

John 8:3–11 and gender-based violence in Johane Marange Apostolic Church, Ruwa District, Zimbabwe

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John 8:3–11 depicts the story of a woman who is condemned to death because she was caught in the act of adultery. The Pharisees and Scribes who condemned the woman cited Deuteronomy 22:23–24 and Leviticus 20:10 which prescribe death penalty for adultery. What begs answers through this hermeneutical study of the pericope from the lens of gender-based violence (GBV) in Johane Marange Apostolic Church, Ruwa District, in Zimbabwe, is why only the woman was picked for condemnation yet the cited Mosaic Law provides that both the man and the woman who engage in the act of adultery face capital punishment. The article interrogates the text to identify limbs or tentacles on which the decision by the Pharisees and Scribes to condemn only the woman leaving out the man stands. An exegetical study of the text is conducted to explore possible reasons behind the relegation of women to the receiving end of misogynistic socially constructed gender stereotypes. A qualitative methodological praxis fusing socio-historical method and qualitative analysis is engaged in analysing the Biblical Johannine and Johane Marange Apostolic Church Ruwa District communities, respectively. The article mirrors patriarchal tendencies in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church into the selective application of biblical doctrine between males and females depicted in the Johannine text of John 8:3–11. The article argues and concludes that, as reflected in John 8:3–11, GBV practices in Johane Marange Apostolic Church have sentenced women to sexual exploitation, rape, early child marriages and high maternal mortality rate.

Contribution: The study recommends ways of cutting the tentacles of the acts of GBV being imposed on women in general, and on the girl child in particular.

Keywords: gender-based violence; New Testament; Johane Marange Apostolic Church; selective hermeneutics; patriarchy.

Introduction

Harmful biblical hermeneutics that legitimise gender and sexual hierarchies between men and women have catalysed, perpetuated and sustained gender-based violence (GBV) in apostolic sects in Zimbabwe (Munyaradzi Kenneth et al. 2016:9). It has been noted that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is quite phenomenal in apostolic sects in Zimbabwe because of ostensible bible-based beliefs, norms and values (Mpfungu 2020). The misuse of Scripture to advance subjugation of one sex by another led to the coining of the term 'texts of terror' by feminist theologian Phyllis Trible who, by combining literary criticism and a feministic hermeneutic, interpreted the tragic stories of Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed concubine and the daughter of Jephthah (Trible 1984). The Triblian approach to the study of terror in the Bible forms an essential motif in this article in the study of the use of New Testament Scriptures for misogynistic purposes in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, Ruwa District, Zimbabwe. In this article, an exegetical study of John 8:3–11 is conducted to examine the causes of the terror that was visited on the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. The study questions the exclusion from violence of the woman's male partner in the sin of adultery as the definitive cog in the GBV act. This study further investigates if a symbiotic relationship exists between the way Pharisees and Scribes treated the woman in John 8:3–11 and the way males in Johane Marange Apostolic Church, Ruwa District, Zimbabwe, treat female members of their church. Jesus' response to the woman's accusers constitutes a platform for the construction of a hermeneutical paradigm that will be useful in fighting GBV in Zimbabwe, in Christian

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churches. Such a hermeneutical model is a dire necessity against the realisation that in spite of protracted anti-GBV efforts by multiple social actors such as the government and non-governmental organisations, GBV still remains very high in Zimbabwe (Magezi & Manzanga 2019).

Johane Marange Apostolic Church

Johane Marange Apostolic Church is an African Initiated Church which was founded in 1912 in Manicaland Province in Eastern Zimbabwe by the late Muchabaya Momberume, who is popularly known as Johane Marange. Magede and Mbwirire (2020:45) argue that the Church started as an anti-colonial religious movement well-known for its resistance to the payment of colonial taxes under the guise of religious beliefs. Johane Marange Apostolic Church is well-known for its rejection of scientific approaches to health issues including medication, hospitalisation and antenatal care for pregnant women.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Definition of key terms

