at a higher economic pedestal than those in marital

relations. So, the Zimbabwean situation and the welfare of single women require constant analysis because of fast-shifting paradigms necessitated by a prolonged political and economic crisis and external avenues that open spaces for single women in their different contexts. Also, education, labour force, wealth, and income are fast catching up in Africa (Gonzalez 2005). Thus, the traditional static conception of singlehood becomes suspect and limiting in post-colonial Zimbabwe and during the prolonged crisis because of various complex factors at play. For example, it is the high-density suburbs of Harare like Sunningdale, Mbare, Dzivaresekwa and Budiriro, among others that single mothers have been popular for buying land and building houses through entrepreneurship programs such as cross-border trading. Yet, the 'poverty thesis' on single women has been and remains popular alongside the 'sympathy model'. However, the emerging trends require attention to these traditional conceptions to establish if they still hold water on single women and may subsequently alter perspectives and attitudes.

The 'deficit theory' and the 'sympathy model' currently seem to also affect those people in marriages because of multiple push and pull factors engulfing the entire continent. Are the current theologies, perceptions, and attitudes towards singlehood cognizant of the shifting complex paradigms or Pentecostalism maintains the syndrome of 'cultural rigidity' and advance a static theology in reading and interpretation of the Bible? The context of biblical scriptures that are deployed, the shifting socio-cultural and economic realities warrant a multi-dimensional critical approach on any discourse that focus on single women. As proffered by Oduyoye (1995:132), the changes that are brought about by colonisation have inevitably triggered the challenge of weaving national identities out of diverse kinship ideologies. The complexity of colonisation and its aftermaths have ramifications on religio-cultural dynamics and Pentecostal theology. What are power discourses on single women, whose interest do they serve and how do single women perceive themselves in the light of the surrounding discourses? What do the

hidden histories of pain and marginalisation reveal about pastoral care and biblical interpretation in post-colonial Zimbabwe, in the midst of a resilient indigenous culture? Radford Ruether (1998:254-255) posits that:

The African populations still retain their historical indigenous languages and cultures, even if their relations to these cultures are disoriented through Western Christianising. The question of the relation between Christianity and indigenous culture is a central one for African Christian theology.

The ‘category’ of single women brings the question of power, in society, Church, families ravaged by conflict, marginalisation and oppression. The power of culture and biblical interpretation render single women invisible and my focus on single women’s oppression and liberation is an attempt to shape a critique of culture and Christianity with a vision of gender liberation and equity in Zimbabwe and to reconstruct symbols and images that are empowering. I do hope that I will proffer a serious theological challenge to the people I share the faith with, i.e., the born-again community.

There are many men who are single and the perceptions of manhood in Zimbabwe are patriarchal. I cannot speak for men for basically two reasons. First, I have consistently challenged the culture of speaking for the other which is common in Pentecostalism. Sermons and teachings about women and singlehood are dominated by men and married women that are ‘outsiders’ and have not experienced what a single woman or woman’s ego is like but teach on singlehood and claim a monopoly of knowledge. It is crucial to question, the validity of such teachings and sermons by ‘outsiders’. Second, as a woman, I cannot claim to understand a man’s ego given the biological differences. I would appreciate the analysis of single men that come from single men themselves because of the power of experience. Apart from these two major reasons, it must be emphasised that Shona indigenous religion and culture is patriarchal. It is difficult to come across a man that is easily identified as ‘single’. Even though there are many single men, and some

Churches and ministries have ministries for these men, they translate to almost 'dead ministries' because sermons appear to condone men's sexual prowess both in and outside marriage (Chitando & Biri 2013). Also, the stereotyping, the eroticisation of suspicion, derogatory sentiments and hate speech on singlehood is mostly directed to single women. Thus, it gave me a strong urge to focus on single women. This background means there is wealth of information with regards to the studies on singlehood, although the area remains one of the under-researched areas in academia and with little focus in Bible studies in Pentecostalism.

The title of the book was inspired by the harsh realities that single women face through verbal attack and disgrace among other forms. T.D. Jakes, an Afro-American tele-evangelist, emphasises secret storms that people experience, be they physical, emotional and financial because no one really understands the magnitude of the effects of the storms on the individual. We were discussing gender issues and the experiences of single women in one of our Friedrich Ebert Stiftung modules on religion, gender, and politics in Harare in 2017, at the German Embassy in Harare. My colleague narrated how a man told her: "I don't want a divorced woman close to me, why did she divorce? I will never try to propose love, no ways. She is a "wounded beast"! As I listened to the narratives my mind raced and tried to understand the statement against the background of my personal experiences and the narratives of pain and marginalisation that many single women have. It was a bold statement of a decided position undertaken by a male individual who had a perception and attitude towards a divorced woman; she is a "wounded beast!" Is there justice to all categories of single women in this claim? The image of 'a beast' denotes a crisis, for a 'wounded beast' is perceived as dangerous, harbouring a spirit of revenge. It became my entry point into the discourse on single women. In what ways is a single woman a "wounded beast" and how does this impact her entire well-being that warrants an 'operation' from the Church? How does the "wounded beast" see herself? How does Pentecostalism deal with the "wounded beasts"? Most importantly, I had a

question, often glossed over, or ignored: who wounded this ‘beast’ and did the man who coined the phrase ever thought of the one who inflicted the ‘wounds’? In all the interactions, debates, discussions, interviews, and observations made on discourses on single hood, any meaningful and objective study on single women whether generalised or contextualised must take the experiential dimension seriously (Smart 1998).

The claims of a “wounded beast” and all the above questions are crucial as they point to an important issue that needs attention from a religio-culture specific approach to deal with the correct empirical template of singlehood. The link between such societal perspectives and attitudes towards single women is important. Also, how does Pentecostal Churches within the locus of such a society understand and relate with single women and do they have a better or alternative template?

Pentecostalism: Defining and contesting the label

I am aware of the contestation that surrounds the label ‘Pentecostals’. Many born again Christians have begun refuting the label as they prefer to be called Believers or Born again.¹ Therefore, I use it on the basis of being the most popular traditional designation that has been used on this brand of Christianity. Many authors who have documented about Pentecostalism have also provided in depth descriptions, explanations, and critique of the meaning. I do not intend to delve into the details of the definitions for it would be to repeat the same old story. Zimbabwe displays diversity of Pentecostal churches, in terms of orientation and thrust. However, I have always distinguished Pentecostalism on the African soil because of its peculiarities that are modified by the indigenous cultural roots

¹ Many Pentecostal Christians have begun refuting the application of the label. They instead prefer to be called believers. See for example, the teachings of Pastor Christian Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy.

and the way these peculiarities are mediated in the gospel. Hence, African Pentecostalism and in Zimbabwe, in particular, is dynamic and continue to centre of the Pentecostal deep-seated ethos of new birth, deliverance, success and prosperity among other key tenets. While the churches and ministries have different labels that capture the tenets, such as prosperity churches, born again movements, Gifford's (2009:112) research in Kenyan Pentecostal churches sums it up, and is applicable to Zimbabwe: ...the principal concepts in Kenya's Pentecostalism are victory, favour, blessing breakthrough. This is important to establish how and to what extent the single women tap into these tenets.

Methodology

Methodologically, the book engages an insider approach based on the phenomenological analysis of Shona indigenous culture that relates to singlehood and how they have found avenues of expression in Biblical reading and interpretation. Thus, the research adopts a comparative analysis in establishing the ways that the Pentecostal single women exegete the Bible vis-a-vis their indigenous cultural norms. The study utilises the concept of womanhood to unravel the challenges, the contradictions and the tapestries of hope that surround single women that are converts to Pentecostal Christianity (in different Pentecostal Churches) and subsequently the prevalent discourses on singlehood. It is culture specific and adopts an African womanist perspective and critiques the religio-cultural discourses on singlehood in Pentecostalism. These religio-cultural-discourses that are dominant within the Pentecostal fraternity have greatly influenced the interpretation of the Bible as many Christians read into the Bible. Therefore, the African womanist approach evaluates the impact of different readings and interpretations of the Bible by the single women in order to ascertain oppressive, liberative or ambiguous dimensions. As such, the investigation falls under the broad feminist approach.

Many Africans have been critical of Western feminism. It is perceived as associated with rights that are destructive to African indigenous cultural values and militates against God’s designed gender roles. Feminism is perceived as a Western idea, alien, bankrupt and a threat to perceived African culture and traditional norms governing gender relations. These are the dominant views prevalent among defenders of the African indigenous cultural values and teachings on gender relations in Pentecostalism. I do admit the hesitation I have when I am asked if I am a feminist. My response is a quick ‘no’. I am aware of the harsh criticisms that accompany anything associated with Western feminism. Caprino (2017) explains the reasons why feminism is so hated by some men and women and the insights aptly describe the attitude of my own people in Zimbabwe:

- It is associated with strong, forceful, and angry women and our societies continue to punish forceful women,
- the fear that men will lose out power, influence, impact, control, and economic opportunity,
- the perception that women want to control and put men down,
- overturning time honoured traditions and establish gender roles and that feels scary and wrong for many people,
- there will be negative shifts in relationships, marriage, society, culture, power, and authority.

Therefore, fully aware of this, I try at times to distance myself from being labelled a “feminist” but at the same time want to maintain that I am critical of patriarchal structures in my society as a Shona woman. I still feel embarrassed to be described as ‘feminist’ and I have often stressed that I am an African womanist with the assumption that I will get ears to initiate my critique from basically an African viewpoint of reality and my daily experiences and those of my fellow sisters. African women theologians have identified challenges in the ‘construction of African masculinity that are

founded on patriarchal ideologies and consequently juxtaposed as polar opposites to African feminism'. For the strong patriarchal structures perpetuate negative images against feminism that is deemed as powerful in unravelling, challenging and dismantling patriarchy. A universally accepted definition of feminism might be difficult, for it means different things to various people. It depends on one's political or sociological observations and goals, one's understanding or interpretation of the word 'woman' and several other factors, for it can be 'a perspective, a world-view, a political theory, or a kind of activism" (Zulu 1998). Definitions on feminism have been provided by scholars such as (Ebunolowa 1998, Offen 1998, Mufema 1999, Caprino 2017). Feminism originates from the Latin word *femina* which describes women's issues. Hence, whatever feminism means to different people, it revolves primarily around the female experience. In this study, single women's experiences, as a social category, thus, the marginalisation of single women is tied to both their sexuality and social category in different facets of life. This is a double blow since women in general have experiences of contempt, exploitation, oppression and marginalisation because women and men's biological differences are reflected in the organization of society and based on these differences, women are treated as inferior to men.

Whether as a theory, a social movement or a political movement, feminism specifically focuses on women's experiences and highlights various forms of oppression which the female gender is subjected to in society. The feminist approach, as pointed by Offen (1998) has three broad components, the validity of women's interpretation of their lived experiences, acknowledging the values of the females and their status relative to men. In addition, Offen points out that feminism exhibits the consciousness of discomfort or even anger of the institutionalised injustice towards women in the family and society. These observations are significant because the narratives of single women show that there are indeed institutionalised forms of violence that include, physical, emotional, psychological, and verbal against them.

The study will not delve into the details of the debate on Africana Womanism and African Womanism as feminist movements that seek to empower women against oppression but in different geographical and cultural settings (Hudson-Weems 1993). Although, it is indisputable that Africana Womanism is very relevant to all Black women's situation around the world, considering the history of discrimination and oppression in America, African American womanist discourse on racial issues became a foremost issue in the formation of ideology and theory articulation (Zulu 1998). In contrast, it failed to consider the peculiarities of experiences of African women. In Africa, economic issues alongside sexist issues are the basis upon which patriarchal structures are entrenched and thrive. Hence, the experiences of different categories of women and their responses to their challenges are shaped by their socio-economic status and cultural worldview.

Therefore, African Womanism, born out of a 'quest for an African variant' (Ebunolowa 2009), identifies poverty and harsh economic conditions as prime factors that significantly shape women's experiences in Africa (Zulu 1998:230) and seems to be a form of indigenous theory that informs the realities of most Zimbabwean women. Hence, I contextualise the experiences of single women in Pentecostal Churches in Harare through an African Womanist perspective. A focus on single women means that feminists, seek to identify and remove all the barriers to equal social, political, and economic opportunities for single women and object to the notion that a women's worth is determined by her marital status (see chapters 2 and 3). Thus, the book is also aimed at 'deconstructing' the established predominant male paradigms and 'constructing' a female perspective which foregrounds the single women's experiences. Zulu (2013) has this to say:

Womanism is informed by serious reflections on the histories and nature of sexual differences and mechanism by which such differences are enmeshed and created out of male power relations that are entrenched in patriarchal ideology. Feminism, due to its inadequacies birthed Womanism... African womanists have different

affinities that direct their agenda in challenging women's oppression; class and race (Marxist), patriarchy and sexuality (radical), individual freedom and equal opportunity for women (liberal).

Hence, this book utilises African Womanism as an ideology that unravels and delineates the indigenous African women's experiences, worldviews, and perception. Challenging women's oppression revolves around single women, taking note of their different classes, their opportunities, examining the complex patriarchal structures that are inter-woven to the detriment of their space in the family, Church, and society. My studies on gender have mostly been through participant observation in Churches; services (including sermon material, presentation, formal and informal interviews with leaders and congregants; extensive informal discussions in Churches, homes, and during activities with single women, (including on social media), and contemporary literature on African Pentecostalism.

While most female studies on gender seek to challenge patriarchy by interrogating men this book takes the same direction but at the same time interrogates both men and women, in particular the role of married women as active players (as available and at the disposal of their men) in discourses that marginalise single women and relegate them at the periphery, in the Church and society through different means and ways. It is not only contempt for the female gender and women that is intriguing in the lives of single women. Single women experience another level of contempt and marginalisation from their fellow sisters- from most married women and the 'first ladies' in Pentecostalism, which brings attention to the nature and complexity of gender politics in African Pentecostalism. In discourses of singlehood, it is inadequate just to focus on men as oppressors but to take a multi-dimensional approach when examining gender relations, between men and women and between women of different marital, socio-cultural, and economic status.

It brings out the nature of patriarchal structures and operations, the corridors of power, not only in Zimbabwe but perhaps most African societies in relation to the cultural perceptions and attitudes towards single women and the reading and interpretation of the biblical scriptures. The nature of patriarchal structure shows the complex gender politics. Gender politics in Pentecostalism helps to understand and analyse the experiences of single women as individuals, how they perceive themselves and how their families, the Church and society understand singlehood. This helps in the construction of new knowledge that bring single women's understanding of themselves, their interests their joys and sorrows as they seek inclusivity in all spheres of life. Their voices represent their experiences and their realities that should be captured and perhaps challenge tradition and the Pentecostal Churches to re-visit the indigenous worldviews and constructions of singlehood, and to discard social and gender stereotypes that marginalise and humiliate single women.

Participant observation is central in my research on Pentecostalism for several reasons. First, it enables me to participate and interact with different categories of single women. The discussions and interviews that I carried out with them, including those who were not willing to disclose during interviews and discussions were all helpful. As pointed by Zulu (1998:109), the significance in the voices is on what they say and what their silence means. Also, important are the single women that were not asked and the voices of outsiders (Taylor, Gilligon and Sullivan 1997). Rein Harze (1992:138) has this question: "Who is speaking when women speak for themselves?" She believes that the authenticity of voices hinges on the fact that their very production may be a form of oppression. Even when women speak for themselves, they can perpetuate systems of injustice through the discourses they use to interpret their stories (Pienaar 2003:29). Also, when some single women (even married women) claim that they are not oppressed when they are beaten or verbally attacked, the social conditioning of being abused should be noted. We should retain a margin of suspicion, especially when all

seems faultless (Oduyoye 1995:131). When ‘first ladies’, men of God and other voices speak for single women, what forms of injustices are being perpetuated and how do they shape the confessions of single women about them and their conditions? The following questions must be asked:

- What are power discourses on single women and whose interest do they serve?
- How do single women understand themselves with such prevailing discourses?
- What is the role of their Churches in deconstructing the stigma and constructing alternative realities to change negative perceptions and attitudes?

I was able to offer critical analysis on my observations and responses that I got, based on my experiences as a single woman and as a Pentecostal researcher for decades. Also, being Shona and a practitioner of some Shona indigenous cultural values. However, this must not be taken to mean that I have the exclusive rights to speak for all single women. Different categories of single women are highly affected by situations that rendered them single. The rural life of single women may differ significantly among themselves and in comparison, with those in the cities. Therefore, results from my findings may inform general trends, the experiences of single women in the whole of Zimbabwe. I did not cover single women in different parts of Zimbabwe, especially those in the rural areas for it warrants a separate study. Also, the research is based on some selected dominant aspects of the experiences of single women. No one should be presumptuous to claim to describe them in the singular worldview. Despite being in the same category of singlehood, the experiences, the joys, the sorrows and challenges differ significantly and are informed by different harsh realities that individuals have gone through or still experience. There is a bias towards greater focus on the divorced single women because of wealthy of information that surrounds the status. However, there is a sense in

which I remain an ‘outsider’ within the fraternity of single women (see the section on the insider-outsider debate below).

The challenges of different categories of single women might leave the position of Womanism in the context of the African female experience in question. I am determined to break away from the generalisations on single women that are dominant in Church and society. Thus, it entails a kind of activism. While the broad different categories and sub-categories based on socio-economic and political status of single women exist, there are other things often ignored or considered minor but remain crucial and central in their lives. Hence, the fusion of methodologies and theories should come to the fore on discourses on single women but at the same time indigenously African in gender discourse rooted in the peculiar and unique experiences of single women and their diverse experiences. This promotes positive transformation (Omolara Oqun-dipe-Leslie 1994:1). She adds:

... what we want in Africa is social transformation. It is not about warring with men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women, and it is also in their interest.

Womanism, thus, makes it clear that the needs of the black women differ from those of their white counterparts, and by recognizing and accepting male participation in the struggle for emancipation it again differs from Western feminism in its methodology of ending female oppression, for the indigenous concept of partnership in development has remained central in the fight for liberation and empowerment of women. The Zimbabwean context and the nature of struggle is captured by Eunor Guti of ZAOGA when she emphasises to women: “...not above him, not under him but side by side

with him”². This is very important as it captures the Shona concept of partnership that is stressed within the framework of Shona communalism and unquestionably, the idea of male compatibility. Womanism is rooted in black culture which accounts for the centrality of family, community, and motherhood. This becomes significant with a focus on single women who have experiences of singlehood in a communally oriented society but at the same time feel marginalised and segregated. Their challenges are centred on the perception of the family, community, and motherhood. I, therefore, affirm the conclusion of the best methodology on the experiences of African women that Ebulolowa (1998) puts across:

...Therefore an indigenous African on gender should involve a dialogic or accommodationist approach, a healthy appreciation of African cultures, a recognition of the heterogeneity of African cultures, a realistic and wholesome strategies devoid of unnecessary aggressiveness, and the centralizing of family, marriage and motherhood as positive experiences for African women based on the idea that we can diversify feminist theory to meet the specific needs of African females wherein gender discourse will be saved from becoming irrelevant, static, rigid and dogmatic, and thus hopefully help in solving the numerous problems of African women in Africa.

² This is testimony of how Zimbabwean Pentecostal women’s forums negate Western feminism which seeks rights in challenging oppression. The question of ‘rights’ is unpopular in Pentecostalism because of the understanding that it is from the West but partnership between men and woman becomes welcome for it is understood within Shona communal beliefs and practices. Also, there is belief that in Genesis 2, God created man and woman to partner and to be together. Therefore, any problem requires dialogue and not exclusion of men.

The Problem and Assumptions

There has been a significant rise in single mother families and female headed houses in Zimbabwe. According to Zulu (1998) premarital childbearing is a major source of singlehood. She argues that 20% in Zimbabwe younger women are likely to be single women compared with older women. However, I find figures in research a big problem for various reasons. Some people (research participants) deliberately give wrong answers once they know that someone is doing research. Or they may pretend for their unknown reasons. This came out through many years of research on Pentecostalism. Especially issues related to gender and patriarchy are sensitive in Zimbabwe and probably most of the countries on the African continent. Issues of sex and sexuality remain highly secretive. It partly explains why most women suffer abuse in marriages, families and society and they are not willing to speak out but to conceal and endure because of complex reasons and traditional patriarchal structures that remain strong. Also, surveys by institutions have an agenda that often guides the outcome of such surveys. For example, surveys by the United Nations, African Union and many others which often have political interests might often be problematic. However, Zulu (1998) positively confirms that the temporary figures discredit figures (in and out of marriage). Marital status variable for classifying whether a woman is a single mother is a great limitation (Moyo & Kawewe 2009). Some are divorced but continue to have relationship as some men or most men often follow the women they divorced and bear children when the woman is out of the marital home and the 'ex-husband' or man (for those who were impregnated but never married to him) has another wife (see Chapter 3).

However, despite the problem of statistics it is undisputed that the continued rise of singlehood points to the breakdown of African traditional family structure and the Shona of Zimbabwe are not an exception. Also, it points to the declining significance of marriage as a family status and for bearing children. Zulu rightly points to

the lower divorce rate in rural areas (1998:58). Rural areas are significant places and as pointed by Ranger (1986) any meaningful study in Zimbabwe that completely ignores the rural areas is suspect. I chose to focus on the capital city as a place of international interaction, mutually borrowing and place of dialogue of cultures because most Pentecostal churches are well established and compete in cities, more than in rural areas where you sometimes do not even have some of the churches. Hence, it becomes strategic to critique the reading of the Bible by the single women in Pentecostal Churches to establish how they navigate their culture in such readings and interpretations and deployment. In the city, there are professional women whom we assume have high level of critical analysis on their situations and have escaped the traditional social opprobrium of oppression by men. Has employment and education empowered single women in urban areas while those in the rural areas continue to be trapped by the traditional structures that encourage endurance in marriages? The question requires pertinent examination in order to bring out the realities of singlehood in its entirety.

While Pentecostalism claims to be a liberative Christian movement, several studies have noted the deficiency in Pentecostal Churches as they continue to deploy patriarchal sermons that relegate women an inferior position to men and tighten the patriarchal grip on women (Mate 2002, Maxwell 2006, Biri 2015 and Chitando & Biri 2013). What are the expectations for a single woman in terms of socialisations? The Zimbabwean scenario is unique on the continent, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa because of highly controversial theologies on gender (and prosperity). It is my contention that: first, the different categories of single women have not been given due attention, particularly the insider perspectives in relation to the reading and interpretation of the Bible. Second, the interpretation of the Bible *visa-vis* the appropriation of indigenous culture in Zimbabwe has not yet received adequate attention. The resilience of the indigenous culture in Pentecostalism seems to have had gained lit-

tle attention and the neglected theme of singlehood and the interpretation of the Bible have remained a big gap that has lacked systematic critical attention. Third, religions and cultures are not only monolithic but also not static. Given the dynamic, vibrancy and creative nature of African Pentecostalism (Zimbabwe in this case), there is need to discredit the 'Americanization thesis', that seems to accord Africa the position of mere recipients who simply regurgitate Western (American tele-evangelists in particular) theologies (ter Haar 1998, Biri 2013) but also local claims that limit the realities of post-colonial narratives on single women. Probing discourses on single women in Pentecostal churches brings out the nexus between Pentecostalism and Shona indigenous spiritualities.

The insider/outsider debate on studies on single women

Elizabeth Isichei (1994:13) has raised an important question that calls for caution to avoid claiming monopoly over the study as an 'insider' when she hammers on 'ambiguities of values'. She asks:

How can one combine the individual view of ultimate reality with the profound secularity of Religious Studies which demands as no other discipline known to do a standing outside of individual belief?

The issues of being a prisoner of faith, the demands of a critical study of religion and hegemonic tendencies to popular Western prevalent discourse are also realities that most African scholars grapple with. However, I have always emphasised the primacy of my heritage as an African woman embodying multiple identities but never losing sight of my African heritage and the experiences that we have gone through and are still going through as African women, despite interactions and influence from the Western world and other forces of modernity and globalisation. In fact, the emergence of multiple identities bundled in me has widened my scope of experiences, analysis and enabled me to be more and more cri-

tical of my Shona culture and Pentecostal faith as an 'insider' and at the same time making use of my academic expertise in objectively articulating the issues from a multi-dimensional approach. In studies on singlehood, who are the insiders and outsiders? Absolute claims of knowledge and qualification are problematic. It must be clear that while I claim to be better equipped and positioned to deal with the subject of singlehood, I submit my limitations also.

There are various ways in which an insider becomes an outsider in certain aspects or discourses. For example, I am neither a single woman by virtue of sexual violence that culminated in pregnancy nor a widow. Therefore, the experiences of these two categories of single women are different because of different harsh realities. I have no knowledge and experience of what it is to be a widow, even though I can be highly empathetic and have the past narratives that rendered me single. Also, I cannot conclusively speak for a single woman who has not been married but desperately desires to be married or one who has been divorced because she failed to conceive. Therefore, it might be misleading to try and describe their ego and their aspirations and even more, the 'wounds' or scars inflicted on them. Therefore, the experiences of single women are not monolithic. Hence, in Chapter 2, the categorisation of single women, which is not exhaustive, is based on a multiplicity of factors that are undergirded by popular perceptions but at the same time engaging the single women to speak and define themselves based on who they understand they are *visa-vi*- the outsider popular conceptions.

I emphasise this degree of being an 'insider' but also being an 'outsider' in some respects in order to point to an anomaly that needs to be rectified in Pentecostalism, to draw attention to religious leaders, in particular, male Pentecostal founders (men of God, Prophets, Bishops, Apostles) and with many other titles. Most of them claim to know about the women, their ego, welfare, hence, producing

large volumes of literature on women and single women to the detriment of writing about their fellow men. Such claims of monopoly on issues of women, often under the guise of inspiration from the Holy Spirit translate to hegemonic tendencies and masculinities that do not present correctly women/single women's diverse experiences, aspirations and their worldview but serves personal selfish interests that seek to advance their status in these Pentecostal movements apart from entrenching a 'religiously bound patriarchy' in the Church. This ignores or underplays the diversity of women. Thus, bottling, bunching, and imposing their pre-conceived socio-cultural patriarchal ideas on women and entrenching a culture of silencing women to speak about themselves and for them. It is another form of surveillance on single women and has fostered the culture among other Pentecostal leaders (elders, deacons, and other congregants: see Chapters 3 and 4). Hence, this deep-rooted culture of speaking for the other must be challenged and call for the single women to speak for themselves, define themselves and say out their aspirations independently.

The interpretation of the Bible by single women in Harare is dictated from above, explaining who they are and what they should do (from the sermonic discourses and available literature on single women). Attention should be given to the 'official' interpretation from leaders and the interpretation by single women themselves, especially in their social forums, independent of what has been inherited from the leaders in order to gain insight on how they navigate their cultural load and interpret and deploy the Bible in their lives. Most Pentecostal Churches that have women's ministries also run single women's ministries. The 'first ladies' in these ministries often act as power points to reinforce the teachings of the 'founders' (their husband) to single women.

ZAOGA and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) women's groups organise big single women's conferences. Often married women are considered renowned speakers at these forums

(although some single women speak in such forums). Yet, single women are considered unqualified to go to couples' forums by virtue of their marital status. It is argued that 'their flesh will be awakened' during discussions and teachings on 'bedroom wisdom' which can pave the way for the single women to indulge in sex outside marriage. However, one wonders why married women are enthroned to be speakers and teachers for single women, yet they do not have the experience that the single women go through. In fact, most single women have gone through marriage and have narratives of the experience of marital life (see Chapter 3). In the light of this, are male founders of Pentecostal Churches, their wives and other Church leaders or congregants in the Churches fit to instruct, teach, read, and interpret the Bible for single women and advise them on issues that relate to single hood?

