

THE IMPACT OF NDEBELE INDIGENOUS RELIGION ON THE STATUS AND ROLES OF WOMEN  
IN MATABELELAND PROVINCE OF ZIMBABWE

by

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## **Declaration**

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### **The impact of Ndebele Indigenous Religion on the status and roles of women in Matabeleland province of Zimbabwe**

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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08/02/2022

DATE

**Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my dear husband, Marcellus Moyo, my son, Dr Clement Moyo and my daughter, Sanelisiwe Moyo.

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## **Acronyms**

BBWEE	Broad-Based Women's Economic Empowerment Framework
MWACSMED	Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development
GTRP	Gender Training and Research Programme
UCCSA	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
AIC	African Independent Churches
LMS	London Missionary Society
GBV	Gender Based Violence
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
AIR	African Indigenous Religion
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination against Women
BSAC	British South Africa Company
GBV	Gender Based Violence

## **Abstract**

The study focuses on how the indigenous religion of the Ndebele of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe has had an impact on the status and roles of women in Ndebele society. It covers the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial epochs. Data was collected using individual interviews and a focus group discussion following a qualitative research design. The findings revealed that there are Ndebele practices in which women play key roles. These include the appeasement of spirits where women brew beer but are not supposed to lead in communication with spirits. They are banned from entering sacred places like the cattle kraal. The study revealed that the Ndebele Indigenous Religion has influence on the roles and status of women. Women are not expected to communicate with ancestors or visit sacred places. Furthermore, the women are suppressed by the patriarchy that has made them to be second to men in society. However, in the postcolonial era pieces of legislation were put in place in an attempt to adhere to international conventions and legislation that seek to bring equality between men and women in social and economic spheres. There is still room for improvement as gender equity has not been achieved because of the patriarchal tendencies that are still prevalent in some sections of Ndebele society.

## **Key Words**

Gender, Patriarchy, Ndebele, Indigenous Religion, Matabeleland, Women, Zimbabwe, Qualitative analysis, Focus group, Sub-Saharan Africa.

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## CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

### 1.1 Introduction

The concern of the study is about the roles and status of Ndebele women. It dwells on the disparities between men and women in Ndebele society. The research will be located in the three historical periods, namely the precolonial, the colonial, and the postcolonial periods in Zimbabwe.

The precolonial period refers to the time before the colonisation of Zimbabwe by the British in 1890. It is characterised by the existence of the Ndebele under the Zulu, their relocation from present day South Africa and Botswana, and their settlement in present day Zimbabwe under King Mzilikazi. It is the period when the Ndebele came under the influence of different religions, including those of the people they incorporated into their kingdom on the way and Christianity, which was being spread by white missionaries such as Robert Moffat, a reverend who had befriended Mzilikazi while the Ndebele were settled in Pretoria. The two became friends and he recommended that Mzilikazi was to relocate to Zimbabwe when he was attacked by the Boers.

The colonial period refers to the time between 1890 and 1980 when the country was under British colonialism and settler white minority rule after the settlers rebelled against British rule in 1965. During this period, the culture and religion of the Ndebele came under tremendous pressure from the white man's culture and Christianity which were promoted by the victorious settlers. The postcolonial period refers to the period from 1980 onwards, the time when Zimbabwe became independent from the colonial and minority settler rule after a war of liberation that ended with constitutional negotiations.

The geographical setting of the study is the Matabeleland region in Zimbabwe which comprises the three provinces of Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South. During the precolonial times, the Ndebele society has been described as patriarchal in nature, a system where men had an upper hand over women. The study consulted sources of colonial writers like Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Bhebe and Cobbing to arrive at the religious culture of the Ndebele of south western Zimbabwe to allude to patriarchal judgments by male writers.

In Ndebele traditional society, the woman in the home reveres the man as the head of the home, a position which raised the standard of men during the veneration of ancestors, be it of family or of national spirits. The reverence of the dead is central in Indigenous Religion among the Ndebele from where originates patriarchy, argues the oral historian Nyathi (2019). If the girl child is socialised within the family to be second to the man, there is every reason for females to be invisible in the mainstream state politics, economics and other realms of precolonial society. However, Queen Lozikheyi the senior wife of Lobhengula demonstrated able leadership and became a charismatic leader and regent of the kingdom after the overthrow of King Lobhengula of the Ndebele. Mbuya Nehanda from among the Shona did likewise during the 1896-97 Chimurenga and Umvukela risings. The example of these two women bespeaks leadership status and roles of women at the onset of colonial rule.

The Ndebele of south western Zimbabwe share an indigenous religion with other ethnic groups such as the Kalanga, Tonga, Nambya and Venda among whom they settled during the period of state formation in the 1840s. They were of Nguni origin, having migrated from Zululand during the *mfecane* epoch a period in Zululand where small nations fled from powerful nations who wanted to capture them. Their religious culture which oppressed women should be examined closely to determine if this was a Nguni imposition, or it could have been adopted from the ethnic groups that they found already settled.

The coming of colonial rule in the last quarter of the nineteenth century coupled with western Christendom became change agents to the religious culture of western Zimbabwe. Contemporary gender activists generally allude to oppressive patriarchy in precolonial Africa and yet the colonial establishment introduced European forms of patriarchal domination. The study investigates the primary sources of Ndebele religious history and secondary sources of women's lifestyle during and beyond colonialism. It is therefore necessary in order to determine women empowerment among the Ndebele of modern day Zimbabwe.

The sex distribution data of the Zimbabwe population shows a female majority even higher in the Matabeleland provinces where the Ndebele state historically existed. The population of Zimbabwe, as of 18 August 2012, was 13 061 239. There were 6 280 539 males and 6 780 700 females. This implies that for every 93 males there were 100 females (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency 2012:11). This research is carried out in a country whose sex distribution ratio has more women than men.

## 1.2 Objectives of the study

The research seeks to:

- find out if religion among the Ndebele people of western Zimbabwe has been an agent of the marginalisation of women.
- find out if there are sources of information about gender relations among the Ndebele from the time of their settlement in the region.
- find out how religion has affected the status and roles of women in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial eras in Matabeleland.
- investigate contemporary trends in women`s empowerment and their relevance to enhancing the status and roles of women in Ndebele society.
- provide recommendations to stakeholders on women rights and advancement pertaining to the target group and thereby contributing to social development.

## 1.3 Research problem

Contemporary writers on gender issues have blamed policy makers and stereotypes of patriarchy for female non-participation in politics and other mainstream leadership positions. That is why Mtuzze (1990) refers to international conventions which encourage women`s advancement and empowerment against traditions, cultures and religions which marginalised women. The Ndebele people found in south western Zimbabwe today fled from Zululand and migrated north until they settled in the south west of presentday Zimbabwe. They establish a state which existed in the last half of the nineteenth century. The historiographical challenge of their past is twofold firstly, there is the absence of female historians and secondly, there is the subsequent lack of information on women stories in precolonial Ndebele history.

When king Mzilikazi and his people settled among the communities found in south western Zimbabwe, they maintained a policy that would stabilise society (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). The policy was meant to exercise control of the communities that they found settled there. Kuper et al (2017) discuss the integration measures to intermarriages and polygamy for women who were captured. Women have been viewed as marginalised in the religious society. The problem with such general stereotypes is that the fall of the Ndebele kingdom in the 1890s saw female activism in the primary resistance against colonial domination. Lozikheyi the former queen influenced

Ndebele regiments into a widespread rebellion against the colonial establishment and this bespeaks a not so fixed patriarchy. During the early years of colonial rule, women in the countryside increased agricultural productivity this being helped by colonial policies. Since Christian missionaries increased their evangelisation of natives after colonisation, there is need to explore western patriarchy of Christianity among the Ndebele. The next section looks at the postcolonial theoretical framework.

#### 1.4 Postcolonial theoretical framework

Chidester (2000) provides a map of how postcolonial studies can be done. He sees postcolonial theory as a mediation between colonisers and colonised, with a particular focus on a recovery of the colonised. Within postcolonial theory he distinguishes between different approaches. On one side of the spectrum is *indigeneity*, on the other side is *hybridity*, and in the middle of these two there is an essentialist strategic position.

The *indigeneity* paradigm is very rigid whose goal is to recover ‘a supposedly pure or authentic precolonial tradition, unstained from the distortions that the imperial encounter imposed on it’ (Strijdom 2009:255). It represents the indigenous people who are against colonialism and wish to recover their pure tradition that was distorted by colonialists. Chidester (2000:433) gave an example of Fanon as ‘an indigeneity that sought to forge a new humanity in the modern world by means of a militant anti-colonialism’.

The second paradigm is the *hybridity* and change with no identities in it. Chidester (2000:434-435) gives the main theorists in this paradigm as Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall. The former, a cultural theorist who is known for his discussions of hybridity contends that it is not possible to recover a pure precolonial tradition, so he advocated for an adoption of a move towards a cultural space which he terms the ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1994:668). He emphasises mixture and change, being accommodative and hence acknowledges that there is cultural diversity. Strijdom (2009:256) points out that Hall focuses on both heterogeneity and hybridity in his analysis of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora and contends that it is not possible to recover a pure precolonial tradition. This view is extreme and views culture from a postmodern position. The strategy takes historical change seriously and focuses on the diversity and mixture of religions which is a result of cross-fertilisation of cultures. It is sometimes critiqued for not foregrounding unequal power relations.

Chidester (2000:433) says Spivak, who is known for being a critic of essentialism, can support it and on some occasions she is of the opinion that we can follow the strategic essentialist

approach to show the changes that have occurred. She says we can say there are women for the sake of liberation of the indigenous people in the colonial societies and this includes women. Her suggestion was that essentialism was necessary as it would stand in for the marginalised so if there is acceptance of indigeneity there should be room for essentialism.

This study focused on hybridity with the idea that, in a global world, a purely indigenous tradition may not be easily attained because there should be changes in the lives of women. Hence, the strategic essentialist approach will be helpful in my investigation to show the changes that have occurred in the lives of women.

### **Definition of terms**

The area of investigation is the impact of religion on the role and status of women in Ndebele society. It revolves around key terms which are defined below.

#### **Religion**

Religion is generally conceived as difficult to define. Edward Tylor's understanding of it is that it is just the belief in spiritual beings. Emile Durkheim saw it as a system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, those that are set apart and forbidden, that serve to unify adherents. Definitions range from psychological, sociological, anthropological to the philosophical and theological and in their diversity add to the complexity in understanding of what religion is (Momen 1999). These numerous definitions inform my research on the basis that they define the parameters of what religion is and what it is not.

#### **Indigenous**

The religion of the peoples of this inquiry (Ndebele) is indigenous, a word which is derived from Latin to mean 'living naturally in a particular region'. This definition would partly be applicable to the Ndebele ethnic group who live in Matabeleland and those who were born within the region, although there are some who were not born in Zimbabwe. This is the generation that migrated from Zululand with Mzilikazi and who finally settled in the south west of Zimbabwe. In this case, the term 'indigenous' has changed and is seen to be a hybrid because of the acculturation and the issue of migration of Ndebele whose history is laden with inter and intra-cultural dynamics and, most notably, the dawning of Christendom at the end of the nineteenth century with the coming of British imperialism. This will be dealt with in subsequent chapters.

## **Patriarchy**

Throughout my inquiry, the term ‘patriarchy’ refers to ‘the rule of a father’ (Ademiluka 2018). This is a system of social structures and practices where men control, oppress and exploit women. Van Rossem & Gage (2009) supports the above idea that patriarchy can be seen as a structure that oppresses women for the benefit of men. Hence, patriarchy is a system where men have power over women in societies.

## **Ndebele**

The term ‘Ndebele’ can refer to a people found in south western Zimbabwe, and their language. Either meaning can be cited as the origins of the names of two southern provinces of Zimbabwe, Matabeleland North and South from whence the researcher collected data for this research. Chapter 2 will further delve into specifics, showing how the term is also inclusive of non-Nguni people who joined the migrant people during the trek from Zululand and those found already settled in the region where a Ndebele nation was finally set up (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009).

### **1.5 Background to the study**

The Ndebele people of south western Zimbabwe have a well-documented history which traces them from Zululand in South Africa until they settled in the south western region of Zimbabwe where they are found today. As there are conventions of patriarchal societies, their history highlights the roles of men as state or nation builders. Women are involved but hardly recognised in society. The Ndebele people are of Nguni descent having migrated from the Zulu kingdom in the 1820s. They migrated northwards until they crossed the Limpopo River and settled in modern day Zimbabwe. The study was conducted in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe. As shown in figure 1.1, the area is made up of three provinces: Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland. Matabeleland North Province is in the western part of Zimbabwe, having been granted the status of a province in 1997 when Bulawayo was upgraded to the status of being a province. Prior to that, the two were combined. This province has seven districts: Binga, Bubi, Hwange, Lupane, Nkayi, Tsholotsho and Umguza. Lupane town the capital of this Province is surrounded by villages. The inhabitants in this district are the Ndebele ethnic group. Binga and Hwange are towns that are populated with Tonga and Nambya communities respectively. In the outskirts of these towns, there are rural areas. Nkayi and Tsholotsho have administrative offices and they are inhabited by the Ndebele. They are also surrounded by communal areas. Bubi and Umguza districts are communal areas also inhabited by the Ndebele ethnic group.



Figure 1: Continued ethnic cartographic representations of administrative provinces in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

**Figure 1.1: Map of Zimbabwe showing Provinces.**

**Source:** <https://about.jstor.org/terms>

Matabeleland South province, which is in the South-Western part of Zimbabwe, was established in 1974. The province has seven districts: Beitbridge, Bulilima, Mangwe, Gwanda, Insiza, Matobo and Umzingwane. Its capital is Gwanda town, an urban centre that is surrounded by rural areas which are inhabited by a majority of Sotho speakers, and the Ndebele, mostly in the town. Beitbridge is a border town surrounded by rural areas in the district as well. It is populated by the Venda, who are a majority. Bulilima and Mangwe districts are communal areas that surround Plumtree border town. It is populated with the Kalanga ethnic group. Umzingwane is a centre with administrative offices and Matobo and Insiza are communal areas. The districts are mostly inhabited by people who are generally classified as Ndebele although there are very



few of those who are descendants of the Nguni immigrants. The majority are those that were incorporated on the way, or the inhabitants that were incorporated into the Ndebele nation, when King Mzilikazi formed the Ndebele ethnic group in present day Matabeleland

The demographic characteristics of the early and later 'state' is worth mentioning in this probe since their departure was sudden. They had not been an autonomous political economy within the Zulu kingdom and had to flee north. More detail will be given in the literature review. Mzilikazi, their later king, had been a commander within the Zulu kingdom. After conflict with Tshaka over booty (Rasmussen 1976) he took his soldiers and left in the early years of state building. Probably the warriors must have been men, hence my characterisation of the early state as a society largely populated by males is justifiable. Their migration inevitably prioritised the capture of the women who were from tribes they encountered on the way for the purpose of growth of the nation.

This demographic factor could have been Mzilikazi's state building mechanism because incorporating women, even after settlement in south western Zimbabwe and inter-marrying women from already settled peoples, was central in state establishment strategies. Furthermore, their settlement around the middle of the nineteenth century was at the dawn of the encroachment of colonialism which brought another culture. Mzilikazi himself allowed the London Missionary Society to open Inyathi Mission in 1859 in his kingdom, a hint of his tolerance of other cultures. Mzilikazi further granted Moffat permission to establish a second mission at Hope Fountain in 1870. The beliefs and practices of Nguni descent cannot be assumed to have remained in fixed form in the nearly two decades of their migrant history as they interfaced with other cultures. Transformation is inevitable wherever cultures or religions interface and it is important, therefore, to regard the mixing and mingling of the Ndebele and other people as an agent of social dynamics. More of this transformation will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Missionaries and later miners and traders who visited the young Ndebele kingdom before the British South Africa Company (BSAC) claimed political control of the state in 1890. While the Ndebele were defeated in the 1893-94 invasions, social transformation was not so sudden for gender dynamics. The colonial political economy based on exploitation and expropriation of resources, such as land and minerals, was yet to factor in the majority of a people who had briefly enjoyed political autonomy.

The deposition of the Ndebele state politics at the coming of the British administration of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, openly shows a difference in gender recognition. Kingship and

chieftainship along with other state positions, such as military leaders, were a preserve of men in traditional patriarchy. After colonisation, the highly centralised state was administered through a system of indirect rule where power no longer lay with the men who occupied these positions. Women were not directly affected by this new political dispensation, having held no political offices which warranted settler intervention.

The onset of colonial rule and its social dynamics, both at the family and national levels, provide a point of discourse in the wake of gender relations, since both men and women changed their lifestyles. The colonial economy for example, drew men from the countryside to provide cheap labour on settler farms, mines and factories. The social transformation which follows emigration of men who were esteemed as heads of homes and warriors is not profusely documented by colonial historians whose focus is inclined mostly to political economics rather than religion. The transformation gave rise to changes, for example, whatever men stood for as custodians of the family, ancestral worship could no longer be practiced after this displacement to farms, mines and towns. According to Wells (2003) the increased influence of women in the families because of the absence of the men shows a diminishing patriarchy and the colonial dispensation had an alternative religion for the women in the countryside, Christianity.

Most historians, such as Bhebe (1979) and Beach (1986) allude to increased successes of missionaries among the Ndebele after the overthrow of the central state and during the establishment of settler economy. The missionaries Christianised many women and new forms of cultures developed in homes, coupled with the onset of education in the schools they set up. In the next chapter, details of the success story of missionaries will be outlined through a survey of these contemporary secondary sources. The colonial administration contributed to the decline of Indigenous Religion through Government acts that outlawed some beliefs and practices. For example, the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1898 helped the missionaries' cause of evangelising natives. To the common man, fear of the authorities changed customs such as wife beating and polygamy. The advent of African nationalism and subsequent protest actions and the liberation war takes over the attention of nationalist historians from gender issues. The cause of women's advancement through empowerment measures pursued by the government of Zimbabwe will be discussed in more detail and with awareness of the life of the Ndebele women in the countryside.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

Writers on Ndebele people like Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Nyathi and Bhebe subjectively presented indigenous religious beliefs and practices and underrepresented women's participation in the shaping of the present Matabele society. I did research into the role and status of women among

Ndebele people and this research is of significance regarding the following:

### **Gender activism**

Data drawn from male writers whose works are inclined to patriarchal conventions do not help gender activism. However, this research study is sensitive to the gender divide and also provides data which is more important to women's empowerment through consistent reference to demographic characteristics of the Ndebele people and their religion over different historical epochs.

### **Religion**

Writers of religious history of Zimbabwe refer to supplanting of Indigenous Religion by major world religions without delving into the implications on gender. This research will trace women's history in successive religious eras - precolonial, colonial and postcolonial. This research investigates on whether the roles and status of women changed in the course of Ndebele history.

### **Policy makers**

Policy makers who include government officials are signatories to international conventions on gender, such as the United Nations Organization Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979. The unique Matabele society that the study investigates, exposes these localised characteristics on gender which will guide government and non-governmental organisations in carrying out gender activities in south western Zimbabwe.

## **1.7 Organisation of the research**

The study is made up of six chapters whose contents are as follows.