Gender-based violence

The United Nations (2017) has defined GBV as physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering inflicted on women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Gender-based violence also includes a rape culture, a social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalised and justified. The term GBV may also include instances where violence is specifically targeted at men and boys because of their gender. Slabu (2014:56) argues that GBV includes all actions that are calculated deliberately or structurally, to make the victim less effective in productive life. Montesanti (2015) adds to GBV elements such as domestic violence, physical, sexual or emotional harm directed at a person in order to create or maintain power and control. Such power and control is linked to gender, sex and sexuality. Gender-based violence includes hating and hurting other people because of perceived or self-identified gender or sexual orientation or because of differences in social or religious definitions of masculinity and femininity. Gender-based violence is the violation of someone's physical, psychological and spiritual integrity. Simister and Kowalewska (2016) state that GBV is an act of violence likely to cause emotional damage such as humiliation or intimidation, sexual abuse, economic dependence and social isolation.

New Testament tentacles of gender-based violence

'New Testament tentacles of GBV' in this study refers to grounds or reasons embedded in selected New Testament texts that are used for relegating women to positions of inferiority and increasing their dependency on men. The tentacles are the limbs on which acts of GBV stand.

Patriarchy

The concept of 'patriarchy' used in this article derives from feminist theologians' understanding. Millett (1970) contends that 'patriarchy' is a gender system of male dominance in society that is used to justify the exercise of power by men over women. Walby (1990:24) argues that the concept of patriarchy is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality.

Methodology

A multiperspectival methodology was used in this article because of the biblical, social scientific and practical characteristics of the subject of GBV in this study. The following analytical paradigms were selected because of the reasons adduced further in the text.

Socio-historical method

Erhman (2016:182) avers that the socio-historical method is a useful tool in analysing how biblical texts relate to social and cultural phenomena regardless of whether the study is dealing with ancient societies, medieval or present-day societies. Lungu (2016:5) posits that John 8:3–11 is an ancient text that can be adopted to address the current problem of GBV. Lungu (2016:5) observes that in the pericope, Jesus acted against the socio-cultural milieu of his time when he interpreted the law of Moses in a manner that rescued the woman caught in adultery from the jaws of death. The socio-cultural and historical worldview will thus help me to interrogate the patriarchal attitudes and vestiges of the Jewish people that crept into the interpretation of the Law of Moses on adultery. Chabata (2021:4) finds that the socio-historical method enables a fusion of traditional biblical historical critical methods such as exegesis, source criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism with social scientific methods. Slade (2020:2) points out that the socio-historical study of religion easily facilitates dialogue between biblical texts and social and cultural science disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and religious history. The study of GBV in this article brings together in dialogue an ancient biblical context in John 8:3–11, entrenched beliefs in Jewish and Shona cultural frameworks. The Socio-Historical Method therefore comes in handy to provide a useful analytical lens from both the scriptural and social scientific standpoints. The pericope chosen for this study, John 8:3–11, is situated in the customs, traditions, religious practices, culture, society and social norms of the Hebrews whose tapestry Chabata (2021:11) has found to be highly homologous to the Shona cultural framework to which Johane Marange Apostolic Church belongs.

The second approach to this study was qualitative analysis. Miles and Huberman (1984) define qualitative analysis as the analysis of abstract phenomena such as text data from interview transcripts. Two types of content analysis have been selected for this study namely sentiment analysis and hermeneutic analysis, respectively. Strauss and Corbin

(1998) described sentiment analysis as a technique of capturing the opinions and attitudes of people towards an object, person or phenomenon. In pursuing sentiment analysis, I adopted critical case sampling and snowball sampling techniques of information gathering. Critical case sampling enabled me to look for interviewees whose views can replicate the views of the macro population under investigation. In this case, 10 females comprising 5 teenage girls and 5 married women, 10 men comprising 5 boys and 5 married were interviewed. Snowball or chain sampling enabled me to select interviewees on the basis of those who can give me the explicit information that I was looking for. In this regard, of the elderly married men sampled for the interviews, five are at the rank of 'Rabbi' or Teaching and Baptising Elder. These five men were chosen because of their seniority and ability to speak *ex-cathedra* (on behalf of the church). Unstructured and focus group interviews were used in the information-gathering process.