The views from the leadership structures within the movement represent evangelical authority and power. These are 'nodal power points' given the centralization and authoritarian structures of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and it is important to note that 'men of God' and the 'first ladies' remain central in gender discourses as they control the Churches and ministries. To call the leaders 'insiders' in the discourses of single women seems to be a problem. Yet, these founders and their wives have enthroned themselves to write books, speak, teach, read, and interpret the Bible for single women. Hence, by virtue of that, they can be recognised as 'insider voices' since they are at the centre of the 'official' reading and interpretation of the Bible that influence the welfare of the single women and consequently shaping attitudes and perspectives on single women. Yet, these 'insider' voices are in many respects 'outsiders' for they do not fully know, experience, and capture the core of single women's experiences and aspirations in spite of absolute monopoly on the reading and interpretation of the Bible. The question of who is better positioned to study single women spans controversy. The questioning of boundaries factors in the question of language competence. Isichei (1993) raises the point of probing those studying a historical book without a historical background, without Hebrew or

Greek. While the Bible can be read and interpreted by anyone, some degree of effort must be put to inquire the context of the historical narratives in order to inform and shape the interpretation and deployment.

The creation of single women's ministries should not be viewed as their empowerment. For empowerment to Gutierrez (1983) on the poor is not 'a general relief action' but a demand to build a different social order and relating to single women, the creation of single women's ministries does not translate to empowerment. The dominant theologies fail to build a 'different social order and lack cultural anxiety and theological social justice and a call for differentiation of discourse in view of globalisation and its effects'. However, caution must be exercised for I have also found intriguing gaps between the 'insider' claims and their behaviour, questioning the experiences of the single women. Could not the 'insider' be acting for the reasons which they are not completely aware of, hence, paving the way to the views of the 'outsiders'? This confirms Chitando's (2001) observation that insistence on the primacy of the believer and respecting his or her point of view pose challenges to research. While this is a valid observation for some instances, the world of most single women is a world of harsh realities (that they have experienced or continue to experience) such that their silence and 'intriguing gaps' are all shaped by the painful realities they have gone through, some that are sensitive and cannot be easily tabled to researchers. As such, it is important to insist on the primacy of the single women's narratives, views, and perspectives. Being a single woman means I have an intimate knowledge of the cultural context of the study and I am familiar with the symbolic language, various cultural metaphors employed and the language as a vehicle of communication.

The appearance of women at the top of the movements and the big titles of "Doctors, Professors, Archbishops, Apostles and Bishops" that they have, especially wives of founders of Churches or ministries, should not mislead and be construed as independence and

empowerment of women from male dominated space, structures and systems. Men continue to control the women forums directly/indirectly as women continue to employ theologies fashioned by the “men of God” (Mate 2002, Soothill 2010 and Biri 2013). The gospel of submission sourced from Ephesians 5:22-23 is largely the centre of appealing to the teachings of men that subscribe and ascribe what women must do and above all set the limits of her boundaries in everyday activities. Is the single woman forgotten, what alternative is there for her when married women are taught to submit (and the view that she divorced because she failed to submit!)?

Single women have the sovereign right to evaluate the cultural patterns and how they promote or impede their safety and development. It is not for men or other women to tell them about their experiences because they judge mostly from outside. In this regard, the ‘insider perspective’, from the single women is crucial, not through research only but also being part and parcel of the community under study. The experiential dimension envisaged by Smart (1998) in the study of religion is very important. Also, not to ignore the observation of Walter Hollenweger (1986) that is important. He claims that the emergence of Pentecostal scholars is significant as it helps in the study of religions to bring out information by those who speak and understands the language of the faith. Years of studies on gender in Pentecostalism and African indigenous religions continue to unearth rich information and in particular, noting and critiquing the new and shifting paradigms. It was necessitated by my experiences as an African woman, birthed and raised in the rural areas among my mother’s kinsfolk and my father’s kinsmen that I joined at a later stage when I was at high school. Although being a University lecturer, I have the experience of patriarchal norms and values among the different Shona ethnic groups and in the Church.

I was born into the Anglican Church, became born again at the age of thirteen, and attended many Pentecostal Churches through high school Scripture Union, and University Christian Union and Get-together events, but at the same time respecting the indigenous cultural traditions of my forbearers. I became a single mother and my world of association shifted and landed in mostly the rubric of single women and some male colleagues. Also, interacting with both African and outside scholars both male and female who prescribe to feminism and African Womanism, impacts on my research on single women and on inter-face between the cultural load and interpretation of the Bible? There is need for African female writers and critics to evolve and/or synthesize an indigenous African theory in order to properly situate and locate the peculiarities of their experience in gender discourse (Ebunolowa 2009). Therefore, it is my privilege to have had vast experience and wealth of information concerning singlehood by virtue of being an ‘insider’ but at the same time recognises the degree in which I am an outsider in some issues that relate to singlehood (see above) for critical analysis. However, I also maintain the significance of outside voices. The male founders and preachers are also given due attention in this book because of their role in formulating theologies based on their interpretation of the Bible. It is women, in particular the ‘first ladies’ who are on the fore-front of deploying the theologies, but men remain the power behind. This is crucial in order to generate a critical analysis in the study of single women and the interpretation of the Bible. The voices of children of single women are also important. Hence, interviews of University of Zimbabwe students in my Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy were also carried out (see Chapter 4). I selected both male and female students who came from single mother headed homes. Their experience of being raised by a single mother means a unique ‘insider’ experience of both their world and that of the single mother.

The book therefore, focusses on a very urgent matter. Many young, single Pentecostal women have been demonized, accused of stealing other women’s husbands, seen as temptresses and

dangerous to the health and well-being of the Church and society. This comes from constant newspaper reports, Pentecostal sermons that are beamed on TV channels. For there are many voices in the media speaking about and for single women. So, studies on Zimbabwean Pentecostalism have completely overlooked this vital dimension on the interpretation of the Bible through the appropriation of indigenous worldview on singlehood. Cognisant of the scholarly debates and developments in Zimbabwean society, it critiques whether particular readings and interpretations of the Bible keep single women in religious and cultural bondage, or whether they equip them to challenge their oppression from all quarters and achieve a sense of value and self-worth. It has been pointed out in various publications that Pentecostalism manifests a lurking patriarchal ideology as most scholars critique the perceived oppression; exploitation and suppression of women (Chesnut 2001). Despite of mass entry or conversion into Pentecostalism, scholars contend that there is “religiously bound patriarchy (Burdick: 1993) and that ‘liberation has not yet gone beyond the split between socio-political engagement with spiritual enrichment...” (Tfwala & Masango 2016). The status and role of single women have been very controversial and the images, myths, stereotypes have been noted both in official and popular debates and publications. These myths, images and stereotypes are located within discourses based on the interpretation of the Bible and sourced from the traditional paradigm. If Pentecostalism, as claimed, offered space for women to exercise their gifting, the question of single women also comes to the fore.

Therefore, the **objectives** of the book are:

- **To identify** how Pentecostal single women interpret the Bible and how they are influenced by ‘spiritual fathers and mothers’ within the Pentecostal fraternity in terms of negotiating their space within their Churches and society. It establishes the contradictions of seeking to interpret singlehood from a Biblical perspective and at the same time carrying the African traditional cultural

load and negotiating space in a globalised world that has been greatly influenced by outside forces.

- **To examine** how/the extent to which certain readings of the Bible either entrench the marginalisation and stigmatisation of single women or empower them to be agents of their own liberation, empowerment, and transformation.
- **To establish** the re-vitalisation, influence, and resilience of Shona indigenous spirituality in Pentecostal reading and interpretation of the Bible in relation to single women.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter gave a glimpse of the world of single women. Knowing a single woman and identifying her is easy. But it appears many of the male founders of ministries, ‘first ladies’ and married women are not empathetically empowered to understand and speak for them, to teach, preach, counsel and reach the core of their world of experiences. However, their views remain important alongside those of single women. An insider-outsider approach, therefore, has the potential to unravel the complexities of the discourses by exposing the re-enactment of the indigenous culture in sermons and the strengths and weaknesses of the reading and interpretation of the Bible. The next chapter unpacks the categories of single women, the complexity of classification and the emergence of multiple identities. It provides a critique of the prevalent designations on single women, from both the Church and the society against the background of how the single women perceive themselves to be.

2 | TRAVERSED AND CONTESTED IDENTITIES

Introduction

The previous chapter opened the discourse on single women and highlighted the multi-faceted approaches to unravel their diverse experience in search for inclusion in every facet of life, especially the need for self-expression in order to capture and understand their experiences. Marriage and co-parenting are considered as the norm among the Shona hence, single women (inter-changeably used with the phrase single mothers to delineate category where it is necessary) are confronted with stigma. Stigma is the holding of derogatory social attitudes or cognitive beliefs that change the way people perceive themselves or the way they are perceived by others (Coleman 1997) and it results in low self-esteem leading to depression in the lives of concerned people and demean their social identity (Miller and Major 2000). The socially engineered patriarchal and cultural discourses are perpetuated especially by other women who feel their marital territories face danger of intrusion by the single women. It is my submission that the Church in Zimbabwe is struggling with single women and has not done enough to eliminate the stigma against them.

We have single mothers who do not live as single according to Secombe & Warner (2004:279). In order to begin and unravel the complications surrounding the status and identity of single women, the important question is: Who is a single woman? It is a simple question, but it does not capture the diversity of single women and the defining experiences. My 2013 publication draws attention to the categories of single women. What is significant in this book is a consistent, deeper and critical categorisation that deviates from the traditional norm of the generalisation norm and bunching of single women in one rubric. Through a multi-faceted empirical approach, this chapter draws attention to a multiplicity of factors that include age, the socio-economic status and most importantly

the circumstances that rendered the women single and their experiences as important aspects that shape their worldview in their different categories and diverse aspirations. The names and description of single women is often generalised, yet there are diversities and complexities. What is the conceptualisation and interpretation of singlehood, in the light of the new emerging socio-economic trends, the new roles and the implications in a changing world? The engagement of all this needs to pay attention to the traditional normative conceptualisations of singlehood and how they are mediated within the Pentecostal spirituality, in the reading of the Bible, understanding, interpretations and deployment.

The key questions include the following: are single women in their various categories accorded dignity and recognition and are they treated as equals with other women in the Church? This is important, given that the Church has always played a major role in fostering society's attitudes towards certain groups of people, thereby indirectly impacting on the condition and status of single women in society. How does the status of single women in the Pentecostalism compare with the status accorded single women in Shona indigenous religion and culture? How do the single women who have experienced stigmatization define themselves? They are viewed as a 'failure' in life because they failed to 'fight' for their marriages. However, research shows how most female Church leaders and congregants vehemently deny that single women are marginalised, stigmatized and do not have safe space in their Churches, despite the evidence of brutal theologies against their welfare. But Paulo Freire (1979) has significant insights that relate to single women: who understands oppression better than the oppressed? Voices of single women should be given primacy in any discussion of singlehood, for their experiences define and shape their understanding of who they are. The circumstances in their lives qualify them to be experts in their life stories, the 'insiders' who have the experiential dimension of the joys and sorrows of singlehood. This is in direct contrast to the attempt made by society, the Church, 'first ladies' in Pentecostal Churches and ministries

who claim to have divine revelation and a better understanding of the life of singlehood. It is my strong contention that the so called 'divine revelations', sermons and teachings by leaders in most cases, fuel stigma and marginalisation of single women.

The meetings of single women allow them to disclose their inner life among generally supportive women. Meetings can be powerfully therapeutic, as women narrate their sufferings and pain at the hands of abusive spouses that they decided to leave/ who left them, the aftereffects, or the struggles and pain they experience as they fend for their children and the hostilities that dominate the environment. The stories of suffering and restoration in their social forums define them as opposed to naming from without that often renders them insignificant. The experiences of the single women are important in Zimbabwe because of the harsh socio-economic realities. As pointed out by Kügler¹, in the face of the collapse of pillars of society, traditional support systems, family structures, the Church and state. Where does this leave the single woman, who shoulders the burden of childcaring alone, the physical strain and emotional stress? What then is their identity in the face of all the pressures and their role? The inside (from single women) and outside (from other people) narratives, perceptions and attitudes are significant to capture broadly the perceptions and images that construct the contested identity of single women.

"Mvana yakarambirwei and why should I marry her?"
(Why was she divorced and why should I marry her?)

"...roora mvana, she is cheap, not expensive to pay lobola than a virgin". (Marry a single woman because she is cheap, not expensive to pay the bride price.)

¹ This is the view of Joachim Kügler that he expressed on African single mothers during the Oberseminar at Bamberg University because of his vast experiences on the plight of women in Zimbabwe, 5-02-19.

Someone added:

“... also, she must not refuse to have sex with you before marriage because she lost all the taste because she has had many men in her life” (3-02-2019).

These are excerpts that erupted from a group discussion concerning single women that I participated. One man had asked if he could marry a single woman whom he loved. The question itself from the man shows he was hesitant because there are perceptions about single women that prompted him to solicit for views. Above, are some of the key responses to his question that can enrich the analysis of views on single women and the responses have a three-fold significance. The first response captures the suspicions that people have about single women if they have divorced. The question of why they divorced/ were divorced is always dogging them. The probing question persists and has a tone that has suspicion on the single woman. There is an assumption that she was divorced; “*akarambirwei*” (why was she divorced?) and not why did she divorce? It brings out the dominant traditional patriarchal view that a woman should/cannot divorce a man and that whatever challenges she faces she must endure: *chakafukidza dzimba matenga* (houses are covered by roofs and many things go on and need to be endured by the woman). Choosing to divorce a man is read as a sign of complete failure, heralding the absence of real qualities of a woman, and expected femininities of endurance, respect and subservience. Men are seen as stronger and superior, and women as weaker and inferior (Rakoczy 2004).

Therefore, there is an understanding that women are the ones who are divorced more than men. Adapting to their social constructed position, women always suffer the fate of divorce compared to their male counterparts. In such cases man walk free and nobody bothers about their status quo (Makwara 2016).

Do single women share the same view and hold on to this traditional perception? The discussion went on, supposing that she was divorced, ignoring circumstances where some were bold to defy tradition and societal expectations and chose to divorce, something being at odds with the male dominated culture and society (Offen 1998). The second response encouraged the man to marry the single woman because paying lobola is cheap. She has no great value because she is no longer a virgin. The issue of virginity brings to the fore Shona culture. A woman is expected to be a virgin when she marries so that she does not bring shame to her family. Lack of virginity brought shame and rituals were carried out that brought shame to her and her family. For example, a white cloth had to be drilled at the centre to signify the state of this girl after her first night with her husband, but purity is not enforced on the husband.

Ordelia Beatti (2008) points to a culture in which marriage is desirable and the view of virginity was particularly prized in females; 'shows how gender relates to social cleavages'. The category 'virgin' helps particular significance, and it reveals a multiplicity of ways in which dominant cultural ideas impacting on Zimbabwe offer ways into the complex process of social classification. The reference to 'easy marriage' should be understood within the Shona culture that gives virginity of the girl outright primacy and significance above that of the man and also contempt on lack of virginity at marriage. This perception does not seem to take into account circumstances surrounding women but simply to strip decency from a woman who is not a virgin. The one-sided axing of a woman who is not a virgin is a cause of concern in challenging patriarchy because the role of men in taking away the prized virginity is ignored. Yet, single women interviewed have often raised how modern men emphasise purity but do not value it practically as they claim they were left with men who took away their virginity. The third response emphasises the issue of abstinence from sex before marriage. The single woman is not a virgin; therefore, there is no moral ground for her

to deny any sexual advances from a man. This brings out the significance attached to virginity which placed the girl child at an interrogative table if she was not and at the same time the stigma that accompanies being a single woman. She is expected to avail sex when a man demands it. That perception has opened doors for sexual violence that is leashed against single women (see chapter 3). The single woman is stripped of moral dignity and viewed as a ready object for sex. There is also the assumption that she is sexually loose, availing sex to many men. The general assumption that she has passed through the hands of many men therefore, she cannot be accorded dignity is misleading and false. The condemnation of single women as being morally loose, and bankrupt requires attention. Most important, what is the role of the Church as the custodian of morality? Pentecostalism preaches a puritanical gospel and that: 'if any man is in Christ, the old has passed away (1 Corinthians 5:17f)', is there a new script for single women, an all-embracing theology in their diversity? A glean on the categories of single women does justice to the critiquing of the status, role and identity and discredits the responses in the above discussion. The context of gender, class, race, culture, and status powerfully contribute to the plot of the stories of single women (Morgan 2000:9). The social class for single women is an example of socially constructed entities. While most scholars agree that class appears to represent a universal phenomenon, what determines class vary from one society to another and the broader social context of the stories is influenced by the culture in which the single women belong to.

Categories of single women

Most studies on single women do not pay attention to the different categories of singlehood. Not only are the categories important, but the different experiences which shape their understanding and subsequently their response to daily challenges. Understanding the categories of single women helps to figure the ways to be employed

when dealing with issues surrounding their challenges. The single women's narratives help to unravel their diverse experiences. Thus, while there are categories of single women, there also run sub-categories based on the experiential dimensions which further define, shape and constantly alter their identities and it is these that are not obviously manifest in the public critique. While they are important and crucial in understanding her, society often overlooks, ignores or is unconsciously unaware of how the experiences are sediments in the subconscious of the single woman. For example, a single woman is often described as a bitter and grudging person. However, her experiences might show continued involvement in her personal life by ex-husband and relatives in order to strip her of dignity and progress. Because she is in constant interaction and battle to defend 'her territory', she attracts the criticism of an unforgiving, bitter, and grudging person. Circumstances that one goes through do not necessarily define her. The more the experience of a harsh world, the more the stereotypes find affirmation in her actions. But facts are not always the truth. It, therefore, calls for sensitive pertinent documentation of her narratives. Women are likely than their male counterparts to be single, because they are divorced, widowed, or separated (Seccombe & Warner 2004:286).

- ***Widowed women***

Some of my critics have argued that widowed women should not be referred to as single women. I insist and maintain them in the category of single women because they do not have a husband. Death robbed them of their husband and therefore, they became single women. I have argued such an attempt to dissociate the widows from the rubric of single women also emanates from a bias towards other categories of single women especially the 'hit and run' and the divorced (see below). Death has always been one of the unavoidable causes of being single and being a single mother by virtue of being widowed is not a preferred choice or voluntary. Generally, people sympathise with widows, as it is generally accepted

that the circumstances of their widowhood were beyond their control. This is irrespective of the fact that some may be breadwinners and generally manage their affairs well. Some of them are even held in high esteem and promoted within the Church structures to leadership positions. This is in sharp contrast to the category of divorced women, who, as has been mentioned, are viewed with suspicion. The youths in the Church are encouraged to visit and minister to widows. ZAOGA encourages the Church to render assistance to needy widows, such as to pay school fees for their children and to buy groceries for them. Often, the biblical teachings on taking care of widows and the fatherless, as well as teachings from Shona traditional religion, are cited, in order to emphasise the need to care for this group. As such, this class is respected and honoured. Maybe, because the Bible is clear on widows as they constitute a special class of God's people. However, it should not be underestimated because the loss of their husband is read and interpreted in different ways especially by the nuclear family. Some widows, especially those advanced in age are accused of killing husbands to enjoy the wealth from the kids alone, or having the intention to prostitute, especially if they are young. These accusations show the wounds inflicted upon widows as they lose the 'supposed protector' male figure in their lives. The age, socio-economic status and the circumstances that led to widowhood should not be underestimated. In some instances of natural death (although among the Shona death has a causative agent), witchcraft accusation by relatives or other known persons, some women are accused of "eating their own husbands" (as witches). Thus, they bear scars of accusations and rejection, apart from the economic burden.

- ***The divorced***

*God had no option for divorce.
Divorce means ripping apart two souls.
It only takes God to heal the broken hearts after divorce.*
(Myles Munroe, Bahamian Minister)

It is an assumption that women do not initiate divorce because many Pentecostal Churches teach women not to divorce but to endure marriage hardships (Guti 2006). Interviews carried out and the sermons that relate to single women show that most Church members are suspicious of those who belong to this category. Why did they divorce or, rather, why were they divorced? Although there are complex reasons, it appears that perceptions of this category are based on a simplified and fundamentalist view, which in turn, is based on discourses of womanhood and significance attached to marriage. Whether they were divorced or even if they initiated divorce, the conclusion is that she lacks dignity because she is not married. Yet, their narratives show an array of reasons. They include immaturity at the time of marriage, physical violence, witchcraft accusations, cheating and irresponsible husband, barrenness and the gender of a child. These factors culminated in divorce. The claims that only men are violent in marriage should be criticised because both men and women can be violent. However, women are frequently seen as inferior and weaker to men. They must endure the painful marriage because divorce brings shame to her and her people. The violence found in marriages is determined by power discourses, for example, in some indigenous cultures man as head of the family can beat the wife. Many abusive marriages often end in divorce and single motherhood and it is one reason why people choose singlehood. How should be the script read in the light of tradition: is to divorce or to be divorced a weakness or strength? If a Shona man is like a bull (Shoko 2007) and she divorced because she challenged and demanded fidelity, should it not be viewed as a

sign of strength? Does weakness come with challenging the inadequacy of tradition and questioning the husband who is the head of the family?

Some say, “I divorced”. The English statement is not sufficient like the Shona language, to capture the details that surround divorce such as who initiated and the circumstances for the marriage breakdown. Attention should be paid to the traditional custom of giving the wife *gupuro* (divorce token) and sending her away. This custom is overlooked as couples choose to divorce without proper traditional channels that involve other practitioners like an aunt and the marriage mediator (*samukuru*). Most single women who are economically sound or those who suffered physical abuse have insisted that ‘*kurambwa*’ (to be divorced) is wrong description of what folded in their lives. That is meant to humiliate and portray them as morally bankrupt and strip them of dignity because divorced women are seen as morally loose and disgraced. Yet, many single women claim that they had the courage to step out of abusive marriage, therefore, no negative and derogatory comments that seek to humiliate them should be attached to their status because they were strong to resist abuse. All the same a Shona woman should endure in marriage since God has no plan for divorce as captured above from Myles Munroe. Therefore, deciding to quit marriage translates to a grave contempt over tradition and seemingly unforgivable sin because one contradicted God’s original plan.

- ***The ‘hit and run’***

The women engaged in pre-marital sex, impregnated, and subsequently rejected and deserted by their partners. They are often held with contempt because pre-marital sex seems to be the most grievous of all sins in Pentecostal rhetoric. There are sub-groups in this category; some do not know or doubt the paternity of their child. Reasons range from multiple sexual partners, or simply rejection by the men or in laws who influenced their son because they were

not ready for a daughter in law or did not want her for their personal reasons. Others are victims of sexual violence by known or unknown persons, relatives, neighbours, or trusted persons. The man did not take care of them or the child. Victims of sexual violence have ‘wounds’ as shown by some who had to shed tears when they narrated their ordeals through interviews. Despite the brutal sexual violence, society has questions for them: why were they raped, how did they dress and what is their status in terms of moral decency? There remains suspicion for women who experience sexual violence. Hence, the culture of blaming victims is deep in Zimbabwe. To question the moral integrity and dress code on victims of sexual violence is one way of surveillance and policing of women’s bodies and it becomes extreme to single women. An attempt to contextualise the Bible in the light of existential realities brings frustration to most single women as they see the Bible’s limitation to specific situations. The question of why they were abused when they served God remains an unanswered question to them. As ‘rejected’ persons, it is assumed that they do not know the father of the child. Interrogating the Bible on their situation has led some to be frustrated. Some of the women claimed that they saw poverty in their man and did not want to marry the man. However, the Church focuses on pre-marital sex as sin that is blamed mostly on the girl child, especially when unwanted pregnancy occurs. This is responsible for the creation and perpetuation of stereotypical images of ‘hit and run’ women as people of loose morals. Therefore, they are regarded as either potential husband snatchers or ‘parasites’, as evident in the sermon delivered on 3-02-2013 at Harare International Conference Centre. The female pastor declared:

Someone is not married, the man who impregnated you left you with that child and instead of working hard to fend for that child, you want to snatch someone’s husband and steal money from the wife. No to small houses! That is immoral, *tsvaga wako!* (Look for your own husband).

Such stereotypes not only render single women suspect, but also question their dignity. Thus, makes conversations and associations with married women difficult. Also, there is no effort to bring the man who fathered the child to accountability and responsibility in the sermon. As one single woman narrated:

...at my workplace, even at Church, you are not hundred per cent trusted. Everyone is married, and they often exclude me in their discussions because what do I know of marriage? Someone had the courage to ask me whether or not the man who impregnated me is not a married man (3-11-2017).

The woman bore the scars of rejection as she felt betrayed because the man refused to take responsibility. Others who could not handle the rejection then secretly aborted. But they carry both the scars of rejection and the guilty of 'murder'. According to prevalent Pentecostal sermons abortion is murder and Jeremiah 5:1 is anti-abortion scripture that is commonly cited. The experience of elopement to the man who rejected her, the pregnancy, the ordeal of abortion and the regret that follows when sermons denounce abortion as murder and emphasise marriage and motherhood gives them nightmares. As one of the women narrated:

I wish I did not abort. My pregnancy was rejected, and I could not handle the pregnancy alone. I then aborted secretly but I am haunted. Every time someone condemns and preaches against abortion, I am convinced I murdered my own blood, I am haunted.... (20-11-2017).

- ***Single women who never married but passed 'marriage age' by societal standards***

This group constitute those beyond the stage of marriage, according to societal expectations. The Shona have drawn certain age limit whereby a girl child should marry. Although there is no exact age that is specified, as the woman advances beyond the age where she was expected to marry, society frets over that. The general feeling is

that they should undergo deliverance from evil spirits that prevent them from getting married. Pentecostal dominion theology (Gifford, 2009:8) states that Christians must excel in all endeavours and fulfil specific goals. Failure to marry is therefore, understood to be caused by *mweya yemadzinza* (demonic forces following the bloodline) or spiritual husbands that need to be exorcised. There is an underlying assumption that all single women desire to marry or re-marry. Some who consistently attend deliverance sessions question the authority of Church leaders because it did not help; therefore, they also question the faith of the leaders. Some women cited Luke 5:17f (when Jesus healed the paralytic because he saw the faith of the four friends) to argue that the faith of the leaders should open space for them to get marriage partners, instead of being blamed for lack of faith.

