

# **Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity in John 7:53-8:11**

**By**

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**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Theology in the Faculty of Theology at**

**Stellenbosch University**



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**December 2018**

# Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

December, 2018

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# Abstract

Violence against women can be perpetrated in various ways, among which is masculine supremacy or the desire to be a successful man at the expense of women. However, when manhood is seen as something that can only be achieved and defended through violent means, the vulnerability of women, who are in most cases regarded as the inferior and weak sex, becomes inevitable. This is one of the problems faced by Nigerian women. The experiences of my two mothers in their matrimonial home shared with my father provide a practical example of the violence Nigerian women face repeatedly. Since violence against women is often theologically motivated, it is important to address the norms that justify the abuse of women through a sound exegesis of a biblical text. This study therefore studied a text, John 7:53-8:11, which depicts violence being perpetrated against an unnamed woman in the name of a construction of manhood.

In order to achieve this, this study adopted a multifaceted hermeneutical approach. In this multifaceted study, the initial focus was on understanding John 7:53-8:11 within the narrative of John through the use of narrative criticism (Chapter 2). The focus in Chapter 2 thus is on the text and *the world in the text*. In Chapter 3, the focus is on John and *the world behind the text*. It is argued that the narrative of John and the *world in the text* reflect the socio-cultural values of the first century Greco-Roman world, even though these two “worlds” are not identical. Chapter 3 provides an analysis in terms of how men at the time of the writing of the Gospel of John constructed their masculinity. In Chapter 4, the text is read from a feminist perspective to ascertain if it can indeed contribute to the empowerment of contemporary women. It thus focuses on *the world in front of the text*.

It is the intention of this study to suggest an alternate way of constructing manhood. The study urges men to be redemptive, thereby taking swift steps to challenge women abuse, rather than instigating it. It is argued that one of the ways of achieving this is through Jesus Christ. Even though he was an ideal masculine figure, whose masculine attributes were divinely granted, he was also moulded by the androcentric culture of the time within which he was born and also grew up. Nevertheless, he chose to act contrary to the cultural values of his time. Occasionally, Jesus is seen in

John's Gospel as engaging with or participating in the patriarchal system of the society in which he was born. However, this did not change his attitude towards the women with whom he came into contact. He treated them as equal to men. This is a credible example that should be emulated by men of the twenty-first century, especially Nigerian men.

# Opsomming

Geweld teen vroue kan op 'n verskeidenheid maniere gepleeg word ten einde die heerskappy van mans oor vroue te handhaaf. Wanneer manlikheid egter gesien word as iets wat slegs deur gewelddadige middele bereik en verdedig kan word, is die uitbuiting van vroue en die siening dat hulle 'n minderwaardige geslag is onvermydelik. Dit is dan ook een van die uitdagings wat Nigeriese vroue ervaar. Die ervaring wat my twee moeders in hul huwelike met my pa gehad het, is 'n praktiese voorbeeld van die geweld wat Nigeriese vroue byna daaglik ervaar. Aangesien geweld teen vroue dikwels teologies gemotiveerd is, is dit belangrik om die norme wat die misbruik van vroue regverdig, deur middel van die goeie eksegeese van die Bybel aan te spreek. Hierdie studie beoog dus om Joh. 7:53-8:1, wat getuig van manlike geweld teenoor 'n naamlose vrou, te bestudeer.

Om die teks verantwoordelik te lees, volg hierdie studie 'n veelvlakkige hermeneutiese benadering. In hierdie veelvlakkige studie is die aanvanklike fokus op die lees van Johannes 7:53-8:11 deur middel van narratiewe kritiek (Hoofstuk 2). Die fokus in hierdie hoofstuk is op die teks en die wêreld in die teks. Hoofstuk 3 fokus op die geïmpliseerde leser van Johannes en die wêreld agter die teks. Daar word geargumenteer dat die geïmpliseerde leser van Johannes 'n leser is wat kennis dra van die sosio-kulturele waardes van die Grieks-Romeinse wêreld van die eerste eeu wat in die teks in die teks weerspieël word, hoewel hierdie twee wêreldes nie identies is nie. Hoofstuk 3 ontleed die gekose teks in terme van hoe mans ten tye van die skryf van die Johannes-Ewangelie hul manlikheid gekonstrueer het. In Hoofstuk 4 word die teks vanuit 'n feministiese perspektief gelees om vas te stel of dit inderdaad kan bydra tot die bemagtiging van kontemporêre vroue. Dit fokus dus op die wêreld voor die teks.

Dit is die bedoeling van hierdie studie om 'n alternatiewe konstruksie van manlikheid voor te stel. Die studie moedig mans aan om hulleself los te maak van negatiewe vorms van manlikheid en om mee te werk aan die uitdaging van die mishandeling van vroue. Daar word geargumenteer dat een van die maniere om dit te bereik, deur Jesus Christus is. Alhoewel hy 'n ideale manlike figuur is, is hy ook gevorm deur die

androsentriese kultuur van die tyd waarin hy gebore is en geleef het, soos uitgebeeld deur Johannes. Tog dui Johannes daarop dat Jesus die kulturele waardes van sy tyd uitgedaag het. Soms word Jesus in Johannes se Evangelie uitgebeeld dat hy die patriargale stelsel van die samelewing waarin hy gebore is, nagevolg het. Dit het egter nie sy houding teenoor die vroue waarmee hy in kontak gekom het, verander nie. Hy het hulle as gelyk aan mans behandel en bied hierin 'n geloofwaardige voorbeeld wat Nigeriese mans kan navolg.

# Dedication

This work is dedicated to my late mother, Patricia Ngizan, and my late step-mother, Esther Nyieker.

# List of abbreviations

JB Jerusalem Bible

NAB New American Bible

NEB New English Bible

NIV New International Version

RSV Revised Standard Version

TEV Today's English Version



# Acknowledgements

I would like to give God the glory for protecting me throughout the tasks of this study. Even when things went wrong and I thought I would not be able complete my studies at Stellenbosch, God made it possible. I am very appreciative.

My indebtedness goes to my academic supervisors, Professors Marius Nel and Charlene van der Walt, for their valuable advice, patience, love, encouragement and understanding. Their readiness to help me is immensely appreciated.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Professor Reggie Nel, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, Professor Hendrik L. Bosman, former Dean, and Professor Juliana M. Claassens and Dr Selina Palm, for their love and creative advice on how to conduct credible research work. My special thanks also go to the entire staff and students of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University.

Exceptional thanks go to the Church of Sweden, for funding the Gender, Health and Theology Master's programme and thereby providing the opportunity for me to take part in the expansion of this field. I will not forget the Rev Dr Kobus Odendaal and the Commission for Witness (CFW), for their immense financial support. To the Reformed Theological Seminary, Mkar, the Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT), the Dutch Reformed Church, Stellenbosch International Fellowship, and the Baptist Church at Stellenbosch: your financial and spiritual support cannot be forgotten.

Special thanks to my spiritual fathers and colleagues: Rev Dr Ayohol Ate (the immediate past NKST Synod President), Rev Anza (NKST Synod President), Rev P..G Azuana, Rev E.M. Shir (NKST General Secretary), Rev I. Vavem, Rev J.T. Hange, Rev Dr J.T. Iorkighir, Rev J.T. Abawua, Rev K. Nyam, Rev and Atese Awua Gbaka, Rev Dr J.T. Weor, Rev Samuel T. Kwaghlu, Rev Cephas Tyokase – what you did for me cannot be explained in words.

I am deeply indebted to these distinguished individuals: the Hon. Prince Yandev Amaa-Bai, the Hon. Joseph Kaaba, Mr Matthew Oryina Shawon, Mr Mathias Terhemba Sendave, Professor and Mrs Jurgen Hendriks, Mariette Odendaal, the

late Rev Johan Botha, Mama Selma Botha, Rev and Mum Jurie Goosens, Lisa le Roux, Mama Helene Lambrechts, Rev Nathan Arul, Rev Chilongozi Mwawi, Elizabeth Ayede, Nozuko Kabelitsha, Nocwaka Gxaba, Friday Kassa, and Phillip Ragette. Thank you to Mr Terfa Tsumba, Mr and Mrs Bitacy Jirgba, Mr and Mrs Emmanuel Terngu Orsar, Mr and Mrs Terungwa Ujoh, Marvel Ahungwa, Daniella Laha, Jennifer Abaji, Jennifer Nduur, Maria Onyi, Dooshima Ahura, Rose Vambe, Ayoungee Zungu Kyumbur, Enoch Mduega Tertese, Cyprian Bem Ikyagh – I greatly appreciate your assistance in one way or another. I am truly humbled by your kind gestures and pray to God to bless you abundantly.

To my beloved, understanding wife, Atese Nancy Ngunan Orpin, and my beautiful, loving children, Ngumom, Ngu-uma, Teryila, Ngizan and Esther (Mama Nyieker) - thank you for your sacrifices and, above all, your patience throughout my time away from home.

To my Father, Captain D.A. Orpin (Rtd), and my uncle, Daddy J.H. Orpin, I remain thankful for your parental role in my life. Mother-in-law, Mama Hembadon Kpela, your role in my journey cannot be forgotten. To my brothers – Terhemen, Aondona (Anzwa), Terhembra Aondosoo, sisters, and the entire Orpin family – I will remain grateful for your support, both in kind and in cash.

My appreciation goes to Heila Marè, Theresa Jooste and Annemarie Eagleton, for your assistance in helping me to locate and borrow books. Special thanks to my editor, for diligent language editing. Thank you all!

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a motivation for this study is provided (section 1.2), and the problem statement (section 1.3) and hypothesis (section 1.4) are stated, before a brief overview of previous African interpretations of John 7:53-8:11 is given (section 1.5), preceding an introduction to the methodology of the study (section 1.6).

## 1.2 Motivation for the study

I am from a polygamous Nigerian family in that my father had nine wives. Five of these wives have died, two of them divorced my father, while the other two wives have also separated from my father. My biological mother divorced my father in 1979 when I was two years old. She died in 1999. In his old age, my father has thus ended up on his own.

It is an unfavourable occurrence that a man who married nine wives could end up being single and lonely. With hindsight, one can easily infer that this tragic situation was due to his patriarchal domination of all his wives. However, when I was a little child, I never realised the effect of violence against women. Growing up in a violent household in which my father would beat his wives daily, I simply accepted his actions as being part of the acceptable conduct of a husband. As I became older, my father taught me that woman-battering is a major means through which a man can control a woman. I can remember numerous talks with my father, which he termed “man-to-man talks”, in this regard. One of his numerous pieces of advice to me during these talks was: *“Never in your lifetime should you turn yourself into a woman’s dress.”* This is a common derogatory expression among men of our land to describe men who have too much respect for women. Our men believe that such men are controlled by their wives; therefore, they have practically become “women’s dresses”.

When I became an adult, the negative attitude towards women in which I was enculturated began to wane. The person who helped me out of this cultural belief

was my step-mother (my father's first wife). Through her, I began to gain great respect for other women, but especially for her. Growing up without a biological mother was a very difficult experience for me, but my step-mother wiped my tears and practically became my second mother. She played a very significant parental role in my life; a role that always makes me shed tears whenever I remember the violence she suffered at the hands of my father. His abuse ultimately led to her illness and a painful death. I can also remember how my biological mother suffered in a similar manner at the hands of my father. I distinctly remember her voice of lament. It was a cry of an innocent woman lamenting her ordeal at the hands of a "mighty man", her husband. It is a lament that I hope never to hear again.