Hermeneutical analysis

Hermeneutical analysis, on the other hand, is a type of content analysis whereby a researcher interprets the subjective meaning of a given pericope within its socio-historical context. Heidegger (1988) introduced the concept of hermeneutic circle whereby any interpretation begins with a previous understanding, previous vision or conception, which creates or leads to new possibilities projected in the understanding and ultimately projects the being to the possibility. Thus, the interpretive act requires a three-tier process in which the interpretive process consists of the author's pre-understanding or presuppositions (the world behind the text), the author's audience (world inside the text) and the possible meaning (the present reader's world). In this article, the researcher engaged in hermeneutical analysis of cultural epistemologies in terms of GBV.

Discussion and findings

Socio-historical study of John 8:3–11

Background of the text

Shepherd (1971:718), Brown, Fitzmyer and Murphy (1990:965), Ridderbos (1997:285), Mare (2004:117), Punch (2013:1) and Erhman (2016:28) have cast aspersions on the canonical legitimacy of this passage within the Johannine corpus particularly and in the New Testament canon generally. In terms of the literary genre, the pericope is a paradigm (Dibelius 1935) also called an apophthegm (Bultmann 1963), referring to a statement made by Jesus that ends with a wise saying or action. Freed (2000:62) states that apophthegms or paradigms are found elsewhere in the Gospel tradition particularly in Mark 2:1–12, Matthew 9:1–8, Luke 5:17–26 on the healing of the paralytic; Mark 3:31–35, Matthew 12:46–50, Luke 8:19–21 on the true relatives of Jesus and Mark 12:13–17, Matthew 22:15–22, Luke 20:20–26 on the question of paying tribute to Caesar. Dibelius (1935) and Bultmann (1963) characterise apophthegms as sayings of Jesus with the following characteristics:

- They are short and simple sayings that have, as their climax, an authoritative saying or statement of Jesus, have very little biographical interest, very little characterisation and characters only help illumine the message of Jesus (Freed 2000:62).
- Paradigms are independent from the content antecedent to or subsequent to them; usually some very little connection is gleanable (Brown et al. 1990:965).
- The message of Jesus is allowed to assume pre-eminence and sublimity with the action or response of the observers serving to amplify the wisdom of Jesus (Freed 2000:62).

Despite the anti-Johannine attributes of John 8:3–11, the majority of scholars who have written on the apophthegm agree that the inclusion of this story in the fourth gospel serves a great didactic and hortatory purpose in the interest of correcting gender imbalances and inequalities in modern societies. Thatcher (1993:69) argues that there is a possibility that the text was excluded from the early manuscripts of Johannine literature as a stratagem by the patriarchal community to suppress the women-emancipatory message embedded in Jesus' extraordinary refusal to sanction the sexual condemnation of the woman dragged before him. Baloyi (2010) argues that the predominantly patriarchal Jewish community which largely constituted the Johannine world apparently sought to nip in the bud Jesus' overture of liberating women from the death penalty in the face of the charge of adultery. Thus, there was a hidden patriarchal hand behind the non-appearance of the story in the earliest manuscripts of the gospel tradition.

Brown et al. (1990:965) contend that some early manuscripts placed the story after Luke 21:38 making it part of the Lucan tradition of Jesus forgiving and loosing women from condemnation as seen in Luke 7:36–50 and 8:1–3. Generally, the setting of the passage is similar to Luke's portrayal of Jesus' daily Temple teaching during his Jerusalem ministry as reflected in Luke 20:1; 21:1,37 and 22:53. Erhman (2016:28) questions how such a popular story in the Jesus tradition, undoubtedly the most famous story of Jesus in the New Testament to set the evils of Jewish law against women could have escaped inclusion in earlier manuscripts only to be added by later scribes. This researcher finds, as did Miller (2006), Lungu (2016:4) and Rushton (2016) that the reception of the story in the Johannine community was not easy, that the story was opposed and suppressed because Jesus' forgiving words were an affront to the ancient Church's penitential discipline. Rushton (2016) stressed that men feared that if the story was allowed to circulate it would make women immune to punishment for their sins. This researcher agrees with other New Testament scholars that the eventual inclusion of John 8:3–11 into the New Testament canon remains a milestone development as the story helps in exposing the evils of the socially constructed inequalities between men and women. The passage leaves all who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ with the challenge of extending the olive branch of mercy to all women who have silently suffered GBV at the hands of their male counterparts.