Chapter one defines the inquiry and its constituencies. In this chapter, I provide a background which prompted me to investigate on how religion factors in on women's roles and statuses among the Ndebele over different historical epochs. Key terms of the study were identified, and the theories of the postcolonial framework were discussed leading to the importance of the study to some stakeholders and their relevance to contemporary women's advancement policies is outlined.

Chapter two discusses the history of the Ndebele ethnic group and the religious transformations

brought about by British imperialists and the missionaries in Zimbabwe. One advantage of the inquiry in this chapter is that the history of the Ndebele is not so ancient. Documents from the colonial administration and postcolonial government will be explored to inform my inquiry in the role and status of women among the Ndebele.

Chapter three gives an outline of studies on women in feminist approaches and a survey of contemporary literature and available primary and secondary sources to assist in constructing a religious history of the Ndebele with particular reference to the Indigenous Ndebele Religion and how it has had an impact on the status and roles of the Ndebele women and those women in Sub-Saharan Africa in the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial epochs.

Chapter four outlines my research procedure. The data collection process ensures my qualitative goals. This shall be accessed from oral data through interviews and a focus group. Then the data shall be coded where key themes and common patterns will be highlighted.

Chapter five will be a presentation of data obtained from research tools. Qualitative data as narrative descriptions will be analysed with reference to scholarly discussions.

Chapter six summarises the findings and provides conclusions and recommendations.

## **1.8 Summary**

The chapter outlined the research problem, and its setting, and also gave a brief background of the Ndebele ethnic group. The objectives of the study were clearly spelt out. The chapter also focused on postcolonial theory with its approaches that are relevant to the study. Key terms to the study were defined, the significance of the study to key stakeholders outlined and finally the organisation of the research was spelt out. In the next chapter feminist discourses would be examined since the study is preoccupied with the place of women in Ndebele society.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NDEBELE OF MZILIKAZI**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the historical context of the Ndebele ethnic group from past to present. Consciousness of historiographical and gender issues concerning this subject is

pertinent, let alone the conjectural problems surrounding colonial and nationalist historians from whose accounts religious and feminine metanarratives have to be examined. This review will be presented in line with the respective historical eras. The first era is the precolonial era characterised by the migration and settlement of the Ndebele nation in present day south western Zimbabwe (1822-1868). They left Zululand in 1820 passing through Lesotho where they had some skirmishes with the Basotho of Moshoeshoe at their mountain fortress at Thaba-Bosiu. They moved on to settle in Pretoria among the Northern Sotho and Tswana. The dawn of imperialism (1869-1898) refers to the beginning of the colonisation by the British, who like other European countries had gained control over Rhodesia in the nineteenth century. Colonialism was characterised by political and economic changes in the country in the period 1899-1930 which was subsequently followed by the rise of nationalism and the coming of independence (1931-1980). In 1980 Rhodesia gained independence and changed its name to Zimbabwe. Postcolonial Zimbabwe (1980-2021) refers to a time when Zimbabwe was freed from colonial rule to date, how the Ndebele history has changed, particularly with regards to the status and roles of women in the independent Zimbabwe.

## **2.2 Precolonial era: migrant to settlers (1822-1868)**

Historians such as Ranger (1967), Cobbing (1976) and Bhebe (1979) who have studied the history of the Ndebele provide common place conventions of patriarchy through the state establishment process from the time the Ndebele were a migrant group of warriors to the period of settlement in the south western region of present day Zimbabwe. Early historians, such as Ranger (1967) took up anti-Ndebele attitudes of nineteenth century missionaries and presented a militaristic outlook of the Ndebele with little regard to the social and religious processes where women and other non-military members of the society participated.

These authors hardly spare the Ndebele from the label of 'warriors'. Mzilikazi, who became the first king of the settled people, was indeed a warrior in the Zulu kingdom and his break away from Tshaka in the *mfecane* upheavals (a period of migration of Nguni speaking groups northwards in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) is well documented in the history of state formation by contemporary historians. Beach (1986) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003) also suggest militaristic traits of the Ndebele when they refer to the 'capture' of women and children during the migration north and even after settlement. Mzilikazi and his followers migrated north in the 1820s until settlement across the Limpopo in the early 1840s.

These secondary sources possess collaborative omissions of the dynamics of gender, the roles

and status of women and primary sources from which such concepts of militarism emerged. The social and cultural aspect of Nguni history, especially in the Zulu period and subsequent *mfecane* migrations, was characterised by militarism (Rasmussen 1976). The focal point of historians of colonial influence is largely focused on conflict and power imbalances in precolonial states which resulted in migrations to the north.

However, secondary sources of where this trek is found have no gender characteristics. The social construction of militarist societies is one which depicts exclusion of women and children from wars, hence being rational enough to view Mzilikazi's migrant community as largely one of men who were warriors. The gender imbalance hence warranted 'attacks' on settled communities on their way north such as the Sotho and Tswana. That is why historians often refer to the 'capture' of women and children along the way and even after settlement.

Ranger (1967) alludes to raiding as a distinguished trait of the Ndebele state in the early years of state establishment. Male domination inevitably overlays historical discourses in precolonial accounts. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) says no attempts have been made to deal with the 'absence' of women's history in the precolonial narratives. His concern lies with the exclusion of about half of the population of the precolonial Zimbabwean society, with which he preconceives a balanced sex demographic characteristic for even the Ndebele ethnic group. It cannot be assumed that the Ndebele migrants and settlers had such a gender distribution, unless our projection is inclined to taking back the sex distributions which was balanced. However, any imbalance that may have been there when they left Zululand would have been quickly reversed through the incorporation of women along the way as well as the reduction of the numbers of men through losses in battle. Kuper et al (2017) say women were forcibly married to the king's warriors- women who had been captured and incorporated on the way.

### 2.3 The dawn of imperialism (1868-1898)

British imperialism across Southern Africa began to dawn much earlier in the nineteenth century with the establishment of the Cape Colony. The visits by missionaries such as Robert Moffat and traders created interest in the land between the Limpopo and the Zambezi. Primary sources from missionary writers, traders and miners lured imperialists such as Cecil John Rhodes who believed that massive wealth was abundant in the area. The later years of Ndebele state existence were characterised by Lobhengula's efforts of safeguarding state autonomy against these external imperialist interests.

Historians avoid much focus on the dawning of imperialism, which ended precolonial political autonomy, without delving into the socio-cultural transformations brought about by western culture and religion. Organisations, such as the London Missionary Society (LMS) established a Mission Station in Matabeleland under Mzilikazi in 1859. The missionaries saw this as a great opportunity to evangelise Africans. Robert Moffat who was invited by Mzilikazi to come to Zimbabwe and was granted an opportunity to start a mission at Inyathi in 1859 (near the capital of the Ndebele state). Mzilikazi encouraged his people to listen to missionaries and attended services on Sundays (Mtshali 1967). He hoped that the missionaries would assist as trading agents in South Africa and in the acquisition of arms. The failure to convert the Africans pushed the missionaries into co-operating with the colonialists and they gave their full support to the British South Africa Company (BSAC) of Cecil John Rhodes when it fought, conquered and subdued the Ndebele. The Catholic and Protestant missionaries considered Mzilikazi as an obstacle to evangelising.

The Jesuits arrived in 1879, during Lobhengula's reign. Unlike Kama who did not allow the Jesuits in his territory, Lobhengula (Mzilikazi's son) allowed them to settle in his territory and train his people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). The Jesuits established their first permanent Mission at Empandeni under Peter Prestage in 1887. Like the LMS, the Jesuits also failed to convert the local people and attributed this to the ruling class and Prestage was of the opinion that, until the Matabeles were forcibly colonised, they would never improve (Bhebe, 1982). The conversion of the natives, however, did not come suddenly, with its political subjugation as many historians allude to early failures to convert the Ndebele to Christianity. The researcher suggests that the failure was in some way due to the missionaries' approach which sought to completely replace the religion and culture of the indigenous people, instead of building on the common belief of the Ndebele which they had.

Gundani (2019:81) alludes to an ‘unholy alliance between Christianity and colonialism’ that saw Father Peter Prestage, offer unqualified support for Jameson to go to war against the Ndebele. He goes on to state that ‘thepartnership between the cross and the flag was further strengthened when missionaries becamemilitary chaplains to the colonial soldiers fighting against the Ndebele state’ (Gundani 2019:81). Father Prestage of the Catholic Church considered Lobhengula’s rule as a ‘pagan system of government’ (Linden 1980:15), cited by Gundani (2019) and provided justification for the invasion of his kingdom.

Furthermore, Gundani (2019) states that the sense of kith and kin between the missionaries and white settlers subsisted throughout the colonial period with a few exceptions. This meant that any injustices on the political front, including the appropriation of land reflected badly on the church and missionaries and contributed to the slowing down of adoption of Christianity. The rise against British South Africa Company’s administration in the first *Chimurenga/Umvukela* uprising in 1896-97 was spearheaded by religious leaders and women such as Lozikeyi and Mbuya Nehanda played a key role. Nationalist historians refer to the spontaneous rebellion and the protests but overlook the religious and feminine leadership of the initial resistance to domination.

#### **2.4 Colonialism: political and economic changes in Rhodesia (1899-1930)**

There are other factors such as economics which also affected gender dynamics over different eras of Ndebele history. Nationalist historians have documented failure by the Ndebele state to resist colonial rule and this brought socio-political transformation and the economics of capitalism (Weiss, 1986). Missionaries stayed longer among the Ndebele than in Zululand where the monarch was not completely destroyed and continued to lead in religious events.

The BSAC administration was bent on establishing its control of not just native societies, but also on the exploitation and expropriation of resources, such as land (Fisher, 2010 and Madimu, 2017). In the years running up to the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, the colonial economy was characterised by settler farms and mines and the development of industrial towns such as Salisbury, Bulawayo, Umtali and Gwelo (Gaidzanwa, 1994). These centres of capitalist economics thrived on exploitation of cheap labour among the natives. Farms and mines sucked the cheap labour of men and young boys from native rural homes called Tribal Trust Lands. Historians, however, do not refer to religious factors around these internal migrations where men would leave their families to the mines and towns for a whole year. Such limitations in their back



and forth movement were enforced by a regime of passes from the colonial system, which affected their position as head of family.

The growing populations of settlers in towns also meant the necessity of communication lines and road networks from producer regions nationwide. These were yet to be developed and white populations heavily depended on peasant produce hence the early boom in their agriculture. Historians do not delve into the gender dynamics of this early colonial system. Men and boys had migrated to leave women managing the homes and agriculture. Early successes in peasant agriculture meant a higher income for the women who led homes in the countryside. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 resulted in the displacement of many black families from their traditional, and often more productive, land to marginal areas that could not sustain the household livelihoods (Gaidzanwa 1994). The act made it illegal for Africans to purchase or own land outside the native reserves and native purchase areas. Residents of places such as Fort Rixon/Emakhandeni were displaced to make way for settler commercial farms.

Wells (2003) alludes to early forms of resistance to traditional patriarchy among native women. She explored oral sources which reveal attitudes of African women towards displacements of males from the countryside. While men left the countryside for work on farms, mines and towns, women welcomed institutions such as schools and saw them as instruments to break patriarchy. They assumed leadership roles which they did not have during colonialism. Schools were predominantly run by missionaries and this implied that education went along with conversion.

Furthermore, numerical sources from colonial texts overlook differences in their data. For example, Barnes and Win (1992) say that in the 1950s, only 5% of all secondary students through Southern Rhodesia were female and only 10% of African children of school going age were girls attending primary school. Such national data does not inform policy in that it does not show how Matabeleland (where the first missionary schools were set up) had responded to the many mission schools which were earlier established and scattered in the region.

## **2.5 African nationalist struggle for independence (1931-1980)**

Nationalist historians like Bhebe (1979), Ranger (1995), and Zvobgo (1979) who have written articles on the onset of modern forms of African nationalism refer to values of equity, not just in race, but also in gender as central in the quest for liberation from the colonial system. Zimbabwe was born from a prolonged war of liberation fought from the 1960s to 1979.

The values of gender equity which support present day government efforts at women's

advancements were shown in primary sources of legislation which included the Customary Law and the Primary Courts Acts (1981). These acts made it easier for African women to opt not to be covered by customary law and to be provided with easier and cheaper access to court. The Legal Age of Majority Act (1982) granted all men and women automatic legal majority at the age of 18 and showed gender sensitivity in the new government. The Immovable Property Act (1982) outlawed gender discrimination in the ownership of immovable property against traditional cultural beliefs of indigenous patriarchy. The Matrimonial Causes Act (1983) in Chapter 5:13, stipulated a fair sharing of property in cases of divorce in Customary Law while the Labour Relations Act (1985) outlawed gender discrimination in hiring. The law made provisions for maternity leave for working women, a postcolonial initiative where women were now employed. Despite these changes, certain practices, like *lobola* and the appeasement of ancestors, are still being practised in some rural and urban areas in Matabeleland.

## 2.6 Historiographical concerns on gender

Writers of gender relations have recently given attention to the challenges of women in Zimbabwe. For example, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) explains the problem of discourses of patriarchy and colonialism and claims that the sources we have be it primary or secondary commonly go into 'celebrating' male activities and subordinating female voices. His inclinations on human rights provide a nationwide view, without delving into the differences that the Ndebele, as an ethnic group, has from their distinct religious and cultural orientation. Current government efforts at women's empowerment and advancement also provide such policy frameworks without being informed by localised socio-cultural dynamics. Sources of colonial times in the 1970's reflect systematic oppression of natives and secondary writers, such as Ranger (1976) Cobbing (1978) and Bhebe (1979) present general descriptions of this oppression without considering the gender divide. I allude to the need to survey the gender oppression, as the colonial system affected women in a different way than it did men. The study will elaborate more on this issue in the literature review. According to Conell (2017) colonisation worsened the gender division through enforcing division of roles for women, favouring men's roles over women's roles. Women were denied the use of public space and were to remain confined to the home.

Stopler (2003) contends that since family is central in all religions and cultures and the fact that it is regarded as a private sphere, women are likely to be oppressed since the state has no interference in private matters. As a result, cultural and religious groups do not consider free will among their members, particularly women in society. That is why Oduyoye (1995) says women

must partner with the men in the African continent if they are to move forward to confront cultural oppression. One would suggest that for women to fight patriarchy and other forms of oppression they should reason with men who were given the mandate to be head of households in society.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The chapter focused on the historical context of the Ndebele, with particular interest in the three periods of study which include the precolonial era, focusing on the migration and settlement of the Ndebele south west of Zimbabwe. It also looked at the advent of imperialism and how it affected the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe then the struggle for liberation. The next chapter looks at literature related to the study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: FEMINIST THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND WOMEN IN AFRICA, ZIMBABWE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter offers a review of literature pertinent to the study. In reviewing this literature, the researcher consulted various published articles on the history of the Ndebele ethnic group focusing on issues relating to the impact of the Ndebele Indigenous Religion on the status and roles of women in the Matabeleland region in Zimbabwe. In order to review the literature, firstly, there will be a brief discussion on the waves of feminism to demonstrate how these discourses developed. Then there will also be a discussion on African Indigenous Religion (AIR), Ndebele Indigenous Religion and studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa shall be discussed, focusing on a sample from each of the four regions of Sub-Saharan Africa which are the Central Africa, East Africa, West Africa, and Southern Africa. The chapter will further look at studies done on women in Zimbabwe, among the Shona and the Ndebele as well as the Kalanga and Tonga (two minority groups) classified under the broader Ndebele ethnic group.

#### **3.2 Theoretical framework**

##### **3.2.1 Background**

Feminism is widely known as a struggle against all forms of injustice towards women and advocates for gender equality in all countries. Tong (2009) defines feminism as a worldwide movement that seeks to address women's political, economic and social status in all aspects of life in all societies. Feminism is interested on improving the social status of women across all spheres of socio-economic and political life. However, there is a problem because it was developed and adopted by white women and does not accommodate the needs of African women. The theory seeks to explain why men and women are not treated equally yet they are both rational beings.

##### **3.2.2 The history of feminism**

Definitions of feminism shall be provided and a brief background of the different waves of feminism shall be given. Feminism is relevant to this study as it speaks of creating a society

and law that is gender neutral since gender difference is a barrier to people's rights. It does not necessarily advocate for gender neutrality as this too might harm women since they advocate for recognition in terms of their rights which in this instance are violated by certain cultural and religious practices.

Feminism was designed for white middle class women and has been divided into four 'waves'. The first three were developed for women in the West while the fourth wave incorporates ideas from non-white feminists that are still suppressed too. The first wave was developed in the middle of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and its main focus was on the rights of western women to vote. The second wave was in the 1960s to 1970s with a bias towards cultural inequalities and gender standards in the West where traditional gender and family roles were questioned. The second wave of feminism characterised by the radical feminism views women's oppression as a fundamental issue in human society and tries to change the situation by promoting lesbians and gays rights. The third wave was developed by Walker (1992) based on postcolonial ideas and was meant to address the issues that failed to be resolved in the first and second waves. The theorists criticised their predecessors who as essentialists failed to bring together women's movements so as to acknowledge the different oppressions experienced by women of other nationalities. The critics of the first and second wave said the latter overlooked oppression in terms of the race class and age, yet the white women were supposed to interact with black women and address their concerns too. Patricia Hill Collins then developed a universal theory that catered for groups with different experiences (Collins 1990, 2000). The fourth wave is built on the third wave's emphasis on being inclusive of the African context. It is about what empowerment, equality, and freedom really mean. It is believed that the fourth wave has not been reached yet since they observe that focus is still on matters in the third wave while others claim that with the notion of human right then a new wave has emerged. The study rests on views of African feminism.

### **3.2.3 African feminism**

African feminism was developed by Filomina Chioma Steady in the 1980s. It is concerned with the liberty of all African people. African feminism originated from African women's resistance to colonialism and its subordination of African women, which led to a breakdown of cultures and gender inequalities. African feminism embraces African values like marriage, childbearing, and the preservation of the family. It also questions features of traditional African cultures with

an understanding that these might be viewed differently by different classes of woman. The African feminists believe that if this feminism is to be effective there has to be an acceptance of mixture with the males (Maathai 2006). However, African feminism is not against men but challenges them to be aware of those aspects of women's marginalisation which is different from the generalised oppression of race of all African people. The theory focuses on the recognition of people as human persons and not by gender. It states that women's status is not the same throughout Africa and varies significantly between societies. Maathai (2006) contends that this type of feminism does not share anything common with Western feminism since it is meant to address different women who are in different contexts and affected by different cultural and racial situations. This assertion is true in case of the continent of Africa which is vast making the experiences of women in these countries that make Africa different. Jackson and Jones (1998) suggest that African feminism has undergone changes since the theorists keep changing their line of thought and modifying as the experiences of women in Africa are different from those experiences in America and other parts of the world. The study adopted the Africana womanism and the Black feminism, which shall be discussed below.