From my personal experience, as outlined above, I realised that violence against women is a crime against humanity that must not be overlooked. It is not only women who are victims of such violence, since their children are also greatly traumatised by it. However, despite the fact that several attempts have been made to address the scourge of violence against women, the problem persists in all parts of the world. *It is thus my sincere hope that my New Testament study will make a contribution to ending gender-based violence, which in turn will improve the health of countless women and children.*

Some Nigerian scholars<sup>1</sup> have pointed out that women in Nigeria are abused in several ways: physically, emotionally, sexually and otherwise, and that these sufferings experienced by Nigerian women are usually perpetrated by men in order to sustain their male identity and supremacy. In most cases, these violence acts are justified by institutions like the church. Abdullahi, Adekeye and Shehu (2011:247) explain how, in some Nigerian patrilineal communities, a girl-child is valued only for the fact that she might be given to another family, who in turn pay a bride-price for her. This practice makes a girl-child to be considered as a transitory member of the family into which she is born. Male children, as a result, gain the advantage of referring to women as being of lesser value than men. Abdullahi *et al.* (2011:247) maintain that the situation is worse in most rural societies, where household chores are reserved for girl-children. A girl who is not hard-working is referred to as a curse

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<sup>1</sup> Abdullahi *et al.* (2011); Akpotor (2009); Bazza (2009); Olawoye *et al.* (2004); Tenuche (2011).



to her family of birth and the family of her marriage. In some communities, girls are expected to marry earlier because that is what they were born for. This has compelled some girls to expose themselves to early sex in order to avoid being subdued by their own families; a practice that has brought many girls into contact with HIV/AIDS, other deadly diseases, and early pregnancies.

Women's rights are also not valued in that they have no right to make decisions that can enhance their personal health. A wife, for example, has no right, according to Nigerian culture, to decide on the number of children she is going to give birth to. Her husband tells her the number of children she is supposed to bear (Akpotor, 2009:2508). The effect of culture on women can also be seen in intimate-partnership violence. In Nigeria, wife battering or torture is accepted and even encouraged, and women are compelled to accept it as a norm (Bazza, 2009:178; Tenuche, 2011:199). Baloyi (2010:2) adds that some men claim that it is right to beat their wives because they paid a bride price (lobolo) for them.

Another area in which violence is perpetrated against Nigerian woman is through the belief that women are not supposed to be heads of their families (Akpotor, 2009:2508). Men are generally regarded to be the heads of their household or in their work place, no matter how young they are. With regard to age, a day-old male child is valued more than an older lady. In any household, the men have the power to make decisions that affect the family. In this regard, a son can even make decisions that are applied to his mother (Olawoye, Omololu, Aderinto, Adeyefa, Adeyemo & Osotimehin, 2004:2).

In different spheres of life – in politics, at schools, and in economic ventures – Nigerian women's autonomy is also restricted. Since the creation of Nigeria as an independent state on 1 October 1960, no woman has been elected as a governor of any of the 36 states, or as the president of the country (Akpotor, 2009:2505). Akpotor (2009:2505) laments that, even when opportunities are given to (Nigerian) women, this does not go down well with the men. This can be noted when the Hon. Patricia Eteh, who at one time was speaker of the house of representatives in Abuja, was impeached in May 2007 after six months as speaker. However, the Hon. Bankole, who became Speaker of the House in November 2007 after the impeachment of Eteh, was not impeached for the same crime for which Eteh was impeached. Mrs

Bucknor Bankole, who was Deputy Governor to Chief Tinubu, also suffered a similar embarrassment, which led to her resignation after two years (1999 to 2001) as Deputy Governor of Lagos State.

It is against this backdrop of the oppression of women in Nigeria that this work intends to study John 7:53-8:11 from different perspectives. The goal of this study was to encourage men to be redemptive, rather than being oppressive towards women. The motive for encouraging men to be redemptive in their actions towards women is so that they, along with women, can challenge the influence and menace of *patriarchal hegemonies* on women in particular, but also on humanity in general.

As a Minister of God's Word from a Reformed Church, whose beliefs and values are strictly governed by biblical injunctions, I believe that the approach that I have taken in this study is relevant to the Church in which I am a minister. In this approach, Jesus will be at the forefront of the study as an exemplary masculine figure whose life is worth imitating in constructing manhood.

### 1.3 Research question

Violence against women is not a problem restricted to our contemporary time. It was also a problem in the first century in which Jesus lived and worked, and in the following period in which his disciples and other early apostles proclaimed the gospel. Evidence of the violence against women from this period can be seen clearly in many biblical texts that scholars have termed "texts of terror".<sup>2</sup> For first-century audiences, these texts would probably not have been problematic, however, due to the fact that they simply reflected the socio-cultural context of the time. In our twenty-first century Christian context, however, these texts are highly problematic. Considering the fact that violence against women has been a problem for Christianity from the first century, *this thesis intends to study a text from this period that depicts violence being perpetrated against a woman. The text will be studied in terms of how it fits into John's narrative (Chapter 2) in view of how men in this period constructed and defended their manliness (Chapter 3), and from a contemporary feminist*

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Peter 3:1-7 are referred to as "texts of terror" because of the great inequality that these texts portray concerning the role of men and women.

*perspective* (Chapter 4). For this thesis, the specific biblical text to be explored is John 7:53-8:11.

By using John 7:53-8:11 as *focus text*, this study intends to address the following research questions:

- How is masculinity constructed in John's *narrative* of Jesus in general?
- How is masculinity constructed in John 7:53-8:11 in terms of the *socio-cultural world of the text*?
- Is John 7:53-8:11 a "text of terror" from a *feminist perspective*?
- What can engaging with the text in a multifaceted way contribute to the *liberation of women in Nigeria*?

The text will thus first be studied to see how it fits into John's narrative of Jesus (Chapter 2), and then to see if it presupposes, reflects and possibly challenges the dominant construction of masculinity of the first-century readers of John (Chapter 3). It will then be analysed from a feminist perspective (Chapter 4) to ascertain if the possible correction it presents to the first-century abuse of women is not in itself problematic for contemporary readers of John, before it will be used to address the plight of Nigerian woman (Chapter 5).

## 1.4 Hypotheses

This study is guided by the following hypotheses:

- (i) That John 7:53-8:11 is characterised by patriarchal hegemonic strands that dehumanise women, but that Jesus chooses to act differently through his exemplary redemptive and liberal acts toward women.
- (ii) That a possible way to challenge hegemonic structures and violence against women in contemporary societies like Nigeria is through the divine love of God, as shown by Christ in John 7:53-8:11.

## 1.5 Previous African interpretations of John 7:53-8:11

As stated above (sections 1.2 and 1.4), this work is foregrounded by the redemptive work performed by Jesus in John 7:53-8:11 so as to encourage men of the twenty-

first century, and especially African men, to imitate his example. As a result, it is pertinent to take note of the past research on this text conducted within an African context. I therefore, after taking note of the work of O'Sullivan, briefly summarise the work of African scholars like Baloyi (2010), Ottuh (2014), Kiambi (2012) and Lungu (2016). It is apparent from their work that this passage has been studied extensively in an African context. It is worth noting, with O'Sullivan (2015:6-7), that the interpretation of John 7:53-8:11 is not static but dynamic, and that the text can be viewed in different ways according to the interpreter's understanding of the problem being addressed. It is thus my hope to contribute to the ongoing interpretation of this important text in the context of Africa.

In his work, "Reading John 7:53-8:11 as a narrative against male violence against women", O'Sullivan (2015:6-7), affirms that the story of John 7:53-8:11 can help a reader to understand how Jesus' work of salvation is expressed therein as being contrary to the patriarchal or kyriarchal violence that was perpetrated against women during his earthly ministry. O'Sullivan (2015:2) explains that some texts serve as counter-texts to biblical texts that have failed to assure women of their liberation from oppression, but have instead dehumanised them in different ways. From this perspective, John 7:53-8:11 has the capacity to neutralise texts that are perceived to be violent to women, despite the fact that the world behind John 7:53-8:11 is embedded within a patriarchal setting, because Jesus' deeds in the text supersede these patriarchal underpinnings (O'Sullivan, 2015:7).

O'Sullivan (2015:3) states that, in the text, Jesus is presented with a dilemma. On the one hand, being a male within a Jewish society, of which the cultural and religious values must be respected, Jesus' responsibility was to do the will of God as stated in the Scriptures (the Laws of Moses). On the other hand, Jesus had the responsibility to execute the redemptive work that he was sent to do. Jesus thus had to act with extreme caution. In a situation in which Jesus was faced with two conflicting responsibilities,<sup>3</sup> He decided against upholding a culture that dehumanised others. The way Jesus handles the situation in John portrays him positively as an ideal male Saviour in a manner that even the Jews had to

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<sup>3</sup> Jesus is confronted with two options: either to uphold the Laws of Moses, or to perform his duty as a redeemer.

acknowledge. Building on this liberatory stance of Jesus in the text, it is appropriate to consider how some African scholars have also viewed the text with a similar perception of liberation.

### **1.5.1 Baloyi (2010) - A Re-reading of John 8:1-11 from a pastoral liberative perspective on South African women**

In his quest to continue with the task of rebuking the hostile attitude of some men towards women, whom they regard as secondary human beings, Baloyi's (2010:1) work on John 7:53-8:11 challenges the manner in which cultural and traditional laws are often used to legitimate women's suffering in Africa. Baloyi (2010:1) first identifies the violence that women experienced in the first-century period. He maintains that, during the first century Greco-Roman period, cultural and traditional laws were shaped by men for their benefit alone. He then specifically identifies John 7:53-8:11 as one of the New Testament texts that portrays the negative feelings of first-century Jews about women.

Baloyi (2010:3) furthermore shows how women are today still being oppressed in Africa in a similar manner as during the first century in the name of culture and tradition. Baloyi (2010:6) therefore concludes that Jesus' response in the text is very important, as it offers pastoral guidelines on how to console women who are facing all sorts of violence from men in the African context, where this text is often misinterpreted to justify a patriarchal society.

### **1.5.2 Kiambi (2012) – Divining John 7:53-8:11 for textual gender-motivated violence: A postcolonial approach**

For Kiambi (2012:11), John 7:53-8:11 clearly portrays a patriarchal setting in which men are favoured at the expense of women. As a result, an alternative interpretation of the text is required. He therefore suggests that the most suitable approach should be what he terms as divination. According to him, the use of divination in this text would not only pave the way for women's emancipation, but would also promote peaceful coexistence between men and women in society. In terms of this approach, the text is approached in the same manner in which an African diviner would perform an exorcism. Through this approach, every single patriarchal element that is obvious in the text must be identified and discarded.

Kiambi (2012:14) continues that the reason why this approach is preferable is that, in most cases, interpreters of John 7:53-8:11 tend to lay more emphasis on Jesus' personality and the merciful work he performs. When the text is viewed in this way, the presence and the sufferings of the accused woman in the text are completely neglected. As a result, the woman continues to be a passive character in the text. Thereby, the quest of challenging patriarchal hegemony is rendered futile and defeated.

Kiambi (2012:14) therefore concludes that biblical scholars must always take cognisance of texts that are less liberating and, as a result, get rid of any sort of evil elements that make it less liberating. For communities to be "*healed*" from the "*illness*" of gender violence, biblical interpreters must try as much as possible to amplify those features in the Bible that can "*heal*" relationships, and also redeem men and women from the danger of violent acts.

### **1.5.3 Ottuh (2014) - The Urhobo traditional justice system in relation to adultery in the light of John 8:1-11: A feminist approach**

Ottuh (2014) interprets John 7:53-8:11 from the cultural milieu of the Nigerian Urhobo people. He summarises how cultural undertones and wrongful interpretation of cultural values in his culture give men unmerited privilege over women. He argues that both men and women were created in God's image and must therefore be treated equally. The example portrayed by Jesus in the text of John 7:53-8:11 should thus be emulated by men in contemporary society in order to challenge violence against women.

### **1.5.4 Lungu (2016) – Socio-cultural and gender perspectives in John 7:53 8:11: Exegetical reflections in the context of violence against women in Zambia**

Lungu (2016:5) approaches John 7:53-8:11 by focusing on Jesus' role in the text in order to address the problem of gender-based violence in Zambia. Just like Baloyi (2010:1), Lungu (2016:5) reaffirms that violence against women is not just a contemporary problem, but is instead a problem that had been in practice in Zambia for years. Considering the persistent occurrence of violence against women in the Zambian context, Lungu (2016:34-37) maintains that the Zambian situation can be compared to that of the first-century Greco-Roman context, in which the Pharisees

and the Scribes in John 7:53-8:11 preferred to protect Moses' Law at the expense of the woman's life. At the same time, they exonerated the woman's partner (the man) in the transgression while pretending to be acting according to law.