Gender-based violence issues in John 8:3–11

To identify GBV issues in John 8:3–11, a revisit of the United Nations definition of GBV is necessary. Elements of GBV include but are not limited to the following aspects:

- physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts
- coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life
- emotional harm directed at a person in order to create or maintain power and control, where such power and control is linked to gender, sex and sexuality
- hating and hurting other people because of perceived or self-identified gender or sexual orientation or because of differences on social or religious definitions of masculinity and femininity
- violation of someone's physical, psychological and spiritual integrity
- emotional damage such as humiliation or intimidation, sexual abuse, economic dependence and social isolation.

The manner in which the woman was brought to Jesus (8:3).

The third verse of the text mildly describes how the woman was brought to Jesus by simply stating that 'the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery and set her in the midst'. The mob that brought the woman to Jesus was in fact a riotous and overzealous lot that would not respectfully walk the helpless woman. Higgs (2000:82) argues that the woman was physically abused, was dragged forcefully and was not even allowed to dress as she was caught in the very act of adultery. Higgs further opines that the woman was presented before Jesus stark naked, dirty and roughed up. To harangue and humiliate the woman further, her accusers placed her in the 'midst' where everyone could see her shame and wretchedness. Higgs (2000:82) argues that the reason why Jesus stooped down and did not look is that he did not want to further subject her to more humiliation by looking at her nakedness. Miller (2006) rightfully states that the unnamed woman was brought shamefully to Jesus. I will add that Jesus' prophetic instincts and premonition might have hinted to him that a similar fate awaited him at the hands of the same petulant mob on his way to Calvary. Elements of GBV at this stage were physical violence, humiliation, psychological trauma and torture.

An adulteress without an adulterer?

Another aspect of GBV is the exclusion of the woman's partner in crime, the man with whom she was caught committing adultery. The woman's accusers separated the woman from her male partner in adultery. That was a flagrant violation of the law of Moses which they cited to condemn the unfortunate woman. The selective application of the law of stoning people caught in adultery was blatantly sexist and misogynistic. Deuteronomy 22:22 which the accusers cited as they asked Jesus to endorse the woman's condemnation by stoning states that if a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband both of them should die, the man that

lay with the woman and the woman so that evil is put away from Israel. Baloyi (2010) argues that this skewed application of the law against women is only one of many examples of how people in Judaism abused women and violated their rights. Baloyi argues furthermore, that it is worrying that the Jewish community from which Christianity emerged, practised oppression of women. Men exercise control over women and women accept the abuse without any resistance. Typically, in the story the woman acquiesced to her fate without asking why her male partner in crime was not captured with her in terms of the law of Moses. This gendered application of the law in patriarchal societies is also alive in most African communities including Zimbabwe (Chabata 2021:5).

As Miller (2006), Rushton (2016) and Chabata (2021:9) established, women in Jewish patriarchy were treated as objects of sex and were possessed like sexual property by men. Schottroff (1995:182) argues that the Jewish patriarchal marriage legal system interpreted adultery as an injury to the husband's right of possession of his wife's sexuality. Schottroff argues that the Scribes and Pharisees who dragged the miserable woman before Jesus were not necessarily representing all Scribes and Pharisees but were in actual fact representing male supremacy over women. They were representatives of patriarchal hierarchy. Schottroff (1995:182) finds that every legal system of antiquity threatened women whose sexuality is the possession of the man, her father or husband with severe punishment or death in the event of premarital sex or adultery. Elements of GBV on this point were selective application of the law on the basis of sex, perceived supremacy of males over women, treatment of the woman unfairly, the marshalling of the woman in a threatening manner and parading of the woman before a horde of men carrying stones as weapons of murder.