### **3.2.4 Africana womanism**

The theory of Africana womanism was developed by Hudson-Weems (1993, 2001) when she noticed that the 'womanism' theory that had been coined by Walker (1983) did not cater for African women just like the feminism theory. The two theories had a bias towards white women not paying particular attention to experiences of women in Africa worse still those in the rural areas. According to Hudson-Weems (2001:24) Africana womanism is a theory that focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women in African culture. It was designed with goal to examine the African women's experiences at family level and in the community. Furthermore, it also focuses on women's careers in today's society, hence I shall use the theory as my lens in the study since it gives room to Ndebele women to outline their experiences in the society. The main emphasis is on the oppression of women, their empowerment and rights (Hudson-Weems 2001). Furthermore, she says most Africana women in general do not identify with the feminism theories yet issues to do with gender are of concern in the women's struggle against patriarchal systems in most African societies.

The Africana women have adopted the feminist theory as they wish to be liberated. Others fail because they are from a different socio-economic set up and they are poor and fail to understand its relevance to them. The next theory to be discussed is the Black feminism.

### 3.2.5 Black African feminism

This theory was introduced by Walker (1983) who addressed Black African American women's concerns. The main focus was also on injustices against Black African women related to family life. They suffered practices that include domestic violence, female genital mutilation, early marriage, female education, polygamy, bride price, women's inheritance, women's reproductive rights, and HIV/AIDS (Arndt 2002) that are imposed upon them by cultural norms. According to King (1988) the Afro-American women suffered triple oppression because of race, gender and colour that is, being African, women and black. They were treated as objects and had the lowest status in terms of education. Men earned more than women, yet they had the same qualification. The survival of the Black woman depended on her ability to use all resources around her. Black women, involved in reproduction, child rearing activities and working in low paying jobs made their predicament to be worse. Black men assumed leadership positions in many Black social institutions like church and political organisations, making them to assume roles of roles that fit traditional western view of women (King 1988). The duties they did as home makers and mothers and expectations to be in good rapport with people around them assume made them face multiple oppression. Hence the formation of Black feminism was necessary for Afro-American women challenged among other issues white patriarchy. Hence, the rise of a feminist idea that was to be associated with Black women, not women of colour and white women.

In precolonial times, in most cultures, there was a common belief that women were highly respected since they could create new life through childbirth. Colonial rule brought about by the imperialists changed the gender dynamic found in most precolonial African societies resulting in women relegated to the private domain. This term is not common to African women who might not have seen anything bad about being in the private domain. Other feminist scholars and Black African Theologians include Oduyoye, Nada, Phiri and Dube, Kanyoro, Chitando and Chiorongoma who criticise patriarchy (which is characteristic of most Africa societies) a practice that is used by men to dominate women.

Chiorongoma and Chitando (2021) contended that women are the ones in charge of domestic chores such as preparing food, fetching water and firewood and the if these very important resources are not available it is women who are troubled. Furthermore, the two produced an interesting connection between women and nature as they showed that African feminism views the earth as feminine as it is usually called Mother Earth. Furthermore, they said there is a relationship between women and nature and the former are care givers and provide humanitarian work

The African feminists are concerned with men who use their religions (African Indigenous Religion or Christianity) to oppress their sisters (Chitando and Chitando 2005). The Theological engagement with gender issues seeks to expose harm and injustices that are in society and are extended to Scripture and the teachings and practices of the Church through culture (Kanyoro 2001:40). Oduyoye (1995) says religion and culture are inseparable, hence certain cultural traits found in traditional religious practices hinder women participation in development since they overlook the relationship between religion and culture (Phiri 1997). One such cultural aspect that Theologians are concerned with is patriarchy, which has contributed immensely to the marginalisation of women. More information on these cultural practices is being given as the chapter progresses.

### **3.3 African indigenous religion and the role of women**

There is a wealth of information on the AIR from scholars such as Magesa (1998), Mbiti (1975), Olupona (2014) to mention only a few. As a strategy, the researcher will provide a survey of Mbiti's work (and a few other scholars mentioned previously) how he discusses AIR and how he refers to roles of women in the AIR. The rationale for choosing to survey the work of Mbiti in the study is that he is one of the leading scholars in writing about African Religion. In his book entitled, *An Introduction to African Religion* Mbiti shows that he subscribes to an essentialist view of African Indigenous Religion. He is not known to be critical of aspects of AIR that contradict human rights. Mbaya & Cezula (2019) say Mbiti studied many societies in the continent of Africa in order to get a picture of African religion, hence he has a number of views of AIR from such studies. The study will incorporate ideas from Olupona and Magesa mentioned above who seem to have shared similar views with Mbiti on African Indigenous Religion.

Like most modern scholars of AIR, Olupona (2014) views the indigenous religions as linked to a way of life of Africans as they feature in the social, economic and political life of Africans making it inseparable from everyday activities. AIR is an integral part of culture, as one finds that certain cultural practices are embedded in the religion, making the two inseparable. Africans gather for religious ceremonies like the inauguration of kings, where ancestors are consulted. African religion is animistic in nature (Mbiti 1990; Olupona 2014), as it is linked to natural features like mountains, trees, caves, and certain animals and reptiles. When Africans communicate with the ancestors, they encounter them in these natural features.

AIR acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being who is known by different names that depict his attributes. He is known as omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (knows all things), and omnipresent (exists everywhere). The Supreme Being is reached through ancestral spirits and



through communication by means of prayer, and is directly involved in the lives of human beings (Magesa 2010). According to Olupona (2014) these ancestors although they live in their own world they are directly involved in human space. Most African societies have an idea of a Supreme Being who observes his creation and leaves the rest of the responsibility to ancestors. These occupy a higher position of existence and watch over the living who are in their lineage. In African Indigenous Religion worldview there are festivals and rituals practiced asking for rain from the ancestors at national level where animals are sacrificed, and libations poured so as to appease ancestors and the Supreme Being (Olupona 2014).

Although Mbiti was a Christian theologian, he argued against missionaries and anthropologists who said Africans did not have a religion (Olupona 2014). Mbiti sought to show that Christianity is very much an African religion since it is not foreign to Africans. Hence he saw the emergence of African Independent Churches as a way that helped Africans to engage in some of their practices (Mbiti 1990). For example, polygamy and spirit possession, which are characteristic features of AIR, show that Christianity engages with African Religion (Mbaya & Cezula 2019) since there are African Initiated Churches that adhere to these African practices.

In his second edition entitled, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1990) Mbiti included a chapter on the place of women in AIR. Having recognised the importance of women and the role they played in African societies Mbiti dedicated a chapter to show their importance. He indicated that women feature in myths, proverbs and in prayers (Mbiti 1990). Myth refers to truths that explain the worldview of a people. Different societies have sacred myths related to the creation or origin of mankind and those pertaining to the creation of the universe which are interpreted differently from generation to generation (Olupona 2014). Some of the myths depict women being created independently of man, unlike the Christian belief where the woman was created out of man's body. Mbiti (1990) says this Christian idea was wishful thinking of men to gain control over women. Mbiti (1990) says myths on the origin of man give a picture of a woman having been created by God to assist Him in the creation, hence having a higher position than man.

Olupona (2014) views proverbs as expressions of wisdom that are acquired through observation of society's surroundings which have deeper meaning. Mieder (1993:23) defined a proverb as 'a phrase, saying, sentence, statement, or expression of the folk which contains above all wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons and advice'. Mbiti (1991) describes African proverbs as surpassing any rich source of wisdom and are embedded with religious beliefs, ideas, morals and warnings as they refer to God, the world, and human beings. Women in most African societies also use proverbs to challenge male patriarchal domination as they reveal their thoughts in any

situation where they cannot boldly say what they want to say (Kolawole 1997). Women use proverbs to give themselves a voice that has been buried in patriarchy.

In African traditions, motherhood was highly honoured, and the woman was regarded as the mother of mankind. This gave her a prestigious position (Mbiti 1988; Oduyoye 1995). According to Mbiti, women are the ones who discovered fire as they interacted with the forest to collect firewood and in searching for food to feed the family. This happens in most African countries where women are still the ones who collect firewood in the forest. Mbiti (1990) further alluded to the fact that childless women lead an unhappy life in society because they cannot perform the important roles of motherhood as they cannot conceive or experience the gift of motherhood.

Prayers are the spiritual aspect of a person's desires which are conveyed to the Supreme Being to express gratitude and seek advice, counsel, comfort, inspiration amongst many others. Mbiti(1990) further goes on to say that if a member of the family is sick, it is the woman who offers prayers to God through the ancestors. According to Mbiti (1990) in African societies, women have an important responsibility in religious activities like brewing beer for rain making ceremonies and the performance of rain dances. Spirit possession is mostly prevalent among women who take advantage of the situation to utter whatever they want under the spell of spirit possession. This gives them power and control over men. Olupona (2014) says African American women favour African religion because it offers them religious liberty than other Western religions as most women are given a chance to participate in the shrines of goddesses. This shows that women do indeed participate in the indigenous religions. However, the view of the writer is that in most monotheistic religions there is recognition of a male deity who is mostly approached by males. This shows that despite the important roles that women have in these world religions, little has been done to undo the patriarchal setup hence Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2005) says there is need to recover the voices of women from the past.

### **3.4 Ndebele indigenous religion in Zimbabwe**

Religious issues suffered peripheral attention among writers of Ndebele history. Indigenous beliefs and practices were central to everyday life, be it family or state. But my inquiry is not just about religion as a function on state political economies (as is corpus from existing histories) but rather in gender relations, a sphere barely delved into and yet fulfilling current holistic research trends (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2005).

African Traditional Religion is still strongly practiced by many Zimbabweans, and the Ndebele

ethnic group is no exception. Although the majority have now been converted to Christianity, they still regard their indigenous religion as an integral part of their lives. One of the most prominent researchers on Ndebele Indigenous Religion is Ndlovu-Gatsheni a postcolonial scholar who wrote works on the Ndebele ethnic group. He traces the Ndebele Indigenous Religion back to Zululand where the ethnic group originated. The Ndebele nation, which was founded by Mzilikazi Khumalo during the unsettled *mfecane* upheaval, did not abandon its religion. It became part and parcel of the nation's lives despite assimilation and incorporation of other ethnic groups in their interactions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003). Social transformation is inevitable wherever cultures or religions interface. It is, therefore, important to regard the mixing and mingling of the Ndebele and other peoples as an agent of social dynamics, and to my interest, gender relations. The beliefs and practices of Nguni descent cannot be assumed to have remained unchanged in the nearly two decades of their migration as they interfaced with other cultures. The ethnic group had to mingle with other groups on the way before and during their final settlement in Matabeleland.

According to Bhebe (1979) the religion is made up of a religion of Mwari Priests, Christianity, Zulu religion, Sotho ancestor worship, and *mhondoro* the royal ancestors. This combination shows that the Ndebele religion from Zululand changed greatly from precolonial times to the present. The religion is characterised by the beliefs and practices which center around the worship of a Supreme Being known as *uNkulunkulu*, a name that means the great-great one (who is the creator of everything) and a belief in ancestral spirits who are known as *amadlozi* and are responsible for mediating between human beings and the creator. Mzilikazi accepted the religious cults of the Kalanga and the Shona whom they encountered in Zimbabwe and adopted the sacred places of worship like the *Njelele* sacred shrine situated in the Matobo Hills, 35 km south of Bulawayo. Every year, towards the beginning of the rainy season, rain dancers go to the *Njelele* Shrine to ask for rain from *Ngwali* on behalf of the Ndebele community.

Today, the Ndebele religion has some slight variations from the Zulu religion where they originated. Religion is not controlled by the state any longer. The coming of the missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought with it some changes to the Ndebele cultural and religious practices. *Inxwala* ceremony is still practiced among the Zulu today having been revived in 1990 by King Goodwill Zwelithini. Among the Ndebele, the *Inxwala* ceremony is non-existent, since the system of governance has changed. The king is not formally recognised, although there is one, Bulelani Khumalo, who resides in the Republic of South Africa and was anointed in 2018 by the Khumalo family in Matabeleland. However, he has not been formally recognised by the

Zimbabwean government. Chiefs are still custodians of the Ndebele culture but work from their respective areas, just like in precolonial times and they lack a coordinating central authority like a king. The Ndebele religion recognizes *sangomas*, but there is an element of *hosanna* (rain dancers) which is a Kalanga construction that was adopted by the Ndebele. The spirit mediums (*amadlozi*) are still recognised among the Ndebele and the elders pass on the idea of ancestral spirits who are in charge of the living. These spirits act as mediators to God and they are also ranked in their realm (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2004:22). This implies that in the spiritual world there are spirits that are closer to the living while those belonging to people who died a long time ago are closer to the Supreme Being. This practice is still conducted in rural Matabeleland. In urban areas some families resort to indigenous practice when they face problems although they have now been Christianised. This has remained one of the biggest problems for anthropological and theological researchers: The mystery of how many intelligent, indigenous and often well-educated peoples can simultaneously embrace two utterly conflicting religions. There are millions of indigenous people, in Southern Africa alone, who believe simultaneously in two conflicting religions. This is hybridity which according to Bhabha is the best option to be adopted in the study of religion in the postcolonial era. The Ndebele also embrace Christianity but will be seen to attend Indigenous Religion ceremonies like the bringing home of the spirit of the deceased. Today adherents of Ndebele Indigenous Religion still believe and acknowledge God (*uMlimu*) who is believed to be the creator of the world and all that is in it. They communicate with Him through *amadlozi*, the ancestral spirits who are an invisible community linked to the living. They are said to be always around their descendants, providing care and joys and at times disciplining them. The Spirit mediums communicate with *amadlozi* (spirits) on behalf of the living (Nyathi 2019:75). They still practice that religious aspect of keeping a black bull to represent the ancestors. The ancestors are regarded with high esteem and their power is acknowledged. They are consulted on important occasions and are regarded as the keepers of morality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2007). Adherents should avoid the activities that were considered immoral by the ancestors like for example, neglecting them without regularly appeasing them, murder and theft. Women functionaries in Ndebele Indigenous Religion existed. The notion of oppression becomes subject to speculation with men having to consult female spirit mediums in the ‘patriarchal society’. My research probes into religion and related realms of Ndebele culture that are centered on the responsibilities that women had which determined their status. The next section deals with the general view of the status and role of women in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Zimbabwe and in Matabeleland among the Ndebele to establish if there are any

similarities or differences in the way women are treated compared to the other parts of the world in the past and presentsituation.

### **3.5 Women's empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa**

This section will focus on how women were viewed in Sub-Saharan Africa in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times. The study will make a general overview of selected countries in this part of Africa. The rationale for choosing the Sub-Saharan part of Africa is that Zimbabwe is also in this region and there could be a need to compare how women were treated in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times.

Sub-Saharan Africa refers to the forty-six (46) countries that form part of the continent of Africa and are located south of the Sahara Desert. It is made up of sub-regions that are recognised by the United Nations as comprising only countries found in West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa. The study selected Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, South Africa and Zimbabwe as samples of countries in the four regions. The rationale for choosing these countries is that they were colonised by the British, just like Zimbabwe, and so they are likely to have had similar experiences during colonialism. The choice of South Africa has to do with the Ndebele ethnic group having emanated from Zululand. Hence the need to compare the way black women were/are treated in that country. Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) was chosen because it was a fellow member state of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953- 1963) with the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (now Malawi). It would be interesting to find out how women were/are treated in that country. Above all, the inhabitants are Bantu speaking and may share similar cultural and religious practices. These selected countries have different ethnic groups just like Zimbabwe.

#### **Precolonial period**

In precolonial times, African women had statuses and roles that were almost similar in these mentioned countries. According to Zimoń (2006) in Eastern and Southern Africa, women were in charge of the fertility of the land and rainmaking ceremonies. The discussion will give an outline of the roles and status of women in the selected countries in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times.

In Nigeria the position of women showed a complementary position with men as the males worked closely with them. Njoh (2006) in his discussion, says that men and women in the past had complementary roles whereby they worked hand in hand, and men were seen to participate in

the clearing of land while women would till the cleared land. There are three different ethnic groups there that are known as the Yoruba, the Barnu and the Hausa. These groups had different roles that women played in precolonial times. The Yoruba women were taught skills in income generation, while the Barnu women were involved in state affairs, the political affairs of the country. The Hausa women were not confined to household chores but were involved in farming and manufacturing and trade. Hence, Yoruba women dominated the industry than men as they were engaged in various economic activities like trade and the processing of food. They also took care of the family and provided for all their needs. These women had a spiritual duty as prophetesses, diviners, custodians of sanctuaries of gods and goddesses and also in the health sector (Wole-Abu 2018).

In Kenya, women during precolonial times were engaged in farming and taking care of families although there were exceptions with some matrilineal societies. According to Mason & King (2001), the imbalances are among men and women especially in terms of rights, resources, economic opportunities, as well as political influence which is prevalent particularly in developing countries. Jones and Budig (2008) say women solicit for equal opportunities in education, politics and job opportunities.

Zambian women in precolonial times also played important roles in the political sphere. For example, a female skilful chief by the name of Mwenya Mukulu who lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century emerged from Eastern Congo into the Northern Province of Zambia. She was able to organise the northern part of Zambia into kingdoms without any conflicts (Sharma, 2019).

The situation of women in South Africa in precolonial times was no different from the aforementioned countries. South African women played important roles in precolonial times. They were leaders in some areas of life, be it social, political, economic or religious life. Some women would even partake in military activities. Among the different ethnic groups in South Africa, some women featured as queens, chiefs or regents. These were equal to their male counterparts and even did extra duties that were not done by men, like taking care of the family. Men entertained their views in the public or private sphere. Examples include King Tshaka's aunt (Mkabayi), mother (Nandi), and sister (Nomcoba) and the Tlokwa Queen called Manthatisi.

### **Colonial period**

A similar trend in the role and status of women in the Sub-Saharan African region was observed during the colonial times in comparison to the precolonial times. When these countries were colonised, although in different periods, there was a sudden change in the political and social lives

of women in Africa. This was brought about by the colonisers and missionaries who introduced the Victorian lifestyle which relegated women to the private domain, and they remained domesticated. The colonial era in Africa brought with it changes which characterised imbalances between men and women. Women who had been accorded with an opportunity to participate in politics were pushed to the private sphere in the kitchen.

In Nigeria, women were excluded from politics and any machinery was to be controlled by males. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, the traditional office of the Obi was only recognised among males, and females were not recognised or given any salaries. The smaller companies that were operated by women suffered collapse and were overtaken by large companies like Lever Brothers (Wole-Abu 2018). This was meant to sabotage them so that they would prove to be failures. Women were further frustrated by not being granted loans to function as small companies. There was no payment for those who brought their cash crops. Education was informal with only Domestic Science being taught to girls so that it would help them to acquire good skills as homemakers. Women were not allowed to own or inherit land although they were involved in the farming.