It is clear that, from their cultural context, there was nothing wrong with their actions, as the laws they were striving tirelessly to protect approved of their actions. However, Jesus boldly disapproved their action by re-interpreting the laws that they worshipped and adhered to strictly (Lungu, 2016:51). By doing this, Jesus not only redeemed the woman, but also restored her dignity as a human being. This significant role played by Jesus in the story is of great importance in bringing hope to the Zambian Church, and to women all over the world who are faced with problems of gender violence (Lungu, 2016:61).

### **1.5.5 Summary**

From the above scholarly work on John 7:53-8:11, it is clear that there is agreement amongst African scholars that violence against women is real and that one of the ways of addressing this scourge is to emulate the manner in which Jesus, in John, treated men and women as equals in God's kingdom. This study will build on this liberatory viewpoint. Therefore, my reading of John 7:53-8:11 is also focused on the redemptive work that Jesus is described in the text as doing.

## **1.6 Methodology and research design**

When a reader reads a text, he or she does the work of an interpreter at the same time (Fee & Stuart, 1993:16). The significance of a reader or an interpreter of a text is therefore that he or she serves as a means through which the meaning of a text is derived. As emphasised by O'Sullivan (2015:1), "texts do not speak for themselves but have to be interpreted". O'Sullivan (2015:1-2) therefore asserts that, since a reader or an interpreter is essential for deriving meaning from a text, there are some principles of interpretation through which a text's meaning can be unlocked, and that the text's meaning is usually expounded in relation to a reader's intentions of carrying out such a reading.

With this in mind, the research design chosen for this study is a hermeneutical study,<sup>4</sup> which will be done through a *multifaceted approach*. This approach is pertinent to this study because, despite the fact that this research work is primarily a New Testament study, it is also an interdisciplinary study (gender, health and theology) which aims at addressing gender and relational problems.

In order to address these issues of gender relations, it becomes pertinent to adopt a hermeneutical approach that is relevant to such an interdisciplinary study. By adopting a multifaceted approach, this work agrees with Mouton's (2002:3) dissatisfaction with the practice of viewing the Bible only from a "one-sided mode". For her, the one-sided mode that is used by some Christians is, in most cases, either the "theological" or "spiritual" dimension of the Bible. For Mouton (2002:3), when Scripture is interpreted only from such a one-sided point of view, it becomes almost inevitable that the biblical texts would be regarded as absolute and unquestionable, even when they seem to be encouraging patriarchal dominance. When this happens, these biblical passages are treated as casuistic laws and principles, which are in most cases claimed to be a divine directive that are supposed to be applicable to all circumstances in life. In order to undertake a multifaceted study of John 7:53-8:11, more than one methodology will be used.

### 1.6.1 Methodologies

Some scholars (for example Green, 1995:1-3; Lategan, 1984:1; Longman, 1987:64-67; Shillington, 2002:208; Tate, 2008:4-5; Van der Merwe, 2015:3) state that biblical interpretation is a form of communication that exists between three communication partners: the sender (the author), the message (the text), and the receiver (the reader) of the message. According to Gooder (2009:iv), New Testament

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<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, hermeneutics is more concerned with how meaning and the principles of interpretation are derived in any written document or communication. Biblical hermeneutics, on the other hand, is specifically concerned with deriving meaning through biblical interpretation. Hermeneutics is a broad term that is divided into two major aspects. The first aspect is known as *exegesis*, while the second aspect is called *interpretation*. Exegesis concerns itself with scrutinising a text in order to ascertain how the first readers of such a text understood it. Interpretation consists of the techniques involved in explaining or drawing out the implications of that which was understood by the first readers, thereby relating it to how the contemporary readers would understand it (Tate, 2008:1).



interpretation is therefore a very long journey that usually occurs from event to reader.

The journey from event to reader is usually divided into three major parts. The first part deals with the journey from event to text. The second part is the text itself. The last journey is the one from text to reader. In this communication process, all the three conversational parties – the author (sender of message), the text (the message), and the reader (receiver of the message) must also be brought together in order to arrive at the meaning of a message (Shillington, 2002:208; Tate, 2008:1). *Since we lack any reliable knowledge about the real author and readers of John, the focus in this study is on the meaning of the text itself and the world it creates (Chapter 2 and 3), before its meaning for contemporary feminist readers is addressed (Chapter 4).*

Biblical texts furthermore presuppose three worlds, as stated by Green (1995:6-9). These “worlds” are the world behind the text, the world within the text, and the world in front of the text. Scholars like Gooder (2009:iv), Shillington (2002:207) and Tate (2008:1) have cautioned that the interpretation of a given text is weakened when any of the “worlds” is preferred at the expense of the other two. *They therefore suggest that the three worlds must be brought into conversation with each other.* It was thus the intention of this study to initiate a conversation between the different interpretations undertaken in line with the “worlds”. The idea is not that the meaning derived from reading the text in terms of one world (e.g. the world behind the text) should be chosen as the best, or only way, of reading John 7:53-8:11. It was instead to enrich our understanding of this text.

### **1.6.2 Research design**

In this multifaceted study, the initial focus is on understanding John 7:53-8:11 within the narrative of John through the use of narrative criticism (Chapter 2). The methodology of narrative criticism itself will be explained in Chapter 2. The focus in Chapter 2 thus is on the text and the world in the text.

In Chapter 3, the focus will be on the Gospel of John and the world behind it. It is argued that the socio-cultural values of the first-century Greco-Roman world that are

reflected in the word in the text are helpful to illumine the meaning of the Gospel's world in the text, even though these two "worlds" are not identical.

In Chapter 4, the text is read from a feminist perspective to ascertain if it can indeed contribute to the empowerment of contemporary women. It thus focuses on the world in front of the text.

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the study and draws a number of conclusions.

**Key Words:** Patriarchal hegemonies; Narrative criticism; Socio-cultural values; Feminist criticism; Redemptive masculinities

## **1.7 Conclusion**

Through multiple methodologies, including that of feminist criticism, this study intends to build on the Johannine Gospel's portrayal of Jesus and his redemptive deeds among women. For the sake of focus, most of the discussion in this work revolves around the pericope of John 7:53-8:11. This study thereby hopes to encourage men to imitate Jesus' deeds as portrayed in the Gospel of John. With this redemptive motive, this thesis endeavours to interact with the themes of gender, health, and theology.

# Chapter 2 – Reading John 7:53-8:11 within John’s narrative

## 2.1 Introduction

As indicated in section 1.6, biblical interpretation usually investigates the communication between the sender (the author), the message (the text) and the receiver (the reader) of the various biblical texts. In investigating this communication process, all the three conversational parties – the author (sender of message), the text (the message) and the reader (receiver of the message) must thus be considered, but *since we lack any reliable knowledge about the real author and readers of John, the focus in this chapter is on the meaning of the text itself and the world it creates.*

In this chapter, the world created by the text (section 2.2) will be discussed, after which narrative criticism as method is explained (section 2.3), along with how a narrative can be analysed (section 2.4), before a narrative analysis of John 7:53-8:11 is undertaken (section 2.5). In section 2.6, the manner in which Jesus is depicted as the ideal man will be discussed, before coming to a number of conclusions (section 2.7).

## 2.2 The world created by the text

When focusing on a text itself, the referential and mimetic qualities of it must be taken into consideration. On the one hand, the referential quality of a text refers to the relationship between the language of the text and the world that it projects or creates. On the other hand, the mimetic quality of a text is the relationship between the original world and the world of the text. By using the referential quality of literature, an author is able to make use of language in order to create the world of the text. *This world is sometimes similar to the real world of the author, but these two “worlds” are not identical* (Tate, 2008:89-90). In the textual world, the author can, for example, make use of words that refer to objects that may or may not be identified in the real world. Text-centred approaches therefore focus on the world within the text,

which is comprised of the narrative or story world created by the text.<sup>5</sup> In these approaches, textual autonomy is crucial in that it is not the intention of the author that is pre-eminent, but rather that of the text, which functions as an autonomous work of literature that communicates meaning.

The processes whereby a part or whole of a text is considered as a medium from which meaning is derived in text-centred approaches are all literary in nature. Some of the approaches that fall under this category of literary criticism are: linguistic criticism, discourse analysis, redaction criticism, genre criticism, new criticism, narrative criticism, structural criticism, rhetorical criticism, and reader-response criticism (Green, 1995:8; Segovia, 1995:373; Tate, 2008:180-185). Different approaches have different intentions and are often tailored to interpret a specific genre of texts.

In terms of the genre of the New Testament Gospels, some scholars argue that they can be classified under a group of writings known as historiography (Tate, 2008:139). This simply means that the Gospels are essentially stories about events in the past. For other scholars, like Burrige (2007:25), the Gospels belong to the genre of ancient bios instead, since they are stories about the life of one person. However, even if the Gospels were written as biographic accounts of Jesus, it is still obvious that these biographies are narrated in the form of stories.

In order to prove that the Gospel accounts are stories, Tate (2008:139), in his explanation of the features of a story, explains that an effective story usually has a beginning, a middle and an end. A story must also create limits within which literary elements like plot, setting, characterisation and conflict are considered. What is pertinent here is that, in story-telling, not every minor detail is emphasised. In order to narrate a major truth, the author selects, arranges and construes meaning from events, characters and settings by making use of literary devices that effectively express those truths. *In order to study these aspects of a narrative, the relevant approach to use is narrative criticism.*

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<sup>5</sup> It must be noted that the referential quality of a text is very significant because it often discloses the storyline and plot of the world of the text. At the same time, the reader is challenged through the mimetic function of a text to discover the truth about a text and the message it contains (Tate, 2008:90).

## 2.3 Narrative criticism

In his contribution on narrative criticism, Tate (2008:337-338) maintains that all critics of narratives must identify the narrative world as a different world from the real world. The real world is experienced in time and space, while the world of the narrative is limited. Movement into the narrative world is done through secondary means created by the text, such as objects, persons and events in the narrative, which usually are not similar to anything in the real world. The meaning of a text is only derived from the narrative world and not from the real world (Tate, 2008:337). As noted earlier (section 2.2), any story consists of elements such as events, characters and settings, and the interaction of these elements comprises what we call the plot. The plot, in turn, guides the reader through devices intrinsic to the process of storytelling. For an interpreter to determine the meaning of a narrative work, he or she must thus take into account how the narrative communication pattern flows (Tolmie, 1995:33).

### 2.3.1 Aspects of narration

Narrative criticism can be done effectively by applying the theoretical model of Seymour Chatman, as suggested by Culpepper (1983:6), Moore (1989:46) and Tolmie (1995:33) among other scholars. The model is as follows:

Real Author [*Implied Author-Narrator-Narratee-Implied Reader*] Real Reader.

According to the model, six participants are involved in a narrative communication situation. The communication from the actual author to the actual reader is done instrumentally through the personae within the brackets. This study follows the features of the narrative communication pattern as diagrammed above, with the real author and the real reader deliberately left out. As explained by Tolmie (1995:34), these two participants in the narrative communication situation are to be regarded as extra-textual, in the sense that they are not directly represented in the narrative text. The focus will instead be on the implied reader and author.

#### 2.3.1.1 *The implied author*

The implied author is always distinct from the real author. Tate (1991:192) and Tolmie (1995:39) define the implied author as an interpretive construct that is created by the reader from the text during the reading progress. One of the

significant features of the implied author is thus that he or she is not a real human author, but rather inferred or created by a literary work. This is what usually differentiates the implied and the real authors. As an inferred author, he or she delivers the message to the readers through a narrator, another inferred communicator of a text (Culpepper, 1983:16).<sup>6</sup> The implied reader is thus an intra-textual literary construct, functioning as a counterpart of the implied author (Tolmie, 1995:39).

### 2.3.1.2 *The implied reader*

Iser (1978:34) and Tate (1991:192) explain that, for a literary work to be effective, a potential reader to whom the text speaks is also created by the text itself. The *implied reader* is firmly planted in the structure of a text. He or she is a construct and therefore must not be identified with any real reader. The implied reader is portrayed by the text as the one who does all the mental moves that are essential to enter into the narrative world and thereby respond to it as the implied author anticipates. Biblical narratives are written to convince the implied reader to embrace a perspective that is in line with the narrative's norms, values and beliefs. This perspective is otherwise referred to as the point of view (Kieffer, 1999:50; Resseguie, 2012:5).