The namelessness and silence of the woman

Neyrey (2003:43), Ademiluka (2018:349) and Chabata (2021:6) argue that women in Jewish society of Jesus' time were reduced to nonentities because of socially constructed gender-based stereotypes. The extent to which women were reduced to the level of men's property is demonstrated in some texts in the gospels where in the process of counting people present at important events women and children would not be included in the statistics. In Matthew 14:16–21; Mark 6:39–44; Luke 9:12–16 and John 6:7–10 at the feeding of 'five thousand' only men were counted although Matthew's account acknowledges that women and children were part of the crowd that followed Jesus. The gender-based segregation against women is also palpable even in the Apostolic Age where, as seen in Acts 4:4, women converts were not included in the statistics of people who believed in Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 11:8–9, Paul avers that the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man, neither was the man created for the woman but the woman for the man. Names of women were not mentioned as it was deemed taboo to do so especially in matters related to property rights, inheritance and posterity. Padfield (2018:8) states that it is not normal to

find names of women in Jewish pedigrees at all. The woman who was allegedly caught in adultery obviously had a name just like other women in the Bible like Deborah, Sarah, Ruth, Mary, Dorcas and others. The non-mentioning of her name was not helped by her tag as an adulteress. Scholars argue that Jesus probably sympathised with this accused woman knowing that in his genealogy, his own matriarchs like Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba who had been labelled as harlots and strange women because of Jewish patriarchal injustices. Jesus was aware of the gender prejudices that Jewish women suffered at the hands of Jewish male bigots who had subjected his own mother to accusations of infidelity and conceiving him out of wedlock (Wilkins & Moreland 1995:40).

On the woman's silence, Manus & Ukaga (2017:69) argue that the woman's silence was because of her submission to Jewish legal prescription that prevented women from speaking in the presence of men. Elsewhere, New Testament pericopes that reinforce the law on women silence in the presence of men include 1 Corinthians 14:33–36, 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Peter 3:1,5–6. The woman also probably reasoned that her lone voice in the midst of an ocean of patriarchal zealots would only attract a death sentence if ever she tried to reason with her accusers. There was also a latent aura of women suppression that was so ominously hanging above her that it appeared as if her fate of death by stoning was already sealed. The woman's silence represents deep currents of pain and resistance in women, reminiscent of a 1983 novel authored by Mungoshi titled, '*Kunyarara hakusi kutaura?*' translated, '*Is Silence Not Speech?*'. For centuries, women have been ordered or programmed not to speak yet, like dormant volcanoes, they simmer and seethe with burning magma-like anger that seeks fissures in order to explode.

Jesus responded to the matter brought before him with another version of silence when he stooped down and started writing on the ground with his finger. Jesus' silence was an interrogative type of silence. His silence affirms the Shona maxim, '*dzimwe nguva Kunyarara kunokunda kutaura*' (at times silence is more forceful than spoken words). Manus and Ukaga (2017:70) interpret Jesus' silence as a re-evaluation of the matter brought before him. The woman's accusers are placed in a cognitive corner where they soliloquise and review their own stance against the unfortunate woman. At that moment Jesus then asked whoever had not sinned to cast the first stone at the moment. Jesus' reply to the woman's accusers elicited another silence from the accusers followed by their dispersal one by one according to rank, leaving only Jesus and the accused woman. Jesus, the great social revolutionary (Crossan 1994:198), with the punch of a countercultural social prophet, proclaimed a new way of living, one that broke down the conventional borders and boundaries of Jewish and Roman culture (Wilkins & Moreland 1995:60). Without saying much to the woman's accusers, Jesus affirmed his trademark *ipsissima verba* mantra, 'You have heard that it was said to them of old time, but I say unto you'. Jesus launched a new way of interpreting the law of adultery against women. He sent a strong and

unassailable message to all patriarchal zealots who practise GBV against women in the name the Bible and religion that if men are equally guilty before the law, they should not condemn women. It was in the quest of levelling the legal ground for both men and women that Jesus broke the woman's silence by asking her where the men who had accused were and when she said, 'No man Lord' (v. 11), Jesus dismissed the case against her by saying, 'neither do I condemn you, but go and sin no more'. Jesus' manner of concluding the apophthegm in John 8:3–11 is a great statement to all women being subjected to GBV. Jesus does not approve of man-made or socially constructed laws that relegate women and the girl child to the status of inferiority compared to men.