In Zambia colonialism dawned in 1924 when the British were interested in the copper business in Zambia and settled along the Copper Belt. They reinforced the system of patriarchy where males dominated over women. Banda and Kapwepwe (2020) argued that in precolonial Zambia 80% of the population was matrilineal and matriarchal. This was changed by the colonial rule to become patriarchal. Women became housewives as opposed to the matrilineal society that had prevailed before. The Zambian female chiefs were removed from power as the colonialists believed women should not hold any position of power. This is a system in a particular society where ancestral family ties are traced through maternal lines as opposed to the patrilineal which is linked to paternal lines. In this scenario, the female and all the lineage members are recognized with high esteem. The man did not pass his status to his sons, as in the patrilineal situation. The coming of the British colonial system in Zambia changed this system into patrilineal as there was a switch over to a recognition of the paternal lines. Women were not allowed to move freely looking for employment. They were denied education as a way of disempowering them. They were not considered fit to partake in the development of the country since colonialists reduced them to mere domestic workers and the idea was that they should be housewives, as men were working for the colonisers in mines along the Copper Belt where business was thriving (Siwila 2017). In 1980, the urban Copper Belt families encountered the worse period of economic

meltdown and women's participation was acknowledged. That was the period where some women gained social status.

In Kenya, the colonisers brought changes in the lives of women too (Muthuki 2006). The plantations for cash crops, which were now owned by white settlers, only hired Kenyan males. Women were sidelined to an extent of occupying a very remote role in the economy. Women were no longer allowed to own or inherit land as it was believed they were incompetent to manage land and the majority of them who provided labour were able to manage the land, yet denied access to it. Women were not to inherit any property when their husbands passed on (Kameri-Mbote 2002). Instead, they were evicted from the land and would not have access to the property or the husband's estate. The in-laws would consider *lobola* that had been paid by the husband. There were women who boldly stood up to fight the imbalances, like Mekatalili wa Menza and Muthoni wa Kirima who participated in the fight for independence (Mugi-Ndua 2010). Women's organization, like Maendelo ya Wanawake were formed to fight for women's rights.

Colonialism brought a significant change too in the image of women in South Africa, just like in other countries in the region (Mogoboya and Montle 2018). The changes were from traditional households where men and women worked hand in hand in providing for the family. The missionaries brought a theory which marginalised women and their role was to be confined to the home looking after children. Their role in society was now bestowed upon men who were to contribute to the upkeep of the family and the development of the country. Women were not allowed to seek employment but were to be confined at home and depend on their husbands (Britton 2006). Most men moved to cities for employment, and this created a situation where men had two families, one in the city and the other in rural areas. Women who relied entirely upon their husbands for support remained subordinate as they were denied employment. Furthermore, those in these marriages were denied legal protection. The traditional law could not allow women to own land since they were dependent upon their husbands. They were denied rights of custody of children and could not be elected as chiefs. This situation of women in South Africa worsened during apartheid (1948 -1994).

### **Postcolonial period**

The postcolonial period brought light at the end of the tunnel for women in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This was a period where the majority of African women thrived to attain leadership positions in the political sphere. Women are found in several leadership roles in both



private organisations and public institutions, including the judiciary, parliament, business organisations, schools, colleges and non-governmental organisations (Mabokela 2003).

Nigeria gained independence in 1960, and a lot of changes were implemented in favour of women. Women had important roles in the development of the nation. Since men were now formally employed in towns, women took this opportunity to get involved in agriculture and this gave a 70% contribution in food for the nation Njoh (2006). A few women got formal employment and the number increased from 6.9% in 1970 to 12.6 % in 1980. Unfortunately, the legal system failed to empower women and they had to seek for permission from their husbands to apply for passports. The contributions of women to other sectors, during this period, can also be seen in areas such as agriculture, artisanship and craftsmanship, other professions and the medical profession. In terms of rights, the legal system that prevailed in the colonial era did not favour women's empowerment and participation in national development. Women have tried to be involved in politics but have met resistance, due to cultural and socio-political limitations. Nevertheless, they feature in other institutions, like schools, colleges and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). After the Beijing Conference of 1995, the government has tried to implement strategies to address the plight of women. This has been done with the assistance of women activists, NGOs and other stakeholders to address issues to do with gender based violence against women and to address their low status.

South Africa gained its independence in 1994, after which changes have been realised in the lives of women. Some assumed key roles in parliament. The lifestyle of many women has improved as some are now rich. Sexual harassment is prohibited and punishable in South Africa. Although cases of gender based violence and feticide continue to occur frequently, the judiciary and the entire community view these strongly and appropriate punishment is meted where there is a conviction (Mogoboya and Montle 2018). The Bill of Rights has a clause Section 9, which stipulates that there should be equality for all citizens. This has assisted in the move towards women's empowerment. To curb the issue of domestic violence, in 2005, South Africa created a department for the management of violence against women and children called Inter-Departmental Management Team. This team was meant to look into issues related to gender-based violence although the country continues to be plagued by the scourge.

In the postcolonial period, South African black women are economically disadvantaged as the majority of women in the country are either unemployed or are in lower paid jobs like domestic and farm labourers. Their salaries are less than those for men. Women are faced with domestic

violence and rape (Britton 2006). Families have been separated as men moved into the city to seek for employment. The customary law in rural areas still allocates fewer rights to women and they later lack full representation in constitutional systems in the country (Mbajiorgu 2017). During the apartheid era, gender oppression was very pronounced, and women were seen to suffer a triple blow from racial, class and gender oppression. In 1996, the constitution was amended, and this was a welcome move for women since it outlawed some gender discrimination. However, this is not the end of patriarchy, as it is still practiced.

Kenya gained independence in 1960. There were some changes that have been effected to improve the lifestyle of women. Some women are now part of the Kenyan government (Muthuki 2006). This development could assist in that these women are now the mouthpiece of women in the country, and they make decisions that will positively change the lives of other women. The government has put in place policies that are meant to ensure that there is gender equality so as to eradicate all forms of gender based violence (GBV). This includes harmful practices such as female circumcision which is a prevalent cultural practice among the Kikuyu.

Zambia got independent in 1964. At independence, there were few trained and educated Zambian women capable of running the government, and the economy was largely dependent on foreign expertise. The native courts became part of the judicial system. Coldham (1990) argues that this system could have implications in cases where there is an issue of inheritance and adultery, as they are determined using customary law.

The next section will give an outline of the role and status of women in Zimbabwe, looking at the Shona women and then narrowing down to the Ndebele society, the second largest group in Zimbabwe which also incorporates other minority groups like the Kalanga, Tonga and Nambia who constitute some sections of Matabeleland.

### **3.6 The roles and status of women in Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe, like other Sub-Saharan African countries discussed above, has not been spared in the way women have been treated and the contribution they make in society. Traditional practices, religion, and colonisation have had an impact on the limited power accorded to women.

In precolonial times, traditionally, the status of women was affected by patriarchy that saw women associated with reproduction and taking care of children and the whole family. Zimbabwe was governed by customary law where each family was controlled by the eldest male

figure who would make final decisions on matters such as marriages of the members of the family. The ownership of land was held by chiefs for the whole community. Once a woman got married, she was obliged to work for her husband and the family. The husband owned possessions that were acquired in the family. When the marriage was dissolved, the husband would get everything, and the children were to be under his guardianship (Nenge 2011). Women did not have freedom of ownership of any possessions and were reduced to slaves as they would declare proceeds to their husbands and not enjoy the benefits of their labour. One can attribute all this to patriarchy which was the norm in precolonial times and is still practiced in modern Zimbabwean society to some extent. This patriarchal system of male dominance and female subordination was a system that ensured boys would be sent to school to take care of the family later in life, while girls would be groomed to womanhood so as to be respectful wives (Nenge 2011).

However, women were responsible for selling traditional and local medicine for treating certain diseases and most of them were skilled in producing these remedies to assist members in the society. They were valued and looked upon as the custodians of traditional medicines. They were respected and had a role of brewing beer that was meant for rituals, and more of them were possessed by spirits than men. Those who were possessed provided information that had to do with health, agricultural problems as they cascaded information from ancestral spirits to the living. According to Gudhlanga (2013) in Zimbabwe, there were women who were nominated as leaders and spirit mediums. This enhanced their importance in society although it was not enough to give them parity with men.

In colonial Zimbabwe, 'the entire relationship with the material world was gender-structured and this separation of roles was reinforced by taboos which were often explicitly linked to the women's role as weaker partner (Auret 1990:105). This trend has been imprinted in people such that in modern Zimbabwe, women economically do not have a decisive role in a family setting even when they are employed. This is because women's earnings are not under their control but under their husband's control. Auret (1990:110) further says, 'the advent of colonialism and introduction of Christianity worsened the plight of women in Zimbabwe as the passage promoted patriarchy which led to a considerable reduction in the value of women by trying to domesticate African women.' A typical example is in Christian mission schools that taught women to stay at home and cook, clean and raise healthy Christian children. They were to observe their duty by obeying and respecting their husbands.

The Western colonial influences led to an increase of women's burdens through the promotion of Western patriarchy. A loss of former status and sphere of influence was, therefore, experienced by African women. Women and girls were excluded from the education system, and usually they were discriminated against and did not profit from it. In the colonial era, women who constituted fifty-two percent (52%) of the population, were largely marginalised in the areas of education, health, human rights, economic empowerment and decision-making. The advent of Christianity affected the situation of women in Zimbabwe which promoted the cultural norm of patriarchy as there was emphasis on submission of women to men. They were encouraged to stay at home and cook, clean and honour their husbands. Western patriarchy increased the burdens of women and the girl child was discriminated against in the education sector. Weiss (1986) contends that the colonial regimes passed laws that worsened the plight of women as they were to be considered as minors. These deprived women of their basic rights. Whatever they did was to be approved by male figures. This shows a practice that was strongly influenced by western culture. Furthermore, the practice of *lobola* contributed to making women not to have a say in matters of the family. Instead, they were to be subservient to their husbands who considered them as commodities since they paid bride price for them (Nenge 2011).

The status of a woman in a marriage set-up was only uplifted once she bore children. In case the husband was barren, his young brother could provide children for him by forcing themselves on the woman without her consent. This made the wife to lose her dignity and to become the property of her husband and of his extended family. *Lobola* weakens the personhood of women under the guise of the preservation of tradition (Matope et al 2013). Women tend to be subordinate in the home, where they only have access to family resources. Today those women who are formally and informally employed, find that cultural and religious norms still follow them at their workplace. This disempowers women and makes them subservient to men. In postcolonial times, the government of Zimbabwe, having realised the anomalies, has tried to improve the position of women in society since independence so as to empower them. Women can now inherit wealth and be appointed as traditional chiefs without any hindrances as well as participate in politics through the implementation of the quota system as a way to close the gap between men and women.

At independence in 1980, there were very few women who were engaged in politics. The new Parliament had only three women out of 40 parliamentarians. Zimbabwe took part in the

Women's United Nations Global Conferences of 1985 (Nairobi) and 1995 (Beijing). This increased awareness of women's rights and led to the formation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development in 1995 to address issues related to women (Republic of Zimbabwe 2013). The main thrust of the ministry was to spearhead women's empowerment, gender equality and equity for community development. This stride has improved the status of women in Zimbabwe and in this case in Matabeleland, which was compromised in the colonial era and after.

In postcolonial Zimbabwe, the government worked on empowering women by putting in place programmes to help in this regard. The Women's Empowerment and Gender Related Programmes Implementation was carried out in Hurungwe. This was meant to stop among other things issues like domestic violence and rape cases that were not reported because the women are economically dependent on their husbands. In 1996, the Bill of Rights was introduced in Zimbabwe to improve the status of women (Republic of Zimbabwe 2013). Despite these efforts of the government to improve the status of women, patriarchy is still practiced, and in some groups, women cannot make decisions and there is gender inequality as women are seen to be less important than men. The New Constitution of 2013 Section 17 stipulates that gender balance is one of the issues to be addressed in institutions at all levels in Zimbabwe. The above issues and others necessitated the formation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development that deals with programmes to empower women.

The twentieth century has therefore seen a change in gender relations where practices like polygamy and arranged marriages are now things of the past. Women can now break away from unhappy marriages, get custody of the children, and secure inheritance and they can also demand equality in the workplace (Wells 2003). Government has further crafted a National Gender Policy Framework in line with the international human rights framework (Mutanana and Bukaliya 2015). There are nongovernmental organisations that deal with issues related to women, like the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association and the Musasa Project, an organisation that focuses on marriage problems such as domestic violence in urban areas.

A typical example is from the results of the research carried out in Nkayi district in Matabeleland by Zikhali and Zikhali (2017) on challenges faced by women in forming income generating projects. Their findings revealed that patriarchy was a major problem faced by these women as they failed to attend meetings due to other responsibilities in the home and their husbands denied them the opportunity to attend the meetings. They also faced financial problems and they did

not have collateral security (Zikhali and Zikhali 2017).

The Government also regards education as critical for the empowerment of women, both in urban and rural communities. Great strides were made to ensure that women, especially girls, received the education that they deserve, which will assist them to develop skills that are important in their management and success once they engage in businesses. The Government of Zimbabwe made it a point that there is a need to eliminate violence against women through the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act in 2007 (Republic of Zimbabwe 2013). Furthermore, there were a number of affirmative action programmes that were formed to empower women economically. In July 2012, the Government launched the Broad-Based Women's Economic Empowerment Framework (BBWEE) a medium-term development plan whose main objective was gender equality and the empowerment of women. Zimbabwe was among the first five African states to introduce the initiative, and is confident in overcoming gender imbalances in national economic development.

Over the past 25 years, Zimbabwe has also recorded critical changes in its legislation and has enacted laws such as the Domestic Violence Act which is one of the most comprehensive laws addressing all forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2013). Major changes have been made to the law such as the drafting of the Harmonized Marriages Bill, which has as one of its key features, the abolition of child marriages which will be discussed at length below. In the year 2000, Zimbabwe worked towards the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by introducing the Land Commission Bill which came with great potential to change the lives of women and girls in that the leases and permits were to recognise both spouses as land holders. Women benefitted from the land reform programme with 15-20% of A1 farms being registered to women as opposed to the average 5% of communal land.

The harmonious elections in July 2018 were marked by peace, and the country for the first time ever had four female presidential candidates. Although they did not succeed, it was a historic moment which was testament to how far the country has come in creating space for women to take up positions of power and decision making. The next section will look at the place of women among the ethnic groups in Zimbabwe which are the Shona, the Ndebele, the Tonga and the Kalanga. The rationale for studying the other three ethnic groups is that, since they are in one country, they are bound to have customs and religious practices that influence each other. There have been intermarriages with the Ndebele hence the need to study them as well.

### **3.7 The place of women among the Shona ethnic group**

Zimbabwe is made up of different ethnic groups. The Shona ethnic group is the largest Bantu speaking group and is found in the eastern part of the country. The Shona are made up of people who speak six Shona dialects, the Karanga, Korekore, Manyika, Ndau, Rozwi and the Zezuru (Mabvurira, Muchinako and Smit 2021). It is believed that they are the descendants of great ancestors who built Great Zimbabwe. The Shona have a population of around nine million. The Shona religion recognises the Supreme Being as Mwari (the creator) (Kazembe 2009). They believe God can only be reached through spirits. They have two types of spirits known as the *Mashave* and *vadzimu*. The former is a wondering spirit believed to be foreign, while the latter is the spirit of the ancestors. This spirit is linked to the ancestors who have links with the living. These are spirits of family members who died a long time ago and some spirits represent those who are gone not long ago.

In precolonial times, if a person murdered a member of another family, his/her family would pay back to the bereaved family in the form of a girl who was given in marriage to the family so that she would bear a child to replace the one who died. This was a violation of human rights and the girl child had no choice but to comply. In this period, marriages were coerced, and women would just comply since it was believed that marriage was for the woman to bear children so that the name of the clan would be maintained (Mangena and Ndlovu 2013). Cultural practices, like wife inheritance and appeasing ancestral spirits posed a challenge too for women as they could not oppose what was sanctioned by society and women were also not involved in planning and decision making. Some men said that the women's role is in the kitchen and it was their responsibility to look after children, claiming that there cannot be two women in the same house. Women seek permission on various issues from their husbands who may deny them. This on its own shows that women are marginalised there and have no say. Men do not seem to support programmes that empower women. In most cases, they still cling on to the patriarchal practices which place women below them.

### **3.8 The place of women among the Tonga**

The Tonga are a Bantu ethnic group inhabiting the northern part of Zimbabwe. The majority of them are found in the Binga district in Matabeleland North Province (Makoni, Makoni and Nyika, 2008). There are some Tonga that have been assimilated in other regions of Matabeleland North, like Lupane and Nkayi and some in Bulawayo Province due to work commitments. The

Tonga regard themselves as a marginalised group who live close to Lake Kariba and are surrounded by other districts. They live in a communal area and are surrounded by national Parks. Historically, they settled along Lake Kariba and later stretched to Binga, Victoria Falls and other parts of Matabeleland. They speak the ChiTonga language and also Ndebele and Shona languages that are spoken in Zimbabwe (Mudimba 2000). In precolonial times, the Tonga were well known for a matriarchal tradition, a system where they trace their clan names through their mother's side showing that women held a higher position than men. However, in the colonial era, the matrilineal tradition gradually changed due to intermarriages with the patrilineal groups like the Shona, Ndebele and Nambya ethnic groups in other districts of Matabeleland who are patrilineal. The change to patrilineal practice has enabled men to have control over women who had an upper hand in precolonial times, even within their families.

In precolonial times, women were expected to carry out all their household duties without any disgruntlement. Performing these duties was viewed as being part and parcel of impressing their husbands. They had no thoughts of delegating these duties to someone else in the home other than themselves, and they believed this is an assignment bestowed upon them which they had to do. The Tonga are faced with male dominance due to their tribal, cultural, and educational background (Mudimba 2000). Gender plays a critical aspect among the baTonga culture and so women contributed equally like men in the development of society in precolonial times. Patriarchy was not a key player in the male dominance, it was only cultivated by the colonial system. Certain cultural practices, religion among other factors have pressed down the status of Tonga women. In Africa, women are equally instrumental to the economic and political development of society (Mudimba 2020). Among the Tonga women very few are into politics. One reason is that they do not feel confident to be involved in politics and they feel that it is easier to delegate the role to men.

### **3.9 The place of women among the Kalanga**

The Kalanga are an ethnic group found in Bulilima and Mangwe districts, which are part of the districts in Matabeleland located south west of Zimbabwe. Their history centres around the hegemony of the Ndebele since the nineteenth century. This is when Mzilikazi and his followers invaded and settled in the region south west of Zimbabwe among the Kalanga and other ethnic groups, like the Sotho and Venda. In the colonial era, the Kalanga language was not official. Despite this lack of recognition, they got linked to the Ndebele since they had a history that they shared. Despite being under the umbrella of Ndebele, they held on to their traditional identity



(Msindo 2002).

Historically, the Kalanga migrated to Southern Africa and, through assimilation they mixed with other Bantu ethnic groups (Msindo 2012). They have, however, lobbied for the government of Zimbabwe to recognise them in a number of ways. They require recognition like the Ndebele with whom they live side by side. In postcolonial times, at the amendment of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Kalanga language like other minority languages, was recognised as an official language. Today, the language is taught in primary and secondary schools in Bulilima and Mangwe Districts in Matabeleland South Province. The Kalanga worship *Mwali* or *Ngwali*. The origins of the cult are debatable. The Supreme Being is believed to stay in various shrines found in Matabeleland South like Njelele, Dula, Manyangwa and others. The main shrine is the Njelele in the Matopo hills). The Kalanga are a minority group like Tonga, Sotho and Venda.