Culpepper (1983:209) explains that, as the reader adopts the viewpoints thrust on him or her by the text, envisages and works out all that the text allows the reader to do, the text's meaning is steadily actualised. In this process, the reader obtains important information from the narrator.

### 2.3.1.3 *The narrator*

The voice that narrates the story and speaks to the reader is a rhetorical device. The reader's response is further moulded by both the narrator's explicit commentary and by the supplementary implicit commentary that permeates the narrative (Culpepper, 1983:7, 16; Longman, 1987:84; Moore, 1989:46). In John, the narrator is undramatised and functions as the voice of the implied author. Since the narrator uses the author's point of view, the two of them are not usually distinguished. The

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<sup>6</sup> Culpepper (1983:15) explains that it is the task of the implied author to select what the reader reads. He does this knowingly or unknowingly.

narrator leads and guides the reader through the narrative, familiarises the reader with the world of the narrative, and offers the proper viewpoint from which to view the action. In John, the narrator is the person who speaks in the prologue, narrates the story, announces the dialogue, offers explanations, interprets terms, and tells the implied reader what various characters knew or did not know. To be precise, the narrator conveys to the implied reader what to think. Because he, or she, makes remarks to the reader that interrupt the movement of the narrative, the narrator is said to be intrusive. The implied reader has a perfect sense of his or her presence and refer to him or her as a person. As the narrator narrates the story, and due to the way he or she tells it, the implied reader soon acknowledge him or her as a trusted guide to the meaning of Jesus' life and death (Bennema, 2009:400; Culpepper, 1983:16-17).

#### *2.3.1.4 The narratee*

The narratee, on the other hand, is the counterpart of the narrator. The narratee is defined as the narrator's immediate addressee (e.g. Theophilus in Luke-Acts). There is a clear distinction between the narratee and the implied reader or audience. While the narratee directly receives the story as told by the narrator moment by moment, the implied reader, in contrast, reads the story as it is being told to the narratee. Another difference between the two is that the narratee is totally defined by the work, while the implied reader is not totally defined by the text but only implied by it. The narratee may be one of the characters within the story, just like the narrator may be in some instances (Longman, 1987:85; Moore, 1989:46; Tate, 2008:337; Tolmie, 1995:33).

#### *2.3.1.5 Point of view*

Point of view in narratives is closely bound to the narrator (Longman, 1987:87). It is both the style and viewpoint from which characters, dialogue, actions, setting and events are perceived, and the narrator's attitude concerning the evaluation of characters and events (Longman, 1987:87; Resseguie, 2012:3).

According to Culpepper (1983:20), the point of view from which the story is told may remain unswervingly internal or external as the story progresses, or it may alter from scene to scene, or different positions may be used at the same time. A narrator may

also provide inside opinions of some characters but not of others, thereby constructing a difference in the readers in the sense of distance from the different characters.

The most important points of view that the narrator uses, as emphasised by Culpepper (1983:32) and Resseguie (2012:4), is the *evaluative point of view*. This is important because, in terms of the narrator's point of view, there is a probability that the narrator would, in some instances, be partial or prejudicial. This point of view is important, since it leads the reader to understand what the characters do in the story from the narrator's evaluative point of view. The evaluative point of view presents the narrator as an absolutely *reliable* person who speaks in accordance with the norms of the work (Culpepper, 1983:32).

## 2.4 Analysing a narrative

Apart from the communication patterns discussed above (sections 2.3.1.1 to 2.3.1.5) that occur in a narrative, there are other basic elements that are essential for the analysis of a story. According to Powell (1990:35), these include events, settings, and characters.<sup>7</sup>

### 2.4.1 Events

Powell (1990:35) says that events are the happenings that transpire within a story. Without events, a story ceases to exist. The mode in which the events of a story are presented is referred to as the story-as-discourse. According to Powell, there are several features that govern the reporting of events. These are: conflicts, the order of events, the duration of discourse time, the frequency with which events happen in a story and the frequency with which those events are reported in a story, and the elements of causality that link one event with another (Powell, 1990:36-43). In this research work, only a few of the elements of events mentioned above are considered, as explained below.

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<sup>7</sup> It must be noted that the communication pattern that consist of the implied author and the implied reader, the narrator and the narratee, etc. are just to show how communication or the presentation of ideas is done in a narrative criticism. Settings, characters, and the events give the reader a clue about the central meaning of a narrative or what the narrative story is about.



An event of a story may be examined in terms of what such an event contributes to the development and resolution of conflict in the whole of the narrative. Powell (1990:42-43; 1995:245) emphasises the significance of conflict in a story, as it is one of the factors that drive the plot and also help the reader of a narrative to arrive at his or her personal judgement about the story of the narrative. Each and every narrative contains conflicts. These conflicts can be a clash of actions or ideas. There are different levels in which conflicts could occur, but the most common are conflicts that occur between characters. Powell (1995:245) adds that what is interesting about the conflicts in narratives is the manner in which they are developed and resolved. This has a significant effect on the reader, especially on the manner in which he or she experiences a story. When conflicts are not resolved, readers are left to decide or imagine how they feel such conflicts could have been resolved.

#### **2.4.2 Settings**

Abrams (1999:284-285) defines settings as the general locale, social circumstances and historical time in which the action of a narrative occurs. Settings are vital to characters because they provide the locations and contexts in which the characters act (Powell, 1990:69).

Settings in literary texts can be real or imaginary places (Abrams, 1999:284). However, settings are not viewed or scrutinised by narrative critics in terms of their external references or historical geography; instead, they are viewed as having internal meanings. Places and times are very important because they acquire highly connotational values. These values are very helpful in deriving meaning from a narrative (Malbon, 2009:81).

Settings are classified into spatial, temporal and social settings. Firstly, spatial settings include the physical environment of the story in which the characters live. Secondly, temporal settings are viewed in diverse dimensions. They deal with a particular point in time in which an action takes place (locative references). This time location may be a day or an hour, a year or a century. Temporal settings may indicate a chronological setting that denotes an interval of time over which an action occurs (durative references). Also, temporal settings specify the kind of time within which an action occurs. In this case it is concerned with a specific moment, like morning or night. Last, but not least in relation to the aspects of settings, are the

social settings. Social settings consist of the political institutions, economic systems, social customs, class structures and general cultural context that are believed to be operative in a work (Powell, 1990:72-74). Apart from unveiling who the characters of a story are, settings also uncover the conflicts of a narrative and provide structure to a story.

### **2.4.3 Characters and characterisation**

One of the most interesting elements of any story is the cast of characters that populate it. Abrams (1999:32) defines characters as the persons depicted in a narrative work. Building on Forster's classification of characters, which divides them into flat, static and opaque types, Culpepper (1983:103) gives another helpful way in which characters are classified. They are as follows: the protagonist, the intermediate characters or the *ficelles*, and the background characters. This kind of character classification could be likened to that of Bennema (2009:399) and Resseguie (2012:11), who classify the characters in the Fourth Gospel as complex, developing and round. Protagonists are the central characters whose motivation and history are most fully established. The *ficelles* are the type of characters that are easily recognised by the readers. The function of the *ficelles* in a text is to reveal the protagonist.

Concerning characterisation, Abrams (1999:33) and Powell (1990:52) explain that it is usually done in two ways: showing and telling. The showing method is also known as the dramatic method. Under this method, characters are presented performing an action or engaging in a dialogue. The reader is left to infer the motives and meanings that lie behind what the characters say or do. It is not only the external actions and speeches of the characters that are revealed by the author, but the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters are also revealed. Telling, on the other hand, is a method in which an author describes and sometimes evaluates the motives and qualities of each character in a narrative (Abrams, 1999:33).

Similarly, Tolmie (1995:165) maintains that characterisation is done in two ways: *direct definition* and *indirect presentation*. The direct definition of characters usually consists of the description of a character by an adjective, like the living God; an abstract noun or another noun, like God is love; and a part of speech, for example, all things came into being through him. The indirect presentation of characters, on

the other hand, is when a trait may be displayed or illustrated in any of the following ways: action, speech, external appearance and environment.

Resseguie (2012:11) explains that character traits are very important, as they enable a reader to know about a character's rise to success or fall to disaster. The reader learns both from the success of characters who overcome obstacles, and from the errors of judgement that lead others to disaster. And, since character and plot are intricately bound, a change or development in a character often provides a clue to the direction and meaning of the plot and theme. For instance, the manner in which a protagonist approaches some crucial situation in his or her life will likely be a clue to the story's meaning. Therefore, explaining the change in a character will be the best way to get at the point of the story.

Characters are often used to express empathy or antipathy. Empathy is the effect that a narrative exerts on the readers' feelings about some characters in a narrative. It could be expressed in two ways. Firstly, readers may feel that they are just like the characters they empathise with. This kind of empathy is known as realistic. Secondly, the characters may be presented as having some qualities or experiences that the readers wish to imitate. This is what is known as idealistic empathy (Powell, 1995:246).

Antipathy, on the other hand, is a feeling of unfriendliness towards particular characters in a story. It is created in the same way as empathetic responses are created (Powell, 1990:57).

## **2.5 Narrative critical analysis of John 7:53-8:11**

In applying this approach to John 7:53-8:11, this section intends to approach the text from three narrative perspectives, as explained above: the settings (section 2.4.1), the characters (section 2.4.2), and the events (section 2.4.3) that are presumed to be encoded in the narrative. Together, the interaction of these elements comprises what is called the plot (Powell, 1990:23).

But, before the text is analysed, it is significant to locate the text within the plot of the entire narrative of John and where the pericope, John 7:53-8:11, fits into it. Also, as noted above (section 1:6), any hermeneutical study usually has the exegetical and

interpretative motives. Therefore, as some of the expressions in the pericope are used in several sections of this study for the purposes of emphasis and clarification, it also becomes important for its Greek version to be translated too.

### **2.5.1 The story of John 7:53-8:11 within the plot of John's Gospel**

Even though John 7:53-8:11 is considered by some scholars (Punch, 2016:8) as an interpolation,<sup>8</sup> it is worth noting that narrative criticism works with a text as it is. This work, therefore, does not take into consideration that John 7:53-8:11 is an interpolation.

The Gospel of John can be divided into four units: the prologue (1:1-18); the Book of Signs (1:19-12:50); the Book of Glory (13:1-21:23); and the postscript (21:24-25). The Book of Signs of John's Gospel is further divided into sub-categories. Firstly, John 1-4 relates the story of Jesus as he makes new disciples and the positive

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<sup>8</sup> Scholars (for example Baum, 2014:163; Gench, 2009:398; Keith 2009:119; O'Day, 1992; Punch, 2016:8) have affirmed the fact that the canonical status of John 7:53-8:11 is debatable. This is because the text is missing from many of the significant early Greek textual witnesses. These author argue that even in some of the manuscripts where John 7:53-8:11 seem to appear, there are still some disagreements on the location of the text. O'Day (1992:638) and Keith (2009:119) maintain that despite the fact that John 7:53-8:11 is the primary location of the text in the biblical tradition, there are also manuscript evidence that locate the text in several locations as follow: at Luke 21:38, after John 7:36, and at the end of the Gospel of John. The unstable state of John 7:53-8:11 in the canon has made scholars to question its provenance. The main question which scholars ask is this: Does the text belong to Johannine tradition at all? To some scholars it is a Johannine text, while others maintain that the text is Lucan or an independent piece of Jesus' tradition (O'Day, 1992:639; Baum, 2014:177). In spite of several similarities between the Johannine literary style and the text as expressed in section 2.5.1, some stylistic elements in the text are used in order to challenge the Johannine composition of the text. For instance, expressions like the "Pharisees and the Scribes" and "Mount of Olives" are found nowhere else in the Gospel of John. Rather, these expressions are considered as being more Lucan in style. With these inconsistencies, Baum (2014:163) opines that the pericope should not have been placed between John 7 and 8 because it is not part of the original text of Gospel. Rather, the appropriate place of the text in the Gospel could have been after the Gospel of John, because the text probably comes from the same historical root. However, even with the numerous inconsistencies that the text presents, Baum (2014:163) and Gench (2009:398) argue that John 7:53-8:11 has great theological and ethical significant values due to the fact that it presents the forgiveness of Jesus to a condemned woman in a more colourful and elaborate ways than any text in the New Testament.

response of each disciple to his call. In each instance, the disciple is seen describing the personality of Jesus by giving him a title they find suitable for Jesus. Some of these titles are King of Israel (1:49), Son of God (1:34 and 49), Messiah (1:41), and Saviour of the world (4:42). What is important in this section is the positive tone it portrays. Apart from Nicodemus, who failed to comprehend Jesus' message, others are portrayed responding positively to Jesus' calling and message. Unlike the first part of the Book of Signs of the Johannine Gospel, the second part of the book (John 2-12) takes a drastic negative change in the tone of the story. In this section, Jesus is met with hostile disputes and opposition from his audience as a result of his divine and prophetic claims. It is this hostility that Jesus faces that would later lead to his death, which occurs in the second half of the Gospel, known as the Book of Glory (13:1-21:23). It is interesting to note that it is within this second part of the Book of Signs that the pericope of John 7:53-8:11 is located (Achte-meier, Green & Thompson, 2001:179-180; Kostenberger, 2009:167).