The categories of the ‘hit and run’ and the old but not married constitute the groups of potential ‘Jezebels’ (Kalu, 2008:155) who can easily seduce men. At the ZAOGA Grand Jubilee 50th Anniversary in October 2010, Guti addressed single women thus: “Some of you have a character that chases away men, you are not docile, and you are naturally challenging and that puts men off”. Guti gave an example of a female pastor whom he claimed changed her character for the better after he counselled her and, as a result, got married at the age of 42. Such sermons and examples reinforce the idea that a woman must be docile and blame her if she fails to get a marriage partner. The example of Guti seems to be absolute and bracket all single women in this category. The Church does not take into consideration the possibility that some women may choose to be single. Pentecostals appear to overlook the fact that the Pauline teaching on singlehood states that “some can choose not to marry.” Guti’s perspective is aligned to the Shona traditional perception that a woman cannot manage on her own; she needs a man. It is not a surprise therefore, that such women are viewed as potential ‘Jezebels’ who look for an opportunity to prey on men or men of God. Because of this perceived potential, some Churches like ZAOGA have rules and regulations that encourage single women

to be in the company of others if she visits the pastor because they are suspects of evil agenda. The single women who choose not to re-marry bring in the question of celibacy in Shona indigenous religion and culture. Singlehood is not an option. It revolts against Shona ideology; Operation *munhu wese ngaaroorwe*” from Daughters of Virtue Ministry (see Chapter 1) should therefore, be understood within the matrix of Shona culture where the completeness of a woman is in marriage, raising a family and being attached to a man.

- ***Single women on separation***

This group is not spared of stigma: why did the husband leave? The women suffer neglect as they are not officially divorced but at the same time neglected. This is one of the most difficult situations women have faced. Culturally, they are not divorced. A man would either give *gupuro* (divorce token) as a sign of divorce or if he was not satisfied with the wife, she would be send back to her maternal aunt for a period of time to reform and she will go back to the husband. This form of “separation” had a specific period of time and the woman would eventually be accompanied back to her husband. In the case of the new phenomenon of separation, it poses great challenge to the woman because she has no husband anymore. Some did not even know the whereabouts of the husband, worse if he has migrated to the diaspora. Yet, she is still held by tradition not to re-marry because of the bride price that was paid for her and because she has not been officially divorced. This has been used by some men to discredit the women because they know society does not support any affair or re-marriage as long as she is called by his name. Many cases of separation ultimately end in divorce though others choose to stay at the marital home and have affairs (to the attraction of criticism) or they ‘wait’ for the husband. This brings out complex challenges that single women have but are often ignored. Also, the disintegrating family structures means the indigenous sacred practitioners that often mediate in marriage challenges

to restore and prevent separations and divorce no longer exist. Marriage has increasingly been reserved for the two partners as opposed to marriage involving two families. The family breakdown adversely affects women in this category because they need to negotiate the dictates of culture and at the same time face the harsh reality of men who do not adhere to the culture, (the ambivalence in deploying culture that negatively impacts on the women). All above categories briefly describe single women but not sufficient to capture their aspirations, hence below is categorisation of desires and aspirations of single women in their distinct classes which has a bearing on why they resist the negative labels such as *mvana* (disgraced single mother), *hure/pfambi* and *nzenza* (prostitute) which are all labels that presents the single woman as disgraced.

Single women and their sexualities

My vast interaction, discussion, interviews, and observations on single women have brought up insights on how the Church and society under-estimate the diversities among single women, diversity on the basis of categories, life experiences and desires. Single women are not the same. Some still desire to marry or re-marry and singlehood to them is transitory. They embrace the faith that God will provide a husband. Only a few indicated that they are ready to become a second wife as long as it is done procedurally for them to be officially recognised as married, if they cannot get their own marriage partner. Polygamy is acceptable among the Shona and those who expressed this desire reveal how they still pay allegiance to their culture despite being 'born again'. The quest for marriage, being tied to a man remains strong. Also, the readiness to be a second wife brings to the fore a neglected issue of the Church and polygamy in Africa, especially in the context of high numbers of women that outnumber men, not only in Zimbabwe but also in

countries like Swaziland and Tanzania². However, the problem is how the Church mediates polygamy, a deep-seated cultural practice that was condemned by Western missionaries. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, this condemnation especially by Pentecostals has birthed the ‘small house phenomenon’ whereby even men of the collar establish secret sexual relations and in extreme cases raise families.

This, therefore, signifies a cultural practice that has only been suppressed but not destroyed or resolved, during the encounter between Christianity and African indigenous religions and cultures. It also explains why some Pentecostal single women (where polygamy is heavily denounced) still support the practice and indicate that they are ready for such a marriage. Also, because it is suppressed, it re-surfaces and re-vitalises in different forms and ways. Others have desire to re-unite with their ex-husband. Often, they blame the negative influence of relatives that were influential in divorce or separation. They sympathise with the man because he was overwhelmed by the power of his mother, sisters, or other relatives. Also, they point to the fact that they do not want to have children with different totems. The Shona people value totems identified with specific animals and denote genealogy/ historical roots of tribes. Hence, they need children from the same genealogy. Some women emphasised that they had bad experience and do not need to re-marry. However, they pointed to the need of sexual relations whenever they liked and with whomever they want. This attitude confirms the accusations of engaging with men for money, pleasure, or companionship. Needless is to consider the single women as ‘Jesus’ wives’ and the emphasis to shun sex outside marriage. The sustainability and practicality of the teaching becomes suspect, especially when the women do not get the men who can marry them.

² President John Pombe Magufuli of Tanzania was reported by CAJ News on 12 February 2018 to have proposed men with sound financial footing to marry more than one wife to curb prostitution caused by large numbers of women. In Swaziland too, polygamy is encouraged.

The probability for them is to secretly engage in sexual affairs. Others have completely shunned the world of men and do not desire to engage or re-marry. This attitude is regarded as un-African. Yet, their dilemma emanates from the contradictions prevalent in theologies. For example, Guti taught that: ‘there are no man in the world’ and at the same time Matimbire says: “operation *munhu wese ngaaroorwe*’.

The lives of single women are under scrutiny and attract criticism. In the light of the above categories and aspirations, it is important to consider the response of single women as they describe themselves and narrate the circumstances that rendered them single. The responses bring out the derogatory labels placed on them and how they contest the labels. The single mothers’ narratives as pointed by Makwara (2016):

...are often dominated by negative socially constructed values and themes which they have internalized. Outsiders have constructed stories in the lives of single mothers that bring painful and traumatic experiences. While many are caught up in the web of low self-esteem and all that accompanies challenges of singlehood, many single women seek to construct new realities which will open up an alternative future offering them a new hope.

Rorty (1979:359) adds by saying that: “When we lose faith in the power of language to mirror the truth, that is, we acquire a new-found appreciation for its therapeutic capacity to help us get what we desire.” According to Muller (2009:204), it is important to listen to the stories of people in real life situations. We can realise that our understanding of reality is the co-product of a broader community and not the idiosyncratic product of theologians with their own isolated rationality (Muller 2004:300). Since people come from complex collage of different traditions and cultures, they have different experiential situations knowledge and ways of interpreting their lived experiences. The narrative therapists are interested in joining with people to explore the stories they have about their lives and the relationships, their effects, their meanings and the context

in which they have been formed and authored (Morgan 2000:10). White (1991) is also in agreement with Morgan as he says:

Cultural stories determine the shapes of our individual life narratives. People make sense of their lives through stories, both the cultural narratives and personal narratives. These dominant narratives will specify the preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving within the particular culture.

According to Mair (1988:127): “Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart; we inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race and place.” Therefore, the inside perspectives are important.

Responses of single women: Contesting the traditional label ‘*mvana*’

Single women are commonly referred to as *mvana* (which means a woman who is divorced, disgraced and is sent back to her parents, mostly with her children). However, the label is deficient and cannot explain and describe the categories of single women. The paradigm shifts necessitated by colonialism and its aftermath have altered the label and challenge its applicability. The single women drew a distinction between *mvana* and a single lady.³ One of them from ZAOGA re-iterated what was circulated on single women’s forums and delivered a long explanation:

...*mvana* was disgraced and dirty for she did not own the means of production or anything except the children that she bore. She, therefore, toils for nothing in the fields as she stays with parents. Under the guardianship of parents or brothers she was prone to

³ There is ‘lady’ instead of woman because in Zimbabwe, single woman and single lady are used interchangeably. In fact, ‘single lady’ is more common, and women’s meetings are generally referred to as “ku ladies” to mean to or at the ladies meeting.

continued abuse either from the ex-husband because she did not divorce but was divorced. She was at the receiving end, an object of sympathy. She was not capable of helping anyone because she was economically powerless and socially vulnerable and stigmatised. A single lady does not stay with parents. If she does, she goes to work, she is a bread winner, she takes care of her children, parents and even other relatives rely on her therefore she is not *mvana*, *handisi mvana* but I am a single lady (I am not a disgraced single woman but an honourable single woman!) (02-02-2018).

The single woman's response is significant. The above differentiation between *mvana* and single woman (lady), is based on the same marital status but has accompanying differences. It draws attention to the shifting paradigms in the society. The differentiation between 'single lady' and '*mvana*' seems to render insignificant the claim that a single woman or a divorced woman is useless and has nothing to contribute to society. She is not disgraced but embraces dignity. Further, it challenges the sympathy model that sees the life of a single woman as that of suffering with her children and therefore, in need of sympathy and support. The 'single lady' is economically sound and not disgraced.

The single women protest and are not complicit in their own culture and the perspectives and attitudes in their Churches. It points to the need to be critical of tradition and to interpret the Bible in ways that do not discriminate single women and fuel stigma. The failure of Pentecostalism is the failure to critique negative aspects of tradition in relation to single women. Teachings in Pentecostalism seem to regurgitate Shona traditions and do not provide, affirm and give safe space for single women (for there is space). Inheriting derogatory terms, sermons that fuel stigma, stereotype, attitudes and castigations in women's forums have discredited Pentecostalism as a self-claimed liberative movement. Thus, the protest "*handisi mvana*" is a challenge to re-consider and critique aspects of Shona tradition that are deficient in defining single women who have acquired new identities. The new identities have emerged from the new socio-cultural and economic avenues. More to this

response are issues that single women voiced out but are ignored in discourses of singlehood. There are women who have divorced their husband because they could not tolerate abuse. A Family of God Church (FOG) woman asked: do our people understand that things have changed, and most women are divorcing men because they cannot tolerate abuse? (10-01-2018). The woman challenges not only the husband but structures of patriarchy which are the cornerstones that define Shona gender relations. It may explain why there is vicious attack and denigration on a woman who divorces her husband. While some single women maybe dependants there are many breadwinners. This discredits the sympathy model that hinge on the breakdown thesis/poverty thesis on single women headed homes (see Chapter 4). Shona tradition is cited as embodying a culture of disempowering single women. The responses of the single women also show that they are radical in approach as they question the role of the man in divorce and sexual purity. Traditionally, a Shona man is like a bull who can prey over as many cows as he can without any problem (Shoko 2007) but a woman's adultery is tantamount to destroying the whole village (Bourdillon 1976). The condoning of male sexual prowess is critiqued because men are identified as the culprits behind the suffering of women and for the status, "*mvana*". The abuse of women is not given enough attention and there is no meaningful criticism or derogatory label attached to men. In fact, it is a widely accepted belief among the Shona that there is no male prostitute, even within the confines of marriage, he can still prey out because it is in their nature to have uncontrolled sexual appetite (*ndozvinoita varume*) (Biri 2014, Chitando & Biri 2013).

While there is pressure to hold man accountable, the role of married women in fuelling stigma against single women deserves attention for it calls for a critique on how other women in Pentecostalism relate with single women. The general norm sees men as sole oppressors of women/single women. While it is true that men oppress women, hierarchies of oppression should not escape scrutiny. Men deploy patriarchal power through the interpretation of

the Bible and married women also utilise the sermons to oppress and marginalise single women. Married women put themselves on a pedestal to dominate single women within the web of patriarchal dictates by virtue of assigning marital status as a higher moral ground that cannot be matched with singlehood.

The ‘Jesus’ Wives’ and ‘Masinguru’ Labels: Implications

The nomenclature ‘Jesus wives’ is popular in Pentecostal Churches (Biri 2013). The previous section categorised single women and the Church’s different perceptions and attitudes towards them. What is significant and cuts across the women in various classes is that they are single, and for this reason it is claimed they are ‘married’ to Jesus. They are referred to as ‘Jesus’ wives’ (*vakadzi vaJesu*). Tying them with Jesus, instils a sense of dignity and self-worth by placing them on a moral pedestal. They have a covenant with Jesus, which denotes their close relationship with Him. They cannot indulge in sexual activities because this would be tantamount to infidelity. They are expected to be totally faithful to him and wholly depend on him for guidance in everything. A discourse of this nature encourages sexual discipline and abstinence. Jesus is the ‘husband’ who provides because they are ‘married’ to him. They should not lack because Jesus, as the creator of the world together with God the Father, owns everything (Philippians 4:13). Further, they do not have to bend over backwards to accommodate earthly husbands (Reference to 1 Corinthians 7), as their married counterparts may do. For example, they do not need to seek permission from husband whenever they want to go for night vigil prayers or engage in any Church activity. The single women should also be careful about who they associate with, for example, they should not listen to discussions on sex because this may arouse their sexual desires, leading them to sin. In fact, Guti teaches them to work hard all day long so that when they go to bed, they are too exhausted to remain awake, thus leaving them with no time to entertain thoughts on sexual

gratification. However, it is important to consider whether or not the label empowers or disempowers single women because they are expected to ‘submit’ to Jesus in all situations. How do the single women perceive the designation, and can they not ‘break the covenant with Jesus’ and choose to re-marry? Yet, those ‘married to Jesus’ are sometimes ‘put under discipline’ (*pasi peshamu*), for indulging in sexual relations. One woman protested thus:

Is it fair, at Church they tell me that Jesus is my husband? I must hold on to him, he is everything, yet after the gathering each one of them goes back home to her husband? I also need one. Jesus is ‘married’ to every Christian not to single women only (5-05-17).

The above protest sheds light on the complexity of labelling single women as ‘Jesus’ wives’ because the label is an imposition from without. From the interviews conducted, some single women have refused to be associated with the single women’s ministry because they want to re-marry. They question the validity of the claim and designation, ‘Jesus’ wives’ if all women have sexual desires. They feel comfortable to attend women’s meetings only. FOG is one of the Pentecostal Churches that do not have a ministry for single women because all attend the women’s ministry, ‘Precious Stones’. Despite the absence of the single women’s ministry, single women in the Church argued that they have not escaped the social opprobrium that other single women face. The label, although popular in Churches, displays power politics at the base. Churches provide space to journey with single women but who has the power to name and what is the intention or effects of naming? The label is an imposition from ‘first ladies’. As suspected persons, single women have to be confined in their space that is ‘vulnerable’ for surveillance so that they do not ‘snatch’ the married men. As “Jezebels” who can way lay the men of God (Kalu 2008) who have a strong sexual instinct like all other men, therefore, they can be sexually explorative if they are seduced and ‘home wreckers’ who destroy homes (Parsitau 2011). “Jesus wives” will serve as a reminder to

them that they should not engage in any sexual activities because they are not tied to any man. Thus, it gives married women a sense of security that their husbands are safe.

Although, the label is insufficient, some older women accept the label. They are advanced in years and sexual relations are not a priority for them anymore. In spite of the label, 'Jesus wives', PHD Ministries, ZAOGA, UFI and DOV Ministry among many others urge single women to undergo deliverance for God to give them marriage partners. At the same time Guti appears honest with them. At 2010 Single Women National Conference, he said "...there are no men in the world. I don't have men...." The National Statistics in 2015 show that women in Zimbabwe were half a million more than men. One would logically question the insistence on deliverance to get one man one husband. When Guti tells them to work hard and enjoy life because there are no men in the world, he is realistic. However, for some single women, the question remains: what can they do with their sexual needs because they are normal human beings, who are told that God's will is that they be married (Genesis 2)? A protest from a woman at a ZAOGA International Single women's Conference in 2010 confirm this. The woman sitting next to me protested: "Ah *baba* (father), it is not about numbers but need..." The teachings and deliverance services present a dilemma to single women. On one hand they are given hope that they will get married and on the other hand their hope is destroyed when they are told there are few men in the world. A UFIC member said:

When our Churches talk of *masinguru*, deliverance and the call for prayer vigils, why do they talk of *kuroorwa* (a woman must get married), why do they not talk about *kuroora* (man getting married). This bias in Pentecostal Churches shows they are also sharing the stereotypes and stigmatisation that our Shona culture advances (4-05-2017).

The word *masinguru* carry derogatory tones and as observed from the UFIC woman, Pentecostalism affirms Shona tradition by creating an avenue of survival of cultural traits, stigma and stereotypes against single women. The section below further explores the derogatory names that are deployed in sermons against single women.

“Small houses, husband snatchers and gold diggers”

Most young and middle-aged single women have been suspected of being “small houses” and “gold diggers” who have sexual activities with married men to get financial support. Thereby, ruining established families. One pastor called them “smell houses” by virtue of their stinking deeds (Biri 2019). Hence, only single women bear the brunt of immorality and as stated by society that there is no male prostitute, Pentecostalism seem to confirm that. In 2017 in Mberengwa, some ‘first ladies’ from different Churches carried out a “campaign” to denounce “small houses” those who were snatching husbands. The important query is to interrogate the forum of the campaign-at women’s gathering. Yet, it takes men and women to establish those ‘small houses’. Men are excluded and married women denounce single women only, hence, it shows how women have been brought to service to promote patriarchal structures that cause disunity amongst themselves without bringing men on the interrogating table. The socialisation process is done by women as ‘first teachers’ and the stigmatisation of single women is manifest in both Shona indigenous culture and in Pentecostalism. They teach, rebuke and comment on single women thereby creating and reinforcing negative perceptions. Guti says that single women ‘are my pillow’; they have been the pillar of ZAOGA in terms of financial support and intercessory prayers (Biri 2019). Yet, the positive compliments about single women as major contributors, not only in ZAOGA but in churches should alter the negative perceptions and stereotypes.

Sermons and teachings: wounding the wounded?

Pentecostal churches continue to preach endurance in marriage, submission and that a foolish woman destroys her marriage (Mate 2002). This means that women in marriage are accorded dignity and higher status over single women because they have resilience and maintain their marriage. Also, the reference of marriage as the symbol of God's Church has negative implications on single women as it appears to fuel stigma against them. It re-enforces the traditional stereotypes of singlehood as a status that is inferior to marital status. Thus, the symbolism, the accompanying sermons and the biblical interpretations re-enforce contempt on single women. In order to escape 'victimisations' and accusations of 'husband snatching' and 'digging wealth' from married men, they have to re-marry. Thus, DOV Ministry's "Operation *munhu ngaaroorwe*" is from the interpretation of Genesis 2:18. Most female leaders teach that singlehood is not God's original plan for God has designed every woman to be married. This means that if a single woman has no husband then it is not God's problem. Something amiss in the life of the single woman has to be dealt with, for instance, spirits that need to be cast out of her life, hence "*ndadhiniwa*" (I am fed up) with the life of single hood should be the guiding spirit for single women in order to be delivered from satanic bondages.

Single women pointed to the challenge they face because they do not carry the title "Mrs". For example, when they visit new Churches, often the question like 'who are you?' requires them to say: "I am Mrs..." I experienced the same challenge when I visited a new ZAOGA Church. The usher said: 'welcome and who are you?' I am Mai Tawana (after my son as this is the custom to be called by the name of the first born). She responded, no, your name? I responded: 'my name is Kudzi Biri or Prof Biri if you like'. She insisted, 'no, Mrs who?' Infuriated, I responded: 'I don't have a husband, I am a single mother'. She then felt uneasy and said, 'oh ok'. This is an example of the annoying incidents that many

single women cite. The same questions as: where did you get the children? Why don't you have a husband? Why did you divorce? All these are common questions that many single women face, and they point to society's perception of a perceived problem in her life. Therefore, the single woman is not whole in the eyes of the Church. As one single woman from the UFIC explained:

Our Churches are not very different from the society, they wound the wounded. We have scars and wounds of rejection. Our Churches continue to poke our wounds, we have been victims and we continue to be victims (7-01-2018).

Therefore, some seek to escape the social opprobrium and marry even if they are not happy or endure abuse in marriage in order to maintain an identity of being a married woman. The independence and individual privacy of single women is questionable in Churches, especially in ZAOGA where there are laid rules and regulations that govern their conduct. The notion of 'umbrellas' has to be surveyed.

The notion of 'umbrella': surveillance on single women?

The original intention by Guti in ZAOGA was to ensure the single women get support as 'vulnerable' people but the developments that follow do not match the spirit of care and consideration. A male leader in the Church is often viewed as an 'umbrella' to single women (although some female leaders have also become 'umbrellas'). He teaches and advises, and the single woman can consult if she needs help. The Church teaches that in all her endeavours, the single woman should ensure that nothing is hidden or done in secret in order to avoid the temptation to sin. The single women are considered vulnerable and can easily make wrong decisions therefore, they need to be shielded or protected by leaders. This practice appears to be a re-invention of Shona tradition albeit in a new form. The single women are regarded as helpless and in need of support

and protection. Traditionally, life outside marriage is a nightmare in which the woman is subjected to pain, suffering and shame upon herself and her people. A widow (no other forms of singlehood because divorce was rare and most young women married) was expected to be inherited and supported by her brother-in-law, especially in raising the late brother's children. If she went back to her own people, the brothers and/or father acted as the 'head' for the single woman. Hence, the persistence of the idea that a woman cannot make it alone in life, therefore, needs someone or a man to provide guidance to her. But post-colonial developments have opened avenues and many single women are economically empowered or independent to make decisions for their lives. The notion of umbrella as pretext of shielding them seems to be a form of surveillance. Therefore, it offers opportunity for the leadership in the Church, in particular, 'first ladies' and other 'sisters' to carry out 'surveillance' on single women.

Barrenness

When Mbiti (1991) says an unmarried woman has nothing to contribute to society, it becomes a double blow, if the single woman has no child (barren). Children are important in African culture. The significance of children in African culture reinforces the negative image that people have of single and barren women. Among the Shona, a man is allowed to marry another woman if his wife fails to bear children, but did not divorce the barren wife (Shoko, 2007:43). The collapse of the culture means barren women are humiliated, especially if they are divorced and the derogatory names continue to inflict pain on them. Motherhood is one of the most cherished statuses in Africa and it explains why barren women are sorrowful. The marginalisation of this category of single women piles pressure and sorrow on them. Even if the husband is impotent, the woman bears the fault. There are no active single men's ministries and single men who need deliverance for impotence in

prayer sessions. I read this as an example of Shona patriarchy that has been inherited in Pentecostalism, it revolts against the mind that a man can be sterile. The stereotyping finds affirmation in the interpretation of Genesis 2, to replenish the earth or to be fruitful, (to which seems to present a dilemma to most barren women, in particular, those who aspire to have children (after divorce). They continue to ‘sow’ in order to bear children. Some single women secretly visit African Independent Churches (AICs) to try their luck from popular prophets for rituals. How does childbearing relate to a woman’s identity and does she lose value and dignity because she fails to conceive? All these point to a crisis in the life of a single woman. The militant theology, derogatory names, negative attitudes, and all other forces against the single women create a harsh environment that project derogatory names and negative attitudes. But how do single women survive under such harsh realities?

Coping strategies: protest and re-affirmation

Most single women face a dilemma of being trapped between individual identity narrative on one hand and cultural ones on the other hand. Community identity has greater weight than individual identity (Jeong 2006). Single women struggle to re-assert their own perceived identities and reject the community’s identities that are imposed on them through naming and are profoundly affected by the values and norms of the community to which they belong. This implies that the single women/mothers’ personal stories are decisively influenced by the social environment, customs, and traditions as a constituent part of their identity. Stroup (1981:110) argues that:

Personal identity requires the use of interpreting personal history, but it also depends on the framework in which personal history is interpreted and that framework is shaped by a person’s location in a particular community.

This informs the struggle that exist between outside perspectives and the single women's narratives that bring out their identity. What has been analysed above seems to show politics that is not only governed by pervasive gender prejudice, but "war" based on marital status. FOG single woman protested: if marriage is God's perfect plan for all women as they interpret Genesis 2, why did God create few men than women? (3-02-2018). This response points to facts that are often ignored or avoided when leaders insist on deliverance for single women to marry, especially those that insist on marrying a man from the same Church. The question was derived from 2015 survey that pointed out that women were half a million more than men in Zimbabwe and it becomes logical to ask the question.

A UFIC woman also had this to say:

If I do everything, feed my children, dress them, send them to school, sometimes even taking care of the in-laws which I have a bond with because my children and the father of these children is somewhere, not responsible, then am I useless, I am a responsible and dignified single mother and not *mvana*! (6-02-2018).

To be a single mother and not '*mvana*' accords single women a dignified or respectable status. They understand themselves as honourable single women and not disgraced and sexually loose. They constantly resist the notion of being 'disgraced' and it shows that it is a deeply entrenched view in the society. While she is single, she has pride of her child/children since motherhood is one of the most cherished statuses by African women. Also, at ZAOGA's Ten Days Prayer, one had this to say:

...*mvana* is better, even if she is a prostitute. She is not married, what about married women who commit adultery? Yet in Church, couples' forums do not call for repentance at the altar. In single ladies' forums, there is always an altar call to confess adultery, what does it mean? Is it single ladies who commit sin and the married do not...? (3-01-18).

Many single women feel they have been unjustly accused of sexual immorality while churches do not give much attention on married women who commit adultery. On 23-03-2018, it was reported by the national broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation that there has been increasing cases of adultery of married women, in particular, those with a husband in the diaspora. The bone of contention by single women is that female leaders cast a blind eye on the evils of married women. Yet, one single woman's actions are used as yardstick and blanket to judge single women negatively. They accuse married women of protecting their husband when they have extra-marital affairs by lashing out at the single women only. However, some very few single women are courageous (because this is largely opposed by the Church) to point out that if men are fewer than women, then there is need to share these few men:

I am not a prostitute; I have physical needs. I have a steady boyfriend, not all women can get married and therefore I just find one consistent boyfriend that is not a sin before God, they talk of fornication and adultery, the Bible is not complete and has no answers for all problems of single women! (23-10-17).

The references to the silence of the Bible on matters that pertain to emerging challenges remain important. This has led to wrong deployment and interpretation of Scriptures. Also, by having a secret sexual affair the woman violates Church rules. However, it unravels the dilemma that single women face, and they attempt to create their own world by challenging and pointing to the inadequacy of the Bible in relating to their needs. This should not be read as a complete disregard of the Bible, for it remains a living book to many people. But the single woman points to her needs which are ignored in the interpretation of the Bible. Some single women held an end of year party on 17 December 2017 in Harare. One of the women had this song:

Ndakarasiswa nemurume, handina kurambwa asi ndakasiya munhu. Vazhinji Havana kurambwa, vakatiza mabhinya saka tiri zvikararume, hatisi mvana, vakadzi vakashinga, vakarongeka, vakanaka uye vane mari... (It is the man who failed me. I was not divorced but I divorced. We ran from violent man We are 'powerful men' and not disgraced single women but powerful single women, smart beautiful single women, organised and rich ...).

Bakare (1997) observes and comments that Africans communicate through songs. Thus, this woman conveys a message of protest through the song which is a powerful way of communication. More important, the meaning of the song brings out her conviction of who she is, denying and protesting the imposed label '*mvana*'. Lamin Sanneh (2003) talks of a "deeper engagement with issues of personal and social identity in Scripture and with questions of individual transformation and cultural fulfilment. Much of that has taken place in the context of awareness of the African religious worldview. But where is the protest "*handisi mvana*" (I am not a disgraced single woman) directed to? Most single women are at pains to make known to their families, the Church and society; that they took a bold decision to leave the man who abused them. Hence, they do not deserve the disgraceful and negative label.