In precolonial times and today the Kalanga women in rural areas played/play important religious roles. They were/are responsible for approaching *Mwali* to ask for rain when there is a drought in this part of the country or when the rainy season approaches. Women play a significant role in traditional ceremonies, being responsible for thanking the Supreme Being for the good harvests. The women who do these dances are known as *amawosana* the rain dancers who appease *Ngwali*. In the past they had a special position too for appeasing other spirits who are less than *Mwali* and are called the *izishumba*. These would possess women only and not men (Zvobgo 1979). The Kalanga believed in the existence of these ancestral spirits who wandered in the bush seeking for a host among family members of that particular clan. When the *Shumba* spirit possessed a girl she would fall sick and would only get better once she succumbed to it. Father J. O'Neil of the Roman Catholic Church confirmed that the girl would be influenced by a woman who would influence her to get married in that family of the woman. This was child abuse as the innocent child was coerced to be married into this family. These responsibilities are still endowed upon women in the Kalanga ethnic group even today despite the introduction of Christianity. In this way women have played a pivotal role in the shaping of the Kalanga identity (Dube 2020).

### **3.10 The place of women among the Ndebele**

The history of the Ndebele has been dealt with at length in the preceding chapters. There is abundant information on this ethnic group in primary and secondary sources from Euro-centric and Afro-centric writers. The Ndebele are the second largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe found in the south western part of the country. In precolonial times, the worldview of the Ndebele ethnic group was

that there was division of labour within a family setup which was determined by situations and circumstances not imposed by anyone. Members of the family did their duties accordingly without any question or complaints. Siziba and Wood (2015) say women were confined to doing domestic chores like producing food and feeding the entire family. Men provided security in the home and other duties like fighting in the wars. According to Nyathi (2019) men cleared the fields and women would be tilling the cleared land.

The colonial rule brought changes in this well organised situation where there was division of labour. The Ndebele ethnic group whose practices (Siziba and Wood 2015) were guided by myths of creation, were substituted with the Christian ideas of creation. This was a strategy of the colonisers who knew that the best way to succeed in their mission of colonising the Ndebele was to make a breakthrough using their beliefs and practices. They substituted the Ndebele myth of creation (where men and women were created at the same level) with their Christian one where the woman was created out of the rib of the man. In the process the gender roles were changed, and women were to be confined to the private domain and seen as assistants. There was no more equality between men and women or division of labour within the family set up. According to Nnaemeka (1998) women were now regarded as assistants to men while the latter were viewed superior. However, there are certain cultural practices that underpin the status of women that remained unchanged like the payment of lobola. This is the money paid by the husband to in laws. African feminists like Oduyoye (1995) say creation myth rubber stamped these practices and this affected the status of women among the Ndebele and Africa in general.

One would say gender roles have not changed much since males take leading roles among the Ndebele but there has been a slight paradigm shift as men are still engaged in hard and demanding jobs and women confined in the home chores and more in the food production and preparation. Women have been relegated to these roles because of their nature. They give life and nurture it. They have accepted these roles since they are naturally skilful in providing food for their families from conception until the child reaches maturity. According to Bourdillon (1993) in traditional rural setting men depended on women for the production and preparation of food and this has made them appreciate the role they played and would not want to offend them. However, in colonial times men still had control over the economic asserts of the family and the wife too because of authority in colonial times where they were in charge of the sales and would take the money and use it as they pleased. Motherhood is a gift which has elevated their status in society. Some women participated in religious ceremonies and others acted as spirit mediums and they would use this power to control men. The problem is that there were no balances, in the home setup and women are seen to do more

work than men. The only problem is that all these roles were not documented in the precolonial times. They are like untold stories that have been hidden in the history of the past.

In the 21st century where women have access to education and the business environment, the choice of marriage lies solely with them. Women are delaying the marriage process for various reasons. In postcolonial Zimbabwe, there are certain cultural practices which have not changed despite colonialism like, the practice of *lobola* that is the bride price (money paid to in laws by the man in exchange for their daughter in marriage) which has remained unchanged, although its value is now very high unlike in precolonial times where it was just a mere token of appreciation that the in-laws had benefited an additional member in the family who would help in procreation and maintain the clan name. Women nowadays have tried to challenge patriarchy by not getting married as they seem self-sufficient and see no need to depend on men.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

The chapter offered a review of literature with a focus on the waves of feminism to demonstrate how these discourses developed. Particular attention was paid to the role that women played in African Indigenous Religion from a general perspective of the types of the feminist theory identified. Furthermore, the role and status of women in Sub-Saharan Africa was discussed with a focus on a few countries that make up this region in Africa. The roles and status of women in Zimbabwe was discussed with a bias towards the Shona, Ndebele, Tonga and Kalanga, the last three ethnic groups being the inhabitants of Matabeleland as the area of study. The Ndebele woman was located in a historical framework in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras. The role of women was examined in the family where they played a major role in the precolonial era, in the upkeep of the family yet their status was changed to be highly marginalised in the colonial period. Changes were noted in the postcolonial era, where the government of Zimbabwe has introduced a number of policies that favour women so as to uplift them. The next chapter looks at the method that shall be employed in collecting the data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters provided an overview of the feminist theories highlighting those that are related to the study. The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological approach which will guide the data collection process. The methodology of the study will assist the researcher to gather information on the roles of women in the Ndebele society, thus answering the research questions of the study. Qualitative methods of data collection are employed, such as interviews and focus group. Women and men were selected from rural and urban areas of three provinces of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe. The chapter includes a discussion of the research design, data collection approach, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, delimitations, ethical considerations and lastly a conclusion.

### **4.2 Research design**

According to Chiromo (2006) research design is the overall pattern of what the research will look like. In a way, it contains guidelines that will be followed by the researcher throughout the whole process of conducting the study. Blanche and Durrheim (1999) assert that research should provide a plan that specifies how the research is going to be executed in such a way that it answers the research questions clearly. In order for knowledge to be accepted, it has to be based on data that will be gathered using recognised methods. According to Creswell (2002) research methodology refers to an approach that the researcher uses when carrying out a particular enquiry.

The research instrument for both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions was open-ended, carefully translated into Ndebele and Kalanga languages by the researcher for the benefit of the elderly individual interviewees. The interviews were generally conducted in settings where the interviewees felt comfortable for example, in their places of residence in case of the individual participants. The focus group was held at the workplace of participants, a familiar place to them. None of the prospective participants who was approached for an interview declined. In fact, most of the interviewees found it interesting and they were eager to engage in the discussion.

This research follows a qualitative paradigm which is more ideal for feminist research. Qualitative research helps to bring out voices which are often silenced (Frisby, Maguire and Reid,

2009). According to Dooley (1995:259) the qualitative methodology is ‘based on semi-structured questions usually in a group setting’. It gives a detailed description of a phenomenon and hence it is also known as a ‘thick description’ (Stausberg & Engler 2011:333).

Qualitative research has a few disadvantages that should be taken into account by the researcher. Participants may pretend to be what they are not, only to please the researcher. Field researchers observe the behaviour of participants and listens to their narratives so as to present findings in their work. At times, the researchers become biased and reflect on their own experiences, and this can affect the final outcome. Esterberg (2002:48) says feminist scholars have criticised the researchers who, they say, have a tendency of being socially higher than the participants. This superiority complex did not prevail in this study; instead, there were reciprocal relations between the researcher and participants as the researcher was able to be on the same level with the participants by arranging a circular sitting arrangement for a focus group discussion and being at the same physical level with the respondents. Also the researcher was being polite and reassured them that she was seeking to get information from them and was not judgmental on any of their views.

The researcher used the phenomenology perspectives in the study, since the research interview questions were purposed to inform on the gender issues that the study seeks to explore, like the primary and secondary sources mentioned in the previous chapter. Qutoshi (2018:218) says ‘phenomenology’ is the study of a phenomenon perceived by human beings at a deeper level of understanding in a specific situation with a detailed description and interpretation of lived experiences. This idea is relevant in the study which tries to investigate on the lives of Ndebele women whose status was affected by colonialism as their lives were changed and made to be confined to the private domain yet in the precolonial era they were treated in a favourable way. Stausberg & Engler (2011) allude to the fact that, in religion, phenomenology draws us towards the experiences that are supposed to underlie religious life and it has to do with description of lived experiences. Hence, participants who lived during the colonial period were able to relate their experiences, for example, like wives being beaten by their husbands due to marital problems that had been encountered. Stausberg & Engler (2011:333) say some scholars refer to phenomenology as ‘lived religion’ since it gives the ways in which people behave in a particular setting relating their life experiences as they interact.

Cox (2001) as a leading phenomenologist in the study of African Indigenous Religion used the phenomenological method. According to Aguwa (1995:5) the phenomenological approach is

appropriate in the African context as it ‘calls for a new approach to the concretely experienced phenomenon’. Chitando (2005) says a phenomenological approach is the ability to view reality from the point of view of participants. This phenomenological approach focuses on the integrity of specific religions respecting the views of the believers and not treat African Religion as childish superstitions (Chitando 2005:8) In this regard the study shall focus on the narratives of the participants on how religion has had an effect on the roles and status of Ndebele women. According to Stausberg & Engler (2011:337) contemporary phenomenology tries to show the world as it is lived by people through their testimonies as they relate their experiences, then they are analysed to come up with a common experience.

The researcher also used the ethnographic method, where she interacted with the participants and interpreted a cultural and social setting of a group of people. This approach to research relies on the researcher engaging in direct observations of people in their natural settings in order to understand social life from the perspective of the participants (Bailey 2018). This choice of the type of research was influenced by the topic which requires an enquiry from selected participants in Matabeleland provinces, focusing on the three periods: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times. The participants were going to be guided by oral history to narrate even in their discussions on the precolonial period. Some of the participants lived close enough to the colonial era so they got information first-hand from parents and relatives who lived in the precolonial era. The researcher was guided by this paradigm, and through interviewing chiefs, educationists and other prominent community members, this research sought to generate data that would give a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the Ndebele Indigenous Religion on the status and role of women in the Matabeleland provinces. The choice of participants like chiefs and educationists was that the former are the custodian of Indigenous African Religion and the latter are educationists who have studied Ndebele history.

### **3 Data collection approach**

The study is located in Zimbabwe a former British colony in the three provinces of Matabeleland which are Bulawayo Metropolitan, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South and speaks across the divide between precolonial and post-colonial practices of the Ndebele. Data was collected from August to October 2020 during the period of lockdown in Zimbabwe where inter-city movement was prohibited because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher reached out to those interviewees in the rural areas and towns and the city of Bulawayo using telephonic interviews and face to face encounter. During the period of Covid-19 at some point the spread was less threatening,

movement was allowed hence the survey was done during this period that this face to face encounters was permissible if one adhered to Covid-19 protocols like putting on mask, maintaining social distance and use of sanitiser and quarantine of those with Covid-19 symptoms. Telephone interviews were appropriate as the researcher would not move around as would happen in the field. Those in the city of Bulawayo were reached through face to face encounter, while those in the rural areas and towns in Matabeleland North and South provinces were reached by telephone. The advantage of telephonic interviews is that they can cover many people at a low cost. Also, telephonic communication was an advantage, since the interviews were conducted with no visual contact, and the respondents freely answered their questions in their best possible way with no possible fear of the researcher. Most of the interviews were done using this method and yielded good results.

#### **4.4 Population and sampling techniques**

A population is defined by Cohen and Marion (1994) as a group of individuals to which the researcher would like the results of a study to be generalised. Gall and Borg (1989) further observe that a population contains some common characteristics that are of interest to the researcher and his/her specific study. Thus, the researcher administers his/her research tool and collects needed data.

Gray (2009:148) defines sampling as 'a selection of people from the entire population'. In order to come out with a reasonable sample for this study, the researcher involved participants with information on the history of Ndebele and some elderly people who uphold the cultural values. Hence, the selection of interviewees was based on stratified sampling in which a cross section of respondents was done comprising men and women from a wide geographical area of Matabeleland who had knowledge of Ndebele history. These included well known scholars on Ndebele history like Nyathi Pathisa. The focus group discussion comprised of well-known members of the College who are engaged in research and some studied Ndebele history. Since the study was meant to find out if the Ndebele Indigenous Religion had an impact on Ndebele women, the sampling was done on both rural and urban based participants. The sample comprised chiefs, the custodian of the Ndebele culture who stay in rural areas and the elderly participants who witnessed two periods of study, that is, the precolonial and the colonial era. The study used participants from the younger generation who have witnessed the postcolonial era. The participants also had oral information about the precolonial period from their parents and grandparents who lived under that period. The middle aged and the young generation who were active in the social sphere and known to be

researchers who also witnessed the colonial and the post-colonial era were also sampled.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) it is better to have fewer interviewees and be better prepared and have more thoroughly analysed interviews. Hence the sample involved 24 individual interviews and one focus group discussion comprising 8 participants. The researcher selected 12 women and 12 men in the individual participant group and 4 men and 4 women in the focus group (an equal number to avoid gender bias). These were selected from different sections of society and the study chose equal numbers to avoid gender bias. The focus group comprised lecturers at a teachers' college in Bulawayo. This is the researcher used colleagues from her workplace to limit the face to face contact due to covid pandemic. Generally, focus groups use convenience samples hence the reason for using college lecturers. The number of interviewees was limited to eight so as to conduct deep interviews of individual experiences and perceptions. The eight members were representative of the population of those with knowledge of the Ndebele culture.

The sampled participants cut across the three categories of the of traditional Ndebele society namely the *Zansi*, the *Enhla* and the *Hole*, who were asked to share their views on the role and status of women in Ndebele society. The researcher made sure the participants were not coerced to answer in a specific manner but were responding to questions in their subjective opinions of situations, relationships and events carefully selected in Ndebele religion so as to construct status and the roles of women. Engaging the participants for the constructions of status and role of women, the study unearthed the sentiment towards the oppression of women in order to construct the women's experiences and status which was left out by historians.

#### **4.5 Data collection methods**

Data collection refers to the process and ways of soliciting information from participants. There are various instruments that can be used to collect data and the researcher focused on the use of four different methods, namely: interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and document analysis. The justification for having more than one method in collecting data is to allow for triangulation, which according to Babbie (1989:99) is 'the use of several different research methods to test the same finding'. These methods of collecting data helped in the comparison of results.

The methods used in this study were semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group discussion administering open-ended questions. The research instrument for both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions were open-ended and carefully translated



to Ndebele and Kalanga languages by the researcher for the benefit of the elderly individual interviewees.

#### 4.5.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. It allows the interviewer to have a conversation with the interviewee and, in this particular study, to determine how women in Matabeleland had their roles and status affected by the indigenous religion in precolonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs. The semi-structured interviews were appropriate, since they allowed the interviewees to be free to express themselves in settings where they were relaxed and comfortable. According to Bernard (2006) semi-structured interviewing is the best option in situations where one might not get another opportunity to interview someone, as it gives the interviewer an opportunity to manage and probe the questions to further keep track of the issues required to cover during the interview session.

The interviewer has an opportunity of conducting informal communication as they can probe further to obtain answers from the participant. Therefore, it is flexible, since the researcher can divert and bring in other questions related to the ones they have. In this type of interview, the participants who cannot read and write are catered for as the interviewer can translate the questions into their mother language, or even explain the questions for clarity. However, interviews can have demerits as they tend to be time consuming. They require a process of interviewing and transcribing the information, then analysing and reporting it (Stausberg & Engler 2011). They may be costly if one has to purchase an audio recorder for the process of capturing information accurately and time consuming since the researcher needs to give the respondent time to think and analyse the question before answering.

The study involved 24 individual interviews with a bias towards the elderly men and women ranging from the age of 39 to 95. The age categories were meant to reveal changes of social practices and experiences of Ndebele women from pre-colonial times to the present. For anonymity and personal identification purposes, the interviewees have been numbered participant 1-24. The profiles of the participants have been indicated in Table 4.1 and will be revisited again in the next chapter with a more detailed description of the participants at the data analysis stage.

The table shows the demographic data of the participants. More information will be unpacked in the next chapter when the data will be analysed.

**Table 4.1: Individual interviewees**

<b>PSEUDONYM</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>DISTRICT</b>
Participant 1	Female	95	Former Teacher	35 years	Bulawayo	Mzilikazi
Participant 2	Female	85	Former lecturer	35 years	Mat North	Binga
Participant 3	Female	84	Housewife		Mat South	Mzingwane
Participant 4	Female	78	Housewife		Bulawayo	Khami
Participant 5	Female	77	Chief	5 years	Mat South	Bulilima
Participant 6	Female	71	Housewife		Mat North	Tsholotsho
Participant 7	Female	69	Informal trader	10 years	Mat South	Umzingwane
Participant 8	Female	67	Traditional healer	10 years	Mat North	Nkayi
Participant 9	Female	66	Teacher	30 years	Mat North	Hwange
Participant 10	Female	64	Housewife		Mat South	Gwanda
Participant 11	Female	47	Reverend	6 years	Mat North	Bubi
Participant 12	Female	39	Youth advisor	5 years	Bulawayo	Mzilikazi
Participant 13	Male	85	Retired Lecturer	36 years	Bulawayo	Umguzu
Participant 14	Male	84	Former Teacher	36 years	Mat South	Mangwe
Participant 15	Male	81	Writer	36 years	Bulawayo	Khami
Participant 16	Male	79	Tour guide	5 years	Mat South	Matobo
Participant 17	Male	78	Former teacher	31 years	Bulawayo	Bulawayo Central
Participant 18	Male	69	Former teacher	36 years	Bulawayo	Reigate
Participant 19	Male	68	Self employed	-	Mat South	Bulilima
Participant 20	Male	65	Lecturer	31 years	Mat North	Hwange

Participant 21	Male	63	Senator	5 years	Bulawayo	Reigate
Participant 22	Male	63	Lecturer	32 years	Mat South	Mangwe
Participant 23	Male	60	Chief	5years	Mat South	Gwanda
Participant 24	Male	60	Farmer		Mat North	Bubi

#### 4.5.2 Focus group

Fern and Fern (2001) states that focus group discussions are group interviews. They involve an interaction that allows for cross-pollination of ideas on a particular topic. The group that was involved had to discuss together the issues related to the status and role of women in Matabeleland and how these were affected by the Ndebele Indigenous Religion. Only one focusgroup was conducted due to the problem of the contagious Covid-19 pandemic. People were not supposed to gather in groups, and they were to maintain a social distance. As a result, elderly people who are more vulnerable, were understandably, not willing to gather and mingle with others. Scholars have different views regarding the composition of the focus group. Qutoshi (2018) says the number depends on the qualitative design used. Some say between eight and ten, while others say there is no one approach to the number of participants. A large group can lead to chaos, as all participants would want to say something and hence, this becomes time consuming.