But locating John 7:53-8:11 within the context of the Book of Signs is not enough, as the context is too broad. Therefore, it is important to bring it more closely to the immediate context, as situated in John. Punch (2016:10) explains that the text of John 7:53-8:11 blends well with the setting of the tabernacle context. This is because the event that is discussed in John 7 and 8 is the Israelite Feast of the Tabernacles. In order to prove that John 7:53-8:11 blends well and contributes to the narrative flow of John 7 and 8, Heil (1991:183-184) provides two literary devices that make the passage an authentic portion of the Johannine narrative. On the one hand, Heil (1991:183) argues that there are striking linguistic links between the story and the Johannine narrative. On the other hand, there is a remarkable literary linkage that indicates that the story contributes to the narrative progression in John 7-8.

With regard to linguistic linkages that occur within the Tabernacle context, Heil (1991:183) is more concerned with the significant linguistic links of style and vocabulary that occur between John 7:53-8:11 and the rest of the Gospel. One of these linkages is found in the expression: Teaching in the Temple (Ἐδίδασκεν αὐτούς, He taught them) which occurs in two places in the Tabernacle narrative in John 8:2 and 7:14. These verses create a linkage. They explain what Jesus does in the Temple – an action he started on the previous day at the feast of Tabernacles.

The second linguistic linkage is what Heil (1991:183) terms the narrator's asides ("Ἐλεγον πειράζοντες, they said tempting him). This aside is found in both John 8:6 and 6:6. Heil (1991:183) explains that the literary function of both asides is to create suspense for the readers. Readers would continue to wonder whether or not the motive behind the actions is successfully carried out. Such asides are quite characteristic of the narrative style of the Gospel of John (Keith, 2009:166-167).

The third linguistic linkage occurs in John 8:7 and 8:59, to throw a stone (βάλλειν λίθους). Heil (1991:183) and Keith (2009:170) explain that the relationship between these passages is not just coincidental, but is an important part of the narrative. In John 8:59, the Jews would be seen taking up stones to throw at Jesus, an action that they were afraid to do to the adulterous woman, as the story unveils later.

The last, but not the least, of the linguistic linkages is found in John 8:11 and 5:14, sin no longer (μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε). These commands to sin no longer are significant Johannine terminology, as they add strength to its theology (Heil, 1991:185; Keith, 2009:172).

Apart from linguistic linkages that prove how John 7:53-8:11 falls within the context of the tabernacle discourse, Heil (1991:185) takes note of the literary linkages that play a significant role in the flow of the narrative.

The narrative sequence shows clearly how the text fits into the narrative of John 7 and 8. Without the story of John 7:53-8:11, the transition between 7:52 and 8:12 appears rather awkward. In the scene in John 7:45-52, Jesus is obviously absent. The scene abruptly concludes with a reply of the Pharisees to Nicodemus. In 8:12, Jesus is seen speaking again to them, saying "I am the light of the world...". The "them" stated in 8:12 simply refers to whom Jesus is teaching in 8:2, and indirectly to the adulteress and the Pharisees, who presumably left in 8:9 but are present in 8:13 (Heil, 1991:185). Also, in the story in John 7:53-8:11, the transition from 7:52 to 7:53 and the introduction to the story appear quite smooth. As will be considered later in this work (section 2.5.3.1), when 7:53 states that each went to his own house, the reference for "each" would be the guards, the chief priests, the Pharisees and Nicodemus, thus bringing the preceding scene (7:45-52) to a conclusion. A new

scene in the story then begins in 8:2, when Jesus returns to the temple on the next day and continues the teaching he commenced on the previous day.

### 2.5.2 Translation of John 7:53-8:11<sup>9</sup>

As stated above (section 2.5), translating John 7:53-8:11 is also pertinent to this work, because some of these expressions (both in English and Greek) will be used subsequently for the purpose of emphasis and illustration.

Vs	Greek	English
7.53 <sup>10</sup>	Καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν ἕκαστος εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ. <sup>11</sup>	Then each one went to his own house.
8.1	Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν Ἐλαιῶν.	But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.
8.2	Ὁρθρου <sup>12</sup> δὲ πάλιν παρεγένετο εἰς τὸ ἱερόν καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἤρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν, καὶ καθίσας ἐδίδασκεν <sup>13</sup> αὐτούς.	And early in the morning, he again came into the temple. And all the people came to him, and having sat down, he began to teach them.

<sup>9</sup> It is a well-known fact that the New Testament books were written in Greek (Barton, 1995:64). In 63 BC, the Romans emerged as the dominant power over the land of Israel. It is interesting that, even as the Romans gained political power after 63 BC, Hellenistic culture still remained the dominant culture. And, being the dominant culture, the Greek language was also the dominant language. So, even though Aramaic was the language that the Jews spoke after the Babylonian captivity, and the language that Jesus himself spoke, the Greek language took pre-eminence. As a result, when one travelled throughout the Mediterranean world, one could easily communicate in the Greek language because of the pervasive evidence of the influence of Hellenistic culture (Green & McDonald, 2013:5).

<sup>10</sup> The TEV simply omits this verse from chapter 7 and joins it to verse 1 of chapter 8.

<sup>11</sup> The TEV translates the verse as “then everyone went home”. The Jerusalem Bible (JB) renders it as “they all went home”.

<sup>12</sup> Ὁρθρου literally means “early” – NEB and JB translate it as “at daybreak”. NIV translates “at dawn”.

<sup>13</sup> Καθίσας ἐδίδασκεν literally means “sitting, he taught” - NEB translates it as “was engaged in teaching”. NIV translates as “he sat down to teach them”.

8.3	Ἄγουσιν δὲ οἱ γραμματεῖς <sup>14</sup> καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι γυναῖκα ἐπὶ μοιχεία κατειλημμένην καὶ στήσαντες αὐτὴν ἐν μέσῳ. <sup>15</sup>	And the Pharisees and the Scribes brought a woman having been caught in adultery, and making her stand in the middle.
8.4	λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Διδάσκαλε, αὕτη ἡ γυνὴ κατείληπται ἐπ’ αὐτοφώρῳ μοιχευομένη·	They said to Jesus, Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.
8.5	ἐν δὲ τῷ νόμῳ ἡμῖν <sup>16</sup> Μωϋσῆς ἐνετείλατο τὰς τοιαύτας <sup>17</sup> λιθάζειν· σὺ <sup>18</sup> οὖν τί λέγεις. <sup>19</sup>	And in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such; now what do you say?

<sup>14</sup> Οἱ γραμματεῖς literally means “writers”, “scribes”, or “clerks” – NEB puts it as “the doctors of the Law”. The NIV reads “The teachers of the Law”.

Newman and Nida (1980:258) prefer the translation “the teachers of the Law”. They maintain that to translate as “scribes” is misleading. Originally, one of the main functions of these men was to make copies of the Law, but by New Testament times they were the recognised authorities on the Law. “The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees” is apparently a set phrase. Most of the teachers of the Law probably belonged to the Pharisaic party. To this study, however, the translation “the scribes” is most preferable because it gives a more explicit meaning of their profession. They did not only teach the law; they wrote them down as the name γραμματεῖς implies.

<sup>15</sup> Στήσαντες αὐτὴν ἐν μέσῳ - JB translates “making her stand there in full view of everybody”. RSV: “placing her in the midst”. NEB: “making her stand out in the middle”. NIV: “they made her stand before the group”.

<sup>16</sup> The personal pronoun, ἡμῖν (us), is a plural form of the pronoun ἐγώ (I, me). Newman and Nida (1980:259), therefore, translate “...νόμῳ ἡμῖν Μωϋσῆς ἐνετείλατο...” thus – “Moses gave a commandment to us in our Laws, saying”. However, the translation that is more relevant is the one written above in verse 5 – “Moses commanded us”. This is because in the verse, ἡμῖν receives the action ἐνετείλατο (commanded) that is being done by Μωϋσῆς (Moses).

<sup>17</sup> Τὰς τοιαύτας literally means “such women” – The RSV writes “such”. TEV: makes it singular, “such woman”, while the NIV makes it plural, “such women”. TEV and JB put it clear: “to condemn women like this to death by stoning”.

<sup>18</sup> Σὺ – the pronoun “you” is emphatic. The questioners are attempting to set Jesus over against Moses.

<sup>19</sup> Τί λέγεις literally means “what you say?” The question is expressed in different ways by different versions. For example, RSV: “What do you say about her”; NEB: “What do you say about it”; NAB: “What do you have to say about the case?” NIV: “Now what do you say?”



8:6	Τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγον πειράζοντες αὐτόν, <sup>20</sup> ἵνα ἔχωσιν κατηγορεῖν αὐτοῦ. <sup>21</sup> Ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κάτω κύψας <sup>22</sup> τῷ δακτύλῳ κατέγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν.	And this they said tempting him that they might have reason to accuse him. Moreover, Jesus bent down [and] with his finger, he started writing on the ground.
8:7	Ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενον ἐρωτῶντες <sup>23</sup> αὐτόν, ἀνέκυψεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν <sup>24</sup> πρῶτος ἐπ’ αὐτὴν βαλέτω λίθον. <sup>25</sup>	And as they kept on questioning him, he lifted himself up and said to them, let the one sinless among you cast the first stone at her.
8:8	Καὶ πάλιν κατακύψας ἔγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν.	And again having bent down, he wrote on the ground.

<sup>20</sup> Τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγον πειράζοντες αὐτόν means “and this they said tempting him” – As noted above (section 2.5.1), Heil (1991:184) calls this an “aside”. It is also found in John 6:6. Newman and Nida (1980:260) add that, in John 6:6, Jesus is not trying to trap Philip but only to test him; here it is obvious that the people are trying to test Jesus so as to bring accusation against him.

<sup>21</sup> Ἴνα ἔχωσιν κατηγορεῖν αὐτοῦ – the fact that the Jews were not simply trying to tempt Jesus but to trap him is made clear by what is said here: “That they might have reason to accuse him”. To trap him may be explained as “to catch Jesus saying the wrong thing”.

<sup>22</sup> Κύψας literally means “having bent” – It is actually a participle in Greek, not a finite verb, but most translations prefer to use a finite verb and to join it by καὶ to the verb κατέγραφεν, “wrote”.

<sup>23</sup> Ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενον ἐρωτῶντες – JB translates this as “As they persisted with their question,” while NEB states, “When they continued to press their question”. RSV translates this as “And as they continued to ask him”. TEV renders it, “but as they remained asking questions”. NIV puts it, “When they kept on questioning him”. Newman and Nida (1980:260) suggest that the TEV understands the verb “remained” to have the force of “remained standing”.

<sup>24</sup> Ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν – JB writes, “If there is one of you who has not sinned”; RSV, “Let him who is without sin”; NIV, “Let any one of you who is without sin”; NEB, “Who is faultless”.