The song is important because the single woman spoke not only on her behalf but also for other single women: "...*havana kurambwa, vakatiza mabhinya ...*" (they were not divorced but ran away from abusive men). Most single women seem to be proud if they are the ones that initiated divorce because being divorced is associated with shame and humiliation. But to divorce gives them a sense of prowess because they became strong and become 'man' because they confused, upset, and challenged the existing traditional expectation. Traditionally, divorce was initiated by men and this explains the shame and humiliation that accompanied a woman who was sent back to her parents. She had no dignity. The emphasis that they left abusive men is an attempt to counter the negative stereotypes and to reject the shame and humiliation that is accompanied by the label '*mvana*'. The idea that they were not divorced is the

premise for challenging the society to note the deficiency of the negative label. Outside the churches are places invented to celebrate being single. Protests are also directed to the ex-husband because there is general hostility that exists between most of the single women and their ex-husband. The Church is another target because she has inherited and not challenged tradition and continues to stigmatise the single women in new ways. This complacency to challenge tradition is read as authentication of negative stereotypes. The society is also targeted in the protest to re-think traditional concepts and to give sermons that do not stigmatise them. Married women are not excluded. While men are identified as oppressors of single women, married women in turn express an upper hand on single women by virtue of having their identity tied to that of a man (husband). Married women become co-oppressors with men on single women, either conscious or unconsciously. Above all, the song is a confirmation of self-worth, a defence mechanism in the midst of challenges and pressures to re-assert a perceived identity. Thus, Zulu (1998) observes the significance of voices of single women, what they say and what their silence means. These women are not silent but protest loudly. In these voices is a single woman's reality of her linguistic world as they experience the effects' of being single. They call for a re-interpretation of Genesis 2 which they think is interpreted wrongly and negatively impacts on their well-being and challenge Shona indigenous nomenclature that strips them of dignity.

Post-colonial realities:

The socio-economic status of single women

There are shifting paradigms that have been necessitated by colonialism and the emergence of new identities in post-colonial states in Africa warrant a fresh look at the single women. The identities are not static and the protest: "*handisi mvana*" but am a 'single lady' is loud enough to attract attention to tradition, post-colonialism,

and the nomenclature. New opportunities have ushered single women independent, self-reliant and their acquaintance with modernity and have acquired new identities (I do not overlook single women who struggle; thus, the categorisation remains important).

Whatever a woman suffers in society, most single women/mothers suffer a double blow. It explains the association of single motherhood with poverty and negative outcome. Their children are pitied. The sermon of single mothers as gold diggers who must work (see above) confirms society's view that single mothers depend on giving their bodies to married men who are financially stable for their upkeep. Thus, "*mvana*" has nothing good that come out of her except to cause problems and marriage breakdown. Relating with a single woman/mother, therefore, requires caution because she is dangerous and can do anything to harm marriages. *Handisi mvana* is a protest from many voices. The single women refuse the denigrated identity. They show the complexities of identities, for instance, some identities can be acquired and can be lost with time and new ones picked on. They lost an identity that they had acquired at marriage. To be called 'Mrs' was and remains an honour and cherished by most Shona women, for at birth a woman is destined to be married (Mbiti 1991). However, they have another identity if they have children. "I am *mai* ... (name of child)" or "Mrs..." is common designation among the Shona. It seems that this places women on a higher moral ground and makes them more respectable. It is an expansion of identities as the woman incorporates more identities. But most important, there is a wakeup call and challenge to embrace singlehood as an honourable status. In spite of the protest, Kalu (1998:30) has this observation:

Admittedly, sensitivity to feminist issues has not clicked in Africa. The women themselves do not subscribe to the type of re-reading the Scriptures, which is common in the Western world although they object to patriarchal dominating system.

While Kalu's observations are crucial but the time frame is important. Over the past years, sensitivity to feminist issues has clicked in Africa as female scholars begin to call for re-reading of the scriptures that fully emancipate women from patriarchal grip (see works of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians-Circle). Africa is unique and the struggle with feminist issues takes different forms and direction with that of the West within different cultural settings. The responses of single women that have been cited above also show how critical they are with tradition and interpretation of the Bible with regards to gender issues. However, a comparative analysis of the approach to feminist issues between African and Western women is problematic because of contexts and experiences (Africana Womanism and African Womanism are examples of challenges of diverse experiences of African women in Africa and those Afro-American women in the West and the broad feminist movements in the world (see chapter 1). However, admittedly, most women still advance patriarchy and run with the button stick of patriarchy especially those in leadership positions for most of the female leaders are beneficiaries of the patriarchal system. Also, dominant oppressive femininities are manifest. The married women seem to flex their muscles against the single women. It shows the complex inter-play of religion, spirituality, dominant oppressive femininities and influence of masculinities inherent among women of different socio-cultural and economic status within the matrix of patriarchy.

The excerpts in the introduction of this chapter, from a discussion on relationship with a single woman, capture prevalent perceptions which provide a narrow and biased description of single women. They down grade and denigrate her image. In the single women's responses, there is an attempt to negate derogatory perceptions and to re-define their world.

‘Champions have scars’

The leader of a single women’s prayer group said:

“Champions have scars”, they have the scars of falling out of marriage. It does not matter what the people say about us. The world sees a broken hearted, poor and probably useless person, but we know what we have fought and won, we are more than conquerors as in Romans 8:37, taking care of our children, a great burden. The Devil is not happy, and he uses the Church and our families to attack us ... (8-10-18).

Envisaging themselves as ‘more than a conqueror’ is contrary to popular belief that condemn and blames them for failed marriage. Yet for them, divorce is read as a mark of victory and strength over what was against their well-being. They could not endure problems but confronted the problems and divorced. If they were divorced, it was because they questioned the status quo and could not withstand injustices. They refused to be sacrificial victims in marriage. They draw attention to experiences which are largely ignored by ‘outsiders’ and this prompts them to interpret Romans 8 in the light of their experiences. While there are narratives of victory they are celebrated alongside the wounds and pain, for many bear scars. For example, those who did not marry and the widowed have gone through experiences and they have challenges that other people have not. Thus, every category of singlehood, the single women perceive themselves as champions who have fought battles and continue to fight injustice, stigmatisation, and marginalisation. On divorce, most of the single women that were interviewed pointed out various reasons for divorce. These ranged from barrenness, gender of child, husbands who infected them with sexually transmitted diseases, men who pushed for oral sex, false accusations of extra-marital affairs among many others. In fact, many single women pointed out how their ex-husband used the blame game, false accusations of unfaithfulness and petty demands as excuses when they no longer wanted the woman. Some were married to a lazy husband who abused them, and they were not appreciated, accused

falsely, and overburdened with responsibilities. But women always bear the brunt of negative names and blame. Parsely (1990) has this to say about dominant perspectives on single women:

‘they are undesirable, with loose morals, selfish, irresponsible, because of this; anger, frustration, guilt and anxiety often accompany her feelings. If indeed she harbours all these, then it probably justifies the criticism that she is a “wounded beast”! But does that erode battles she has fought because she also has her perception: ‘champion have scars’?

In single women discussions and debates young women/girls who are not married but sleep around with men but marry later also disgrace single women. These are not stigmatised or marginalised although they would have lived a sexually immoral life. The same is raised on married women who are unfaithful to their husbands. Society does places emphasis on single women even if they lead a morally upright life. The significance of this is to draw attention to the treatment of single women while other women who are promiscuous and unfaithful escape such a treatment. One constant protest by the single women who share these sentiments is how such girls and married women are co-participants in stigmatising single women. It brings out the friction that runs among women in the family, Church and society. One interviewee had this to say:

I am not worried about the derogatory terms. The world knows I am single. What about the ‘married women who live like single women and they pretend as if all is well’? They are sacrificed because even if the conditions in the marriage are brutal, burdened with the family upkeep, denied sex, they still cling to their husbands in order to protect their marital status (17-12-2017).

Married women are taught to submit and endure hardships and fight for their marriages (building them). Proverbs 14:1 says: “every wise woman builds her house but a foolish one tears it with her own hands...” The woman is blamed when the man strays away. The assumption is that the single woman failed to take care of the

husband, his relatives or give him good sex. No attention is given to check the contribution of the husband in the marriage breakdown. Also, the Shona Proverb goes: “*chinonzi tsveta ndicho chiri muruoko chiri mumoyo unofa nacho*”. This proverb means that whatever is in the hand, you can put it down but what is in the heart, you can choose to keep. Related to sexual relations, it denotes that the husband decides to have extra marital affairs and if there is no reciprocity and restraint on sexual prowess, the marriage fails. Single women argue that submission and endurance in marriage should be conditional in order to promote and empower women to question and resist injustices. Some married women are physically abused, have unfaithful husband, deprived sexually; bear the responsibility of raising children alone when the husbands are not responsible. It is under such circumstances that some single women question the notion of submission; hence, cherish their singlehood than to endure hardships. The married live like single women because of the burdens that they shoulder alone. What difference if any, are these married women showing from single women? These are some of the realities that are often concealed or overlooked by both the society and the Church. Another interviewee raised this:

There are many things that our mothers, aunts and pastors did not tell us: what do you do in face of a bastard, an abusive, irresponsible husband. All they said was give him sex anytime he wants, submit. If you share problems with the pastor, it is all about praying. My marriage collapsed because he was a prostitute, and I could not withstand that. I chose to start my life afresh instead of the risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases ... (5-03-18).

The woman sounds bitter not to the ex-husband but to pastors who could have saved her marriage. What she says brings in the role of mothers, aunts and pastors in marriage and divorce. Her claim is that all these people bear responsibilities in the life of a single woman who divorced. They did not offer a moral compass for the future as sacred practitioners in Shona culture (aunts) and in

Church (pastors). They ignored the harsh realities such that they did not empower the young woman how to negotiate difficult moments in her life. At the same time, they are also cited as the leading group to stigmatise and marginalise single women (see chapter 3) and women who are victims are blamed and continue to be marginalised and stigmatised (Caprino 2017). Among the Shona, ideological empowerment of women encourages them to be docile, subservient and to submit while men are socialised to seek transcendence. Most kitchen tea parties centre on a Proverbs 31 woman, how to submit and please the husband in the form of giving him sex, seeing into his welfare, and guarding him jealously with prayer (Mate 2002, Biri 2014). Teachings seem to downplay the reality of complex marital challenges. Most Pentecostal churches act as if divorce is something that is not numbered among their Church members. They spiritualise problems through emphasis on prayer for men who cause problems because of the belief that they are influenced by evil spirits. The above complain captures how the Church is not pro-active in dealing with marital challenges. Hence, the woman calls the man 'prostitute', something that challenges the Shona culture because there is no male prostitute. Also, the Church avoids such a blunt confrontation.

Teaching on enduring hardships for the sake of identity (misplaced conception) and safeguarding marriage for perceived dignity that is construed to derive from marriage is one of the seamy sides of Pentecostalism. Therefore, teachings on submission embody a lurking patriarchal ideology that fails to effectively address issues related to marriage in a meaningful way. It empowers women to be sacrificial victims and to avoid a head on confrontation with men or to encourage reciprocity and bring men to responsibility and accountability. This is mainly because, the over-glorification of the headship of men who should not be questioned; ('masters from the streets to kings in the houses') has been identified as a cause of the breakdown of marriage especially when women cannot bear it. Causes of the fallout from marriage are not given adequate attention.

Similarly, the narratives of barren women show the predicament that they face, dilemmas, challenges and unbearable pain and have scars of denigration. Yet, the potential defects of manhood are not even imagined by the Church and society. In fact, when addressing barrenness, men are not put in the picture. This confirms the traditional attitudes and perceptions that only a woman can be barren. If a man is not virile, it was held in secret and the practice of *kupindira* was secretly organised so that the brother of the infertile man raises children with his wife for his own behalf because the infertility of the man was not to be known. The significance of this practice is the support system to cover up men's infertility. However, a woman was not divorced for barrenness, but the man married another wife to raise children because of the value attached to children, hence the childless woman suffered the pain of longing for children but retained her marital status. The divorced single woman suffers a double blow of shame, humiliation that accompanies the disapproval by her husband and then the pressure and derogatory names. The essence of womanhood is denigrated if fullness and dignity of a woman is measured on the basis of marriage and children. It becomes a double blow if a woman falls out of marriage and at the same time has no children of her own.

Those who have children lose the marital status, but children confer some degree of respect, contrary to the barren woman. By virtue of being a mother, she is called 'Mai *nhingi*' (name after their children). It becomes a determinant of her status, something which the study queries: is a woman's dignity tied to the ability to procreate? If so, what about women who choose not to have children? Yet, choice of singlehood and even not to have children is dismissed as un-African. Tradition is more and more challenged; women lose their marriage because of barrenness and she lives with the disgrace of being called *ngomwa* (the barren one). The questioning of men's virility by single women brings to attention the socialisation process of children. Boys are socialised to seek transcendence while girls are socialised to be weak and to submit. This translates to marriage and gender roles. Guti (2007) wrote that a man should think

sharper than a woman. Therefore, failure to display masculinity in marriage is not an imagination. This means that where a man fails, the blame shifts to the woman. The blame finds avenues in denying a woman, status, and dignity. Therefore, marriage and childbirth define the well-being of a woman. In most African societies a woman earns dignity and respect through marriage and childbirth hence the conception that there is no dignity outside marriage (Oduyoye 1995). Related to barrenness are those cases where single women gave birth to girls only or a girl child when the husband expected a boy.

Shona tradition values boys more than girls because they perpetuate the lineage. The priority of boys over girls in families still exists today. In such cases, women are accused of having failed to bring forth a boy child. While other men do not divorce their wife, they often have extra-marital relations in search of a boy child. However, in worst scenarios the woman is divorced, and the single women carry the burden of looking after the girls alone.

The scars of criticism and attack are a mark of the single woman's experience in the Church. There are certain standards that are set for her to adhere to in order to be a woman of worth. At EFZ Women's Inter-denominational Conference, a prominent pastor declared:

Mumwe munhu mu single lady but she sleeps until mbabvu dzave kurwadza. The next thing is to snatch our husbands because you want support for your children. My husband does not call them "small houses" but "smell houses" because of the evil consequences that they cause to married women and their children when they take money which is not due to them (3-02-13).

The sermon assumes that single women are lazy and have an evil agenda of snatching out men in order to get support for their children. The assumption is that single women do not work or do not go to work and are after married to get support for their children. This goes in line with another label for single women as "gold diggers". Thus, they are seen as devoid of the ability to genuinely seek

a marriage partner for life and to fend for their children through their hard work. The Nigerian pastor Adeboye from the Redeemed Christian Church of God came to Zimbabwe in 2017. He declared: 'do not get advice from a single woman. Even if she gives you good advice, do not take her seriously because she is a jealousy person'. Note that the single woman sees success in its entirety, for instance, successful elopement from the grip of patriarchy when she divorced, success of mental emancipation and success materially. This is opposed to the above claims by the two preachers, one who is economically dependent and should not be trusted because she is jealousy. The significance of this sermon from a renowned man of God is the over-generalisation: Are all single women devoid of knowledge such that they are useless in society and that they cannot genuinely be advisors in their churches, of the same age and with same life experiences and aspirations? The sermon leaves no space for single women in the Church to operate freely as part of the body of Christ because of outright dismissal. The impact of the sermon centres on the status that the men of God unquestionably enjoy in Pentecostalism and it has negative effects of stigmatising single women. Thus, confirms the stereotype that other leaders have inherited in ministering to or about single mothers. The claims seem prejudiced because single mothers are suspected to have contributed to their singleness out of their irresponsibility. Therefore, they are not to be trusted. As observed by Peterson (1984), they spend most of their time with other singles, hence furthering their hidden agenda. Exaltation of the pastor to an infallible oracle of the Holy Spirit for any and all matters of faith and life is a problem (Kenny 2001:3). If the pastor demonises and castigates single women, it fuels contempt and stigmatisation because no one questions the man of God. It confirms a lurking traditional perception that a single woman has nothing to contribute to society. This is important in a general evaluation of what Pentecostalism has offered to the single women in their Churches. Yet, Gasho (2017), a writer, sees it differently. She has this in connection with single women:

...is independent financially...does not nag... is not the jealousy type...knows how to look good... is a hard worker... is not desperate for a man and can smell a deuce bag from afar...a woman with a heritage....

What is notable, however, is that Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe have contradictory postures with regards to the status, role and significance of single women. On one hand, the Church acknowledges that single women are members who make meaningful contributions, yet on the other, the sermons militate against their well-being. On widowhood, most young women pointed out that they are not spared of stigmatisation by virtue of the age. They remain potential 'husband snatchers' or witches. Thus, anger, shame, disappointment, frustration, humiliation, rejection, abandonment, bitterness and stress are all part of their experience. Most of them claimed they have moved on and focus on new things after they lost their husband, but they continue to bear the pain, trauma and hurt inflicted upon them, by their families, in laws, in the Church and in the work place. Their personhood is mistrusted and questioned.

I am called names when I lost my husband, I am not divorced. I am just a single mother. Most people know how to point at us and say we are *mvana* but they do not know and understand us. They live with us, but do not share our experiences. People must change the way they see others and respect us; the Church is not different in anyway (28-03-2018).

The issues raised should be taken as drawing boards to studies in Pentecostalism and the welfare of widows. A glimpse of the situation of widows in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe is provided by Machingura (2019) (generalizable to many Pentecostal churches) although it has focussed specifically on leadership. Machingura sheds light on the plight of widows in the AFM. There is neglect, barriers to promotion and demand for them to contribute like the widow of Zarephath. The recurring issue and contention among single women is the naming and description which give power to outsiders (see Pongweni 1983), show contempt, fuel

stigmatisation and marginalisation and lack of sensitivity to the context of the single women in pastoral care and sermons. According to Clinebell (1984:14), if context is not duly noted, there is a danger that the Church will be confronted by irrelevance. That applies to pastoral care. If pastoral care does not take context seriously it will be confronted by irrelevance as manifest in theology. Pastoral care is defined as that aspect of ministry which is concerned with the wellbeing of individuals and communities (Campbell 1987:188). Also, Wright (1982:23), emphasise notable insights with regard to context:

The ministry of the cure of souls consists of helping acts done by representatives of Christian persons directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise into context of ultimate meaning and concerns.

This indigenous approach to caring relies upon story telling as one style of pastoral care. It is from the insider perspective that I have developed sensitivity to listen and understand how single women experience stigma. In this research, a number of single women speak out their experiences and views and lack of understanding of their experience in different contexts.

Context of Bible Reading and Dilemma

This section grapples with dominant questions that bring out the challenges of tradition and the role of the Bible in discourses on single women. Do we have a description of the single women in all different categories in the Bible? Are Pentecostal churches forthcoming in terms of re-affirming single women to alter the traditional perspectives in their sermons? How the Bible is read (both in Greek and Hebrew cultures) and how it can be related to post-

colonial realities is of utmost importance to problematize the biblical contexts with the current Zimbabwean situation. Kügler⁴ as a Biblicist has significant insights. He points out that there is a great difference between the Old Testament and New Testament. According to him, the Bible has no answer to all the problems in particular what to do with your sexuality. He adds that the Church interferes in individual affairs, but she is the congregation of sinners, poke nose into individual affairs. In this regard, the single women have suffered the most of negative name calling, surveillance and other forms of injustice. The developments in Pentecostal churches in relation to single women affirm a renewal and revival of tradition and the rehabilitation of the indigenous spirituality on gender relations. Married women ordain themselves to provide checks and balances and 'tame' single women who have fallen out of marital union. Thus, social forums for single women become safe spaces to protest the challenges that they encounter. The protests send a strong message, calling for justice in theology; preach fidelity for all, responsibility and accountability on men (Chitando & Biri 2014). However, there seems to be some positive acknowledgement of single women, all embracing sermons that should not be over-looked. These have been noted in EFZ and ZAOGA.

Family building, nation building and transformation: the role of single women

ZAOGA and EFZ's women's fellowships have embarked on a nation building agenda. They teach that women need to lead in the transformation of Zimbabwe. Citing and validating Cindy Jacob's 1998 prophecy, they claim that women are going to lead in the

⁴ In BiAS 4, Joachim Kügler and others stressed the point that the Bible has no answer to all the current problems. Other problems and challenges require theologians to infer from the scriptures and then establish sound teachings that embrace people.

transformation of Zimbabwe and take Zimbabwe out of the economic crisis. Under inspiration of this prophecy, ZAOGA and EFZ women's fellowships have encouraged inter-denominational gatherings in order to mobilise women to take the lead in re-building the nation. They identify the family as the basic institution in society that needs urgent attention and reconstruction before the same is extended to the nation. Therefore, all women and mothers have a role to play in re-building the nation. In their discourses, motherhood means caring for the family, which is part of the family building agenda. Thus, motherhood, according to Pentecostal women, is not related to marriage and childbearing only:

Even the so-called barren, even the single in our society, you are mothers because your sister has children. You are blood sisters and sisters in the Lord. Therefore, you have no excuse of not taking part in this vision of moulding our families and aligning them with the Word of God (2-03-13).

The sermon extends the domain of motherhood to those who are excluded by virtue of the fact that they do not have children of their own for various reasons. The single women are embraced. It also challenges the traditional perception that one who is not married has nothing to contribute to society (Mbiti 1991). However, the sermon scratches the surface and do not impact greatly because of several reasons. First, many people have a bias on singlehood and the absence of interrogating tradition and diverse changes that come with modernity and other auxiliary forces means there is no practical challenge to stereotypes and perceptions against single women. Second, the sermon is birthed from the expediency to fix the economy and require the effort of every woman, therefore, do not reflect an attempt to address the practical concerns of single women. The absence of serious practical discussions and address of single women in different churches testify to the urgency and expediency of such a sermon. Therefore, it should not be read as seeking to address the concerns of single women and encouraging inclusivism, but contextual theology born out of an urgent matter. Yet, the negative attitudes and perspectives towards single women

remain strong. Thus, Ogburn (1978) observes that material culture changes more rapidly than non-material culture, in other words beliefs and ritual practices last longer than objective artefacts (material things). Developments show the 'resilience of axioms and aesthetics of African culture'. This probably explains why the traditional negative perceptions and stereotyping of single women has remained in Pentecostal churches.

Conclusion

Reference to single women has many implications. There is a multiplicity of identities, yet the negative views of single women have persisted. Pentecostal churches have become a vehicle force of the renaissance of Shona tradition, however, with negative effects on single women. The significance of Pentecostalism in relation to gender studies show that they have not offered alternative perceptions about single women. It has embraced and perpetuates the version of what they are already familiar with in the indigenous religion and culture. A glimpse from what the single women said or argued expose their experience, often ignored by families and the Church which have failed to offer space and comfort for healing, recuperation, empowerment, and development. The concluding remarks of Rachel Makwara (2016) on single women in Zimbabwe are important.

Apparently, there is no ethnic group which displays affirmative action about single mothers. It is therefore up to the single mothers, in the face of marginalisation, to write their story in the empty space from the community. They have to come to terms with their odds. The marginalisation perception thickens the single mothers' story of stigmatization. Therefore, they are being challenged to have an alternate story for preferred realities.

An in-depth critique of the challenges of single women and the coping strategies against the hostility for survival follow in the next chapter.

3 | THE CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS OF SINGLE WOMEN

Introduction

If you perform you have no husband to entertain and take care of, therefore nothing hinders your progress, you have all the time, if you are active in the Church, you want to be seen by men, if you sit down, you are lazy, you sit as if you have a husband to support you, yet you need God's blessings, if you argue, you are venting out your stress because you have no husband, if you are vocal and stand for your rights, that is why you were divorced or you have no husband, if you show boldness and extra-ordinary courage, she has a spirit, no man could stay with such a woman (3-08-2013).

The previous chapter focussed on the contested identities of single women, the dominant perceptions that are prevalent and in turn shape attitudes and perspectives that are largely negative towards them. The women's response to the perspectives and attitudes, the sermons and the accompanying stigma bring out the challenges and dilemmas that suffuse the world of single women. Are the society and Church ready to hear the pains and experience of single women? What is the role of the Church in deconstructing the stigma of single mothers to help them not only to construct alternative realities, but for the 'outsiders' to listen and effect meaningful change? Also, what is the status of the children, who stay with the maternal relatives, yet the patriarchal Shona culture give primacy to paternal relatives as custodians and guardians of children? This focuses on the challenges and dilemmas that single women face. An array of probing questions comes to the fore:

- > What is the experience of single women after divorce?

- > How far does Pentecostalism ‘protect women within threatening structures and challenge structures that marginalize them, in relation to their health and well-being?
- > What is the status of the children, especially when they are neglected by their father? How does the Church deal the behaviour of men in relation to accountability, responsibility and restraint on sexual prowess which is biblically construed as adultery?

Parsitau (2017:10) has this to say:

Single mothers are often stigmatized and branded by churches as “husband-snatchers” and “homewreckers”. In Kenya, there is strong social stigma attached to single women, especially single mothers, who are frowned upon by society and often branded as women of loose morals who fend for their children by preying on married men. This is a particular challenge given that Kenya has one of the highest percentages of single mothers in Africa, according to a 2012 Pan African Study.

The above observation relates to society’s perception about family, community and the Church which fuel stigma on single women. As such, many women fear to be single, are guilt, anxious, harbour feelings of regret and at times get depressed by the harsh environment as their world become a real challenge. Yet, the churches which are supposed to be the sanctuaries of healing and progression seem not to pay attention to the contexts of challenges, pain and marginalisation that require a high degree of shepherding for restoration and wholesomeness. De Gruchy (1986:36) says:

When people forget context and crisis, they turn abstract, detached, ideological, remote, and unhelpful. However, when they remember context and crisis, they show their identification with the people who are subjects and objects of Christian Ministry.

The context and circumstances of the plight of single women couch in men, who are active players in all the situations, but victims are

silenced with their narratives. Several reasons for silencing her include the challenge she presents to patriarchal structures. Her condition is a threat to men. She is 'no longer a woman' and she becomes an inspiration, role model, not to men but to other women. This inevitably means the authority and monopoly of men on gender issues challenges them as their women aspire to be independent. A bunch of single women who are independently propertied seem to have send shivers among most African men in view of the negative portrayal and alienation as men feel the evolution that threaten structures that give them unquestioned authority and power over women. Patriarchy encapsulates the mechanisms, ideology and social structures which have enabled men throughout much of human history to gain and to maintain their domination over women (Ramazanoglu 1989:33). This discourse has been widely accepted by women and children, and has seldom been questioned, especially by 'first ladies' in Pentecostalism who shares the benefits. Thus, women are servers and maintainers of a system that continues to relegate them to inferior status in society.

Patriarchy discourse has given power to men in society, while women and children have been subjugated by this power. How do womanists identify the problem of who is oppressed and the source of oppression? Through capturing the voices of victims, the above introductory excerpt sums up the challenges and dilemmas that single women face in the family, society and churches. They are condemned on all fronts and nothing good seems to come out of them. Thus, Gilbert (2015:08) posits the question: are they a marginalised disenfranchised social group? The excerpt above and the observation of Parsitau in Kenya answer to Gilbert's question. The narratives of the single women bring out their predicaments. However, there are factors that are important in interrogations of the challenges and dilemmas. These include the women's ages, education, assets, job status or income, ethnicity or religion and their cultural backgrounds. They determine the individual's perception of reality, the challenges that she faces and how she negotiates them in different contexts. Also, they determine the level and magnitude

of her joys and sorrows. The classes play a very significant role in how they respond to their relations with people especially the ex-husband and other men in general. The economic situation is generally at the centre stage as an important determinant of how single women, in particular mothers, relate with their ex-husband, family, and relatives. If they are economically stable, they are often tougher and seek total independence. Those who depend on their husband for the welfare of the children often find themselves in situations that require their compromise. For example, a common complaint from most single women shows that most of their ex-husband demand sexual favours as condition to take care of the child/children, especially when there is an urgent need in which they contact the ex-husband for help. This leads to an important question: does entry into singlehood compromise children's health and their well-being? Consequences of singlehood on children's health and the mother's health are very important on any study on singlehood because of a number of factors.