Stausberg & Engler (2011) say focus groups can be better than the individual interviews, as they help those who may have problems with the knowledge of the topic. They always gain from the discussion of other participants in the group. Should the group be too large, some may not get a chance to say anything, as the group will be giving their opinion or attitude with regards to a phenomenon. However, if participants are too few, then there will be less views shared. In this research, the number depended on the availability of participants who were willing to take part in the interview and the availability of new information on the topic. Although researchers have proposed some very loose guidelines, Brinkmann (2013) suggests that qualitative interview studies typically have no more than 15 participants. These guidelines are somewhat erroneous, as each study will differ depending on the type of method.

The research used eight participants due to the situation of Covid-19 pandemic that was prevailing, as the researcher wanted to avoid having too large a group as this would potentially compromise the health of participants and the researcher. The advantages of the focus group discussions are that there will be a variety of ideas discussed and this allows for a large amount of interaction

within a short space of time, making it cost effective (Esterberg 2002). In focus group discussions, ideas are developed collectively: if some forget a pertinent issue, the others can bring it up. Groups are useful in exploring topical issues. However, a focus group discussion has a disadvantage of the presence of the researcher, which could inhibit the smooth running of the process, as the participants might not feel free to share their views. The idea of video filming the whole process could also disturb the participants who might not understand the purpose of using the device in the process. The researcher mitigated this limitation by explaining to the respondents the need to record using an audio recorder. The Focus group discussion in this study referred to earlier on comprised of participants, named participants 1-8 for personal identification and according to ages, from the eldest to the youngest. For a clearer presentation, women will be presented first in the profiles. The ages of participants in the focus group were arranged from ages 45 to 64 and, for a gender balance, the researcher decided to select a similar number of participants. The profiles of the participants in the Focus group are indicated in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Focus group**

PSEUDONYM	GENDER	AGE	OCCUPATION	WORK EXPERIENCE	PROVINCE	DISTRICT
Participant 1	Female	60	Lecturer	32	Matabeleland South	Umzingwane
Participant 2	Female	57	Lecturer	31	Bulawayo	Khami
Participant 3	Female	50	Lecturer	28	Matabeleland South	Beitbridge
Participant 4	Female	45	Lecturer	23	Bulawayo	Bulawayo Central
Participant 5	Male	64	Lecturer	35	Matabeleland North	Nkayi
Participant 6	Male	63	Lecturer	34	Matabeleland South	Gwanda
Participant 7	Male	62	Lecturer	33	Matabeleland North	Lupane
Participant 8	Male	46	Lecturer	29	Matabeleland North	Umguza

#### 4.6 Delimitations

The researcher met challenges of some participants who were afraid to participate during this

period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation made it difficult for the researcher to go out to the field to collect data, since there were periodic lockdown restrictions in the country. The researcher reduced the limitations by conducting telephonic interviews with participants in the field and with some participants in urban centres. For a face-to-face interaction with participants, the researcher provided masks and sanitisers for them and maintained social distancing. Furthermore, the issue of focus group discussion was reduced to one group and the research was conducted at the researcher's workplace with colleagues of the researcher. At the researcher's office they were in their familiar place. The researcher also observed ethical principles in order to ensure maximum cooperation from her participants. The issue of ethics will be dealt with at length below.

#### **4.7 Ethical consideration**

Social research deals with human subjects, hence the need to consider ethical issues. The researcher obtained an ethical clearance certificate from the Unisa College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Since the research involved human beings, the participants were given an opportunity to choose to participate or to discontinue. The researcher had to avoid using them as means to an end which is, getting information she wanted at their own expense. The use of their information without their consent was violation of their rights as well as using their confidential information without their permission. Hence the researcher gave participants written information on the description of the research and consent forms to sign as an approval that they agree to undertake the research. For those who could not read and write the researcher explained to them to get their verbal consent and in signing the consent form they used initials or an 'x' This document helped in making the whole process authentic and valuable to the interviewees (see Appendix A for the attached Ethical Clearance Certificate from Unisa).

The researcher made sure that all participants from marginalised sections of society, like in strong patriarchal societies and other sections from certain religious societies were respected (Stausberg & Engler 2011). The researcher did not collect any data without the acknowledgement and consent of participants. She explained the rationale of conducting the research and asked for permission to interview the participants. Stausberg & Engler (2011) say that a good ethical research involves a respect of the interests of the participants and appreciation of their differences. Those who were not able to express themselves in English were allowed to use vernacular so as to express themselves well. Gray (2009:370) says, in qualitative research, interviews function as a way of giving people feelings and thoughts and means of establishing rapport

between the participant and the researcher. That is why Esterberg (2002:48) says ‘ethical issues are of critical importance to researchers because they tend to present themselves as belonging to a higher class than the respondents’.

The researcher tried to ensure the respect of the respondents by maintaining their dignity and integrity. She did not show off as one having more knowledge and education, but humbled herself to their level, especially to the less educated ones who were elderly and the housewives. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in a place that was quiet and familiar to them and a safe place where the participants and the researcher were not in danger. Since it was conducted during the period of the Covid 19 pandemic, the researcher made sure that the environment was safe and social distancing was maintained. The participants were each issued with a mask for protection. Confidentiality is one other aspect that the researcher assured the respondents of. She explained that the information they gave would remain confidential. Stausberg & Engler (2011) say researchers should strive to protect the privacy of participants and not disclose what they say for use by other people without the consent of participants. Researchers must show respect for their participants’ wishes and not use their information as a means to getting information wanted.

In the focus group, the researcher sought permission from the college administration to conduct the interview. The members of the focus group were told the intentions of the research and all written documentation was availed to them to familiarise them with the whole process and permission was sought to record the session. They agreed to partake in the interview and also signed the consent form after the session.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

The chapter looked at the type of research that the study engaged in and the justification for choosing the type of research. Methods of collecting data were also discussed with particular attention paid to the merits and the demerits of the instruments for collecting the data. The members that constituted the focus group had their profiles indicated. Ways of addressing the limitations in the instruments that were identified were also discussed. Sampling techniques were highlighted as well as the groups of people that were interviewed and the rationale for choosing them, that is, their familiarity with Ndebele history and their position in society. The setting for the field research was identified in the three provinces that make up Matabeleland region, which are Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South provinces. The next chapter concentrates on presenting data that has been generated in this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter gave an outline of how the field work was conducted, showing the design of the study, and the sampled participants and how they were selected and their demographic profiles. The research instruments were discussed and validated. This chapter focuses on the presentation of the research findings based on the analysis of data which was collected and analysed with the help of the postcolonial theories and African feminist theory discussed in chapter 1 and 3 respectively.

### 5.2 Biographical profiles of the participants

The first part will deal with the demographic profiles of participants, one for the 24 individual participants and the other for the 8 focus group discussion participants adding up to a total of thirty two (32) respondents from the three provinces in the Matabeleland region.

The individual interviewees and the focus group have been arranged in tables 5.1 and 5.2 respectively beginning with the eldest female to the youngest, then the eldest male to the youngest, with pseudonyms, gender, age, occupation, work experience, province and district stated. Data was presented and the data themes will emerge and will be analysed with the help of the African feminist theories discussed in Chapter 3 and the postcolonial theory dealt with in Chapter 1.

The researcher will embark on coding the data, where key themes and common patterns will be highlighted. These themes were assessed to identify common issues from the different groups of people who contributed to the data presented. The first part will deal with the biographic profiles of participants, one for individual participants and the other for the focus group where the researcher targeted a total of thirty-two (32) respondents who included traditional and community leaders, twelve (12) educationists and twenty (20) local community members from the three provinces in the Matabeleland region. The individual interviews and the focus group were arranged on table 4.2 beginning with the eldest female to the youngest, then eldest male to the youngest, all ranked according to pseudonym, gender, age, occupation, work experience, province and district.

The demographic information of all the participants is presented in the Tables 5.1 and 5.2 reproduced here from chapter 4 using pseudonyms. In total, twenty-four individual interviews and

one focus group interview were conducted. The following is the demographic information of participants who were interviewed individually and the focus group. The information will be presented using false names for instance ‘participant 1’ to ‘participant 24’ and for focus group ‘participant 1’ to ‘participant 8’.

**Table 5.1: Demographic information of individual participants**

<b>PSEUDONYM</b>	<b>GEN- DER</b>	<b>AG E</b>	<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>WORK EX- PERIENCE</b>	<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>DISTRICT</b>
Participant 1	Female	95	Former Teacher	35 years	Bulawayo	Mzilikazi
Participant 2	Female	85	Former lecturer	35 years	Mat North	Binga
Participant 3	Female	84	Housewife		Mat South	Mzingwane
Participant 4	Female	78	Housewife		Bulawayo	Khami
Participant 5	Female	77	Chief	5 years	Mat South	Bulilima
Participant 6	Female	71	Housewife		Mat North	Tsholotsho
Participant 7	Female	69	Informal trader	10 years	Mat South	Umzingwane
Participant 8	Female	67	Traditional healer	10 years	Mat North	Nkayi
Participant 9	Female	66	Teacher	30 years	Mat North	Hwange
Participant 10	Female	64	Housewife		Mat South	Gwanda
Participant 11	Female	47	Reverend	6 years	Mat North	Bubi
Participant 12	Female	39	Youth advisor	5 years	Bulawayo	Mzilikazi
Participant 13	Male	85	Retired Lecturer	36 years	Bulawayo	Umguza
Participant 14	Male	84	Former Teacher	36 years	Mat South	Mangwe
Participant 15	Male	81	Writer	36 years	Bulawayo	Khami
Participant 16	Male	79	Tour guide	5 years	Mat South	Matobo
Participant 17	Male	78	Former teacher	31 years	Bulawayo	Bulawayo Central



Participant 18	Male	69	Former teacher	36 years	Bulawayo	Reigate
Participant 19	Male	68	Self employed		Mat South	Bulilima
Participant 20	Male	65	Lecturer	31 years	Mat North	Hwange
Participant 21	Male	63	Senator	5 years	Bulawayo	Reigate
Participant 22	Male	63	Lecturer	32 years	Mat South	Mangwe
Participant 23	Male	60	Chief	5years	Mat South	Gwanda
Participant 24	Male	60	Farmer		Mat North	Bubi

Note: Some of the participants did not disclose their years of experience

### 5.3 Summary of participants' profiles

The demographic information of participants presented above shows a total of 24 participants with fifty percent females and fifty percent males - a gender balance to avoid a bias towards females since the researcher is also female. Although the study is related to women, the researcher deliberately chose to include males in the research to hear what they have to say on this issue of role and status of females with whom they interact in society in various ways. It would be appropriate to gather views from men so that the findings are not biased towards women. Table 5.1 shows the participants' gender, age, occupation, province, and district and work experience. Females were presented first on the table, since the study is related to them and range from the eldest to the youngest. The information from the elderly was presented first as they could have more information due to their experiences. The majority of participants are the elderly who have a recollection of the past events and are likely to provide as much information on women as possible through their oral testimonies. Participant 1, the eldest in the group was a Nguni descendant who gave information of how she was treated when she got married to a Kalanga who are regarded as the *hole* (these were people who were not of Nguni origin who were already in Zimbabwe when the Ndebele ethnic group arrived). Participant 2 was a *hole* who remembered very well how *lobola* was paid for her. Participant 11 and 12 were the youngest among the females. The latter is a Chairperson of the Youth and Women Economic and Empowerment project in Matabeleland and the former, a Reverend of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). Although they could not have had knowledge of the history of the Ndebele, they were selected so that they might give views of postcolonial Zimbabwe, since the elderly

could not have some of the information of the government policies that have been implemented after independence. Also, participant 11 would help elaborate the position of leadership in their church. Participant 5 was a female chief of Dombodema in Bulilima who presides over all issues to do with settlement of disputes in the arrangements of traditional ceremonies in Bulilima district. She provided information on precolonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe and the reaction of her society. She also provided information on women's empowerment in independent Zimbabwe.

Of interest also, in the group, are participants 7 and 10 who are housewives engaged in cross-border trading. They buy and resell goods from other countries. They provided information on how women fend for their families even when they are not married. Participants 3 and 4 are widows who are not employed but earn a living by tilling the land and producing food for family consumption. Participant 8 was a traditional healer who was responsible for offering traditional medicine to the locals in Nkayi district and was also involved in rain dances when the community went to ask for rain at a local sacred shrine. The male participants were generally from members of society from different categories ranging from former lecturers, writers, teachers, senator, chief and a tour guide. The highlights were Participant 23, a Chief in Gwanda district in Matabeleland South Province with similar duties with Participant 5 who is based in Bulilima, who was involved in solving domestic problems in society and making sure the laws are adhered to in the community. Participant 13 is an educationist with knowledge of the history of Ndebele from pre-colonial period to present Zimbabwe, while Participant 21 is a senator in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, in Kami district who was elected 2018. Senators are responsible for passing legislation that comes from the parliament of Zimbabwe. Hence, they also approve laws that have to do with the empowerment of women. Of interest also was Participant 16, a tour guide at Amagugu Cultural Centre in Matobo district responsible for managing the cultural centre that exhibits all artefacts to do with Ndebele culture. The majority of participants were employed in the civil service and some retired in the field, hence, they were likely to give valid information on Ndebele History.

The majority of participants were drawn out of Bulawayo Province and were interviewed through means of the telephone due to the problem of the Covid-19 pandemic, which restricted

movement out of the city. A closer look at the participants' details shows that the three provinces in Matabeleland were represented to a large extent. Work experience is one category that was also considered. The majority of respondents were formerly employed and had work experience ranging from 5 to 36 years.

**Table 5.2: Demographic information of participants in this focus group**

<b>PSEUDONYM</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>PROVINCE</b>	<b>DISTRICT</b>
Participant 1	Female	60	Lecturer	32 years	Matabeleland South	Umzingwane
Participant 2	Female	57	Lecturer	31 years	Bulawayo	Khami
Participant 3	Female	50	Lecturer	28 years	Matabeleland South	Beitbridge
Participant 4	Female	45	Lecturer	23 years	Bulawayo	Bulawayo Central
Participant 5	Male	64	Lecturer	35 years	Matabeleland North	Nkayi
Participant 6	Male	63	Lecturer	34 years	Matabeleland South	Gwanda
Participant 7	Male	62	Lecturer	33 years	Matabeleland North	Lupane
Participant 8	Male	46	Lecturer	29 years	Matabeleland North	Umguzha

## 5.4 Research questions

*Table 5.3: Individual interview questions*

Question number	Question
1.	Are the beliefs and practices of Ndebele Religion still being observed?
2.	What was the status of women in pre-colonial Ndebele society?
3.	What are your views on the roles and status of women in Ndebele Indigenous Religion?
4.	What impact did colonial rule have on gender relations among the Ndebele people?
5.	What was the impact of Christianity on the Ndebele beliefs and practices?
6.	What are your views on the theme of ‘women emancipation’ in post colonial Ndebele society?
7.	Is gender equity in post-colonial Zimbabwe possible among the Ndebele ethnic group?
8.	What is the present day government in Zimbabwe doing to help upgrade the socio-economic status of women?
9.	Do women play leading roles in indigenous Ndebele society, be it political, economic or social?
10.	What are some of the examples of leadership roles promoted in post colonial Zimbabwe?

In the presentation of questions for discussion, the study followed a chronological structure that is asking questions to do with the precolonial era first, the colonial and lastly the postcolonial era. The main discussion focused on the place of women and their role in religion. The responses from individuals were then linked to the actual historical research and aligned to the current role of women among the Ndebele ethnic group of which the description of the method and the details will follow in the discussion of results. It should be sufficient to mention this here without going into details as this part is an after the fact report of the process undertaken. Stausberg & Engler (2011) say it is always appropriate to formulate an interview guide with questions to be asked. These were formulated in a structure that required information for the pre-colonial era,

colonial and post- colonial with regards to how the Ndebele Indigenous Religion has had an impact on the roles and status of women in Matabeleland.

The first question explores the status of Ndebele religion and seeks to find out if the beliefs and practices are still being observed. The rationale for choosing the questions was to start from the general question of one's understanding of the Indigenous Religion, and to find out if the religion is still being practiced. The next two questions covered the period from pre-colonial era in order to understand the role of women during that period. Then the enquiry moved on to focus on the impact of colonial rule on the role and status of women among the Ndebele ethnic group. The impact of Christianity on Ndebele beliefs and practices was explored, since the majority of the Ndebele ethnic group are Christians owing to the missionaries who were granted permission by Mzilikazi and later, by Lobhengula to open missions in Matabeleland. The views of the respondents on the women's emancipation theme, the likelihood of gender equity and gender relations in traditional, political and social structures was examined. This

was to ascertain if participants were aware of general information on gender issues in this part of the country and Zimbabwe at large. The last three questions explored the government's efforts to upgrade the socio-economic status of women and leading roles that women play in the Ndebele society.

The five themes that emerged from the questions directed to the individual interviewees were:

Theme 1 -household work

Theme 2 - Religious influence

Theme 3 - Herbal specialists

Theme 4 -Politics and gender

Theme 5 - Gender equity

The questions below were for the focus group discussion.

**Table 5.4: Focus group questions**

<b>Question number</b>	<b>Question</b>
1.	Did women participate in Ndebele religious affairs in pre-colonial times?
2.	What was the role and status of women before the colonial era?
3.	Did the coming of Christianity and the colonial rule in 1868-1898 worsen or improve the role and status of women?
4.	What is the current status and role of women in religion in independent Zimbabwe?
5.	Does Ndebele religion uplift or suppress women today?

The questions discussed during the focus group interaction are presented in Table 5.4. In the formulation of these questions, the study followed a chronological structure just like that for the individual participants, where the questions were asked from a perspective of pre-colonial, colonial, to post-colonial eras. The first question had to do with the participation of women in religious affairs in the pre-colonial era. This was followed by a question on the roles and status of women in Ndebele Indigenous Religion before colonialism. The issue of the coming of Christianity and colonialism between 1868 and 1898 was explored, especially with regards to improvement or worsening of the situation on the roles and status of women in Matabeleland. There was a question on the status and role of women after independence and one to do with Ndebele religion to explore if it suppresses or uplifts women in the postcolonial era.

From the above questions, the researcher came up with the following emerging themes:

Theme 1 -Women emancipation

Theme 2 -Religion and gender

Theme 3-Politics and women involvement

All the emerging themes shall be discussed in the next section where data is presented.

## 5.5 Presentation and analysis of data

This section presents findings of the study based on the focus group discussion and individual interviews. The discussion of the findings will be presented in themes that emerged from the recorded transcriptions. The responses from the participants are not direct quotes from participants but similar responses were grouped together and presented in italics, then analysed using feminist perspectives and African Theologians discussed in Chapter 3 then finally a critical analysis shall be given below. The discussion below shall begin with the findings from the individual interviewees.

### Individual interviews

#### Theme 1: Household work

The participants gave several contributions on the role and status of women in precolonial Ndebele society. What appeared to be common in the responses was that the status and role of women were twofold. Some participants stated that women played important roles at the same time in some instances they were not supposed to participate in the state affairs.