<sup>25</sup> Ἐπ’ αὐτὴν βαλέτω λίθον literally means “throw a stone at her” – At the conclusion of the chapter, the same vocabulary is used for the attempt of the Jews to kill Jesus in 8:59.

8:9	οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ἐξήρχοντο εἰς καθ' εἷς ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ κατελείφθη <sup>26</sup> μόνος, καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἐν μέσῳ <sup>27</sup> οὔσα.	And having heard him, they went out one by one, having begun from the oldest, and he was left alone, and the woman being in the middle.
8:10	ἀνακύψας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῇ, Γύναι, <sup>28</sup> ποῦ εἰσιν; οὐδεὶς σε κατέκρινεν. <sup>29</sup>	And having looked up, Jesus said to her, woman, where are they? No one condemned you?
8:11	ἡ δὲ εἶπεν, Οὐδεὶς, κύριε. <sup>30</sup> εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Οὐδὲ ἐγὼ σε κατακρίνω· πορεύου, <sup>31</sup> καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε. <sup>32</sup>	And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said, neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no longer.

### 2.5.3 Settings of John 7:53-8:11

As explained above (section 2.4.2), settings are very significant in a story because they portray the locations and contexts in which the characters perform their actions.

<sup>26</sup> In the Greek version, this verse is one sentence. The TEV makes it two sentences and, at the beginning of the second, changes the Greek pronoun “he” to Jesus. The pronoun “he” is contracted in the verb κατελείφθη; the name Ἰησοῦς is not found in the verse.

<sup>27</sup> Ἐν μέσῳ literally means “in the midst”, the same expression used in verse 3. The NEB, NIV, and JB translate this expression as “there,” and the RSV and NAB as “before him”.

<sup>28</sup> Γύναι means “woman” - In the Greek text, this same noun is used by Jesus in John 2:4 and 19:26. Newman and Nida (1980:262) explain that the word does not indicate that Jesus is speaking disrespectfully, but in English it may sound disrespectful, so the TEV has deleted it.

<sup>29</sup> Σε, κατέκρινεν literally means “has condemned you.” This may be rendered “to denounce you”, to say that you have sinned, or even to say that “you deserve death”.

<sup>30</sup> Κύριε literally means “Lord” - NIV and TEV translate this as “Sir”.

<sup>31</sup> Πορεύου means “go.” This is a Greek imperative. The NEB and NAB translate it as “You may go”.

<sup>32</sup> Μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε means “no longer sin” - The same expression is found in John 5:14. The NEB, TEV and JB have the same expression, “don’t sin anymore”. Some translators, such as the NAB, take the command “Do not sin again” as a specific reference to the sin of adultery and so render “avoid this sin” (Newman & Nida, 1980:263). In NIV, the word μηκέτι (no longer, anymore) is completely omitted. Rather, the NIV translates as “leave your life of sin”.

In John 7:53-8:11, the prominent settings that are mentioned are the feast of Tabernacles, the Mount of Olives, and the temple. These settings, especially the temple settings, are very important to this study because they give a portrait of how people, and especially women, were discriminated against in the temple of God.

#### *2.5.3.1 From the Feast of Tabernacles to the Mount of Olives (John 8:1)*

The *first spatial setting* of the story of John 7:53-8:11 is the Jewish feast of Tabernacles. On the other hand, the expression in John 7:53 that all the people returned to their respective houses at “the end of the day” denotes the *temporal setting* of people’s departure from the scene which the feast of Tabernacles occurred. In contrast, Jesus goes to the Mount of Olives (8:1).<sup>33</sup> However, even if the Mount of Olives is mentioned three or four times in each of the Synoptic Gospels,<sup>34</sup> it only appears here in the Gospel of John. The Mount of Olives was a hill east of Jerusalem, named for its extensive olive groves, and separated from the city by the deep Kidron valley (Newman & Nida, 1980:257). But it is uncertain why Jesus chose to go to the mountain. Could it be related to what Jesus says in Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58, that “foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head?” According to Punch (2016:10), there may be more at play than a mere acknowledgment of Jesus’ homelessness.

The second *spatial setting* mentioned in the pericope, Mount of Olives, is the subject of numerous verses in Zechariah 14. Van Staden (2015:9) adds that Jesus often went to the mountain to pray and receive strength for his prophetic task. It is interesting to note that there are also other connotations concerning the Mount of Olives in the text. Bal (1997:45-46) explains that one dynamic that is relevant in the spatial settings of stories is the contrast between inside and outside. Inside settings sometimes convey the meaning of protection or security, while outside settings may connote danger in one narrative or freedom in another. The same type of opposition can be detected in contrasts between country and city, land and sea, etc. It appears

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<sup>33</sup> In the Synoptic Gospels, we are told that the pattern followed by Jesus during the closing days of his life was to teach in Jerusalem during the day, and to retire outside the city to spend the night. Luke specifically speaks of Jesus as lodging on the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37).

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 21:1, 21:1-25:46, 26:30; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 19:29-30, 21:37, 22:50-52.

in the text that, for Jesus, there is a contrast between the Mount of Olives and the city of Jerusalem. For Jesus, the Mount of Olives gives a sense of protection from the hostile Chief Priests and the Pharisees who reside in Jerusalem.

### 2.5.3.2 *From the Mount of Olives to the Temple (John 8:2)*

John 8:2a states that “early in the morning, he again came to the temple”. The *spatial setting* of the temple indicates the main arena in which the story of John 7:53-8:11 takes place. After spending the night on the Mount of Olives, Jesus returned on the next day to the temple and sat down and taught. The *temporal setting* is early in the morning. The adverb πάλιν, “again”, indicates that the narrative from which this story was taken included a previous visit or visits to the temple. The same vocabulary was used previously in 7:14, when, with the feast of Tabernacles already half over, Jesus went up to the temple and taught (Keith, 2009:166).

On the arrival of Jesus, people were already there waiting. Minear (1991:24) maintains that the people acknowledged Jesus’ role as a teacher, thereby requesting him to teach them. Jesus’ teaching caused bewilderment among those who heard him in the temple, not bewilderment about his knowledge, but rather offense at it. This is why the Jews asked, “How can this man, who had never acquired the appropriate training, act as one educated in the Scriptures?” It is also interesting to note that the narrator of John portrays the temple as a special symbolic feature.

There are several implications of the usage of the temple in John’s Gospel. Firstly, Coloe (2009:370) explains that the temple was a symbolic feature and physical reality that reminded the people of Israel that God dwells in their midst. The very designation of the temple, the house of God, expresses God’s presence, and in the temple cult Israel was guaranteed of God’s blessings. This could be the reason why the people were in the temple very early in the morning. However, the Gospel of John presents the importance of the temple to Jesus; he had several conflicting encounters with the Jewish leaders there. Jesus’ first public action and confrontation with the Jewish leaders occurred in the temple, which Jesus had claimed as “my Father’s house” (John 2:12-17).

Secondly, in contrast to Jesus’ claim, and based on Jewish tradition, the temple was also a place where Jewish leaders could express their authority at will. This can be

seen clearly in John 7:53-8:11. John's narrator presents the Pharisees and the other religious leaders as creating an ominous or threatening presence in the temple as they approached Jesus without his consent. Van Staden (2015:9) emphasises that:

Their entrance was abrupt and interruptive, upsetting the almost pastoral harmony of the teacher and his audience in the opening scene. This in itself carries a symbolic message. It is a take-over, a power play aimed at rearranging the scene through the social mechanism of public humiliation. It is an effort to undo the popularity Jesus has built up around his person, to discredit him, and, if possible, to remove him from society.

#### **2.5.4 Characters in the Gospel of John**

From a narrative critical perspective, it is appropriate to construct the Johannine characters from the information that the text of the Fourth Gospel provides.

Culpepper (1983:103-104) states that Jesus is the only character in the Gospel of John whose character is static. At the same time, Jesus is known in the Gospel as the main protagonist, since the whole story of the narrative revolves around him. Jesus is depicted as the most important individual with whom all the characters of the narrative must come into contact in order to be saved. This way of characterising Jesus and other characters is important, since the purpose of this study is not to discuss all the characters in the Johannine Gospel. Its focus is rather on the specific characters in John 7:53-8:11, which include Jesus, the Pharisees and the Scribes, and an adulterous woman. Even though John 8:2 clearly mentions the people in the temple who gathered around, in the story they are passive. As a result, the concern of this research will be on these three main (groups of) characters in the story: Jesus, the Pharisees and the Scribes, and the woman.

##### *2.5.4.1 Jesus*

Johannine characterisation is entirely Christocentric. Jesus is a static character in the Fourth Gospel; he does not change (Moore, 1989:46). According to Conway (2008:144), the Johannine Jesus demonstrates a superior masculine status vis-à-vis other characters in the Gospel through his self-revelation as the Son of God the Father. No other Gospel is so permeated with references to the Father/Son

relationship of Jesus with God. Another way in which Jesus is characterised in the Gospel of John is the way he is referred to as God (Houlden, 2006:35).

The way Jesus is characterised in the Gospel of John is of great significance, since it shows that Jesus was an honourable person because God bestowed a special honour upon him. The following passages of the Gospel explain this: God sent Jesus (3:34; 4:46; 7:28-29, 33); He loved him (3:35; 15:9); He gave him great powers (5:21-28); and He showed Jesus all that he did (5:19-20). In turn, Jesus honoured his father. Jesus frequently insisted that he came to do his father's will (4:34; 5:30; 6:38-40, 12:43) and to seek only the Father's glory (7:18; 8:49-50). These are direct definitions of Jesus' character, as expressed above in section 2.4.3 by Tolmie (1995:165).

When these verses are closely considered, what Culpepper (1983:113) says concerning the character of Jesus/God in the Fourth Gospel becomes clearer. According to him, Jesus' relationship with God in the narrative helps us see God clearly, even if He is not specifically characterised in the Gospel. Therefore, when Jesus is seen performing an action or making a speech, he is doing it just as God would like to do it, for he who has seen him has seen the Father (John 14:9).

#### 2.5.4.2 *The Pharisees and the Scribes*

The Pharisees and the Scribes is a common expression in the Synoptic Gospels. However, in the whole of the Gospel of John, the expression occurs only here, in John 7:53-8:11. As suggested by Culpepper (1983:103) above (section 2.4.3), this group of characters could be classified as a *ficelles character*. It must also not be forgotten that the purpose of this study, in particular, is to investigate the apparent hegemonic mentality of the Pharisees and the Scribes. As a result, the character of the Pharisees and the Scribes will be considered briefly in order to discern whether they functioned as a hegemonic group in John.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Saldarini (1988:79) explains that the historical Pharisees were a political interest group who always competed for power and influence and, whenever power shifted, the Pharisees and other social and political forces in Jewish society would become active in the competition for power and influence. Saldarini (1988:120) also emphasises that, whatever the Pharisees achieved, they usually achieved it with the

In John's Gospel, the characterisation of the Pharisees is often confusing. This is because Jesus' opponents are usually generically labelled *the Jews*; in John, the Pharisees are also sometimes referred to as *the Jews* (Stemberger, 1995:34-37). For Hylén (2012:98), the characterisation of the Jews can be viewed from three positions: positive, neutral and hostile. Like Hylén, Poplutz (2013:116-119) contends that the characterisation of *the Pharisees* and *the Jews* is a vague one. According to him, the way they are characterised makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. As Pharisees they belong to the group of the Jews, as well as to their own group. The only thing that makes the Pharisees different from the Jews is the role ascribed to them by the narrator: "their acting as opponents to the main character, Jesus" (Poplutz, 2013:119).

In agreement with Poplutz, Bennema (2009:41) maintains that it is difficult to separate the Jews clearly from the Pharisees, and in several episodes they are synonymous. He gives two instances in John 8 where the narrator uses the two designations interchangeably. Jesus debates with the Pharisees (8:13-19, 21), but the Jews answer him in 8:22. From 8:28 it is clear that the Jews are the elites from Jerusalem who are, from the narrator's perspective, responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. According to Bennema, both designations can be used as synonyms. Likewise, the Pharisees and the Jews are one and the same in John 9:13-41. Bennema concludes that the two groups are differentiated by the narrator in John 11:45-47.