The centrality of children among the Shona and in most African indigenous societies. According to Caldwell (1982), the Africans love children, and the number of children influence whether the marriage is stable or not. Oduyoye (1995:141) emphasises the significance of procreation as the most important factor governing marriages in Africa. Motherhood is a highly valued role, open only to women but desired by both men and women as well as society as whole, it is the channel by which men reproduce themselves and continue the family name and it is the channel by which women actualise their psycho-religious need to be the source of life. However, over the past years, because a large number of children is fast losing value especially in urban areas where several factors such as economy and housing are influential on couples' decisions to have few children. However, this change has not eroded the significance of children within most marriages, for having at least one child remains desirable in most marriages, more so, a boy child. The children make families to relate at varying degrees and levels, even where marriages have collapsed. Most single women have children

to take care of, and in most cases single handed. Curtis (2001) has insights on the effect of divorce on single women. He claims that the health of single mothers is relatively lower than that of married women. Bonginkosi Justice Mditshane (2012) therefore, might be apt in placing emphasis on the traumatic experiences that emerge when someone experience divorce, single parenting, re-marriage, and step parenting.

The burden of single parenting on women reflects the traditional gender division of labour. Poor women are expected to be in custody of children at divorce. The economic status of the single mother determines how she toils for the children, in a country like Zimbabwe where both the Church and the state have no child support funds or any form of public social service from the government for support. Therefore, the burden piles on the single mother. Some single women live in abject poverty, including those whose ex-husband stopped them from going to work when they were still married, and they could not get a job after divorce. They become vulnerable and open avenues for sexual relations to earn a living, for some, however, secretly in order to protect their image as they know that the Church does not condone such behaviour.

Pentecostalism in Southern Africa seems increasingly insensitive to the socio-economic needs of the marginalised groups (Gifford 1988) and probably because of its capitalist orientation. However, churches like ZAOGA have empowered single women economically through entrepreneurship programmes such as Talents and 'round tables' (Biri 2013). The economic empowerment should be considered with caution because the woes of single women and women in general do not centre on the economy only but on the social, religio-ethical, or cultural dictates that remain a formidable force that hold women under patriarchal grip (Biri & Mutambwa 2013). For example, despite the implied benevolence towards widows, the fact remains that the woman is imaged as a minor who must be protected and provided by males, be they from maternal or paternal relatives, in the name of avoiding her from being destitute (Oduyoye (1995:137). The 2000 'Operation Murambatsvina'

(Operation Restore Order) (see Chapter 1) and other inconsistent government policies created a crisis for single mothers who do not have family and government support. Hence, the socio-cultural structures push them to the periphery when they have the burden of childcare. While some children live in poverty, others do not, but inevitably, it affects the physical, emotional, and mental health of the mothers in most of the cases. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...” (Philippians 4:13) was the response of one single woman who narrated her hectic schedule and struggles to fend for her two children through doing part time work as a house maid in the leafy suburbs of Harare. Citing biblical scriptures gives such women hope and endurance as they remind themselves that God is with them in challenges and trouble. Although they are heavily taxed physically, emotionally, and mentally, Scriptures foster a spirit of resistance, endurance and resilience and they give comfort and solace. Another cited Isaiah 43:2-3 to point to divine will and presence of God in her situation as she should completely surrender to God:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned....

Complete surrender can be a sign of powerlessness as she and others go through challenges that they cannot control. Their strength and hope rely not in the family, Church or society but in God. Thus, scriptures have become a ‘durawall of their faith’ (Maxwell 2005) in contrast with the sermons which largely condemn them (see Chapter 2). The economic situation in Zimbabwe has fuelled their challenges but the single women have through deployment of biblical scriptures remained hopeful, for they strongly hold on to their faith. It should be stressed that even those who have jobs are not in complete comfort zones. Problems, dilemmas and challenges also stifle them in different ways. The centrality of the Bible, sermons that militate against the single women and the way they invoke biblical scriptures to find meaning and purpose in their difficult moments

require interrogation. Often, it is the dilemma that emanates from how the Bible is read, understood, and interpreted and deployed in specific contexts.

Biblical exposition

One of the greatest dilemmas that most single women face is how to be true to their Christian faith. They fear to commit fornication but at the same time they feel they need men in their lives to fulfil their sexual desires. One minister said to me: 'I encourage single women to have permanent boyfriends privately for I cannot say it on the pulpit because I understand that they too have sexual needs...' This led me to question further whether it is the hypocrisy in the Church or is a manifestation of failure to balance Christian dictates and cultural underpinnings in marriage, divorce, singlehood, and re-marriage. Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe seems to emphasise the sin of adultery/fornication as the most grievous of all the sins and with a bias towards single women. Also, some women indicated that before their marriage crumbled, they were sexually starved by their husband which was a primary indicator they were no longer loved. However, they had nowhere to present their problems because they bemoaned the absence of the traditional sacred practitioner (aunt) who was responsible for dealing with private sexual matters and could interrogate the husband. At the same time, the Church leaders emphasised the need to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:16). When they are out of the marriage, they are told to refrain from sexual relations as 'Jesus' wives' or they have to re-marry. Yet, some men profess that they do not need a 'wounded beast' close them! In one of the discussions during single women's gathering, there was earnest talk. One said:

I do not need a sex toy, it is Western, I don't need to masturbate, it is not healthy for me. I need a man. If I cannot get a man, God will then give me the grace to live a life of celibacy (7-06-2018).

Most of the single women in their copying mechanism dismissed the issue of sex toys and many professed that they do not even know them or make an attempt to inquire about them. It brings out the binaries of things regarded as Western and African. Hence, the women affirm the African womanist claim that African women do not seek to fight and get rid of men but to point at injustices they perpetrate, negotiate with men to create safe space for them and partner. It also dispels negative stereotyping of African Womanists as people who seek to destabilise society by tapping into Western discourses on gender norms. The quest to have a man in life seems to remain resilient among most African women, regardless of their different categories. Hence, any meaningful interrogation of challenges of women brings to the fore the role of men in a culture enmeshed in patriarchal structures and hierarchies. Also, the empowerment of women in general and specifically single women, requires the participation of men. The problem of name-calling and suspicion on single women cuts across many Pentecostal churches (see Chapter 2). This section gives attention to the bias that seems to permeate Pentecostal theology on advancing the figure of Jezebel in sermons that attack single women.

The Jezebel personality: wrong deployment of scriptures?

The Jezebel thesis correlates with the belief that men will be seduced and snatched! Jezebel is deployed in sermons to show an evil woman with an evil spirit. The Jezebel thesis is problematic because there are married women who are not faithful in marriage but the sermons on Jezebel seem to point to single women (Kalu 2008). Also, Jezebel in the Bible is a married woman (1 Kings 19). On 23-03-18, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation announced concern over growing infidelity among married women especially those with a husband working in the diaspora. But sermons on Jezebel centre on single women and not married women or at least to

interrogate men. This is a sign of patriarchy that is deep-rooted in the churches. Ramazanoglu (1989:33) notes that:

Patriarchy is a dominant discourse which has constituted the lives of many people. Patriarchy encapsulates the mechanisms, ideology and social structures which have enabled men throughout much of human history to gain and to maintain their domination over women. This discourse has been widely accepted by woman and children and has seldom been questioned.

The deployment of sermons by female leaders confirm this observation by Ramazanoglu because most ‘first ladies’ in Pentecostalism regurgitate the teachings of their husband and make little effort to focus on boys and call men to dialogue for gender justice on domestic and marital issues and relations. How then can single mothers inform power structures regarding their challenges and experiences of stigmatization especially when the female leaders are complacent? The single women are perceived as daring, dangerous ‘wondering beasts’ with no place of abode (out of marital home). *Mweya yetsvina inongotenderera* (wondering evil spirits) looking for an abode (to have a husband) therefore, there must be checks and balances on her. The metaphor of a ‘wounded beast’ is evocative of an unstable, pained, hurt, grudgingly, revengeful woman. This probably explains why the presence of a single woman among couples is read as a spell of disaster and married women seek to protect their men from wandering away and risk being snatched by her. And not only men, but the suspicion extends to participation in the Church also. Most parents do not want single people to lead their children at Sunday school or youth forums. There are explanations as to why the Church views single women with suspicion. According to West (1997), women who do not have a religious orientation have higher marital divorce than those who do not have (because the religiosity of single women is questioned, especially when they divorced). Churches can offer an alternative to the home as a social space that can allow for avoidance of questions over motivation and behaviour. This observation correlates

with Mbanefo (2013) who claims that in Southern Africa, divorce among Pentecostals was a bit lower. There might be two views to this observation. The period of study time affirms the observations, apart from the fact that the Church in Zimbabwe often conceals hard facts and seek to present the good side of moulding marriages. An example is how the Church took long to accept that HIV and Aids infected members among the congregants. Sermons castigated those who had infections as evidence of sexual promiscuity. It also took a long time to convince many ministers in the Church that the sermons were brutal because AIDS is not a moral disease and the Church was not spared by the epidemic.

Pentecostalism has not been forthcoming in dealing with issues of divorce despite the widespread evidence. That is why the 2013 survey by Mbanefo is suspect because churches often sweep under the carpet many gender issues that challenge her theologies. While Pentecostalism remains a force behind enforcing submission and endurance in marriages (as in Shona tradition and culture), divorce is rampant in the Pentecostal churches too. It is misleading to claim that there is a lower rate of divorce in the Church. Evils that are figured out in society are also common in the Church. In fact, my study groups are single women in different Pentecostal churches. Leading criticism of Pentecostalism on gender issues in Zimbabwe have been pioneered by female scholars, who are also members of these churches.¹ It should therefore be time specific and contextual to declare lower divorce rates in churches. Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe seem to have cast a blind eye on divorce and struggle to cover up the prevalence of divorce. At the same time, their teachings mainly centre on encouraging the women in marriages to hang on and pray in face of challenges! Therefore, there is a lurking ideology that views women who divorce as lacking

¹ See for example, the works of Kudzai Biri on ZAOGA, AFM and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the overall body of Pentecostals, Rekonpatswe Mate, Tapiwa Mapuranga and Molly Manyonganise on United Families International Church.

in terms of their religious commitment to the ideals of Pentecostal spirituality.

It is not surprising why the single woman is viewed as a 'Jezebel' who has an evil agenda to destroy. Hence, she poses a threat to marital relations. The single women have no one to submit to and it has remained an open question of how far their morality is tested. The suspicion brings to test the image of the churches as sanctuaries of peace, love, comfort zones and complete virtuous spaces for the single women. If a single woman falls prey to a pastor (as they are always regarded as a target), she seduced the man of God. No critical thesis is advanced to interrogate the men of the collar. Many Pentecostal churches teach that members should find marital partners in their Church. This means that single women remain exposed to suspicion, hate and accusation, name calling and systematically marginalised because they are viewed as people on a searching spree for partners, through illicit means even.

Verbal attacks in sermons

At an EFZ gathering, a pastor declared:

Prayer should be the lifestyle of a single woman. Others have a husband to lean on and you do not have. If you are lazy and you do not work hard you will end up admiring someone's husband. It won't stop at that. You will end up snatching someone's husband! (2-02-2013)

By imploring single women to pray always in order to overcome their challenges, Pentecostals present a simplified and homogenous image of people suffering and in dire need of a husband to provide for them. Guti (1992:21-22) teaches that single women should pray to God in order to seek guidance for the right partner. This teaching overlooks the fact that some may not want to re/marry or at least are not obsessed with re-marriage, while others

are economically empowered and can adequately look after themselves and their families without depending on men. The sermons lack critical awareness of diverse socio-economic status of single women, therefore, do not practically impact the lives of single women in a meaningful way. Rather, they simply perpetuate negative stereotypes. At the same EFZ meeting another speaker said:

“Some of you want to be married *asi hamugeze* (you do not bath/you are dirty)”. *Vamwe venyu murume wako akafa muhondo saka namatai kuti denga rizuruke* (Some of you your husband died during the liberation war, so you need to pray for the heavens to assign to you another man and it is not easy).

The generalisation of hygiene in the sermon can be regarded as an insult because it creates an impression of single women who are dirty hence, they cannot find a man, or they got divorced because they did not keep high hygiene standards. Also, reference to the liberation struggle is out of context. The liberation war was waged many decades before 1980, and most of the target audience did not experience the struggle and more so, do not qualify to be connected to the current young generation in marital relations. Hence, the sermon immediately got a response from one of the single women: “even guerrillas and baboons attract tourists...it is not about bathing, beauty or someone who died, but it is pre-destined by God”. This response shows how some sermons are resisted by the single women, although they cannot openly challenge leaders. The overglorification of marriage over singlehood gives pressure for the single women to desire to get married. Also, married women endure abusive relations in order to protect the honour and dignity that comes with being in marriage. Challenges in marriage show out clearly the woes of women in general, for they endure marriage and the single woman who is divorced faces more challenges. Thus, whether a woman is married or not, there are huddles that have to be challenged for total emancipation from the grip of patriarchy. On 8-02-2019: “Madam Boss” (Tyra Chikocho) a popular Zimbabwean comedian apologised on Facebook how she taught women

in kitchen tea parties not to associate with single women. She claimed that her interaction with single women taught her lessons on their humanity, how they are hard workers and dignified. This confession reveals the prevalence of teachings that dominate kitchen tea parties. They fuel stigma because teachings come from people of great influence. The image of single women is that of people who have failed and who are determined to destroy other people's marriage, evil advisors and 'husband snatchers'. The verbal attack and the hostile attitude inevitably impact on the well-being of the single women.

More so, single female pastors are not immune to these challenges. I recall soon after she was widowed in 2015, one of my pastors, whom I was close to, explained how some female elders in the Church became protective of their husbands during leadership meetings in which she presided over. One female elder was courageous to confront the pastor:

“When you call for meetings, you cannot call my husband. Instead, you notify me, and I will pass the message to him, you must not exclude me, we need to protect (the) image, and we are human beings”.

Although she did not spell out what kind of protection was required, the pastor reported that she knew she posed a threat, and the 'safety' of the elder's husband was the major concern. Such scenarios need attention to investigate the psychological impact on single women in the body of Christ and how it measures with their performances. For example, how did it impact mentally on the female pastor who had to live with the knowledge of knowing that she had some checks and balances on her because she had become suspect? Also, it brings to the fore the question of how serious the Church is in living the values of Jesus. A colleague in my Church narrated:

My brother called me because he had some problems with his wife. He wanted me to mediate because they had sharp disagreements. My sister-in-law told me: 'keep quiet you do not have a husband to tell me about marriage'. I was hurt, I am a mother of

four boys, and I wed(ded), and my husband has gone to the Lord!
(24-12-17)

As soon as she lost her husband, she then lost dignity and the assumption that she was devoid of wisdom and constructive knowledge. It is one of the recurring assumptions that a single woman has limited mental capabilities. If churches and families are places of perpetual hurt, then Jean Gashu (2017) has an important question: is there a place of love and security for her? A FOG pastor's wife narrated how a fellow pastor's wife resisted a single woman to lead a Department in the Church. She insisted a suitable person was a married woman. After a short while, her husband passed on and a couple was brought to pastor during her grieving period, after some time the Church's opinion was sought to find out if the widowed female pastor could lead the Church. Many leaders recalled the incident that she denied a single woman to head the Department and concluded that she cannot! The widowed pastor insisted and pleaded for mercy, but her plea was ignored and she lost the leadership position. While it can be seen as victimisation of a widow, it couches in the politics of relations and capabilities and dignity that affect single women. When the pastor became widowed, she thought she could handle the leadership position. Yet, she previously denied a single woman to take a leadership position because she has no husband. This becomes a strong basis to argue for a model that takes the experiential dimension on studies on singlehood. The inconsistency of the pastor in her approach represents the approach of many Pentecostal churches towards single women because they are far removed from their experience. It sheds light on how out of touch people are with the life of singlehood. When the Church 'others' and distances themselves from single women, in some instances, it is noble to question the orientation of single women's ministries and the claims of partnering with them. The widowed pastor came to understand and believe that a single woman could lead but it was hard for her before she lost her husband. Experience becomes the power to navigate life objectively and the absence of experience show how leaders or

other people can inflict hurt and inflict pain on single women, even if they are capable to of carrying out the duties.

A colleague at work came to me seeking solace because someone had told her: ‘if my husband hears that I am talking to you while you no longer have a husband, he will be angry with me.’ I sought to establish the incidents with what I experienced in my life. Related to her story, was my experience with a friend. I regularly gave a friend some groceries because she was going through financial challenges. She always drove to my place when she was in need. But when I asked her to help, she would turn down and pointed out that she needed permission from her husband, yet she did not seek permission to come and collect the food that even the husband ate. There are undercurrents to such relations, and they give a glimpse of the deep-seated policies that are deposited at the base and govern the way married women and single women relate. On the whole, churches have internalised negative beliefs about single women, sometimes unconsciously, or without any spoken word, and these lead to marginalisation.

Apart from attitudes within the Church, the society is not all friendly. One female pastor from Harvest House Church had this to say:

A married man in our vicinity approached me and proposed love. He offered to take care of my two kids, paying their fees, my rentals in exchange for sexual favours. I refused and told him that I was hurt when someone took my husband, and I cannot do that to another woman. The man responded and said who told you I want to divorce my wife...? (3-03-16)

The incident confirms the attitude that some men have the view that single women are desperate and can easily be manipulated to offer sex, especially when there are offers to provide for their children and other material needs. At the same time her response to the man demystifies the myth that single women are morally loose, embody the Jezebel spirit and can easily fall for married men.

Submission as a mark of virtue, godliness, and resilience

Lack of endurance is a characteristic associated with most single women. They failed to endure whatever problems they met. They were not submissive to their husband. Eunor Guti (2006:66) wrote what she teaches and says that the husband 'is a perfect shoe'. Hence, most teachings in ZAOGA's Gracious Woman emphasise that women who divorce are 'fools' because they lack wisdom to build their homes. These teachings reinforce stereotypes on single women who divorced, regardless of their varied circumstances and experience. The women have hidden histories of pain, abuse and marginalisation that is not manifest to the public. Some sermons in Gracious Woman also present challenges to the single women, for instance, the insistence that no matter how educated and wealthy they are, they need men (note the contradiction, on the one hand they are 'Jesus' wives', and on the other they need men and that there are few men in the world!). As already been indicated, single women, especially the young ones, are seen as potential threats to the stability of marriages. The diction itself also discriminates against single women. Hence, those who divorced lacked feminine traits, failed to submit and to endure challenges and to safeguard their marriage. Therefore, most are perceived as bitter and set on a mission to destroy other women's marriages. This is the justification of portraying them as Jezebels. It also explains the popular feeling that single women cannot be genuine good friends. The final goal of her friendship is viewed as destruction., empowered with such teachings from perceived renowned 'mothers' in the Pentecostal fraternity, to hold on to the 'perfect shoe', it helps to cultivate contempt and bias towards single women who are divorced.

In Chapter 2, I drew attention to categories of single women. Those who have not married and the 'hit and run' suffer almost the same. Their morality is questioned because of engaging in pre-marital sex. Therefore, they are perceived as loose, prostitutes, *nzenza* (one without an aim in life). Yet, according to single women, criticisms cast a blind eye to married women who engaged in pre-marital sex

but find themselves in marital homes. As pointed by Burdick (1997) men love Pentecostalism because he is taken from being master in the streets to become kings in the houses. Men are not fingered out or blamed in the case of pre-marital sex and unwanted pregnancy. Men who are nodal power points in Pentecostal hierarchies do not attempt to address (through sermons) the plight of single women or to engage the men to equally account in cases of pre-marital sex and unwanted pregnancy. Emphasis is on the girl child and the women to respect and honour their bodies and this does not match with the few references made to ensure the boys and men to restrain themselves sexually. Instead of dealing with the one inflicting pain, tradition has often held women responsible for peace, stability and development of the home and family (*mutsigu wemusha*) (Bourdillon 1976). The call to endure hardships has vehemently been condemned by the Circle. The conditioning of women to endure hardships in Shona traditional religion seems to be inherited by ZAOGA (see above teachings) and many other Pentecostal churches. In one of the Sunday services at Grange, Eunor Guti prophesied and called women in front:

Do not leave your husband, the devil wants you to be a prostitute, don't leave your husband, don't leave him. Come in front for deliverance. The devil wants to destroy your marriage! Refuse to be defeated ... (5-10-2015).

The Guti couple presents a perfect example that I use to argue in this book. Female nodal power points in Pentecostalism entrench patriarchy, whether they are aware of it or not. This can be gleaned from Eunor's book *Wise Woman* (2006). The call for women to endure hardships without dealing with the source of the problem is how Pentecostalism seems to have failed to effectively deal with the problem of adultery and other marital problems that include abuse that end up in divorce. The call for endurance without confronting the ills camouflages 'many secrets and this world of secrets hides a lot of wrongs' (Oduyoye 1995:131). Yet, a man (Guti) at some point appears forthcoming in dealing with abusive relations. Guti and

Makandiwa of the UFIC teach that physical abuse has to be reported to the police and do not require prayer.² It shows that there are cases beyond prayer, yet, in most women's forums such as the kitchen tea parties, the young women are not empowered to deal with violence and abuse because these are not even among the topics that are taught (Mate 2002). What to do if they marry a bastard is out of the central teachings, and it is evidence of how many Pentecostal churches live in denial of gender based and sexual violence in marriage. Hence, churches have also become breeding grounds where gender based and sexual violence against women thrives.

Gender politics: debate on headship and responsibility

There are hierarchies of identity and experiences that shape Pentecostal thinking on single hood. Leaders, single women, men and married women are chief players in discourses of femininity and singlehood. Men are taught to be responsible husbands, fathers and brothers. Chitando (2007) details the teachings in AFM and ZAOGA on men as leading Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. He points out that men are called to responsibility and accountability. This is in spite of the fact that all these noble teachings are watered down by 'soft masculinities' that cannot effectively tame the man who has been socialised and indoctrinated that he is a 'bull'. There is lack of strong mechanisms to enforce discipline among men. However, the call of responsibility does seem not to extend to the children that the men fathered out of wedlock or the woman they are divorced with. The responsibility of the men is not emphasised when it comes to the single mother's well-being. Most single mothers indicated that the Church leaders advise them to pray so that God intervenes. There is no meaningful head on confrontation to challenge the men who do not take care of the kids. There might

² Guti and Makandiwa have recently been teaching their congregants that they need to report physical violence to the police.

be some explanations for that. First, men are generally known to protect each other (not an absolute claim), especially in cases of domestic violence and abuse. Although some leaders challenge men to be responsible and accountable,³ most male leaders do not. It then affirms the vulnerability that single women experience in a patriarchal society, aptly captured and summed ironically by Kügler (2019): “A single woman is like a fish without water!”

Second, most of the divorced men re-marry and they become husband to someone else. Encouraging the single woman to engage the ex-husband seems to be an attempt to re-engage them, a move that often threatens the new wife. Third, it might proceed from the contempt on the single woman because, why did she leave and not cling to the husband? Therefore, this blame always negatively affects the single woman and inevitably renders her powerless to pursue the ex-husband through either her relatives or Church leaders. The judiciary structures in Zimbabwe are weak on men who evade responsibility on their children. Often there are reports of married women who prevent their husband from taking care of the children who live with their mothers. The wives become influential in decision making as they protect the resources and to safeguard their husband. Hence, it shows another level of gender politics that disadvantage the single women. The dominant factor in such cases is to safeguard the marital home, thereby side lining the requirements of the other woman’s children. The fear of reconciliation between the husband and his ex-wife is the driving force. As a result, it is the innocent children who suffer neglect by their fathers. Apart from the wife, the mother in-law is cited as very instrumental in preventing childcare support by monitoring activities of her son. However, some married men impregnate and desert the women because they cannot marry them and to present themselves as dedicated Christians, do not even talk of the children born out of extra-marital relations. Some men demand sex with the ex-wife if they

³ Pastors like Christopher Kapandura have consistently called for men to be responsible and accountable, especially to shun adultery.

want childcare, the selfish conditions which seem not to be given serious attention by the judiciary. If assessed within their particular power context, it provides the practical example of power dynamics that run in Shona patriarchal society and inherited by the churches. Legally, the women remain at a great setback. The law in Zimbabwe is not watertight as many single mothers lost their properties to the husband, they continue to suffer with the children while the men contribute little or nothing and most men get away with it. Hence, there is need to interrogate the meaning and significance of 'family' and responsibility of the father, especially when men have children with the woman/women he parted ways with. Do these children cease to be part of his family given the silence of the Church to press for accountability and responsibility through sermons, teachings and Bible studies?

The study challenges Pentecostalism to re-visit the concept of 'family' in her teachings on upholding the integrity of the family. Two issues have to be confronted. First, it is necessary to deal with 'theological rigidity' on the meaning of marriage. While it is noble to uphold marriage as symbol of God's Church (Matthew 5:23-32), the question of single headed families come into play. There is need to broaden up and embrace an inclusive theology that acknowledges the role of single mother headed families within the body of Christ caused by the crisis of an emerging 'fatherless generation'. It might be prudent to acknowledge that although Zimbabwe is a religious nation, and the Bible is central in daily life to many people, it is the centre of problems and challenges especially for the marginalised groups such as single women. Thus, the title of the BiAS volume edited by Kügler, *et.al.* (2019) sums it up: *The Bible and Gender Troubles in Africa*. It reinforces the idea that the interpretation of the Bible causes 'troubles' mostly for women/single women. Indigenous patriarchy informs the reading and interpretation of the Bible and reinforces patriarchy where there is parallel or resonance between Shona culture and Jewish patriarchy. The divinely headship of man explain the reluctance to call and challenge men to responsibility.

Celibacy: trapped by two traditions

Different views among women left them without concrete agreement on celibacy. I Corinthians 7 became one of the controversial topics. Most single women that were interviewed did not want to be single. If they chose to be single, it was an after-thought after the harsh conditions that they experienced and more so, the failure to get a serious partner to re-marry. Therefore, some evil spirits seem to be behind marriage breakdown or marriage failure. This explains why the deliverance sessions of UFI, ZAOGA and PHD are flooded with women who seek either a husband or stability in marriage so that they do not lose the husband to “predators”. The belief in evil spirits that militate against marriage is strong among the Shona people. African Pentecostalism affirms that indigenous belief by emphasising the role of spirits in countering God’s original plan of marriage in Genesis 2. The struggle revolves against wrestling with evil powers.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12).