Phyllis Trible's texts of terror versus Jesus' revolutionary hermeneutics

Jesus' response to the case of a woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8:3–11, and how he made the angry mob throw away the stones they were carrying as weapons for murdering the woman, denotes a revolutionary way of interpreting gender-sensitive biblical texts. It is quite apparent that superficial interpretations of texts like 1 Corinthians 14:33–36; 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Peter 3:1, 5–6 will open biblical texts to abuse. As Magezi and Manzanga (2019) argue, weak hermeneutical skills in Christians are mainly responsible for the misunderstanding of scriptures like Ephesians 5:22–33. As noticed from the text under study, the enemies of Jesus weaponised the law of Moses in Deuteronomy 22:22–23 to trap Jesus between condemning the woman in accordance with the law or violating it. As Rushton (2016) argues, the marauding accusers of the woman were intent on finding fault with Jesus by setting him up against the Torah, that they had no interest in the woman, her allegedly wronged husband or the other man. This researcher agrees with Rushton (2016) that if the men who dragged the woman before Jesus were really concerned about the offence committed by the woman, they should have brought both the woman and the man for sentencing in terms of Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22. Thus, we see a hermeneutical tentacle of weaponisation or abuse of biblical texts.

Terror texts, as Trible (1984) described them, are those texts in the Bible that place men in a hierarchical position of advantage over women. Such texts grant men sweeping authority over women and the girl child under the guise of divinely ordained human governance. Jesus' revolutionary hermeneutics helps in distinguishing between doctrines of men and genuine theology, futile and 'weightier matters of religion such as justice, mercy and faith' (Mt 23:23). Both Jesus in the Gospels and Paul in the Deutero-Pauline letters distinguished between true theology and what they called 'the precepts and doctrines of men' (Mt 15:9; Mk 7:7; Col 2:22 and Tm 1 4:1). Paul distinguished between what he received from God and what he called 'the traditions of men', 'traditions of my fathers' and 'traditions which you were taught' (1 Cor 11:2; Gl 1:14 and Th 2 2:15). In the interpretation of texts that contain gender connotations, it is important to

distinguish between traditions or cultural tenets that have nothing to do with permanent biblical truths. Such an interpretation is very helpful to avoid harmful and wrong application of biblical texts in everyday life. When it comes to the issue of gender, Paul categorically states in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female.

From the above analysis, it is apparent that distinction between the infallible Word of God and human stereotypes and traditions is absolutely necessary considering that Christianity has come through the womb of human cultures. As Chabata (2021:15) argues, there is need for detoxification of the Scriptures through balanced hermeneutics.

Johane Marange Apostolic Church gender-based violence situation and John 8:3–11

Gender-based violence situation in Johane Marange Apostolic Church

The researcher conducted some interviews in the Johane Marange, Ruwa District, Zimbabwe community and the following information was gathered.

The five married women and five teenage girls interviewed showed a very limited understanding of GBV. When Woman Number 1 (WN1) aged 47, was asked what GBV is, she said, '*Ndiri kutonzwa mazwi aya kekutanga*' (I am hearing the words for the first time). Woman Number 1 explained that she is the first in a polygamous marriage of eight wives, that she and the other seven women loved their husband equally, that their family of 23 children, 8 mothers and their husband does not believe in the so-called human rights. The researcher asked if there are any areas of life that she feels women in Johane Marange Apostolic Church should improve in. In response, she said, '*Madzimai echipositori akarairwa kuchengetedza mhuri, tinokomborerwa nekubereka vana nekuremekedza varume vedu sekudzidzisa kwaMwari, hatina dambudziko pezviri izvozvo*' (Apostolic women were oriented to raise families according to godly principles, to work hard, submit to and support their husbands, God blesses us women when we sire children). Asked if the girl child in Johane Marange has access to education like the boy child, WN1 said, '*Mwanasikana akadzidza kusvika pa Grade 7 chasara kubereka vana nekufadza murume wake*' (After Grade 7 the girl

child should marry, beget children, please and submit to her husband as instructed by God).