**Participant 1, 2 and 17** shared the same views that *women were not in the public sphere, but would wake up very early work in the fields to cultivate and remove weeds at the same time expected to go home and cook for the family. They were involved in food production, cleaning, preparing food for family, collect firewood, and water and looking after children and also responsible for grooming girls into marriage. They also said that the women's most important possession was the granary where food was stored. That is the reason why they would be buried behind it in most cases when they passed on.*

The above views are in line with Black feminism which was developed by Walker (1992). Its main goal was to fight the injustices that Black African women suffered in their family lives. Collins (1990) confirmed the observation of Walker (1992) that Black women did cooking, cleaning, and executed other domestic duties that included and nurturing children. Apart from the duties mentioned above, King (1988) alluded to the fact that the that women were involved in reproduction, child rearing activities, home chores and expected to be good to people around them. In addition, Theologian feminists like Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) shared the same sentiments that women are the ones in charge of domestic chores such as preparing food,

fetching water and firewood and once these resources are in short supply or not available they get troubled.

The above contributions from feminists and theologians show similar trends with the participants' contributions who agreed that women did all duties and had to fend for the family to make sure it is well catered for. They have had a passion for feeding the family right from the idea that they are involved in carrying and nursing babies from conception. That is why they would work even in the fields and produce food to feed their families, even when their children were grown up. One would link this to the idea that women provide food from conception through the umbilical cord which is the centre of life a comparison of the woman is the central figure in her family (Hudson-Weems 1993). This serves to show how important women are as they carry life for all mankind. It is surprising to see them being marginalised and their status undermined yet they are the carriers of life. The males who seem to be head of household are what they are because of women. Society has created the idea of power that makes them superior over women 'who gave birth to the nation' Women produce and provide which in business terms is very important hence their importance too in the family. If there are no producers, then nothing will be sold. Similarly, if women are not there will be no children born. That is why men end up seeing them as tools, which are in this case very important. From the discussions above then it shows women are important and should not be looked down upon.

## **Theme 2: Religious influence**

With regards to the religious influence, some participants indicated that women were heavily involved in religious or cultural ceremonies including rain dancing and appeasing spirits.

According to **Participant 6, 16, 19 and 21** *women's role is spiritual as it cuts across all spheres of life. They played and still play a bigger role in rain making ceremonies and are a majority in the 'Hosanna' rain dancers who go to the well-known shrine in Matabeleland in Matobo district called Njelele to ask for rain. This practice is done by women and if there are men who happen to be part of the group, then they would be possessed by the spirit of a woman. Women do these dances which are known as mayile a Kalanga term meaning fertility dances where men are not supposed to pass anywhere near the place where this would be taking place, or else they would be beaten up by these spirits that possessed the women. During the normal hosanna dances men could come and watch and there were some men who were also Hosanna dancers. So women*



*were involved in rain dancing to appease the spirits so that they provide rain for the nation. Since the Ndebele relied on agriculture for food, there was need to have rains and the women were important in that regard.*

However, men had their own space as well where they collected bones and animal carcasses to burn them. African belief was that lack of rain was attributed to the filthy environment which angered the ancestors,

**Participant 22** *said old women became the host of the most powerful spirit and some would dance during the ritual for rain making ceremonies. If the mother passed away, succession would be taken by the first born female child. They had a huge responsibility in this regard, since they had a role of making sure the rain was invoked. They were responsible for brewing beer for the occasion and organising matters for the ceremony, which was very important, since the production of food relied upon the rain.*

**Participants 8, 14 and 16** *acknowledged the Ndebele Indigenous Religion has raised the status of women with a gift spirit possession who take advantage of the power and say what they want when they are possessed. These women have had an opportunity to rise in status, due to the respect they get from men out of fear of punishment from the ancestors. Women attain higher status on such occasions temporarily and when this is over they assume their usual position especially when they get home where men assume leading roles because of the patriarchal power that was bestowed upon them by social norms that are followed.*

**Participants 4 and 24** *said men used their power to eliminate women and they have made the kraal to be out of bounds for women as they were associated with menstruation which was believed to have a negative power on the livestock.*

According to Olajubu (2005) the issue of blood contributes to the construction of gender in religion and if women are not allowed in the sacred place while menstruating it is because the blood has power so it is believed that there would be a clash of this power with the one for the deity. Phiri (2021) is of the opinion that the fear of the menstrual blood by men has used the blood to deny women their status in society yet, Mafume et al (2016) are of the view that Menstrual blood is not considered as ordinary blood but blood but symbolises a woman's fertility.

Those who are still within the age of menstruation were /are not allowed to participate in the preparation of traditional beer for rain-prayer ceremonies. It is done by those who have reached

menopause stage.

The sacred place has power inherent in it so there should not be another power close by. The idea of women having this kind of power then makes them very important. Blood has life in it so the idea of women having that menstrual blood then means they have some very important power in them since they were bestowed with that ability to carry precious life then they are important.

Only men the head of the household who had the responsibility of approaching the ancestors to present problems affecting the family were allowed to enter. This scenario meant that women could not communicate directly with ancestors and possibly that men could misrepresent what was said by ancestors to their favour and women would not know this. With this theory in mind one would assume that Ndebele women also desired to enter the cattle kraal and participate in the process of communicating with ancestors, but they were not permitted to do so. They were side lined and were to be confined to the domestic issues and allow men to take a lead in ruling and running the political affairs of the nation. This shows they were undermined and could not implement any policies which led to their low position in society. The issue of women being involved in rain dances in places where men were not permitted their 'sacred space', which according to Chidester (1994:21) was 'a powerful place that appropriated, possessed, and owned and excluded certain classes of people' In this instance women could not allow men in their territory as it was their space. This was the time they received recognition and respect.

### **Theme 3- Herbal specialists**

According to **Participants 3, 9 and 15** *the Ndebele society was continually fighting and conquering other nations. Some women treated wounded soldiers as they possessed knowledge of herbs for the wounded.*

**Participant 10 and 11** *said majority of women were skilled in treating the barren women to conceive as they knew the type of herb to be taken. The women possessed this gift of being able to use herbs to heal the sick. Their status was raised in this regard since society looked upon them to assist in saving lives by nursing the sick.*

African feminists like Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) produced an interesting connection between women and nature as they showed that Africans view the earth as feminine as it is usually called Mother Earth (Mafume et al 2016). Furthermore, they said there is a relationship

between women and nature and since women are care givers and provide humanitarian work they can be compared to the earth which provides food to mankind.

The interaction of women and the environment made them possess a skill in identifying herbs that treat ailments which men do not have. The indigenous knowledge systems which they have acquired through their interaction with the environment looking for firewood and food in the forest is important for the preservation of Africa cultural heritage. As they interact with the forest they have made discoveries of herbs that are useful in curing ailments. The information on which herbs to use is usually communicated by the ancestors. This situation has helped to raise their status. Women administer these indigenous herbs (common in the rural areas in Matabeleland) to expectant mothers so that the unborn baby is preserved and protected from all harm.

#### **Theme 4 Politics and gender**

**Participants 8 and 15** were of the view that *women were important as they would exert power over man*, hence they mentioned the Ndebele proverb *'Umfazi kalankosi' (a woman has no king)*. *She would not attend court sessions, but would still advise the king or any one closer to the king. Although they had this power, they could not be elected to chieftaincy. They would say they could not be ruled by isidwaba (dress), implying that they could not be ruled by a female.*

Maathai (2006) says feminism theory focusses on the recognition of people as human persons and not by gender. It states that women's status is not the same throughout Africa and varies significantly between societies. Among the Ndebele women are looked down upon as people who could not lead or rule.

It seems in Ndebele society, women were looked down upon and viewed as insignificant, yet they contribute a lot in society. It is surprising to note that men despised women, yet they are born by women who they always regard with respect and great honour. Only when they refer to their wives do they seem to use that term which is meant to demean women. When they are unwell they look up to traditional healers who are mostly women for assistance.

**Participant 23** stated that *there were a few women who had significant political positions, like royal women who participated in public life as they would be consulted on political issues. Other women would advise kings through their husbands. 'Inxwala' ceremony or when they asked for rain. They were like managers, in charge of everything, at the death of a member in society they were, and are still, responsible for carryingstones to be laid on the grave.*

Hudson-Weems (1993) says the harmony between sexes was mostly affected by colonialism where women were relegated to the private domain while men were seen to dominate in the public sphere. This implies that women did have a status before the colonial era which was diluted in the colonial era. Some participants were of the view that women were side-lined and looked down upon as they were not allowed to make any decision in the home or public life.

**Participant 5** said as a female chief *she participates in indigenous practices like going to the sacred shrine called Njelele to ask for rain with other women*. During the telephone interview which happened in October 2020 she mentioned that she had organised a journey to the sacred place in the week that was to follow. *She said women still lead on such occasions and men look up to them to observe this practice, and they would always remind them when the time comes to ask for rain*.

There has been a paradigm shift in post independent Zimbabwe where there are now female chiefs that have been elected to posts. The position of chief empowers women to participate in decision making and processes which were previously not open to women. The leading of women in rain dances gave women higher status, although one would say it was temporary since they would be respected only under that circumstance. If women participate in something that men are not able to do it gives them recognition and status in society but this is short lived.

Most participants blamed missionaries who brought Christianity and colonialists for worsening the plight of women in Ndebele society. Women could not be elected to leadership positions. Colonialism reinforced the keeping of women in the kitchen. They emphasised that changes were only realised after independence when the government introduced laws and policies that were meant to emancipate women. They still have those tendencies of patriarchy where men are looked upon as leaders. It takes a few women to vote for other women to become leaders.

Responding to the issue of the impact of Christianity on Ndebele women, **participants 2 and 3** were generally of the opinion that *Christianity came and disrupted the belief systems in Zimbabwe and Matabeleland was not spared. Women became committed to the new religion and broke away from the Ndebele Indigenous Religion*. However, they said *others practiced both religions as they did not want to abandon their belief systems wholly. They took part in religious ceremonies and did their regular duties of brewing beer and dancing on social indigenous occasions despite being converted to Christianity*.

**Participant 6** who lives in the rural areas of Tsholotsho District testified that she is Catholic,

and she always attends initiation ceremonies. She said that she once attended *an initiation ceremony that was organised by her neighbour who is a spirit medium and responsible for training rain dancers. When they graduate, she conducts an initiation ceremony in her homestead and invites neighbours to attend to witness to the induction of these rain dancers.*

**Participant 23** who is also a chief like **Participant 5** shared the same sentiments *that women in Gwanda district in the rural areas are still involved in the Indigenous Religion as they are seen to be participating in Indigenous ceremonies when need arises. They have not abandoned the Indigenous Religion. He also talked about the journey to Njelele with the women in his jurisdiction to ask for rain. He said women take the lead in brewing beer and organising such religious ceremonies.*

**Participant 19** acknowledged *that Ndebele Indigenous Religion plays a pivotal role in the lives of women, as those in rural areas still uphold the indigenous religion.*

The postcolonial theory of *hybridity* propounded by Homi Bhabha comes to effect.

Although they have been Christianised they mix the two religions a result of a ‘cultural negotiation of the coloniser and the colonised’, (Strijdom 2009: 255-256).

The general feeling of **Participants 5 and 6** was that Christianity *did not utterly destroy the Ndebele culture - it actually buttressed the African culture in many ways. That is why patriarchy was not eradicated, but supported.*

**Participant 9** was of the view that *women were denied the privilege of being elected to pastoral roles, the reason being that women ministers find it hard to perform a double duty of being mothers at home and having this leadership role. It seems it is very difficult to undo a cultural norm that has been imprinted in the minds of women, one suggesting that only men should be elected to leadership roles. Participant 12 supported the idea and said when there are elections, women mostly vote for men and not for fellow women because they have the mentality that women should be led by men, and they cannot lead where men are available. She said time has come for women to realise that they can rise too and lead. The women cannot see that there is oppression due to ignorance and they seem to believe that whatever is happening should be correct.*

Hence, Hudson-Weems (1993) says that African women in general do not identify with the feminist concept as they fail to see it as referring to them as the beneficiaries of its promises. They assume it was meant for western community. That is why participants said women could

not manage to do two duties they assumed that only men could lead.

One would say only those in urban centres would see African womanism as relevant to all Black women. The issues to do with gender are of concern in the women's struggle against patriarchal systems in most African societies. The Ndebele women particularly in the rural areas where tradition is still respected and adhered to and have accepted that men are head of house. They accept the status quo believing that they should adhere to norms and not question them as they were sanctioned by society. Among the Ndebele patriarchy is viewed differently by women in rural areas and urban centres. The rural women are loyal and believe that men were destined to be leaders in the home, while the urban women believe they can be in charge now and lobby for equal rights.

**Participant 11** said that *when Christianity was introduced in Zimbabwe, only male ministers were to serve in the position of reverend or pastor. From the onset, when the missionaries came to Zimbabwe, they were male, only their wives were left behind and the only females who came were based in Harare and there is very little that is said about them. When Robert Moffat, the missionary, came with his wife, she came as a spouse not for work. The participant further indicated that the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) has eleven ordained ministers in Zimbabwe, but the congregation does not trust a female minister and they always prefer a male one. Female ministers have to work hard to prove that they are capable. She said, even after 50 years, there has not been a woman in the leadership top post. It is a male dominated society. She lamented that women themselves have a mentality that only men can lead.*

King (1988) highlighted that men assumed leadership positions in many social institutions like church and political organisations. In the same manner in the colonial era Ndebele men would lead in church services and women were not elected to any posts showing a patriarchal stance. However, in postcolonial they now assume leadership posts like the position of Reverend. Tomalin (2007:19) says besides Orthodox and Catholics, most denominations have accepted women's ordination as priests, but this has not been well received in other areas because of the patriarchal tendencies where women are not supposed to stand in front of men.

**Participant 15** was of the view that *the indigenous Ndebele society was disrupted by Christianity that came and preached a gospel that undermined the African beliefs. Women were some of the first people to be converted to Christianity, as they sought something to replace Ndebele Indigenous practices that undermined them.*

**Participant 21** said *Christianity coupled with the colonial rule and civilisation took the Ndebele out of their beliefs and practices. For example, Christianity banned polygamy which used to be a source of wealth as women would marry and their fathers would receive lobola. Women now are educated, and they are not dependent on marriage, they have the audacity to have five children with different fathers and remain single and no one bothers to ask about the father of children or the marriage rite. One can say the role of women was uplifted in a positiveway, but the cultural right of marriage was denied. They are not allowed to be ordained as priests or elected as Pope in the Catholic church.*

**Participant 24** said *the missionaries brought their religion to convert the Ndebele, then the colonisers brought nice things like sugar, medicine and guns to lure the Ndebele and divert their attention while they had another agenda of taking their land.*

According to Olupona (2014) the early missionaries who came pretended to show interest in the study of African religion, yet it was a way of trying to convert them to their religion as they established their trade interests and colonised Africa. In the process the role for women were redefined and the beliefs and practices of Africans changed. Tomalin (2007:11) argues that ‘although religious traditions are frequently oppressive towards women this is a product of patriarchal culture rather than the religious tradition itself.’

This implies that patriarchal tendencies have always been there in African communities even before the coming of Christianity. This that Christianity did not change the patriarchal stance but supported it in a way, since women although they constitute the majority of members in most churches the top positions are taken up by men.

### **Theme 5: Gender equity**

Some participants agreed that there is gender equity in Zimbabwe as their responses show the following ideas:

**Participants 7, 11 and 15** agreed that *the government has promoted equity between sexes, there has been affirmative action which has been instrumental in acknowledging that women have been side-lined in the past and the government has tried to close the gap. However, they reiterated that in African families, women are still suppressed as they cannot make decisions. They*

were quick to say that traditions do not change as fast as laws change. Public life and professions had quota systems introduced to cater for women.

**Participants 12** said the government has tried to promote equity between sexes, the affirmative action has been a means to close the gap to ensure that women who have been side-lined in the past are considered on equal terms with their male counterparts. The government has passed laws in favour of women.

Hudson-Weems (1993) argues that Black feminism was developed to address the experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of African women. These experiences have been partly achieved since there are changes where women are treated on equal terms with men others elected to top managerial posts.

Some of the participants felt that gender equity may be very difficult to attain because men are still holding onto the power vested upon them by society.

**Participant 7** said there will never be a time when men and women are equal. This cannot change overnight because society has learnt the wrong things. According to the informant, the main reason is that there are benefits derived out of masculinity. It would appear that there is a tendency of moving towards globalisation, and if society has not embraced that women have power, it will not change. To crown it all, he said, men cannot renounce their power as power is about economy and men acquired it in order to access wealth.

**Participants 10, 20 and 23** agreed that society is to blame for all this as correction should be made from the age of the boy child. If the boy child sees his father beating his mother, he will grow up and do the same, so society should catch them young and correct the anomaly. They said that the only way to eliminate gender bias is to start from the boy child at an early age, then the issue will be corrected.

**Participants 17 and 22** noted that although there was a possibility of gender equity in some respect, it can never be achieved one hundred percent, since married women have a lot to do at home. Political meetings are done in the evening and men would not allow their wives to be away from home at night. It only happens where both are involved in politics. For some women to participate, men will have granted permission. Despite all these efforts by government, men still are taking the lead. There was resistance initially, but society has since accepted women as equals, especially in urban centres. The rural folk are still traditional, hence patriarchal, but trying to move towards that change too.



The above statement shows that men in the rural areas will not relinquish their power especially the strong traditionalist these are in support of the indigeneity that advocates for the pure tradition (Chidester 2000).

### **Focus group**

During the process of collecting data, the researcher also conducted focus group discussions with lecturers from a teachers' college in Bulawayo Province. The responses from individual participants and the focus group showed that there was a similarity with regards to the responses as shall be shown according to the following themes:

Theme 1 -Religion and gender

Theme 2 -The Marginalised

Theme 3 - Women emancipation

#### **Theme 1: Religion and gender**

The participants seemed to have a consensus that women had roles of being engaged in family chores and the important role of brewing beer for religious ceremonies. This can be considered as an important role because if women are not there to do it then the religious ceremony would not succeed as expected or even conducted because beer will be needed for libation to ancestors. They are involved in rain dances to invoke the spirits when they held ceremonies to ask for rain from the spirits and procreation, among other things. Then their status was that of minors and made no decisions but men would decide for them on matters in the home. The issue of *lobola* was looked into as well as a practice that worsened the status of women as they were reduced to being a commodity that was bought.

**Participants 1, 5 and 8** stated that women *had a special role in religious ceremonies as they were skilled in brewing beer that was used in appeasing spirits be it at family or national level.*

**Participant 3** said, *Mbuya Nehanda, in Mashonaland, the spirit medium, led during the war and gave instructions on how to fight the opponents when Lobhengula had disappeared and that actually uplifted the status of women. Among the Zulu, Mkabayi, Tshaka's aunt led the team that killed him. The participant said although they were involved in brewing beer and advising their husbands behind the scenes they never assumed any leadership roles.*

**Participants 3 and 4** said Christianity *did not utterly destroy culture it actually buttressed the African culture and that is why patriarchy was not eradicated but supported*. They said *Ndebele religion which is dynamic has been affected by the coming of Christianity which partly suppresses the role of women since Ndebele Religion has not been static*.

**Participants 1, 5, 6 and 7** generally agreed that *the Ndebele women especially in rural areas, practice Ndebele religion together with Christianity. There are certain ceremonies like African marriages where women are involved in brewing beer and even participating in the religious ceremonies*. They agreed that *women are involved in performing certain cultural practices like counselling the bride before marriage known as ukulaya*.