The interpretation and deployment of such scriptures of warfare, alongside the indigenous belief that a woman who fails to marry or who divorce has an evil spirit (*chitsinha*). This fuels stigma against single women. Thus, even those who choose to remain single do not have peace of mind because of the stigma that is attached to celibacy. Genesis 2 is at the centre stage of deliverance services to get a marriage partner. Matthew 5 is deployed in sermons in order to emphasise that it was not the original intention of God to divorce. The interpretation of the Scriptures blame man for failing to obey God’s original intention and in a patriarchal society, a woman is regarded as *mutsigu wemusha* which means that the dignity and functionality of the home comes from the woman. Hence, the woman shoulders the blame, even in cases where the single woman is not directly criticised, it remains an unsaid truth that she

did not live up to both societal expectation and the biblical dictates of her role. Such teachings are compounded by the indigenous view that a woman is destined for marriage and gains dignity and status only through marriage. Yet, many single women feel that such views and teachings are based on a narrow interpretation of the Bible and a static reading of Shona indigenous culture. As one complained:

I wonder what tradition they always point to. We are no longer part of that tradition. Things have changed and we no longer live in the past, if men are few and there are no men to marry us, is it a crime; let these preachers provide the men to us and then we will re-marry! (11-08-2017)

Celibacy is un-African and has no place among the Shona. It is always accompanied by derogatory labels and comments. However, the questions raised show a number of emergent issues that challenge old established traditions.

‘Sowing’ in order to marry

Pentecostals teach that one reaps what he/she sows (Galatians 6:7). It is common in many churches and ministries to hear preachers teaching those who are not married to ‘sow’ into the life of the man/woman of God, and also to pray and fast. This is another dimension of the Pentecostal theology of dominion. Single women are expected to have dominion over spirits which are deemed to be against their marriage. The teaching creates problems since it raises the question of whether all married women ‘sowed’ in order to get married. It also portrays the gullibility of desperate single women who do whatever it takes to get a husband. They are haunted by the pressure exerted upon them, the perception that there is no dignity outside marriage (Oduyoye 1995). As has been indicated, these are perspectives from Shona traditional religion

that have been inherited by the Pentecostal churches. However, critical single women have questioned the notion of ‘sowing’ in order to get married as some viewed it as a way of harvesting from desperate single women who want a marriage partner.

Rules and Regulations: Dress Code

There are also rules and regulations that should not escape scrutiny. The dress code of women in general is monitored because of the belief that women who dress ‘provocatively’ can easily seduce men. Policing of single women’s bodies involves dress code, which is always monitored, there is a certain way of dressing that is expected, which does not equally apply to married women. For single women, the situation gets worse. Guti, for instance, taught in 2010 at ZAOGA Golden Jubilee that women were created with something that men always want, and when they (women) do not dress properly, men can steal it (implying the use of force) (Biri 2013). The teaching encourages or justifies sexual violence against women based on dress code. It is also one-sided, as Guti argues that the dress code cannot be prescribed for men. These rules, although meant to protect male pastors and men in general, cultivate negative attitudes towards single women. The fear of seducing and snatching men in the Church is at the fore. Not only does this bring devastating effects on the psychological and emotional well-being of single women but research shows how women (and with single women it doubles) languish as they are sexually violated but with little or no meaningful punishment on perpetrators.

Churches do not emphasise the single men’s ministry but focus on sexual purity for the single women, which is not extended to single men. The absence of emphasis on the single men’s ministry in order to engage single men in issues pertaining to divorce, upkeep of children and re-marriage warrants critique. It appears to be an oversight on the part of the churches. Over-emphasis on single women to the exclusion of single men brings out the patriarchal nature of

Zimbabwean Pentecostalism. And in extreme cases, it has created an environment where single women who are sexually abused are blamed instead of blaming the male perpetrators.

Formal education and empowerment

Educated single women seem to be a threat in most of the churches. First, the academic and professional credentials are far above that of most of the clergy and married women. The greatest fear is that they bring heresy in the Church. Their academic and professional qualifications seem to be read as a posing a threat to the status quo in Pentecostalism.⁴ Women in Pentecostalism are taught that the sky is the limit and that they should excel (Soothill 2010). However, Pentecostalism is on record to spiritualise problems, hence lacks the audacity to confront challenges in a meaningful way, in particular areas that presents challenge to theology and relate to gender based and sexual violence. This is one of the weaknesses that marginalise educated single women at various degrees in their churches. They are viewed as symbols of Western or intellectual aggression to traditional norms and values of the indigenous culture and biblical stipulations on gender hierarchy (that has fuelled violence in marriage and culminate in divorce).

⁴ In Israel on E21-Conference, female scholars from Southern Africa discussed how the attainment of degrees and professorship created problems for them in their churches as they are often viewed as posing threat to gender relations because many people think they embrace Western ideas, even when they are silent, they remain symbols of Western challenge to African indigenous values.

Physical and sexual violence

Men are associated with power and strength to shield women in relationships. The idea that the single women are vulnerable because they have no husband is deeply entrenched. Also, the idea that they are not virgins therefore, they have no right to deny any sexual advances are prevalent (see chapter 2). If they do resist, they can still be sexually assaulted or denigrated through harsh words that diminish their well-being. Feminist scholars, however, have recognised the limited utility of the law in deterring perpetrators and protecting women from sexual violence. Research has shown that single women have been sexually violated and many kept it to themselves because of fear of reprisals because society is not sympathetic to them. In fact, the victims are condemned because there should be a reason why they were sexually assaulted. During my research, I had a long discussion with heartbroken parents, whose daughters have been continually violated sexually, without the law taking course on the perpetrators. Below, is a testimony of sexual violence against a teenage girl who became a single mother, as narrated by the parent:

She went to play with a boy next door without suspecting anything, they were alone, and she was overpowered physically and raped. She fell pregnant and dropped out of school. The matter could not be reported to the police but was settled by the two families because the boy had just failed his high school studies. After the girl delivered and raised her child, another guy in the neighbourhood came to their house in the absence of all family members as he knew the daily routines. He raped her and told her, you are not a virgin and you have no husband, so we quench your sexual hunger. Unfortunately, she fell pregnant again...and she is a teenage single mother with two children (2-06-2015).

The case above represents many cases of sexual violence against women who then become single mothers. The hidden narratives of violence are not even considered when the women are insulted and given derogatory names. It becomes worse if she becomes a mother

at such a young age, from two different men. She then confirms the negative stereotypes of being morally loose because of age and having children from different fathers. The issue of sexual violence is one that the judiciary in Zimbabwe has to give serious attention. Perpetrators of sexual violence are encouraged because most cases go unreported and at times the sentences for these perpetrators are too lenient in comparison with culprits who, for example, steal a beast, get a good jail term, yet a man who rapes can stay in prison for a short time. Repeated/sexual violence is one of the challenges faced by single women and most of them suffer in silence because society is brutal at them. It is always concluded that they deserved to be raped because of bad morals or improper dressing that seduced the men. Often, physical abuse is accompanied by verbal abuse if the woman resists sexual advances because she is seen as a sexual object. The dehumanisation keeps her quiet. It seems to be a paradox about how the Shona men emphasise and idealise virginity as significant but at the same time fail to live with the woman that he found virgin. It calls for re-imagining purity if it no longer guarantees the stability of marriages and if it is still a determinant factor of moral uprightness in the context of sexual violence.

Gender roles and partnership

Not all single women are economically challenged. However, there is a point of convergence of the prime needs of most single women. The need for a man in their lives remain crucial, not necessarily for sex in some instances, but the indigenous Afro-centric womanist social and cultural perspective remain dominant. The urge to partner with men remains strong. Gender roles between men and women, girls and boys are central in the home and they remind some single women how the absence of a man in their lives creates a social vacuum. One of the most common questions that single mothers received from their children is the whereabouts of their father and at times why they divorced. So, while some of the single

women take care of their children and other family members, the legacy of divorce is resilient. Some pointed out that they feel lonely at times and that there are some things that they need a man to be by their side. But at the same time, they get comfort from the fact that some married women also suffer many challenges, those with a husband who does not take care of the family and the woman shoulder the burden. Although some felt that they needed a man, many single women pointed out that they abhor marriage because of their past experience of abuse, suffering and the aftermath of divorce.

One overarching question among the single women is why the faithful women are often out of marriage? There has been an overwhelming consensus that promiscuous women stay in marriage which most of the women cite as adding to their bitterness against God, confusion in their Christian life and some seek revenge to their ex-husband. "I am confused and always ask God why women of loose morals get married and stay in marriage ..." The issue of their innocence triggers bitterness and many questions to God. What are the effects of this approach to life? The irony is that although they have different derogatory names and are looked down upon, there is a sense in which most of the single women feel superior in terms of moral consciousness. Some point to divine plan of their experience. What befell them after divorce is not really important but the pre-marital narratives where they were pure but were betrayed by men. This places them on a high moral pedestal despite the breakdown of their marriage. Empowered with that sense of moral worthiness, there are a lot of survival strategies that act as copying mechanism for them in face of hostile attitudes, discussions, and teachings on single women.

Copying mechanisms and survival strategies

Social forums of single women are significant because they become places of re-creating their identity. They protest the conservative

views and perceptions that view them in a negative manner. There are different coping mechanisms that keep single women strong. Often their situations and desires govern their approaches to life. Prophetic imagination takes centre stage. Psalms 23: “The Lord is my shepherd...” is a popular verse that most single women cite. The art of positive confession and self-affirmation that is popular among Pentecostals is very important to many single women, referred to, by Ridj van Dijk (2001) as ‘technologies of self’. At times, the spirit of rejection pushes them into their own world that they rule by re-affirming themselves amidst rejection. Brueggemann (1978 [2001]) points to the power of positive confession that suffuses Pentecostal teachings. Thus, they confess abundance and that their children will not lack and will prosper and have great future. The imagined great future for their children is perceived as a God given reward to comfort the hard labour and toil that they have gone through as single mothers. Yet, some have their ex-husband who takes care of the children. While they acknowledge the care that is given to the children, they always question why they ever failed to establish permanent marriages, a lurking African indigenous ideology that places marriage at the centre of life.

“Men with wombs”: Confusing gender roles?

Most single women see themselves as ‘men’ because of the hardships that they have gone through and the role that they play. Shona society regards women who do extra-ordinary things, outside the stipulated domain of women as “men”. It can be positive or negative. Most single women who carry the burden to look after their children often brag with the success stories without the presence of a male companion in their lives. There is a sense in which to be a ‘man’ is a standard of a real woman but at the same time invites problems as it often threatens the men because such women intrude into their sacred space and acquire a label that makes them unique. The extra-ordinary role that they take in solitude prompt

some of them to rate themselves as equal with men or even above men. This is one of the things that continue to infuriate most men as they feel that single women step into the domain reserved for men. There are several explanations that can be given. The status of the single women and the absence of male figures in their lives to play the husband-father roles mean they take care of their families on their own. If they excel, they celebrate their mental prowess and physical capabilities. Thus, they challenge the long-held tradition that a woman needs a man in order to excel.

Among the Shona, the expressions “*Mukadzirume chaiye* (she is a woman but a man) or *murume pachake* (she is a real man) explain the type of women who have strong character traits and who do things normally reserved for men. As the headship of the family traditionally is reserved for men, and as the Bible also emphasises the headship of the man (Ephesians 5:22), it means women are generally displaced from such a significant decision leading role. In line with the expectation of the headship, Gutti (1997) wrote that a man should think sharper than a woman! This is significant in several ways. First, it empowers men to resist women with strong character traits as they endeavour to intrude into the space for men. Second, it authenticates casting and discouraging the promotion of women’s capabilities. Women are rated far below men’s mental capabilities. It is one reason perhaps society becomes brutal to successful women; and single women happen to be among the most successful women. Third, the male gender becomes a standard for judging prosperity and success. You lose the woman’s identity to embrace the identity of being a man (which has negative connotations at times). Such notions in society help to keep women under patriarchal grip, by embracing patriarchal ideologies. It translates to rubbishing other women who do not reach such standard. In fact, despite negative attitudes in society, it seems single women are also fast becoming a symbol of bravery, resilience, and success.

Mate (2002:557) talks of ambiguity for women in Pentecostalism because they are placed into an ambiguous position, as they are required to leave their homes to engage in economic activities. Even though it is essential, movement outside the home contradicts use of Biblical texts for example, 1Timothy 5:14, which would have them, “take care of their homes, so as to give (their) enemies no chance of speaking evil of (them)”. While the Bible is elevated to a very high status, it is a problem to single women headed homes because they cannot stay in the home and are required to work for their children. Context is disregarded by encouraging single women to work and not snatch people’s husbands but when they work and excel, they become a threat because they become ‘men’. The sensitivity to their solitary situations and environment probably prompts single women to work even harder and excel, thus, it spells disaster to men who are socialised to see women under them. Also, some women, especially the married, are socialised to believe that a married woman is better than a single woman and if the single woman succeeds, it invites disaster for her. The envy, jealousy and condemnation emanate from the fact that it revolts against the Shona indigenous worldview that a woman independent of a man can still be successful far above men or couples.

The single women have not only confused gender roles but also constitute the strongest and toughest group of women critical of biblical interpretation and tradition. There is a tradition of hierarchy in African culture and religion. This demonstrates that women who challenge ‘patriarchal norms are subject to censure and are even at risk of violence’ and yet society has disregarded circumstances that have forced these women to challenge patriarchal norms. Pentecostalism plays an important role in society, but it does not seem to protect single women within threatening structures or challenge the structures that marginalize them.

Prisoners of hope? – validating the future

Some single women believe that there are good men although they were unfortunate, so they have hope to marry/re-marry in future. They argue that they were just unfortunate and prayer for marriage takes a centre stage, for marriage and children for those who lost their marriage because they did not conceive. They wrestle with perceived spirits that render them out of marriage. Mostly relatives or former in-laws, in particular the mother-in-law, are identified as sources of their woes. They are highly aware of the presence of evil. The spiritualisation of the causes of divorce is one way that Pentecostalism has dealt with issues that surround divorce. Single women who go to the deliverance sessions believe there are evil spirits behind their broken marriage. This is in spite of evidence of how the marriage broke down, for example, an aberrant and abusive husband. It also confirms the resilience of the Shona belief that no evil happens without a spiritual cause. If the husband was irresponsible, the question is why was he irresponsible when other men are? Therefore, spiritual forces are blamed. What requires explanation is why then it is the single women who are called for deliverance and not men. Some single women who have serious economic challenges seek opportunities to go out of the country and get a job or married. An exit from the continent is envisaged as an escape from the memories of abuse they suffered during the time of their marriage.

I came across a few who confessed that they are ready to be a second wife and encourage the man to take care of the other wife. However, many condemned the idea as a sign of desperation and as injustice for the other woman. The experience and socialisations distinguish African women from Western feminists in their criticism of men who are largely responsible for their predicament. Most of them still need their men; ‘not above him not under him but side by side with him’ is an inscription common on ZAOGA posters that advertise Gracious Woman’s meetings. Single women remain vulnerable because it appears there is lack of an empowering theology for them to cope up with their socio-economic and

cultural needs. The single woman also gets trapped with the contradictory teachings that give dilemma when she fails to secure a man for marriage. If she fails to secure a husband, how do they quench their sexual desire? The issue of masturbation (*bonyora*) has been a bone of contention among the social groups of single women. Division centre on whether it is a sin or not and also whether it is healthy or not. The great challenge comes from the fact that two prominent African Pentecostal theologians; Guti and the Nigerian Christian Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy Church have conflicting teachings on masturbation. Both men are prominent Pentecostal founders of large international Pentecostal movements that command respect. While Guti (2012) condemns masturbation in his book as evil and sinful, Oyakhilome teaches that it is not a sin. Thus, this has left Pentecostal congregants in a dilemma and divided as they engage the subject. To have temporary relations (privately) to either get money or relieve their sexual needs as some advocated has been one vehicle for the spread of sexually transmitted infections where either prevention methods have been scarce or where there is poor sexual education.

Condemnation of traditional perception of sexual purity

The value of virginity has been questioned. Most of single women indicated that they were virgins when they got married. Their men did not value their faithfulness and purity hence questioning the rationale of remaining virgins until the marriage bed! Shona traditional puberty rituals place much emphasis on purity of the girl child, less on that of the boy child. It is regarded as an honour to keep virginity until marriage. Yet, the high rate of breakdown of marriage and the narratives of divorced single women are calling for a re-evaluation of the indigenous traditions on the emphasis on purity of the girls at marriage while not taking boys on board. Some were infected with HIV by their spouses despite maintaining purity. Unfortunately, questioning and highlighting the relevance of long-

held traditions in their social forums does not seem to impact and influence change, save to strengthen one another.

“God understands our needs”:

Personal affirmation and re-construction of theology

While the past is hurtful for most of the single women, strength to move on seems to come from the way they have re-appropriated biblical scriptures. The selective citation of scriptures and relating to their own personal experience is a source of hope, empowerment, and strength for them in the face of hostile teachings and negative attitude towards them. They find healing in not only scriptures but music. Prominent gospel musicians like Charles Charamba “*Ndimi munoteerera inzwi reshirikadzi nenherera*” was played in one of the prayer meetings as the women prayed. Jimmy the Psalmist from Nigeria too; certain words from his song entitled “Yahweh”, gave them comfort. He points to God as “the husband to the widows and father to the fatherless...” Thus, even single mothers who are not widowed believe they lost a husband who is “dead from the lives of the children. While some single women protest the label ‘Jesus’ wives’, they have no problem with God being referred to as their husband as it relates to provision of material needs for their children. So, to them, God becomes the ‘father’ to their children. It gives them confidence and purpose in life, and it becomes a ‘durawall’ of protection from the hostilities. However, the single women who experienced sexual violence (rape) are different. Finding meaning from the Scriptures is difficult for most of them that I conversed with. Those whom I interviewed faced challenges in interpreting Jeremiah 29:11 and Proverbs 31. From Jeremiah 29, they questioned the good plans that God claimed upon them. They also struggled to affirm themselves as Proverbs 31 woman of worth and dignity because the physical violation and sexual abuse haunt them and prevent them from embracing a high self-esteem. The wounds inflicted on the victims of sexual violence should not be

under-estimated because they also struggle to understand and interpret certain scriptures in relation to their life experience. In a low voice, one had to say to me: “No one knows that I was raped ever since I moved to Harare from the village, I am ashamed to say it in the Church and I have lived with this pain...” Her story and the pain that she endures couch in the role of the Church, and the perception and attitude towards single women cast doubts on whether the Church has been able to journey with the wounded, shepherd them and bring healing.

Bareness seems to be a serious problem for many women. They have to grapple with the stigma of first, divorce, challenges of being single and then barrenness. Do Pentecostals address the problem of bareness effectively? The fear of re-marrying and the re-cycle of events is the greatest fear among the women who pointed out that failure to conceive led to the breakdown of their marriage. Focusing on deliverance has two implications. There is a sense in which her hopes to conceive are raised, but the dilemma is that she has to re-marry in order to engage in sexual activities and to conceive. It is a constant reminder to her that she failed to be like the other women because she is blamed for lack of faith. The story of Hannah and Peninah (1 Samuel 1:6-16) is taught to encourage women to pray to God to open their wombs. Therefore, she failed to pray or lacked faith to witness the miracle of conception.

The question of seniority as an embodiment of wisdom is one that calls for attention in relation to causes of singlehood and challenges faced by single women. Often single women are challenged to love their mother in law even if they have wronged them. The question of forgiving and respecting in laws is very deep among the Shona and the daughter in law cannot contest with the mother-in law. However, the deployment of cultural beliefs and practices without reading the context creates bias against single women. Also, it betrays Pentecostalism of bias by tapping more into the indigenous spiritualities than adhering to stipulations from the Bible. It is the contention of this study that as long as Pentecostal churches avoid the question of seniority and its flaws, the woes and sorrows of

women in general will continue to mount and single women will be marginalised increasingly. Despite that shortfall by most Pentecostal churches, most single women have demonstrated a high level of resilience and strength against negative odds. Makwara (2016) has this to say:

Resilience of single mothers is manifest in their survival of an oppressive societal structure that stigmatises, hence survival strategies are indicators of resilience. Despite the Legal Protector Women Rights, including the Criminal Code which provides punishment for sexual offences, domestic Violence Act of 2007 which criminalises domestic violence provides increased protection for victims, single mothers remain disadvantaged in Zimbabwean society.

Conclusion

The abuse and challenges that are perpetrated against single women are not met with adequate justice for rectification. Most of the single women have 'wounds' of 'hidden histories' of pain, hurt, exclusion and marginalisation. This is in spite of the fact that some Pentecostal churches like ZAOGA have contributed to the economic empowerment of single women through entrepreneurship programmes. Such programmes, as well as some piecemeal positive affirmations of their role in the Church, appear to have embraced single women but they remain vulnerable and stripped of dignity. The challenges and dilemmas are evidence of the hostile spaces. Thus, it raises the question of the extent that churches have been healing sanctuaries for the wounded single women. While chapter 2 focussed on how the single women re-foster their own perceived identity, it is crucial to engage and probe the views of their children, the re-construction enterprise and how they engage single hood in the light of their children. The narratives of single

women are not complete without factoring in the role and significance of the children. The next chapter, therefore, deals with perspectives and attitudes from the children of single women.

4 | ALTERNATIVE CONFESSIONS OF SINGLE MOTHERHOOD

“Left with babies in the arms by the men they trusted ...”
(Jean Gashu 2017)

Introduction

The previous chapter captured the challenges and abuse of single women in different forms and various degrees, in the family, Church, workplace and in the public space. The society imposes identities on single women that are largely negative and derogatory in nature, even though the single women seek to refute the negative identities. Burr (1995:54) argues that the discourses which form our identity have implications for what we can do and what we should do. He maintains that “discourses ‘show up’ in the things that people say (Burr 1995:50). Given the nature of such social constructions it is important to question, challenge and deconstruct the role of discourses that have trained people towards certain dominant ideas and away from others (Madigan 1998:89). Burr’s observations show that the discourses surrounding an identity determine the activities that are undertaken and the space that should be occupied with those who fall into the rubric of that identity. This becomes a problem because the prescriptive nature of discourses seems to be predicated with biases, limiting and underplays the potentials, energy and the spaces occupied by a certain group. Only those who are in higher positions have a voice and power and this comes from a culture and religion that give higher privileges to certain groups of people who are perceived as embodying wisdom, maturity and experience, for example, the elders and community leaders. The cultural and religious dictates in the religious institutions ‘have prescriptive powers that are not easily opposed’. Hence, Pentecostalism bestows unquestioned authority

and power on leaders as living saints (Achunike 2004), even though some do not have the experience on specific subjects that they teach. The sermons are not opposed or questioned in most cases. Freedman and Combs (1996:32) say:

In any culture, certain narratives will come to be dominant over other narratives. These dominant narratives will specify the preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving in a particular culture. Some cultures have colonized and oppressed others. The narratives of the dominant culture are then imposed on people of marginalized cultures. Whatever culture we belong to, its narratives have influenced us to ascribe certain meanings to particular life events and to treat others as relatively meaningless.

Freedman and Combs' observation affirms the negative labels imposed on single women/mothers. They are predicated with assumptions and bias, but despite the bias they are deeply entrenched in society and continue to thrive because they are narratives of the powerful. They have served and continue to serve the purpose of marginalising those who have crossed the boundaries and norms set by society. For example, the women who divorced or those who do not want to get married have 'poured ashes' to the long-established traditions and the auxiliary ethical dimensions. Therefore, the 'punishment' of failing to conform and live up to the societal expectations attracts criticism, stereotyping, marginalisation, and exclusion. All these have been the portions of single women/mothers at various stages in their lives. While the criticisms and stereotypes are largely unfounded, they remain powerful because of the power base upon which they are built and established. Men are not comfortable with women with strong character traits, who challenge the established hierarchies of power enmeshed in the patriarchal structures, in particular in the family and Church. The immediate beneficiaries of the system ('first ladies' and married women) strengthen the biased narratives that promote stigmatisation and exclusion (see Chapter 3 on sermons and confessions). The single women/mothers, therefore, have had unique categories

of experiences that are fashioned and fabricated to completely ‘disarm’ them through available means. Denise Ackermann (1996:138) has insight on ‘categories of experience’. She argues that ‘experience’ as a point of departure is valid for doing theology when it is an attempt to fracture the fallacy of the impersonal objective ‘knower’. She adds:

The aeons of male definition of our social world presented as ‘knowledge’ have shown up how just flawed this exercise is. As a feminist theologian, I have tried not to fall into the trap of making assumptions on behalf of other women.

Ackermann reinforces the significance of experience as an important component in order to avoid bias and dispel fallacy in society’s claims of ‘knowledge’. She makes a significant contribution by ‘fracturing’ claims of absolute knowledge that are advanced by founders of Pentecostal movements and the ‘first ladies’ who claim monopoly of knowledge over women’s affairs, especially on single women/mothers. The reference to the notion of ‘experience’ as a point of departure for doing theology draws us to the following:

First, the insider-outsider debate that I referred to in the first chapter. By virtue of experience, single women stand uncontested masters of their narratives, which however, are owned and perpetuated by ‘outsiders’. In spite of that, the experiences of the single women, which are not experienced by most of the leaders (who are not single women), are a testimony of the bias that is exhibited in the sermons, teachings and claims of singlehood. Second, the notion of experience does not only dispel myths of monopoly of knowledge over singlehood by the privileged elite, but it also magnifies the oppressed and marginalised groups and attempts to give them a voice or a platform as they are an embodiment of specific knowledge. This inevitably clashes with the existing social order where power and status dictate the order. This partly explain why even single women who are economically powerful are stripped and disarmed because there exists a form of ‘power’ and status that have modelled the society, to either elevate or despise.

However, Ackermann's awareness on the diversity of experiences of women which leaves no room for absolutism and speaking for the other women remains remarkable. Thus, it prompts an investigation not only on the experience of single women but also the children of single mothers. These have diverse unique experiences that constitute a body of knowledge. The children have a comprehensive contextualized understanding of how single mothers are perceived in the church, but their significance derives from the importance of their experience as an independent source of knowledge of single motherhood. They have a body of knowledge that 'outsiders' have neither experienced nor accessed and may not access. The hidden narratives of pain, exclusion, and marginalisation that a mother goes through impacts on the child and the level of impact is determined by a number of things whether or not they are negative or positive. Therefore, apart from the knowledge that the family, Church, and society have validated on single women, a search for alternative 'knowledge' is important and crucial for African theology. Mair (1988:127) captures the significations of stories, which I construe as part of the experiences that the single women go through:

"Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart, we inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race and place."

It is, therefore, important to give attention and critique to the religio-cultural and contextual stories that come from individuals, especially those who are 'powerless' or 'vulnerable'. What are the stories that inform the lives single women, their children and how are these stories mediated by the 'outsiders?' Also, do the stories encourage inclusivity or marginalisation? White (1991) adds that 'stories determine the shapes of our individual lives through stories, both the cultural narratives they are born into and the personal narratives they construct in relation to the cultural narratives'. The discourses on single women confirm the bias of the stories, the limitations and expose the degree in which the significance of single

women is under-played. In particular, the single mothers' double role in the upbringing of children in the absence of a father. The discussion below is derived from the debate that centres on fatherhood. It came from a Fathers' Day discussion in 2017 when I congratulated single women as 'fierce and strong fathers' who are impacting the lives of 'fatherless' children in our families, community and nation. I got surprised with the backlash, a number of responses from the male pastors who fiercely resisted the placing of the designation 'father' on single mothers. To most of them, there was no justification to apply the label on single women, although they acknowledged that she has multiple roles which are difficult and too demanding.