Girl child Number1 aged 12, said she learnt about GBV at school. She said, '*GBV ndezvoinitwa nevarume kudzvanyirira vanhukadzi kana vanasikana*' (GBV is to do with acts done by men to oppress women or the girl child). GN2 aged 13, who no longer goes to school said she heard about GBV but did not quite understand the concept.

A focus group interview session was held with elders (rabbis) of Johane Marange Apostolic Church and their understanding of, views on and attitudes towards GBV are summarised below:

- '*GBV ihondo yaAnti-Kristu yakauya kuzoparadza kereke nedzidziso dzedu vatema dzichitsiwa netsika dzevarungu dzechingochani, vakadzi vachichata nevamwe vakadzi, varume vachichatawo nekoko*' (Gender-Based Violence is an anti-Christ campaign that aims to destroy the biblical and African value system to replace it with the teachings of same sex marriages).
- '*Mhuri dzedu dzine runyararo nekuti vakadzi tinozviisa pasi pevarume sezvoinoreva Bhaibheri*' (Our marriages have always been peaceful because we are bound by biblical precepts that confer authority in men).

Gender-based violence parallels between Johannine community and Johane Marange Apostolic Church

Table 1 shows that there are striking similarities between the Johannine and the Johane Marange Ruwa District religious and cultural settings. Religious and cultural beliefs combine to entrench GBV in contemporary Zimbabwe, Johane Marange Apostolic Church as they influenced GBV in 1st century Johannine Jewish community.

Research findings

The overall findings of the research were as follows:

- There is a strong correlation between patriarchal and structural settings of GBV both in ancient Jewish and contemporary Zimbabwe's Johane Marange Apostolic Church.
- There is a need to separate traditions of men from theological truth in the interpretation of gender-sensitive texts of the Bible.

TABLE 1: Comparison between Biblical Johannine and Johane Marange Apostolic Church Communities use of Scriptures in GBV.

Biblical Johannine community	Johane Marange Apostolic Church Community
Women subjugation is scripture based.	Profuse reference to the Bible to justify gender stereotypes between men and women
Women accepted their position of subservience to men as legal	Women accepted their inferiority to men as God ordained
Societal norms based GBV	Societal norms based GBV
Deliberate misapplication of Scripture to prejudice women	Weak hermeneutical skills a cause of GBV practices
Roman administration advocated for relaxation of GBV against women	Zimbabwe Constitution Chapter 2, section 17(1) and (2) enforces gender balance
GBV rooted in Jewish cultural traditions	GBV rooted in African cultural traditions
Jesus' revolutionary hermeneutics freed GBV against women	Transformational/Revolutionary hermeneutics still needed

GBV, Gender-based violence.

- Members of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church have a very limited understanding of GBV.
- A limited understanding of the scriptures and adherence to obsolete human traditions have arrogated to men a baseless hierarchical supremacy over women (Bishau, Chitando & Chirongoma 2013:9; Magede & Mbwirire 2020:43; Maisiri 2015; Mashiri & Mawire 2013:94).
- The Johane Marange Apostolic Church is a closed community that does not open up to gender balance initiatives because of its entrenched esoteric tradition.
- Gender-based violence is rooted in a social construct that is inculcated in children at a young age with males having an upper hand over females.

Gaps and shortcomings

The following gaps and shortcomings in the treatment of GBV from a New Testament perspective are noticeable:

- Lack of an entrenched all-stakeholder approach to the tackling of religiously premised GBV in African Initiated Churches.
- Inadequate advocacy for gender parity-oriented hermeneutics in theological colleges and university faculties of theology.
- There is need to open up more dialogue between men and women on GBV issues in apostolic churches especially, where awareness of GBV is limited.

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Competing interests

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Author's contributions

The author, L.C., declares that he is the sole author of this research article.

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