**Participants 1, 2 and 3** said women performed other roles like *conducting other roles like performing rites before the bride goes to join the other family. This is like the cleansing of evil spirits known as ukuphehlela isithundu and counselling the bride before marriage*.

The Africana womanism theory by Hudson-Weems (1993) supported the Black feminism theory which describes African women as mothering and nurturing. The theory advocates for the empowerment of African women so that they have control of their lives without participation of family responsibilities.

Women have a lot of activities that they do as alluded too by the participants that they also have other duties like counselling the bride and conducting other rites to do with marriage.

## **Theme 2: The Marginalised**

**Participants 1 and 3** were of the opinion that *women were viewed as children and the Ndebele men would refer to them as 'abesintwana' meaning childlike. They were like children because they could not make any decisions without consulting their husbands. If they made money out of craft-work, they would hand the money to their husbands who would take it and use it as they wished*.

A similar view is found in Black feminism where King (1988) says the survival of the Black woman depended on her ability to use all resources around her. Black women involved in reproduction child rearing activities and working in low paying jobs made their predicament to be worse.

**Participants 4 and 7** said, *women were viewed as a property of the home as the husband felt*

*that since he had paid bride wealth / lobola this gave husbands legal control over wives, their children and their wives and children's labour. They were seen as secondary citizens in the home, since they had a different surname and came from another family. They had to be answerable for their whereabouts and did not count in the home.*

**Participants 2 and 5** said women were viewed as childbearing tools. One would even be sent to go and bear children for an aunt who could not conceive. Parents would arrange marriages for their daughters to wealthy men. It was repressive, because women did not have a voice but were viewed as tools that would bear children.

**Participants 7 and 8** agreed with the above view that elderly rich man would have an arranged marriage and receive a girl to bear children for him. Culture allowed it and one would be punished if they refused to comply. Issues of love did not matter when a girl was sent to go and bear children for a barren aunt, she had to comply.

### **Theme 3: Emancipation**

The participants were able to identify the efforts that the government of Zimbabwe has made to improve the status of women in Zimbabwe, Matabeleland not being spared. They mentioned that empowerment of women has led to some being promoted to leadership posts like Vice President, chiefs, heads of schools and other senior managerial posts.

Many women have regarded the war of liberation as their means to attain their independence from patriarchy and to improve their social status.

**Participants 1 and 2** agreed that at independence, the government of the independent Zimbabwe amended the constitution in a bid to empower women and this amendment was meant to address women's rights. There were women who became elected to top leadership posts like former Vice President Joice Mujuru, Thokozani Khuphe, the latter who is from Matabeleland, who was vice President of opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). So he said postcolonial period liberated women and corrupted them as some of them are now stubborn, he also said there were some who face resistance from their husbands and a male dominated society, if they get promoted.

**Participant 3** further elaborated that the amended constitution saw some women being appointed into chieftaincies. They further cited that, there were policies that were crafted like the Gender Policy that was put in place to help.

**Participant 7** maintained that *postcolonial rule brought division of labour in families where men and women help each other with household tasks regardless of their gender. All these were a result of efforts to empower women through education programmes and legal framework such as the gender equality policy which was introduced after Zimbabwean independence.*

**Participant 8** argued that, *although women also participate in paid work, like men, they end up doing household tasks still after they come back home from work showing that there is now equal distribution of chores at home especially in rural areas where the traditional men still uphold the patriarchal stance.*

**Participants 5 and 6** argued that *this move changed the cultural setup, since a man was regarded as the head of the family (inhloko yomuzi) when his wife was appointed chief she would be the head of the whole community a post that was higher than his own.*

The issue of a female chief is a bone of contention because when a female chief accepts chieftaincy then the chieftaincy moves to another family. The first born son of chief female who bear a diff surname to the traditional line of chief the first born son of the chief takes over then he will be from a different line of chief and the chieftaincy will be from the matrilineal side. The Ndebele traditionalists were not happy with the policy of accepting female chiefs. The researcher is of the view that the social construction of women has changed but one would wonder if the change really liberates the Ndebele women or it dispossesses values they possessed on the pretext of liberation.

### **Implications of the findings**

The findings imply that women were more respected when the Ndebele Indigenous Religion more prominent in the precolonial era, as women played critical roles in the home and on spiritual matters. African patriarchy was operational but was not very serious as men and women shared roles evenly and worked side by side in harmony. Women accepted their roles willingly and did not complain. The situation changed when the western patriarchy was introduced at the advent of colonialism. With the adoption of Christianity and western culture women have been side-lined. Therefore, the changes in culture and religion have impacted negatively on the roles and status of women. However, the postcolonial situation has shown some changes in trying to improve the situation of the marginalisation of women. Work is still in progress although the rural folk still uphold the traditional patriarchy the situation is slowly changing in urban centres.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the views of participants from the individual interviews and focus group. The general consensus was that in precolonial era Ndebele women played important roles of the upkeep of family, producing and preparing food. They played leading roles in procreation and nurturing the children up to maturity some being spirit mediums and also had leading roles in organising in religious ceremonies with some being spirit mediums for powerful spirits. However, their status was undermined they could not contribute in any major decision to do with the home or politics of the country.

Participants agreed that during the colonial era, women were further pushed away from the public sphere and were confined to the 'house'. The Missionaries who brought Christianity buttressed the patriarchal culture and women were not allowed to make decisions. The independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 brought a constitution that worked towards the empowerment of women and abolished practices that infringed on the rights of women. There are equal job opportunities, child custody and wife inheritance among other privileges to empower women.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to conclude the study and provide recommendations. The chapter summarises the main findings of the study, provides policy recommendations and outlines areas of further research.

### **6.2 Summary of the study**

This study sought to explore the impact of the Ndebele indigenous religion on the status and roles of women in the Matabeleland province of Zimbabwe. It was carried out in the three provinces of Matabeleland, which are, Bulawayo, Matabeleland South, and Matabeleland North. The two latter provinces are peri-urban and rural areas of Bulawayo (urban). Traditional and community leaders, educationists, and local community members were engaged. The study was chosen by the researcher because she felt that not much research has been done in this area and in Matabeleland. This study was qualitative in nature and utilised a case study design, since only three provinces in Zimbabwe were targeted. The population of these provinces comprises the traditional and community leaders, educationists and local community members. From this population, 32 respondents who included four traditional and community leaders, 12 educationists and 16 local community members were randomly, purposively and conveniently sampled for this study. For the purposes of collecting data from these participants, open-ended interview guides and the interviews were conducted by telephone or face to face encounter. The aim of this research was to develop an understanding of the changing societal and family roles and tasks that women undertake under the influence of the Ndebele Indigenous Religion, past and present. From the discussions it was evident that religion is embedded in culture and hence certain cultural practices like payment of bride price, early child marriages, and patriarchy infringe on the rights of women and thus negatively affect the status and roles of women in Ndebele society. The research also looked at decision making over matters of parenting, socialisation of children, household finances and the general running of family affairs. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological study of religion focusing on African scholars. The data was collected, analysed and five themes emerged from the individual interviews and three themes from the focus group. These were discussed elaborately in Chapter Four.

Relevant feminist discourses were used to explain and consolidate the findings of the study. The research findings from individual interviews and the focus group that were conducted with Ndebele men and women from the three provinces of Matabeleland. The eight themes that emerged were discussed with the help of feminist and postcolonial theories. From the discussions with participants it was established that Ndebele women. The researcher initially intended to include a quantitative method (questionnaires) in the research, but this was altered for fear of increasing the risk of spreading or contracting the corona virus as the study coincided with the first wave of covid-19. All these and other risks were reduced by adhering to World Health Organisation requirements, adopting ethical considerations, and studying a

manageable sample. Despite the few challenges, this research came up with very interesting findings, conclusions and recommendations as discussed in sections 6.3 and 6.4.

### **6.3 Findings and conclusions drawn from the study**

The research revealed that the Ndebele Indigenous Religion has had an impact on the status of women among the Ndebele. This was the case in the precolonial times when women were side lined in major decisions, partly as a result of patriarchy, a practice that gave man the lead as heads of households. This position was also visible in the communication with ancestors within a family setup where women were even restricted from entering the cattle byre where communication with the family's ancestral spirits was conducted. Their role was limited to brewing beer and cooking during the family ceremonies and as rain dancers (hosanna) and spirit mediums although they did not take any lead in family and national events such as the *Inxwala* festival. The cultural practices which are intertwined with religion like payment of lobola, patriarchy, widow's rites among other issues clearly showed that women were looked down upon. Their status would be raised for a while as they did other important duties which men could not do. Once all was over they would assume their usual position. Their status deteriorated during the advent of colonialism and the introduction of religions such as Christianity that restricted women from assuming leadership roles.

The colonisers may have instilled self-doubt on their subjects which lead to the misconception that the colonial culture was superior to the traditional one. For that reason, the colonised adopted some of the practices of the colonisers. Related to the study will be the idea of relegating women to the kitchen and instilling the idea of men as head of the house. This worsened the plight of women and male chauvinism in Zimbabwe was reinforced by educating the boy child ahead of the girl child. The result of these actions was the inequalities between men and women.

In the postcolonial era, the indigenous religion got a boost when the government recognised it, as opposed to the colonial government that considered the indigenous religion as primitive and something to be done away with. The government also enacted several laws and policies that sought to enhance the status of women and their role in society. The indigenous religion is often used as justification for some practices that demean the status of women, including participation in some rituals during the reproductive stage of their lives, such as initiation into puberty and adulthood. However, feminist discourses continued to engage on behalf of women and the government has introduced policies to correct gender inequalities. Women have now assumed

leadership roles and in many spheres and share equal job opportunities with their male counterparts. Despite all these efforts, the practice of patriarchy still lingers in Ndebele society. Men still possess the power of being in control and will not let go of it easily because it has benefits that go with it.

The research concludes that these two major religions (Ndebele Indigenous Religion and Christianity) contributed significantly to the lowering of the status of women. Some of the ways in which the status of women is undermined include the following:

- Women today face lack of support in their advancement, not only from their male counterparts who are dominating in various spheres of life, but also from their female counterparts who still hold on to the traditional norms and cultural beliefs that have since placed them in the kitchen. These women should be taught to support other women and help to fight the gender imbalance by breaking that norm.
- The traditional setup also forces women to stay in abusive marriages in the name of submissiveness.
- There are still women who succumb to violence each and every day due to the financial dependency they have on their husbands. This leads to women not reporting cases of abuse.
- Despite several improvements instituted by the government to empower women in Zimbabwe, patriarchal values have not died but have continued to exist in Matabeleland with men holding on to power not willing to relinquish it.
- There is fear of victimisation from the society, as women tend to be scrutinised when they venture into politics and other challenging jobs in Zimbabwe.
- While the participants in the studied provinces in Matabeleland are aware of the status and role of women, gender imbalances were instilled a long time ago.

In conclusion, the Ndebele Indigenous Religion contributes to the undermining of the status of women and their role in society. There are factors such as culture and historical economic exclusion (before, during, and after colonialism) other religions also contribute to the marginalization of women.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been specifically made for this study in line with the



findings and the conclusions made:

- The status and role of women in society needs to be enhanced. This will ensure that the full potential of mankind is realised as both men and women make a full and positive contribution.
- Some have been put in place to address the issues related to marginalisation of women to eradicate culture domination and oppression of women among the Ndebele in the selected regions of study in Zimbabwe.
- There is need to improve the state policies in the constitution of Zimbabwe so that they have an impact on the status and role of women among the Ndebele and the whole country.
- Government should go beyond encouraging women to participate in politics through promotion of gender equality and creating a conducive environment so as to bring about a change in the cultural norms.
- Adoption of both the father and mother's surname by children to accommodate women as well.
- It is therefore imperative that women should continue to break the barriers which were set and create the new normal structures.
- Women should support each other and elect other to positions of leadership since men are having confidence in them leading now,
- There should be a re-interpretation of traditional practices to empower women so as to uplift their status. This can be done by revising practices that infringe on the rights of women like bride price payment and widows' rites among others.

## **6.5 Areas of further research**

- Further research in this area could be conducted on the role of culture and religion on women in other districts and provinces of Zimbabwe.
- There is need to research on how women are treated in other religions besides Ndebele Religion and Christianity in Zimbabwe.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The chapter dealt with a summary of the whole study giving highlights of the area of concern and the setting where the investigations would be carried out. The aim of the study was

tabulated, and it also indicated the targeted population which comprised 32 participants. as well as methods of collecting the data from these participants were identified. The design of the study was also given with the limitations to the study shown since the research was conducted during the period of covid 19 pandemic. The chapter further outlined the findings and recommendations to the study and areas of further research were also indicated.

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## **Appendix A: Ethical clearance**

UNISA RELIGIOUS STUDIES & ARABIC ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date 20 July 2020

Dear Mrs Cynthia Moyo

**Decision:**  
**Ethics Approval from 20 July**  
**2020 to 19 July 2023**

NHREC Registration #: Rec-  
240816-052

ERC Reference # :2020-REL  
STUDIES & ARABIC-CHS-  
53154002

Name: C Moyo

Student/Staff #: 53154002

**Researcher(s):** Mrs C Moyo

**Supervisor (s):** (1) Prof JM Strijdom  
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(2) Dr EEN Dube  
Department of Religious Studies & Arabic  
University of South Africa  
[dubeeen@unisa.ac.za](mailto:dubeeen@unisa.ac.za)  
072 248 4908

**Working title of research:**

**THE IMPACT OF NDEBELE INDIGENOUS RELIGION ON THE STATUS AND ROLE OF  
WOMEN IN MATABELELAND, ZIMBABWE.**

**Qualification:** MA in Religious Studies

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by Department of Religious Studies & Arabic Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for three years.

*The low risk application was reviewed by the Departmental Ethics Review Committee on 15 July 2020 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision was tabled at the Committee meeting on 15 July 2020 for approval.*



The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UJESB Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the **Religious Studies & Arabic Ethics Review Committee**.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assumptions made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2003; Children's Act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**10 July 2023**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

**Note:**

The reference number **2020-RELSTUDZES-CMS-33154002** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the proposed research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature :

**MA RAFUDEEN**

Prof MA RAFUDEEN

Ethics Committee Member:

Religious Studies & Arabic Ethics Review Committee

E-mail: rafudeen@ujesb.uj.ac.za

Cell: (083) 997 7186

Signature :

**F FEUKES**

Dr Fana Feukes

Deputy Ethics Chair: GREC

E-mail: ffeukes@ujesb.uj.ac.za

cell: (074) 826 8622

## Appendix B: Consent form

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and she has or had explained to me and have understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the video tape recorder

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature..... Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher's signature..... Date.....



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## **Appendix C: Interview questions**

1. Are the beliefs and practices of Ndebele Religion still being observed?
2. What was the status of women in pre-colonial Ndebele society?
3. What are your views on the role of women in traditional, political and social structures in pre- colonial era?
4. How did the colonial rule have an impact on gender relations among the Ndebele people?
5. What was the impact of Christianity on the Ndebele beliefs and practices?
6. What are your views on the theme of ‘women emancipation’ in post -colonial Ndebele society?
7. Is gender equity in post -colonial Zimbabwe possible among the Ndebele ethnic group?
8. What is the present day government in Zimbabwe doing to help upgrade the socio economic status of women?
9. Do women play leading roles in indigenous Ndebele society, be it politics, economy or social affairs?
10. What are some of the examples of leadership roles promoted in the post- colonial?

### **Focus group questions**

- 1) What was the role and status of women before the colonial era?
- 2) Did women participate in religious affairs in pre -colonial times?
- 3) Did the coming of Christianity worsen or improve the role and status of women?
- 4) What is the current status and role of women in religion? Does religion uplift or suppress women?

### **Kalanga interview questions**

1. Milenje nemipanga yeBakalanga itja tobelegwa zwayo kene?
2. Nhukadzi waka ebhakhwa tjini mutjaba tjeBakalanga nelubaka hango isanhu ikatogwanebatjena?
3. Iwe nokumbula tjini nekwe n’hingo webetjikadzi muzwinhu zwemilenje.zwetungamigwa kwehango nemisiwa kwetjaba nelubaka hango isanhu ikabe mumaboko ebatjena?
4. Tungamigwa kwehango nebatjena kwahhisani pakati kwebetjilume nebetjikadzi beludzi

gweBakalanga

- 5 Bugalimoyo gwetjikhirisitu gwakahandula tjini milinje nemipanga yeBakalanga
- 6 Iwe nobona tjini nekwe n'holo unoti 'sunungugwa kwebanhukadzi' nelubaka hangoyabhuda mumaboko ebatjena mutjaba tjeBakalanga
- 7 Lizana kwendulamo dzebetjikadzi nebetjilume hule kwengwa kungabe kulipo mutjabatjeBakalanga kene?
- 8 Ini tjini tjinoyetiwa nahulumente weZimbabwe ngwenuwale mukupfumbidza mamoezwebufumi akalingisana nebanhukadzi
- 9 Banhukadzi banotungamila wale mutjaba tjeBakalanga muzwinhu zwinonga tungamigwa kwehango,zwebufumi nezwebutjilo gwebanhu bose?
- 10 Ndizwipi zwimwe zwilayidzo zwebhatika mukutungamila zwakamilidziwa hulekwehango yatjibhuda mumaboko ebatjena.

### **Ndebele interview questions**

1. Ukholo lwesintu lusakhona yini lapho ohlala khona?
2. Kungani abantu sebebalutshwana abalandela ukholo lwesiNtu?
3. Ngokubona kwakho ukholo lwesiNtu yayincindezela kumbe luyaphakamisa abesifazana?
4. Abafazi babelomsebenzi bani kukholo lwesiNtu?
5. Abafazi kudala babelezikhundla yini embusweni welizwe? Qamba okunye kwalokhu.  
(nxa babengela zikhundla kwakubangwa yini nlokhu?)
6. Ngesikhathi sokuza kwamakhiwa yini okwantshintshayo empilweni yabesintwana?
7. Yiyiphi imizamo ka Hulumende eyokuphakamisa abesintwana?
8. UHulumende uyabaphakamisa yini abesifazana/ ubakuyikho ngaziphi indlela?
9. Abesifazana balezikhundla yini ekuthuthukiseni ilizwe?
10. Yizithi izizikhundla ezaphiwa abasifazana emva kukazibuse?



## Appendix D: Proof of editing

### LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER DECLARATION

I, **Robert Hift**, being the holder of the following qualifications  
**B.A. HONS. (English) H.D.E.**

Certify that I am the language editor for **CYNTHIA MOYO**


with a thesis entitled:

#### **THE IMPACT OF NDEBELE INDIGENOUS RELIGION ON THE STATUS AND ROLES OF WOMEN IN MATABELELAND PROVINCE OF ZIMBABWE**

I hereby certify that I have edited the language usage in the above document.

I have made a series of recommendations regarding content, cited references and references. I believe that the document is ready for appraisal by the supervisor, if my advice is followed, as suggested in my comments.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E: Turnitin report

### Cynthia Moyo dissertation Final Copy

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