Most of them argued that there was nothing special and unique in raising children on their own. I struggled to dialogue with most of them because they were not willing to have a deeper engagement on the subject, save to say, it is unacceptable and contrary to the Bible to say a woman is a 'father'. I tried without success to explain why I had contextually referred to single women as 'fathers of the fatherless'. It was apparent to me from the discussion that the fury and criticism was not only limited to the image of 'father' that I had invoked, but it had to do with the fact that a 'woman/single mother' was imaged as 'father', a special designation, jealously guarded in a patriarchal society. However, I still have a lingering question, are all men fathers and what is fatherhood?

Contesting the concept of ‘fatherhood’

Many single women call themselves ‘father and mother’ of their child/ren but most of the male pastors reject it.¹ They argued that being a ‘father’ is a God-given and sacred title that must not be assumed by a woman. Even though the single mother toils and does all the responsibilities of an absent father, the single women must not imagine or categorise themselves as ‘fathers’ to the children. I was made to reflect and search for the possible reasons why a vicious argument erupted and there was strong resistance on the application of the label on single women. Nothing gave me satisfaction to rest my inquiry than to realise how the patriarchal Shona indigenous cultures have provided gatekeepers for certain domains, titles and activities within the patriarchal hierarchies. Because a woman who straddles into the male domain is an affront to patriarchy, she is seen as a threat to male dominated institutions and society. The patriarchal structures in Pentecostalism do not validate a woman who seeks to exit the designated space and delve into a perceived ‘sacred masculine domain’. Thus, the fierce resistance from the pastors seem to emanate from the premise that it places single women on a pedestal higher in terms of hard work and managing their homes and families as compared to most men. Hence, to proclaim that the single women are ‘fathers’ translate to an illegal intrusion into a male guarded space that they do not deserve. I knew the pastors knew what I meant. It was about my experience of mentoring boys, especially during the puberty age, which should have been the work of the father, had he been present and available for them. Most single mothers share the stories of the challenge of

¹ I am in the social group of pastors and elders of a leading Pentecostal Church in Zimbabwe. On Fathers’ Day, 2017, we argued and debated on the label ‘father’ in relation to single mothers. Most of them argued that they know the important role and difficult tasks that she undertakes alone but it is God-designed that a woman cannot be a ‘father’.

mentoring boys, especially where there are no male figures like uncles to help, because of the external factors that continue to destroy the indigenous way of life.

Yet, the single women maintain that if they are competent to play the role of fatherhood, then they have become ‘fathers’ to their children. The contestation seems to revolve on the understanding of **the headship that was bestowed on the man by God**. The pastors held on to the Bible and argued that the Word of God cannot be challenged. The single women maintained they are “fathers” because they are heads of their families and also argued that they use the label figuratively for it captures the role they play, initially designed for men/fathers. The role evokes the memory of broad responsibilities and accountability that surpass what society has assigned and stipulated for the female gender. But the single mother finds herself, delving into the role that society has not designated for a woman. Therefore, it is the spirit behind the use of the label ‘father’, dictated by undertaking the roles of fatherhood.

The single women teach their sons especially at puberty, the most crucial transitional stage in the life of the boy child (Aschwanden 1985, Bourdillon 1976). Therefore, they have assumed the role of a ‘father’ to their children and they are appreciated by their children. The politics of naming is at the centre stage. Naming oneself is powerful because it defines borders and activities and, in this sense, it challenges the traditional negative appellations that disempower single women (see Chapter 2) and empowers them because they undertake headship roles. Therefore, the challenges that they face (Chapter 3) are driving factors for the single women to challenge the traditional and rigid concept of ‘fatherhood’. Fathers’ Day is celebrated to recognise the contribution that the father figure makes (fatherhood and male parenting) to the lives of their children. Drawing attention to Shona indigenous culture shows the significance of a father figure. When the biological father passes on, the uncle (brother of the deceased) often takes the role of the father to the children. The sister, in particular the oldest, of one’s father (*tete*)

is referred to as *babakadzi*, (the female father). She would sometimes chair meetings at the traditional court (*dare*) to air views either from women or simply representing an absent male figure. She is recognised as ‘father’ and this explains the label *babakadzi*. Gombe (1986:61-62) says:

“Mukadzi uyū ndiye mumwe wevakadzi vaive nesimba raigona kup-fuura ravarume... Vanhu vavaShona vakavapa mai ava samba ne-basa guru chose... semunhu akamirira rugare, runyararo, rudo, wir-irano nekufambira mberi kwemhuri dziri pasi pavo.”

(She is one of the women that were powerful even more than men...the Shona gave her powers because of the great work she performed as advocate of peace, love, understanding and development of family welfare).

When I related this to single mothers, I had in mind how single mothers assume a father figure in the absence of a father and the father duties that they execute. It was, therefore, a celebratory salutation that captured their role and achievements in the lives of the children. The protests that followed show the bias that enshrines categories of women. Society is comfortable with its application on an aunt, but when the label is used on a single mother who toils for the children on her own, there is stiff resistance. This is a mark of deeply entrenched contempt on single motherhood and points to the negative perceptions and stereotypes that accompany it. However, the protest and insistence by single mothers that they are ‘fathers’ is an attempt to negate the prevailing discourses about their well-being, which they construe as deficient and not in tandem with their daily experiences. It seems to be a recovery tool, to challenge society to acknowledge their significance in the family, Church, and society. The drive for recognition comes to the fore because of the significance of the Fathers’ Day. Their innocence, hard work and dignity are usurped by the brutal treatment, sermons, and attitudes. It is my submission that single mothers stand as the oppressed group that the dominant groups attempt to silence. This brings in the insights of Paulo Freire (1970) that are crucial in describing the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. He argues

that the struggle is led by the oppressed as they question and challenge the beliefs and practices that surround them.

Most of the attitudes are shaped by dominant myths that are deeply embedded in the indigenous Shona culture. Culture is shaped through myths and these myths are socially constructed and are internalised by society, making them part of their culture and establish the basis of society and the social relationships. In spite of the success of single women/mothers, the repetition of the negative myths about them leads to certain perceptions which the society maintains (Lincoln 1989:25), regardless of the fact that there might be evidence to dispel such myths in the lives of the single women. In the midst of all the challenges and imposition of labels from without, most single women find their children being the source of comfort and hope. Therefore, strength, courage endurance and inspiration derive from the children. Chapter 2 captures how single women attempt to reassert their denigrated image through fostering identities that place them on a moral pedestal and their worthiness in society. They struggle to contest the prevailing images and perceptions that are largely negative and denigrating. Most narratives show how they sacrifice for their children in order to compensate the gap that has been left by the men who deserted them. The general view of women as weak vessels and in need of men for protection and success is derived from cultural discourses that position women as taking a subordinate role in relation to men. Yet, the increasing rate of divorce, widowhood and many other factors that render women single challenge the traditional and conservative beliefs about women.

The absence of men in their lives and the success stories that they embody discredits the conservative views, narrow and negative perception of the need or a must for a woman to have a man for success and prosperity. Success and prosperity in this case is all-embracing and does not refer to financial wealth, for there are many single women who do not have a bank account. However, from their rejection and divorce, they have success stories of bravery, strength in the way they negotiated their hardships and challenges

and remain faithful to raise the kid(s) that were left in their arms by the men that they trusted (see above). The bravery that they displayed in defying the odds against them and the courage to tear down the walls of tradition constitute part of the single women's success stories. In this sense they are heroines in their own right, who fought battles and thus, have scars of championship. Some toil for the kids without a monthly salary or help from other people. A single woman has a hidden history of rejection, pain, marginalisation and exclusion but she fights all the odds in solicitude and towers above with her wounds and scars which earns her a mark of championship (Biri 2017). The woes of the single women mount probably because society does not forgive them for challenging the status quo (sailing above what the society does not give a nod) that is enmeshed in patriarchal anecdotes and men being the most beneficiaries. As Milestone and Meyer (2012:99) state that "men are associated with the public domain and the world of work while women are associated with the private space of the domestic". Yet, single women have dabbled into that domain relegated for men and therefore, the repercussions are sour for them.

Many preachers have emphasised that despite the best that a single mother can do to their children, they cannot fill the void that the children long for. A father figure is a desired and natural gift. Such claims suffuse the society and have had the significance of reminding the single mother that the family is incomplete because there is no man in the home. Also, no matter what she goes through on her own, she cannot claim monopoly because the children belong to the father. In some instances, it has caused some single mothers to live in bitterness. However, in spite of dominant views, sermons and narratives that describe the single mother and her children, probing the perspectives of the children of single mothers is important. Do they validate the public opinions, views, and attitudes towards their mother? It is crucial to incorporate narratives and stories because their experiences are a point of departure to do theology. The children are 'victims' of marriage breakdown, separation, divorce or widowhood. Before focussing on the child perceptions

of single motherhood, it is important to enumerate some of the several myths among the Shona. These play a key role in the representation of women and their roles in marriage. Through the repetition of these myths, social identities are established, thus building them on the construction of culture. It is, therefore, important to briefly consider them to shed light on how society's perspectives are shaped and how contempt and denigration of single women is perpetuated through the advancement of these myths. A critique of the myths is necessary in order to expose how they relate to single motherhood and also to expose their deficiency.

Myths: authenticating stigmatisation and marginalisation

There are many myths that pertain to women and inevitably infringe with the welfare of single women. These include:

- **A woman is destined to be married in order to fulfil her gender role** (Mbiti 1991). Therefore, she should be married and stay in that marriage regardless of the situation. Failure to keep the marriage or to divorce is against the norms and values of the society and a great sign of failure on her part. She has three roles to play: as a woman, wife, and mother. If ever she fails to fulfil the three roles, it means that she misses her destination, as does a woman who divorce/is divorced, one who fails to bear children and one who has failed to get married.
- **Single parents have children without fathers.** Children of single mothers have been referred to as children without fathers (*vana vasina vana baba*). Among the Manyika people (one of the dialects that comprise the Shona people in the eastern part of Zimbabwe) where I grew up, some derogatory names were given to children of single mothers, for

example *bonga* (wild cat). This means that they are classified as undesirable outsiders in the family and do not belong. The assumption is that no man fathered that child, which is a gross error in society. It becomes worse, for some reasons, if the child adopts her mother's surname. This brings stigma to both the child and the single mother. Some women are divorced but their ex-husband continues to take responsibility to their children. These children are therefore, not less in any way than the children who have both parents taking joint responsibility on them.

While the pressure is on the single mother or the child, in effect, the father who does not take responsibility is considered a shame in reality. My grandmother used to say: "*murume anoramba mukadzi kwete vana nokuti irombe*" (A man divorces his wife but takes care of his children and he who does not is a bastard). The traditional society had no kind words for a man who abandons his own blood for it would anger the 'living dead' (Mbiti 1970) because the Shona family consists of the living, the 'living dead' who are the 'timeless living' (Bakare 2007) and those who are to be born. In spite of this inclusivity on the structure of the family, society generally views children of a divorced woman with contempt, as children without a father (which in some sense can be justified because they do have a 'dead father' when the father does not take care of them or relate with them in any way. However, what is significant in the structure and unity of the family relates on how children are valued as components of the family but also how children of a single mothers lose value in the family.

- **Single mothers are lacking.** The failure of marriage is construed as a sign of dismal failure on the part of the single mother who did not have knowledge to save and maintain her marriage. Regardless of circumstances leading to the breakdown of the marriage, the woman is always the one

to blame. She is also shamed not only for the breakdown of her marriage but for raising children alone. As pointed by Makwara (2016), it is derived from the gender myth that men are the only providers of resources since they are heads of families. But most important is how most of the single mothers cherish their marriage in spite of the circumstances that befell them, be it a result of divorce, separation or death. More important, if they can be providers for their children in the absence of a father, then the claims of lacking require further interrogation. Also, not only is interrogation being on the single mother but the father too, especially those who fail to provide for their children or provide very little to the burden of the single mother.

- **Single mothers are not good role models in life.** I have pointed out how many people in the Church are not comfortable with single mothers being youth counsellors while they are comfortable with them being child evangelism teachers and other duties that do not bring them at the forefront. The assumption is that the youths are at a critical stage that requires serious, experienced mentorship, in particular, concerning marriage and the single woman cannot be such one because her family composition is deficient (does not comprise of a father figure in the home). She, therefore, as assumed, sets a bad example to the young people. Also, there is the belief that the children of single mothers are emotionally and behaviourally defunct because they lack role models in the home. Hence, things such as drug abuse, thugs, teen age pregnancies, school dropout and other forms of rebellion come from the single mothers' families. The criminals, thieves, bullies and violent kids must be from broken families of the single mothers (Mabullela 2002). This is in spite of the fact that there has not been a legitimate study to justify such perceptions even where there is overwhelming evidence of the success of sin-

gle mothers and their children in life endeavours. Therefore, what is significant is to note the power of myths and stereotypes that society validates towards certain groups of people (single mothers and their children).

- **Single mothers are not responsible women.** While single mothers cannot be bunched into one rubric in terms of how they toil and provide for their children, one thing is certain. Most single mothers do not abandon their children. They are often forced to work hard and fend for their children, a mark of responsibility and fulfilment of the call to motherhood. Their status quo often forces them to have a strong bond with their children whom they see as one of the main reasons for their existence (see below). Therefore, to question the level of responsibility of single mothers appears to be misdirected effort.
- **Single mothers have reckless behaviour.** Single motherhood has been associated with young women, who did not have plans for marriage but are sexually loose. Thus, they became single mothers. The myth overlooks the fact that many women get married but later divorce, are widowed or aspire to get married and did not plan to be single. However, I do not have absolute claims on all single women in as far as one cannot claim moral integrity on all married women.
- **Single motherhood is associated with poverty.** There is an assumption that the rise of single mother families in Zimbabwe is occurring within a climate of increased deprivation. This supports the feminization of poverty, and yet there are no compatible public social services to support these families and their children (Moyo and Kawewe 2009). Poverty is affecting all people in Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and the whole African continent. The mass exodus from Zimbabwe and other countries to, for example South Africa, is evidence of the economic crisis that has rocked

the entire continent. Families with both parents are also facing socio-economic challenges in Zimbabwe and beyond. This means that single mothers are also affected but the magnitude depends on the economic status of the single mother and probably how she relates with the ex-husband in terms of sharing the needs of the children. Many women and single mothers too, have had opportunities that economically empower them and live better lives with their children, even more than some families with both parents. But the resilience of the myth sheds light on some issues. First, the families, Church and society are not ready to embrace the success stories of single women/mothers. Second, while there can be pressure on most single mothers which surpasses that of married people, the absolutizing claims of poverty on them becomes questionable. Some of the pressures that single women experience do not relate to financial issues but probably the need for a hand during the day to day running, for example, those with kids that require to be accompanied to and from school. In a society and economy like Zimbabwe, where the informal sector thrives more than formal sectors, approaches to evaluation of the economic developments and status of single women/mothers need to be re-aligned with prevailing realities.

- **Children from single mother families are deviant and do not have societal values.** It is widely accepted that children of a single mother lack, have bad behaviour and do not have good education. There is a myth in some African communities that single motherhood leads to the deterioration of normative family values and systems. The girl child from a single mother family is believed to go after the mother and will become a single mother as well. She failed the family and the community by getting out of marriage therefore, what if any, values and morals can she instil to the children? On Mvenge Mvenge/Ezomgido Group, a popular Facebook

group dominated by Zimbabweans, someone posted: “Do not marry a person raised by a single mother” (31-03-2020). Responses were mixed as some protested and others agreed with the writer. The post draws attention to the challenges of stigma associated with being raised by a single mother. Nothing good seems to come out of the whole family because even the children are suspect. Yet, there are examples of outstanding children raised by single mothers and this seems to escape the attention of society. Thus, the persistence of the myth fuels stigma against the single mother and her children, especially the girl child. Stigma exists and that gives the single mother the feeling of being cursed and at times, it negatively affects her children. Because of this, anger, frustrations, guilt, repression, and anxiety have often accompanied this feeling (Parsley 1990). Makwara (2016) who has carried out research of the life of single mothers in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe utilises her experience as one of the few ministers of religion who seek to understand the plight of single women. She says:

While churches run programs that have a strong emphasis on marriage and family life, nothing is being done to address single motherhood and its related problems. As a result, single mothers always regard themselves as unimportant and worthless.

The above myths are important because they bring out the negative perceptions embodied in relation to single motherhood. They do not only stigmatise the single mother, but they relate to the children of the single mothers as well. As such, they are important to evaluate their significance against the background of the relationship between the single mothers and their children. Also, do the children of single mothers tap into the myths and stereotypes that relegate their mother and even themselves at the lowest ebb of the societal structure and dustbin of unimagined positivity and development?

I pointed out the significance of children among the Shona, as also is the case with many African indigenous societies. Therefore, the discourses of single women/mothers are not complete without a focus on the role and status of children and establish how the children understand and interpret their situation in the light of their experiences. The issue of children of single women remain tied to their paternal relatives according to the Shona customs. The concept of 'blood' (*ropa*) does not denote the liquid in the body that gives us life but significant family relationships, the lineage (*dzinza*).

The family, blood ties and emerging challenges

It has to be pointed out that among the Shona, blood ties are significant and are based on totem (*mutupo*). In summation, *mutupo* refers to an animal, an animal's body part, a water creature, bird of a specific lineage group. This animal is sacred to the specific group and points to a sacred covenant that was entered by forbears but whose time is not traceable (Gombe1986). However, the Shona value totems and embracing the same totem denotes family ties or blood ties. Thus, it points to the concept of extended family that goes beyond biological parents and the nuclear family to include those who share the same genealogy on the basis of the totem. The paternal relatives have a central role in the life of children. However, in the face of multiple factors that include sexual rape, and other cases where a woman fails to identify the man responsible for impregnating her, it becomes different. Often the child adopts the mother's surname. It means that children identify with the maternal relatives only. If so, they cannot recognizably perpetuate the lineage and make significant contributions in the family. That explains why a man who neglected his children was referred to as a bastard. In the case of divorce, the man always took care of his children.

A fresh look at post-colonial Zimbabwe reflects otherwise. While most men do not take any responsibility, some would take care of the children but whenever they want. Some families make an effort to bring a child once they learn that their son fathered the child out of wedlock. This aptly captures the strong communally oriented life of the indigenous Shona people. The departed living will withhold blessings if one of the family members is away, for it translates to vulnerability to evil and negative things in life because he/she is not sheltered by the ancestral spirits. Often when the Shona carry rituals for protection, the libations are characterised by naming members or heads of the family and it means the unknown child is not included. It has given birth to a number of issues. It is believed that some children of single mothers are morally bankrupt because the paternal spirits will be searching for him. The wayward behaviour that he/she exhibit is a call of awakening to be instated into the paternal family. Also, such children are believed to be open gates for evil spirits from both the father and mothers' bloodline; therefore, they are not successful in life. Whatever beliefs and myths that pertain to the children of single mothers, many case studies seem to contradict such beliefs (see interviews below).

Many single mothers toil for their children but other children are taken care of by maternal relatives, mostly their grandmother or uncles but the single mother is always at the centre stage. Several factors are behind most of such arrangements for the kids' welfare and this study cannot detail them, except to mention, the contention between the two, the ex-husband and the single mother which infringes with the welfare of the children, the mother-in laws or the new wife (if the ex-husband re-marries) as hindrances to child paternal care. In spite of such cases, single mothers strive to raise their children. *Chirere chigokurerawo mangwana* (take care of the children, in future they will take care of you also) is a Shona proverb that is at the heart of inspiration for most single mothers, in particular, those who do not have a stable means of income. It explains why most women cherish to have at least one child in life for security reasons at old age, status and also successful children seem to

be a billboard that heralds the achievements of mothers in raising them. The ideology of investing in the child for future security has communal dimension that kept families intact, for it fostered and cultivated a strong sense of belonging and responsibility. While the single woman faces hardships and challenges, most of them believe that it is a phase which shall be replaced by a joyous lifetime when their children will excel in life. The following questions are important:

- Does a neglecting father find a place of honour and respect among his neglected children?
- How important are blood ties that hinge on totemic praise names (*mitupo*) and the taboos and avoidances that accompany them especially when fathers 'deny' or neglect their own 'blood'?
- How is the traditional notion of fatherhood and the rituals that accompany father roles challenged by the lives of children raised by single mothers?
- What are the lessons for the girl and boy child comparatively? Society has stereotypes about girls being attached to the fathers and also boys believed to have a strong desire to be associated with their paternal relatives. How does single motherhood infringe with such beliefs and perceptions?

The experience and confessions of single mothers' children

It is important to engage some narratives from children raised by single mothers. My target was students at the University of Zimbabwe where I teach. The target of the university students is significant. First, it is the highest institution of learning where individuals have climbed the academic ladder. Having children raised by single mothers at the University is evidence of educational achievements. Second, being a University student means a certain degree of maturity and conscious of their purpose and understanding of their purpose in life. They understand the social dynamics in their lives.

Hence, they are able to reflect, critique and question their health and well-being in relation to existential realities. Third, the University is a place of sophistication, upward social mobility and a marketplace for modernity and all that it entails. How does this level of sophistication affect and shape their worldview? Do they tap into the public narratives, views and perceptions that strip single mothers of dignity and all the negative stereotypes that have been validated and imposed on single mothers? How do they see their mother's status and aspirations? For gender balance, both young men and women were targeted, in particular, the final years who were about to graduate. After graduation, they were 'going into the world' to search for employment and become independent from their mother. Therefore, they were the most important target group to solicit their views, perceptions, hopes and aspirations in relation to their mother and also father or paternal relatives.

One male final year student declared:

I am 25 years. My father paid my fees only for the primary level before he left my mum to re-marry. I got support from my mother and her brothers. I have one sibling. There is a lot of witchcraft on my fathers' side. They don't want to see my mother succeed. We are Pentecostals but my mother goes to *Vapositori* (African Indigenous Churches where prophecy and healing are central) because of witchcraft (22-11-2017).

His response gives weight to claims of witchcraft as instrumental in the breakdown of marriages which Pentecostals uphold as they emphasise deliverance in order to preserve marriage. It is also a widespread belief among the Shona that the children that are neglected by the father are seen as vulnerable and gateways to negative incantations and evil covenantal blood ties by relatives (*kurasirirwa*) which hinders progress in life. Thus, the children in such families are much aware of the persistence of evil spirits and they tap into their mother's views on relations and boundaries that need to be observed. Often, boundaries of how to relate with the paternal relatives are set if they are viewed as casting spells to the

children in order to punish the mother by distracting the progress of the children. It has the effect of bonding the mother and children who always see themselves as victims of witchcraft, unjust treatment and jealousy. The Pentecostals seem to operate under the same worldview. The call for deliverance for marriage partners and preservation of marriage is testimony of how the Shona belief in witchcraft is deeply entrenched among Pentecostals. The theology of deliverance and wrestling with evil spirits become central and meaningful in the lives of both, those who are Christians and those who are traditionalists. The young men valued his mother and the help his uncles gave their mother in times of extreme hardships and financial lack. He added:

I did weld for self-reliance, but I give credit to my mum, she has gone through a lot, she is a vendor and I know sometimes she has nothing and she pretends as if all is well. She sacrifices a lot. She is the one graduating when I graduate, not me. My perspective of a single mum is now different from what I thought. My father has re-married and works in South Africa. Recently he began making efforts to get in touch with me. I said no new face in life but the face we have had through all the struggles, my mum! (22-11-2017)

Bitterness was very apparent as we went through the discussion, for he felt rejected by a man who fathered him. The young man thought his father wanted to reap where he did not labour, for he knew that he was about to graduate from the University and probably find a good job. This is a common phenomenon in Zimbabwean society where fathers who desert or neglect the children or even deny the pregnancy will later re-surface when the children are grown up. The interviews mostly show the bitterness in most of the children. Thus, I concluded that Pentecostal churches are a haven of wounded single mothers and bitter children! The issue of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation is important and centre not only on the single mother but her children as well. However, while healing, forgiveness and reconciliation is desired and needful in the churches, the pre-requisite of reconciliation remains at stake where children feel that the father is after material gain.

In cases, of witchcraft accusations, the boundaries that are set prohibit reconciliation since it largely requires the negotiation of two parties and yet, many people do not want to get entangled with relatives that they believe cast spells on them. In fact, the setting of boundaries is accompanied by regular penchant ‘warfare prayers’ that seek to paralyse the powers against them, defend and protect them as victims of witchcraft activities (Adogame 2004). This young man cited experience as important in shaping attitude and perspectives: “my pre-conceived notions of single mums have changed, for my mum is a hard worker and not morally loose.” The young man has first-hand experience of how he sees her mother doing things, against what he has been socialised to believe in society. Also, he brought into question a challenge to tradition, as he denies his own blood (father) in turn. That was very radical and he confidently challenges the idea that fathers should be involved with the children unconditionally. Also, he reverses the negative image of single mothers and point to the ethos of hard work and morality that the Church and society overlooks as they are governed by negative images of “husband snatchers”, and “gold diggers” who do not work and rely on *mari yemusana* (depend on money got from sexual activities with various men).

The young man was able to bring the past (circumstances of divorce) and the present, to notice, enumerate and appreciate the fiery ordeal that single parenting entails in her struggles to raise the kids, which other people do not seem to give attention to. He pointed out the sacrifice of her mother and how she covered up challenges so that the children do not see her suffering (protection). The man confirms the resilience, hard work and sacrifice and yet, all these bring out the challenge of single parenting, especially through informal trade of market gardening products. Another 21-year-old female student shared her story. She broke down in tears as she narrated, not what she has gone through but the hardships that her mother experienced.

My mother is a teacher for the deaf and dumb. She was abused by my dad and regularly beaten. Yet my father is a great singer in

the Church choir, and I would look at him in disgust while he pretended to be a good man. We don't greet, he bypassed me on the road with his car and could not give me a lift. My father is arrogant and did not greet his mother-in-law. I have nothing to do with him. He paid maintenance for the three of us, now am excluded because I am over 18, but very sick money (200 dollars for all of us) which is almost nothing since we were at boarding schools. He has several women in his life (22-11-17).

The above response shows a number of issues that reflect a general development or dominant trends in families, Church and society. Children feel the pain and hurt of their mother and it also marks the bond which exists between them. There is bad blood between the father and daughter because of the divorce. The daughter is sympathetic to the mother who was abused. Not only is there blood between the father and daughter 'who fights' the battles of her mother. Paying little maintenance fee is common with most men in Zimbabwe and the judiciary system seems to be lax on imposing maintenance on men as single mothers continue to be victims of enormous burden after divorce. The legal system has a lot of flaws, in particular on lack of serious engagement of men to accountability. Most men do not even pay maintenance fees for the children with their ex-wife. If they do, it almost amounts to nothing and the single mother shoulders most of the responsibilities. The issue of domestic violence needs attention in the Church and society.

Nurturing negative labels against single women in sermons and teachings is one form of verbal and emotional violence from the Church. Apart from that, the silence itself from some ministers who distance themselves from the issues surrounding single mothers, without correcting and challenging the negative perceptions is in a way giving a nod. Thus, the stereotypes and attacks continue to thrive and are perpetuated. The father of the student was in the praise and worship team in Church but was abusing the wife at home. At no point did the abuse come to the Church for discipline or any measures, giving weight to claims of accusation that the Church nurtures violent masculinities by failing to deal with male

perpetrators. Also, the mother did not report the case to the police for the husband to be arrested before they divorced. This is a serious issue in Zimbabwe where gender-based and sexual violence thrive in and outside marriage because even if women report, there is no meaningful practical change, especially if the husband has got money and is in a position to evade the wrath of the law. As such, it encourages men to abuse women and girls because the law is not hard on them. In some cases, victims of abuse are blamed for the abuse, and as a result many victims die in silence. And women who have ‘courage’² opt to divorce but the blame follows them.