Reinhartz (2009:384) explains that the interchangeability of the two groups of characters has the effect of extending the *negative qualities* associated with the Pharisees to the Jews as a whole. In essence, it seems that what Reinhartz is proposing here is that the Pharisees are different from the Jews, but they are the same in the roles they perform in the Gospel. As a result, when the narrator uses the two names interchangeably, he simply wants readers to understand that both groups perform *negative* roles and share common qualities.

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help of a powerful patron. At the time of Jesus Christ, the Pharisees had no political influence anymore. Still, they were zealous to dominate others. This time, the dominance they wanted was a spiritual one, as they were no longer relevant in the political arena. It therefore is no wonder that Jesus, the major spiritual figure in John, became their primary target.

We cannot ignore the fact that, in John's Gospel, the Pharisees are in most cases depicted negatively and as a threat to Jesus. For instance, in John 4:1-3, Jesus had to leave Judea for Galilee as soon as he learnt that the Pharisees had heard that he was making more disciples (maybe in fear of the Pharisees). Here, we can see a clear difference between John and Mark in how the two evangelists locate the Pharisees. While Mark's Gospel places the Pharisees in Galilee on all occasions, in John Jesus is leaving another town to go to Galilee because of the presence of the Pharisees. Implicitly, in John's Gospel the Pharisees do not exist in Galilee. This is why Stemberger (1995:34) is faced with the difficulty regarding why Jesus had to leave Judea to go to Galilee. "Does this mean that Galilee was not within the Pharisees' sphere of influence?" asks Stemberger (1995:34). However, it is true that, throughout the narrative of the Gospel of John, the Pharisees do not appear outside of Judea.

The Pharisees' first attempt to arrest Jesus is seen in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (John 7). In 8:13, the Pharisees clash with Jesus in the Temple. They accuse him of testifying on his own behalf, which is thus not a valid testimony. On the way to the Temple, Jesus heals the man born blind, whom the people then bring to the Pharisees, because the healing took place on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were not happy with Jesus for performing a miracle on the Sabbath (9:13-16). After Jesus raised Lazarus, a few people told the Pharisees what Jesus had done. As a result, they gathered together and decided to kill Jesus (11:46ff). With Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the Pharisees were angry and complained why "the world has gone after him" (12:19). John reports that many people believed in Jesus, but they were afraid to confess it for fear of being cast out of the synagogue by the Pharisees (12:42ff).

The last time John refers to the Pharisees is in 18:3. Here, it is stated that Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees to arrest Jesus. The portrayal of the Pharisees in John's Gospel explains how a hegemonic group operates, as is made clear by Stemberger (1995:36), who states that:



John represents the Pharisees as a driving force among the people, the men who mattered. For the most part, they are a group united with the high priests, but usually the initiative comes from the Pharisees.

It can thus be concluded that, throughout the Fourth Gospel, the Pharisees are people who like to be the dominant group and, just as Stemberger describes them as the chief initiators, it could be construed that they were also the ones who initiated the plot that takes place in John 7:53-8:11.

The Scribes were different from the Pharisees as they were not actively involved in political matters. Saldarini (1988:79) also confirms that they never appear as a separate group in antiquity as they do in the Gospels. The Scribes started being famous during Second Temple Judaism (Twelftree, 2000:1086). According to Twelftree (2000), although the Scribes were known for different kinds of professions, their major duty was to teach the law.

In John's Gospel, the Pharisees and the Scribes are for the first and the only time mentioned as working together in John 8:3. Since the fact that John 7:53-8:11 is an interpolation is not disputed, it needs to be asked why the interpolator presents these two groups of people together in an episode where both groups are united in a conspiracy. For Newman and Nida (1980:258), the Pharisees and the Scribes is apparently a fixed phrase. Most of the Scribes probably belonged to the Pharisaic party.<sup>36</sup> In agreement with this, Morris (1995:780) affirms that, in the days when writing was far from universal, the Scribes were members of a skilled and important profession. Among the Jews, the principal study was of the law, and as this was the chief interest of the Pharisees, the two groups had much in common. John's interpolator (7:53-8:11) statement, "the Pharisees and the Scribes", is therefore precise. Keith (2009:110) adds that the acceptable reason why the Johannine interpolator pairs the Pharisees and the Scribes together is because of the nature of their specific role in regard to Jesus. Whenever the Scribes are presented as a group, they are found doing or saying something credible and reasonable. By

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<sup>36</sup> In Mark 2:16, it is stated thus: "the scribes of the Pharisees". Likewise, in Luke 5:30, Luke portrays scribes who "belong to the Pharisees". Matthew 2:4 references the "scribes of the people" in King Herod's court. In Matthew 7:29, it is claimed that Jesus was teaching differently from the "scribes of the crowds".

contrast, whenever they are presented in association with other groups like the Pharisees, the chief priests and the elders, they are depicted as planning a plot or carrying out a plot.

#### *2.5.4.3 The adulterous woman*

The woman caught in adultery is anonymous. It could be that the narrator of John's Gospel does not find it important to mention her name. According to Phillips (2013:414), one of the reasons why her characterisation is difficult is her involvement in a sexual sin, which characterises her. Objectification is therefore often an important aspect of the characterisation of the woman; she is presented as an object on display, given no name, no voice and no identity, apart from that for which she stands accused (O'Day, 1992:632; O'Sullivan, 2015:2; Phillips, 2013:414; Toensing, 2003:162). This explanation is significant to this study, as it gives a glimpse of the way women are treated in a patriarchal society.

## **2.6 The presentation of Jesus as an ideal man**

It is clear that, in the Gospel of John, the character of Jesus is presented as an ideal man whose honour was divinely ascribed. Neyrey (2007a:539-540) refers to this presentation as "encomium". In order to discredit the claim that Jesus was an honoured man, his enemies in John's narrative tried to challenge Jesus. Neyrey (2007a:539-540) terms their challenge "vituperation".<sup>37</sup>

Firstly, Jesus' claim concerning his origin had a great impact on his status. Jesus said that no one knew where he came from. He alone knew. In many instances, Jesus is heard telling the Jews where he had come from. For example, he is the bread that has come down from heaven (John 6:41); Jesus did not come on his own consent, he was sent by his Father (John 7:28-29); the Jews did not know where Jesus will be going (Keith, 2009:146; Neyrey, 2007a:539).

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<sup>37</sup> In antiquity, an encomium was a way of praising someone by expressing Jesus' origins, parents, nurture, virtues and death. In contrast, vituperation simply means using harsh or abusive language to condemn someone (Neyrey, 2007a:529).

Also, because of the fact that Jesus came from a heavenly Father, he is the Son of God or Son of man that must be greatly honoured because he is just like his Father. For example, Jesus was equal with God (John 5:17; 10:30); he acted in his Father's name (John 5:43; 10:25); and his duty was to make the name of his Father known to all people (John 17:6, 11, 12, 16). In turn, Jesus' Father held him in very high esteem because he was the Son whom the Father loves so much (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 3:35; 5:20; 15:9) (Gupta, 2014:62; Keith, 2009:150; Neyrey, 2007a:539).

In contrast, Jesus' opponents tried as much as they could to discredit the claims about his origin by stating: Jesus is just a son of Joseph, the carpenter they know very well (John 6:42); and Jesus was from Galilee, where no prophet was destined to emerge (John 7:52). In their challenge, Jesus is just a deceiver because both his place of birth and his parents lacked nobility (Keith, 2009:158-159; Neyrey, 2007a:540).

The second claim made by Jesus was about his wisdom, which he derived from God. The fact that Jesus was well trained and educated by his Father warranted him the name *rabbi* (John 1:38, 49; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8). According to John, Jesus had superior training by God on what to say and what to do (John 5:19-20) (Neyrey, 2007a:545). However, when Jesus' enemies challenged him, they mocked him for his lack of education and training (John 7:15). They consistently disputed Jesus' teaching and preaching as lacking weight and depth (Keith, 2009:150-152; Neyrey, 2007a:540).

The third aspect in which Jesus displayed his manhood in John's Gospel is through virtues. Virtues are essential features of masculinity construction. The Gospel of John portrays Jesus as exhibiting a high level of virtues in whatever he did. He was loyal and obedient to his Father (John 14:31). He was not a man who sought to be glorified; rather, he sought the glory of his Father alone (John 5:30; 6:38; 19:7). The greatest virtue displayed by Jesus was justice – justice for the less privileged and the oppressed, and justice to the will of his Father (Neyrey, 2007a:547).

In contrast to Jesus' claim of masculine virtue, the Jews saw no virtue in Jesus. Instead, Jesus was accused by them of deceiving and leading people astray (John 7:13). Others referred to him as being demon-possessed (John 8:48, 53), and a law-

breaker because of his healings on the Sabbath day (John 5 and 9). As a result, some people branded him a sinner and blasphemous because he claimed to be equal to God (John 5:18; 10:30-33) (Neyrey, 2007a:542).

## 2.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of narrative criticism and to undertake a narrative analysis of John 7:53-8:11 in order to indicate the way in which the implied author, through the narrator, moves the implied reader to accept a certain perspective.

The perspective that is expressed through the narrator's point of view and characterisation is that Jesus is the Son of God who is honoured above all other masculine figures. For John, Jesus is the ideal man who illustrates what it takes to be an ideal man. He is therefore a static character who never changes. In the narrative of John, however, Jesus' status as ideal man is denied by his Jewish enemies, of which the Pharisees and the Scribes are the most important.

As noted by Campbell (2007:163), the anti-language of John's narrative is very significant in order to determine the meaning of the Gospel's story due to the fact that it gives a glimpse of how characters in the Gospel relate to one another.<sup>38</sup> As the idea of encomium and vituperation are expressed above (section 2.6), one can easily deduce that characters in the Gospel relate to each other in very tense and hostile manners. John 7:53-8:11 also narrates one of these numerous scenarios of the Johannine Gospel in which men are seen constructing their manhood according to the standard accepted by the world they lived in. But what are these manhood standards? In the following chapter (Chapter 3), the socio-cultural world, which the first-century readers of John understood and the acceptable standards of manhood construction, will be analysed.

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<sup>38</sup> Anti-language is a language adopted by an anti-society. In the Gospel of John, the author uses the language to describe Jesus' relationships with his opponents; his family members included (Campbell, 2007:163).

# Chapter 3 - The socio-cultural world of John 7:53-8:11

## 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, a narrative critical analysis of John 7:53-8:11 was undertaken by focusing on the events, setting and characters evident in the pericope. It was argued that the narrator depicts Jesus as the ideal man (section 2.6). In this chapter it will be investigated how the *first-century readers* of John's Gospel would have evaluated the character of Jesus as depicted in the narrative thereof. *In short, would they have agreed with the narrator's characterisation of Jesus or not?* In order to answer this question, it is important to understand the socio-cultural values of John's first-century readers. Although it is impossible to identify John's *actual intended readers*, it is clear from the Gospel of John that its intended readers understood the socio-cultural values of the first-century Greco-Roman world and how they were practised, *since they are not explicitly explained in the Gospel*. It can thus be accepted that the first-century reader was knowledgeable about them.

Before the characterisation of Jesus can be evaluated from the perspective of the socio-cultural world of John (section 3.5), the approach followed in this chapter will be differentiated from author-centred approaches (section 3.1.1) and the use of socio-scientific models will be explained (section 3.1.2). An overview of how masculinity was constructed (section 3.2) and performed (section 3.3) in the Greek and Roman worlds will also be given, before John 7:53-8:11 is read as a challenge-riposte exchange (section 3.4).

### 3.1.1 Differentiation from author-centred approaches

It is important to emphasise that, in attempting to understand the socio-cultural values of John 7:53-8:11, this study is not following an author-centred approach. An author-centred approach is concerned with the historical and ideological aspects of the *real author* of a text and the original, real audience (Tate, 2008:1). According to this approach, the text is a window through which the author's intentions about the

text are made known. In an author-centred approach, the focus is thus also on *the world behind the text*,<sup>39</sup> otherwise known as the author's world, in order to locate texts and their theologies within their first-century context (Green, 1995:7). Meaning is assumed to be derived from the real author's intention, which is usually formulated with regard to the author's social, political, cultural and ideological background. The interpretation of a text is therefore dependent on understanding the circumstances that encouraged the real author to write, the author's geographical location, and how the text's history has developed over time (Tate, 2008:2). In an author-centred approach, interpreters recognise that a text is a historical phenomenon in the sense that it was created at a particular time and place and thus reflects specific cultural, political, linguistic and religious conditions.