Cultural dictates forbid women to take action against the husband. Pentecostals preach endurance and prayer, which reinforces the Shona tradition. While leaders like Emmanuel Makandiwa and Ezekiel Guti have encouraged believers to report cases of physical abuse, other forms of abuse are not enumerated which means most women endure problems in abusive marriage. It is, therefore, needful for the Pentecostal churches to engage the issue of domestic violence so that they will be able to bring to light cases of abuse and also challenge hegemonic masculinities that render women servile and powerless to challenge male behaviour and resist exploitation and abuse. The relatives have been cited as instrumental in divorce. Hence, some children harbour resentment against, not only their father, but grandmothers or any other person that the mother fingers as a hindrance to their well-being. The other student had this to say:

My grandmother did not like my mother. She did not go to work, but she worked all day in the house. My grandmother always accused her of spending her son’s money while she was an unproductive woman. Worse, she had given birth to one child. Therefore, she always mentioned that it was better for my father to look

² I point to ‘courage’ to divorce because divorce brings a lot of pressure on the woman, the shame, derogatory comments, exclusion, marginalisation, and the responsibilities of single motherhood require a strong woman to handle.

for another wife. And my father chased us from home when I was 10 years old, but he did not take care of me... (5-10-17).

The influence of the mother in the affairs of her son and the daughter-in-law are manifest. It explains why most single women pointed to the role of their mother-in-law in the breakup of their marriage. Traditionally, the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law are known for schisms. The 'fight' centres on the 'son' as they compete for recognition and dominance. Pentecostalism teaches young women to respect the mother-in-law. However, the single women point to and complain that mother-in-laws are not often reminded to restrain themselves in the affairs of their son when he marries. Marriage among the Shona takes a communal orientation and is not an affair of two people (Gombe 1986). However, the influence has become complicated because traditional relational structures are being eroded. Hence, there emerge relational blocks and boundaries when divorce happens and even in the case of the death of the husband.

While situations are not the same, the issue of lack of childcare and divorce also centre on mother-in-laws who are expected to embrace grandchildren of the woman who has left the marital home. But antagonisms between the two divorced persons often re-structure and shape the kind of relationships that are established between the two families. Thus, the children side more with their mothers more than anyone else, especially when they stay with the mother. Most of the interviews and discussions held with the University of Zimbabwe students show that the children of single mothers feel a great deal of betrayal by their own fathers, grandmothers, and other paternal relatives. They seek to appreciate their mother but at the same time to prove to those who rejected them that they excelled in life. There are biblical verses and proverbs that were cited by some. These include *chaitemura chavakuseva* (the times of lack are overtaken by abundance). By virtue of being a university student, it marked the beginning of a successful career in which they had big plans for their mother. The common reward for their mother that most of the students cited is building a house for her once they find

jobs or before they get married. They defended their mother as a victim of abuse which churches and society do not appreciate much in word and deed, although they sacrifice a lot. They are champions with scars of rejection and hate in society. The children pointed out how they plan big things to console and comfort their mother as reward for raising them alone and enduring hardships. “If I can buy a residential stand and build a good house for her” was the most common response when I asked how they wanted to thank and appreciate their mother. However, the economic situation in Zimbabwe has had devastating effects and thwarted dreams of many people for more than three decades. And for university leavers to harbour such ambitions and to get them fulfilled will be subjected to rigorous test by the effects of the devastating ailing economy.

However, despite that, most of the students remained hopeful that God will enable them opportunities to excel and make their mother happy in life. The status of the university students helps to demystify the myths that children of single mothers are dysfunctional, deviant, failing and without norms and values in life because of the breakdown of the family. Most of them embrace their mother and they celebrate single motherhood contrary to most of the perceptions of other people. The struggles and experiences they share with the mother shape their understanding of singlehood. Thus, while single women have their unique experiences that outsiders might not appreciate or understand their children also share experiences of single mothers. It explains why they have alternative stories concerning their mother who are viewed negatively. Oduyoye (1995:143) notes that African male students talked of doing ‘something for their mother’. She made her observations in Nigeria, of how children affirm and celebrate their single mothers; asked whom they trusted most, Nigerian students placed mother first, father second and wives third.

Ama Aidoo (1979:123), utilising the Nigerian context too captures this recurring theme of ‘dreaming big for the mother’ in detail:

For most, it was the mother thing. Everybody claimed that he wanted to make sure that he did something for “my mother” “because” they would add, “my mother has suffered” Awo, mama, Ena, Maeta, Nne, Nna Ema (ma, Iyie... Of course, she has suffered, the African mother). Allah, how she has suffered.

It is important to note how the children emphasise the experience of suffering, something that is often ignored by the ‘outsiders’. Most of the sermons do not pay attention to the details of ‘experience’ but the children of single women do pay attention to the day-to-day struggles. While single mothers go through hardships and struggles, it should not be generalised. Some single mothers are employed and take care of their children well. Others who are unemployed do all the different types of dirty jobs to make sure they afford their children some basic needs in their lives. It is in the light of these achievements by single mothers that they are seen as heroines and champions by their children. I questioned them on how they judge the moral standing of the mother. They defended them and one had to say: Even if I hear that my mother is a prostitute, I love her because she has done a lot in my life, after all, no one ever chose a parent!” Responses were a direct opposite of the views of many people who are critical of single mothers and view them in a negative way. Therefore, a fresh look at the negative labels is necessary (see chapter 2). The affirmation of mothers by their children has to be treated with caution. Children re-open the wounds of mothers in many ways. If it is a girl child, the time of marriage is significant for the father to be present. This means that even those who did not take care of the girl child, will get a share of the bride price or at least to be present. Re-engaging the father or paternal relatives is a difficult time because it ‘resurrects’ all the negative experiences that the woman faced in fending for the child alone. However, there are many cases that maternal relatives can arrange marriage and charge bride price with the exclusion of the paternal relatives, especially when the father rejected the child and did not take any responsibility in bringing up the child.

I also encountered a case that is quite unique. The woman narrated how she lost all her property, including the father who took all the three children. It continues to hurt her as she is not allowed to see the kids or communicate with them. She blames the judiciary system for not giving fair judgements particularly to the poor and vulnerable. According to her narrative, the ex-husband has money that he used to manipulate the judiciary and waylay justice in the courts. This is a double blow for her, the pain of divorce and at the same time losing her children to her husband and his relatives. She was not able to tell about the upkeep of the children since she claimed that she had no access to them. But most narratives are that of the children who share the joys and sorrows together with their mother after divorce. It, therefore, dispels the myth that men are the same for there are men who can take responsibility for their children. Although not all men stay with the children after divorce, some continue to provide for the children in the custody of the mother. Co-parenting after divorce seems to have a positive effect in terms of the emotional bonding of children with both parents, an aspect that lacks among children raised single handed by the mother. However, this does not mean that it does not affect the children in a negative way although the father shares the burden with their mother. The children in this category had positive comments about their father:

I don't really understand why my parents divorced. I do not care because that is not my issue. What is important is that I love both my parents because they love me and they both take care of me. It would have been better if they were together, but I do not know what happened (21-11-17).

It brings out the significance of mutual caring for kids. Often, the mother whose child is taken care of does not influence the child against paternal relatives. The above response shows that the mother did not divulge any information concerning her divorce to the child and the child equally respects both parents. The young man felt loved by both parents and did not feel any form of rejection.

Thus, an important fact in most instances is the issue of ‘rejection’ that surround the single mother and her children, the chain of rejection of father and mother, mother and paternal relatives and between the father and the children. The neglect of their mother and lack of responsibility to the children is read as rejection while the responsibilities by the mother is a sign of great love and task that have to be rewarded. The children of widows also point to the hard work by their mother without the help of the extended family. The disadvantages and challenges of single mothers give them a strong ground for them to be appreciated by their children. The negative labels are denounced. One had this to say:

My mother is a woman with dignity, and I don’t care what people say about single women. It won’t change who she is in my life. She is a fighter because she overcame many battles and God raised us from the dust (23-11-17).

While single women have their joy and enjoy positive affirmation from their children, single motherhood is not an easy experience. The burdens, marginalization and exclusion mean one has to work in order to have a social life. However, abandoned and rejected by the man they trusted even their own families or relatives the children remain a source of strength and hope. Some often guard the children against paternal relatives, creating their own world of ‘us against them’ to justify the pain and hurt that they have gone through. In a way, children help to redeem the bruised hearts of their mothers and the damaged image and self-esteem. However, in one of the incidents, the young man is living positive with HIV. He was born to HIV/AIDS parents and he had since lost his father. His greatest challenge was accepting his health status:

I have my dark moments of groaning in pain, crying. Why did God allow this to me? I am innocent and I don’t know who is responsible for my condition, my mum or dad. Who was a prostitute between the two? I am always hurt when I think that even when I want to marry, who accepts me, and I am seen as promiscuous (25-11-17).

The narrative of the student provides a glimpse of challenges of HIV and Aids in Zimbabwe. Despite all the efforts to educate the masses, it is still regarded as a moral disease. The infected persons are seen as people of loose sexual morals, that is why the student asks: who was a prostitute between the two? It is a general assumption in society that men spread the virus and infect their faithful wives. Yet, this is also based on stereotyping that is common in society, for HIV and Aids is not a moral disease and to blame men alone is a strong gender bias. However, strong stigma exists against those who are infected, and this often takes a heavy toll on single mothers. The burden of losing the husband, the economic burden taking care of the child(ren) and struggling with her health in a country where the health system is paralysed. In this case, the mother does not only worry about her health, but also about the child who was infected from birth, an additional burden since both need special diet and medication. This case also shows reasons that lead some single mothers to be bitter, especially if they feel strongly that they are innocent victims infected by the husband.

At the same time, the child is bitter and normally the mother who is available becomes the object of his frustrations even of his unanswered questions because he has no other narrative except that of her mother. She was 'left with a baby in her arms' and the baby is frustrated and bitter. Hence, the single mother feels betrayed, vulnerable and has wounds of the past entangling with the life of her son, a strong reason why the Church should be a sanctuary for healing and embracing the single mothers. I could personally relate with the curiosity the young man had of longing to hear from a dad who never existed in his life. One day, my nine-year-old son from nowhere just asked: mum why did you marry a silly man, the three of us have no dad and all other kids have a dad and he is nowhere to be found!" It came as a surprise as we laughed with his brother and sister. But it took me to task; he was aware that something was amiss in his life. The absence of a dad was at the centre of his thoughts. I did not share much with them about their father who deserted them when they were very young, but all they knew that

he was totally absent in their lives and was nowhere to be found. Hence, the question coming from a boy who began to figure out things in life but at the same time had no deep knowledge of the issues. This stood out to me as one of the nasty effects of divorce, for the repercussions affect even the children, no matter the good life they might be enjoying. It has therefore, become my entry point into the discourses of marriage, family building divorce and all that relates to the welfare of the children, in particular, calling men to be available, to account and to be responsible for their children even in circumstances where they neglect them because they know the children are in safe hands.

Single women without children seem to be the most 'wounded' category. Without biological child/ren to call them 'mother' is one of the greatest challenges pertaining to womanhood and motherhood, not only among the Shona people of Zimbabwe but across African indigenous cultures. The pain of divorce because of barrenness is a great thorn in the flesh, for children remain at the centre of most marriages and one of the most cherished statuses among African women. It is against such a background that one would understand how it takes toll to be divorced on the grounds of barrenness. This woman was left without a baby in her arms and this is a double blow for her. Whatever comfort she gets from, even if she has a good job, she is always reminded of her 'deficiency' in many ways. I remember some years ago, when I saw a woman who cried when she saw a woman who was breastfeeding. The woman had lost her marriage because she had failed to conceive. The sight of another woman feeding her baby triggered the thoughts of how she longs but failed to have children. At the deep centre of a woman's being, uncontrolled and unknown by any other human being, lies motherhood (Oduyoye1995:143). Thus, despite pressures of modernity and new social and economic avenues availed by colonialism and its auxiliary forces, it appears the quest for motherhood has not been eroded and has remained central and of great significance for most African women. If the woman goes to a Pentecostal Church, the interpretation of barrenness is brutal (see above) and mostly

portray a deficient, prayerless and faithless woman. At the same time, the society is not friendly when a woman is barren. Hence, it is a lifetime plague if she does not bear children.

Conclusion

The discourses on single women show a variety of several labels. Their identity is tied to the prevailing dominant myths in society. The families, churches and society seem to be guided by the myths in relation to single women. The children have different narratives and re-affirm the dignity and value of their mother, exposing the brutality of their father and the deficiency of the society and Church in failing to acknowledge the positive role of single mothers. They often identify with their mother more than father and other paternal relatives. They are also enmeshed in the web of conflict that involves their mother and paternal relatives. They bear scars of rejection but live in the future where they believe the tables would turn in their favour and manage to reward their mother. The challenges of single women and the welfare of their children expose deficiencies in Pentecostalism that warrants some strong recommendations for the family, society and more importantly, the Church leaders.

5 | SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

It is important to re-trace the previous chapters in order to give a conclusive overview. In the *first chapter*, I emphasised that the subject of single hood (single women) is an under-researched area in academia. Also, the sermons and teachings about single hood come from ‘outsiders’ who claim to have knowledge on the life of single hood. The voices of ‘outsiders’ dominate the discourse; hence single women have been silenced and they ‘groan in faith’ in their families and also in the public space. Often their voices are submerged by the voices of leaders. However, I insist on the primacy of the authentic views of single women in any study that pertains to them. More important, are the hidden narratives of pain, exclusion and marginalisation that single women have experienced which not the families, Church and society hardly give attention. The power of experience, over and above those who might simply know without the experience make single women the rightful people to interpret their own life experiences, define themselves and project into their future.

Chapter 2 drew attention to the derogatory names that have usurped single women of their dignity. The negative attitudes and perspectives on single women are deeply entrenched in the Shona culture and inherited by the Church. The naming system is brutal because names such as ‘*mvana*’, ‘gold diggers’, ‘home wreckers’, ‘Jezebels’ are popular and carry negative connotations that also blanket the single women in one rubric. The naming itself shows the ‘power’ that certain groups in society have over single women who are deemed as weak, vulnerable and inferior. Most of the people, including leaders do not have the correct script of the life of single women because ‘they do not belong’. This captures the relationship

between the oppressing group and the oppressed that have little or no power. No matter the valid justifications for their need of the correct script, the 'oppressors' do not pay heed. Little or no attention is given to the different categories of single women, their socio-economic status and the diverse experiences that shape their approaches to life. While single women bear scars of the past, in different forms, they are not the same. Hence, discourses on single women must not present a monolithic view of their experiential dimensions and it is the single women themselves who have the power to change the script!

Chapter 3 critically probed and brought to light the challenges and dilemmas of single women in their diverse categories. Their testimonies and stories bring to the fore, the harsh world they live in. The Church is not completely a safe space because church settings are predicated with militant and confrontational theologies, negative perspectives, and attitudes towards single women. Also, the narratives of the experiences of single women expose the deficiency that characterises the derogatory names that fuel stigma and marginalisation of single women. The increasing cases of the infidelity of married women which is not given full attention (sermons that castigate and denounce) is a further pointer of the deficiency and bias of the Church when it focuses on single women only. Most Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe have not been forthcoming in terms of interpreting the Bible in ways that promote the value and dignity of singlehood. The family settings, workplace and the public spaces are not safe too. Yet, the Church is the most powerful institution that shape and cultivate beliefs and practices and is better positioned to promote love and unity such that it bears the greatest responsibility and accountability of different forms of violence on individuals that result from sermons and teachings. However, the gender politics largely influences developments that sustains and entrenches patriarchy. Hence, female leaders and other married women have partially enjoyed the facets of patriarchy such that instead of working towards dismantling the patriarchal structures, they entrench them and divide women. They, therefore, fail to form

a strong united front that dismantle patriarchy and against male abusers. They perpetuate and interpret culture in forums outside the domain of men. Hence, they bear the largest responsibility of perpetuating patriarchy. The traditional rituals, the name calling, denunciations and condemnation that exclude single women are instigated and envisaged mostly by women. They run with the button stick of patriarchy instead of supporting each other. The challenge therefore is on who can engineer positive change when the leaders, specifically women themselves are comfortable within the confines of patriarchy. While the female leaders seem to be limited by a number of factors that include the monopolisation of power and authority by the men of God, the most important avenue of hope rests on single women themselves. Their testimonies and protests are significant in challenging the structures of oppression and marginalisation in the Church, family, and society.

Chapter 4 gives primacy to the other voices of ‘insiders’- the children of single mothers. These are not detached to the daily experiences of the mother. Therefore, they seem to offer a fair and balanced critique of the life of single mothers. Their stories show a deep concern and empathy for the mother and they dream of a special ‘reward’ for them. The children are in most cases inevitably dragged into family politics that led to divorce. But above all, most of them side with the mother whom they always see not only as the victim of abuse and injustice but also themselves. Hence, detachment from paternal relatives and the father seem to be the major reason that creates a strong bond between the children and their mother. They elevate their mother to an uncontested position of a hero. They challenge the views of society and the Church, especially putting married women on a pedestal. They completely make an overhaul of the belief system by disregarding negative comments and stereotypes against single mothers and their children. Thus, they challenge tradition in a unique way that does not openly confront the structures in their Church. Putting single mothers on a pedestal and providing strong affirmations is in itself a confrontation to tradition and the views of the Church that are negative.

Conclusion

Overall, most single women have largely been hurt, wounded, marginalised and excluded. Their well-being and struggles have not been appreciated. In fact, the stigmatisation and stereotypes help to erode the achievements of single women. Single motherhood is hardly celebrated except by the children that have witnessed the struggles of their mother. Single women, therefore, require space for healing, recuperation, stability, and progress. The unavailability of healing sanctuaries creates alternative sanctuaries that single women create for survival in harsh environments. The Church has failed to bring man to account in cases of divorce and also in the upbringing of the children. The single women's platforms and private gatherings that challenge the prevailing notions about single hood and celebrate the status of single hood is a pointer to the deficiency that has gripped the Church and society in promoting classes that are based on marital status. This weakens the Church and renders it ineffective. The deficiencies manifest in the family, society and Church warrants strong recommendations.

Recommendations

The perspectives and attitudes towards single women show that there is a lot that needs to be done to promote their well-being. The teachings are also important as they promote the negative attitudes. Hence, below are recommendations that are derived from the whole discourse. These can be of use to ...

1. the **single women**. They need to be empowered to know their rights and also to judge the interpretation of the scriptures that are deployed concerning their lives. This enables them to resist oppression, domination and ultimately break systematic exclusion and marginalisation. This empowerment should be in its full package, including ideological, economic, political, and spiritual support.

2. **Pentecostal leaders** deploy evangelical power, and they command unquestioned authority over their congregants. The level of submission that they receive from the members of their churches requires them to have full knowledge of issues that they deal with concerning the single women. Therefore, a re-evaluation of how they deploy and interpret the Scriptures should promote abundant life to single women. The leaders bear great responsibility and accountability on the impact of their sermons and teachings on single women. As such, I challenge them to deploy all-embracing life-giving sermons that promote abundant life.
3. the **families, church members and colleagues** in workplaces (society) are challenged to accept and embrace single women and to affirm them in their diversities and to shun the derogatory terms that violate their well-being and space.

All the above groups, therefore, are required to adhere to the following:

➤ **Challenging ‘Theological Rigidity’¹**

The interpretation of the Bible should be sensitive to the different groups of people in the Church. The contexts upon which Biblical texts came into being are important and leaders must be aware of that. The popular Scriptures such as Genesis 2 have to be interpreted in ways that do not blame the single women when they get divorce and if they fail to get marriage partners. Sociological realities have to be factored in, when interpreting the biblical verses. Blaming single women for failing to get a marriage partner as lack of faith encourages contempt for them and cultivates negative attitude and abuse. Also, the concept of submission should be reconsidered to challenge masculinities that endanger women and prevent them to break away from marriage that is abusive. The

¹ I am indebted to Ezra Chitando who frequently uses this phrase.

same applies to the headship of men. It must be accompanied by a call to responsibility and accountability, to love your wives as Christ loved the Church.’ (Ephesians 5:25) and above all challenge masculinities that encourage men to embark on sexual sprees and commit the sin of adultery. The Church must not condone male promiscuity by inferring from culture which condones it because it is understood to be in their nature to cheat. The traits of Shona culture that promote sin in the Church must be stripped, through a radical approach and should not be upheld uncritically. Embracing Shona indigenous culture uncritically translates to cultural rigidity² which damages the well-being of other groups of people (single women). Thus, ‘the message has to be stripped of cultural wrappings, to be separated from cultural modern expressions’ (Bevans 1992).

The continued negative perspectives and stereotypes on singlehood that are inherited from the indigenous culture have either explicitly or implicitly found avenues of expression in Pentecostal churches. The upholding and baptising of indigenous beliefs and culture without critical sociological consideration in teachings and sermons need attention. Therefore, I challenge the Pentecostal churches to re-theologise the discourse of singlehood through, challenging cultural traditions that negatively impacts on the welfare of single women in order to re-shape Pentecostal theology of Mission. It is important to note that the role of women has been altered over the decades as they actively participate in both the formal and informal sectors. Therefore, the demands of traditional household chores should be reviewed against this background in order to encourage partnership with men and encourage the sharing of responsibilities in the home.

² I have coined the term to explain the desire to safeguard culture even when it has lost its significance and relevance through socio-economic, political, and social developments.

➤ ***Gender-based and sexual violence***

It begins with the family and mothers as first teachers in the homes are urged to carry both boys and girls on board in mentorship on responsibility and accountability. The burden of household chores should not be placed on the girl child only. The Church needs to journey with boys from Sunday school and socialise them not to see girls as sexual objects in order to instil values that combat sexual and gender-based violence. The ethos of respect of each gender is important to instil on boys and to catch them young to avoid violent masculinities that are a result of putting boys on a pedestal by valuing them more over girls. Also, there is need to engage men to dialogue and transform subordinating practices. This entails a challenge of ‘soft masculinities’, to ‘repair men and tame boys’. Challenge all forms of dangerous masculinities because they are mostly responsible for quarrels in marriage and end up in divorce. The high rate of divorce as a result of gender based and sexual violence require the Church to address the issues in a meaningful way. Dealing with gender based and sexual violence should not be one sided, for there is also the need to probe the role of women too in unleashing gender-based violence. Thus, it requires a holistic approach that brings everyone on board and to value every marital status, especially single hood that has been viewed with contempt.

➤ ***Marriage as symbol of God's Church***

There is need of re-thinking marriage as symbol of God's Church, in the light of increasing numbers of single headed households and also child headed homes, which also constitute a bulk of membership. Marriage as the symbol of God's Church should not create avenues of discrimination and marginalisation of single women. The high rate of divorce and the increase of single mother headed families require a theology that is sensitive and non-discriminatory. Also, the emphasis of marriage as superior

to single hood is dangerous, for it is the basis of intrigue and disunity in the Church as we witness counter discourses and response. This should extend to leadership positions which should not be accorded on the basis of marital status unless there are unique reasons that can be justified. Certain questions should guide the Church: how do we interpret the emerging challenges in families? Does the disintegration of the marriage institution translate to the disintegration of the Church and how does theological rigidity contribute to the decline in the significance of marriage?

➤ *The well-being of single women*

To be a human being means to belong to particular communities. But do single women belong? The single mothers form part of the community. The collage of culture must be challenged and be able to accommodate single women. The churches must deconstruct the discourses embedded in patriarchy, gender and stereotype cultures in order to empower single women to have an alternative story for their preferred realities. Such knowledge is crucial because Pentecostalism as a radical Christian movement needs to negotiate healthy ways of accommodating singlehood in the Church. This is possible when it critically engages the traditional milieu in the interpretation of the Bible and identifies the changes that have taken place and the transitions that have occurred. Awareness of the shifting paradigms necessitates a reading and interpretation of the Bible that is guided, promotes, and enhances inclusiveness.

When the capabilities of single women in Pentecostal churches and society are properly marshalled, they can make an effective contribution to the development of communities and nations. Thus, there should be unity of purpose. When evil is perpetuated against a group, it weakens the existence of everyone. This is manifest when some single women celebrate married women's stress-

ful marriages, and this is evidence of disunity in the Church. Divorce, singlehood, and marriage should be defined, in a manner that is all-embracing, tolerant and promote love, unity and building of the individual and the Church.

➤ ***Shun the culture of blaming victims***

The Church is challenged to be sensitive to the needs of the marginalised groups. This calls for sermons and teachings that embrace single women and to defend their cause. The Church must be a healing sanctuary for the wounds that are inflicted on single women. One sure way of healing is doing justice to victims, listening to their narratives, providing safe space, and condemning the perpetrators, and to bring them to accountability and demand responsibility. The Church must have a positive view of victims of rejection and divorce to avoid wounding the wounded!

➤ ***Re-thinking fatherhood***

Fatherhood must be re-configured. In the light of increasing divorce, single hood is on the rise and many women assume headship roles in the absence of a father in families. The prevalence of a ‘fatherless generation’ challenges society to re-consider the role taken by single mothers and the status of such fathers. In a society that values and elevates fatherhood, re-configurations of both fatherhood and motherhood are necessary. This re-configuration should also centre on the welfare of children.

➤ ***Transforming the legal and judiciary system in Zimbabwe***

The legal reforms in Zimbabwe need to deal with issues of child-care practically and perpetrators of violence and injustice have to face the wrath of the law. There should be measures against men who neglect families, structures that tighten responsibilities.

Most women carry the burden of raising children while men escape responsibility because the law is lenient on them. It extends to defending women's rights to property ownership because some single women lost their houses because they could not fight in the courts since they could not afford legal fees. Also, (single) women in rural areas need attention because they must be empowered through acquisition of land which is basically the means of production that enables them to earn a decent living.

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Notes

1. There is a bias towards Guti and ZAOGA because ZAOGA has set pace for most Pentecostal churches and ministries in Zimbabwe (as one of the oldest Pentecostal churches that command unquestioned numerical strength and influence). Also, Guti is spiritual father and his wife Eunor, a mother to many leaders within the Pentecostal fraternity.
2. Interviews with the students at the University of Zimbabwe were carried out between October and December 2017.
3. The word 'Church' has been used in general terms and used inter-changeably with Pentecostalism. The study focuses on Pentecostalism as one of the most vibrant form of Christianity not only in Southern Africa but on the African continent and has shaped not only theology on gender relations but also attitudes and perspectives towards certain groups or classes of people. Pentecostalism has changed the face of African Christianity such that the narratives of Christianity in post-colonial Africa are incomplete without Pentecostalism.



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This volume captures the experiences of single women in Zimbabwe. It brings out the indigenous cultural socialisations that negatively impact on them. The vibrancy of Pentecostalism did not save them from stigma and negative perceptions but rather fuels their challenges and misery. The over-glorification of marriage over and above singlehood and in extreme cases denunciation of singlehood, has implications for single women, especially for those who have divorced. The attitudes and perceptions towards single women in the families, society and Church are largely adversarial and do not attach dignity and value, in a nation where marriage and motherhood remain important and cherished statuses. Therefore, the author adopts a multi-dimensional approach in analysing and critiquing the pitfalls of Shona indigenous cultures, limitations of Pentecostal gender ideology and proffers avenues that can create safe spaces for single women.



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