Methodologically, real author-centred approaches are broadly divided into historical and cultural criticisms (Tate, 2008:74-82). Segovia (1995:372) states that historical criticism, on the one hand, encompasses other sub-divisions such as source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism, textual criticism, composition criticism, and history-of-religion criticism. Cultural criticism, on the other hand, consists of three major theoretical approaches: sociological theory, neo-Marxist theory, and cultural or social anthropology (Barton, 1995:67; Segovia, 1995:374). Cultural or social anthropology is a cultural-critical approach that is carried out through scientific procedures that focus primarily on comparative and cross-cultural investigations. Its emphasis is on fieldwork procedures in which anthropologists strive to study a society as a whole by observing the ways in which

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<sup>39</sup> The world behind the text is made up of the contexts against which the text in question was created. In this regard there are two major contexts— the historical and the cultural contexts— of the world behind the text. The combination of these two approaches has been suggested and applied by Barton (1995:77-85). Barton explains that this fusion does not run counter to the perspective of each approach; rather, they complement each other's view. In cultural criticism, the message of the text is viewed as a communication that happens between the author of the text and the reader within a specified socio-cultural context. In this regard, the text is considered as a means of approaching the work within the cultural context in which it was produced. Its meaning is retrievable through a proper use of specific scientific procedures, which are grounded in the social sciences. These scientific procedures are otherwise referred to as social-scientific criticism (Segovia, 1995:374). In cultural criticism, the meaning of a text is arrived at when the social and historical aspects of the text are brought together. This entails that the social and historical aspects of a text are inseparable (Segovia, 1995:374).

the people in such a society conduct their day-to-day life, as is undertaken by Mediterranean studies (Tolbert, 1993:257).

### **3.1.2 The use of socio-scientific models for understanding the world of John 7:53-8:11**

The already stated focus of this study is not on the world behind the text, or the intent of its real author. It is instead on the world created by the narrative of John. It is important, however, to note that even though the *world in the text* of John's Gospel is a narrative world, *the world behind the text* is to an extent encoded in this narrative. Information about the world behind the text can thus be valuable to understand how the socio-cultural world of John's narrative would have been understood, even though the two "worlds" – the world in the text and the world behind it – are not completely identical, since texts replicate the culture in which they were produced (see section 2.2). Therefore, to read texts apart from the culture in which they were produced is to invite a high level of misunderstanding (Tate, 2008:12). Barton (1995:64), Mahlangu (2001:86) and Malina (2001:13) therefore argue that noting the cultural and historical context in which a text was created is important for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it prevents contemporary readers from introducing anachronistic features into their understanding of a text.

Secondly, the anthropological component aims at discouraging modern readers from being ethnocentric.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> This is because modern readers are given the opportunity to do a comparative study about an ancient foreign culture. By doing this, they acquire not only knowledge about the other culture, but they also learn to appreciate some elements of other people's culture. Mahlangu (2001:88) therefore proposes that it will be fascinating if social-scientific models are also applied when interpreting a text in an African context. For him, for instance, the general African social values are similar to those of Mediterranean society. Examples are the display of honour in terms of material possessions, body parts, choosing a wife and ascribing honour to ancestors. Just as these cultural values are much cherished in African society, they were in similar ways upheld as valuable norms by the people of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Thirdly, the writers of the New Testament and their actual audiences all originated from the north-eastern coast of the Mediterranean. As a result, the social systems, cultural values, person types and behaviours of these peoples differ from contemporary values.

*It is thus clear that, since the social and cultural values of the first-century context of the Gospel of John differ from those of contemporary readers, it is important to take note of the socio-cultural values that John's Gospel would have inferred. It is in this regard important to acknowledge that our understanding of the socio-cultural world in which the New Testament text originated is limited. One way of overcoming this limitation is to use the various models developed by socio-scientific studies of the New Testament. As a result, this study will use models developed by socio-scientific studies for the first-century Mediterranean, which explain the pivotal cultural values of honour and shame, in order to explore how masculinity was constructed at the time the Gospel of John was written. The use of this model is in line with Neyrey's (2007b:16) argument that, in order to understand the cultural world of John's Gospel, the socio-scientific model of honour and shame must be taken into consideration.*

In terms of John 7:53-8:11, attention will be given to whether the socio-cultural world of the text would express that Jesus was an honourable male according to the values of the ancient Mediterranean world when he was persistently opposed by his rivals. The model of honour and shame will also give insight into how women were viewed in the honour and shame societies of the first century, and how this may differ from how a twenty-first century reader who seeks gender justice understands the role of men and women.

### **3.2 Masculinity in the first-century socio-cultural world of John 7:53-8:11**

In the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, masculinity was measured by one's willingness to compete in the public world (Liew, 2003:105; McDonnell, 2006:1), as well as the morals one displayed. For one to become a real man in the Greek and Roman worlds, one was expected to practise specific virtues (Conway, 2008:21). It is therefore important to give a brief overview of these, often overlapping, virtues



(sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2), practices (sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4) and beliefs (section 3.2.5).

### 3.2.1 *Virtus*

The concept of *virtus*<sup>41</sup> portrays masculinity as martial prowess, or courage, which one must work very hard to attain. Roman manliness in the antiquity was represented by the concept of *virtus*; as a result, it was regarded as the most important aspect of Roman masculinity. For Romans, *virtus* was not a moral concept, but was regarded as a concept that played a vital role in war, politics and religion. The Romans believed that their greatness and self-image were tied to this concept. However, although much value was placed on this concept, there was a general belief that the concept was only applicable to men. Women, children and slaves were excluded whenever this concept was mentioned. *Virtus* can also be associated with the concept of *imperium*, a term that entails dominion. This term, for example, signifies the rule or dominion that magistrates wielded over the Roman people, generals over their armies, the Roman people over their subjects, and Roman men over women and slaves (McDonnell, 2006:1, 3, 133, 167; Williams, 1999:133).

### 3.2.2 *Arête* (ἀρετή)

The moral aspect of masculinity was referred to as *arête* (ἀρετή). *Arête* as an aspect of the construction of masculinity was focused on moral behaviour development. It was the ethical sense of *virtus*. Masculinity as an ethical concept was a late development (McDonnell, 2006:383). For one to become a man (*vir*) in the Greco-Roman world, one was expected to exhibit manliness through the practice of specific virtues (Conway, 2008:22). There was a prevalent philosophical impression that true happiness was achieved through virtue. This was firmly rooted as a moral concept for all free adult men. Man cannot be perfect unless he is virtuous. In this sense, the Greek word *arête* means excellence and perfection, which are conventionally part of ideal male heroism (Mayordomo, 2006:7). Women, on the contrary, lacked virtue.

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<sup>41</sup> As explained by McDonnell (2006:1), *virtus* is a Latin word for manliness. The word is derived from *vir*, meaning man. The word denotes the activity and quality connected to it and, as a concept for masculinity, came into use in the Republican period of Rome.

They were deprived of morality. Whatever ideal features men enjoyed inherently, women were believed to suffer from the lack thereof. If men were expected to be self-controlled, intelligent and courageous, women were expected to be dissolute, unwise and cowards (Kuefler, 2001:19-20; McDonnell, 2006:383; Mosse, 1996:5).

### 3.2.3 Control and dominion

Williams (1999:137) asserts that two of the principle ways in which masculinity was constructed in the first-century Greco-Roman world was through control and domination. Control, as a prime directive of masculinity, was viewed in two ways – the control of oneself and the control of others. While the control of oneself was more positive, the control of others was negative. The control of others goes along with the domination of others. According to Conway (2008:21) and Frilingos (2007:336), being born a male in the ancient Roman world was not enough. Free Roman male citizens were required to act the part of the man. In this regard, acting like a man demanded that one must assume the active role in both private sexual practice as well as in one's public life. In sexual practice, for instance, men were expected to be the actor rather than being acted upon. As expressed by Conway (2008:21), the reason was that, "from the philosophical sphere to the social, masculinity was understood to be the active, rational, generative principle of the cosmos".

Secondly, being a hierarchical society one was expected to express dominion over others at all times during the first-century Greco-Roman world. Dominion, in this sense could be seen in a similar way to being active. To be active means to dominate, while to be passive means to submit to one's control (Conway, 2008:22). There was a very common belief that true Roman men, who possessed *virtus* by birth, rightfully wielded dominion or *imperium* over both women and foreigners. In this sense, foreigners were implicitly likened to women. This implies, in turn, that women and non-Roman peoples were destined to submit themselves to Rome's masculine *imperium* (Williams, 1999:135-136). As explained above (section 3.2.1), another meaning of *virtus* was aggressiveness. Being aggressive encourages one to exercise dominion over others. McDonnell (2006:71) explains that, since the ideal of Roman manliness encouraged aggressive, martial types of behaviour, Roman men were thought to pose a threat to society and anyone with whom they came into

contact. It should also be noted that sexual penetration was the preferable way in which the Greco-Roman elite demonstrated manliness.

Self-control emerged as among the most significant aspects of ideal masculinity under the influence of Stoicism. In terms of this belief, self-mastery was viewed from the perspective of mastery of passions like anger. Also, self-control in eating, drinking and luxury were emphasised in Stoic teachings (Conway, 2008:24). For Osiek and Pouya (2010:46), this was the most important quality an honourable man could possess. An ideal man had to express his manliness by showing that he could control his passions, such as anger, greed, desire and pleasure. Williams (1999:138) adds that even excessive displays of pain or grief were often dismissed as womanish. Also, giving in to sickness by failing to bear it steadfastly was likely to be referred to as being effeminate.

### **3.2.4 Physiognomy – presenting oneself as a manly man**

Physiognomy is a field of study that is concerned with the appearance and behaviour of persons. According to Myers (2015:197), physiognomy – understood as being concerned with looking like a man – was one of the masculine virtues that young boys were expected to acquire. They therefore needed to be able to distinguish between masculine and feminine traits.

Conway (2008:18) explains that the main reason for this was because of the doubt that the ancient world had about the real gender of men and women. According to her, men were always expected to prove that they were a “manly man” rather than a “womanly man”. This is because, for a man to be born with male reproductive organs was not enough to prove his manliness, since there were other aspects of the body that could betray his manliness. Physiognomy, as a result, was the discipline for detecting one’s character, disposition or destiny through the study of the external appearances of bodies. Ancient physiognomists also believed that the body was always deceptive when it came to basic anatomy and gender identification. This was why it was necessary to know how to interpret the evidence that could reveal true manliness (Conway, 2008:19).

Gleason (1995:82) says that physiognomy emphasised four areas which includes one’s voice, rhetorical performance, bodily behaviour and comportment.

Firstly, voice was a basic way by which physiognomists determined manliness. However, there were a lot of contradictions in physiognomical discourses about the kinds of voices that make someone masculine: Is it a low or a high voice? According to Gleason (1995:82), Aristotle was reported to have taught that a low voice is a sign of courage, while a high voice is a sign of cowardice. Ancient physiognomists, therefore, concluded that a man who lacked sexual control was known through his speech; he usually had a high-pitched voice. Gleason (1995:82) states that such behaviour in which a man lacks self-control could be regarded as feminine behaviour, since self-control is one of the masculine qualities. To physiognomists, an ideal orderly man is usually associated with a low voice. Although low voices could be taken to be hollow and lacking carrying power, they importantly were not flexible. This was important, since in an actual rhetorical performance, flexibility in voice was physiognomically suspicious. The reason for this is that a high-pitched voice that is smooth and flexible was a sign of being androgynous (Gleason, 1995:101). Despite all these contradictions, many people considered all these variables in voice development as important aspects of manliness. Both physicians and educated laymen had the belief that, when a man developed his voice, it not only affected the way he talked or delivered a speech, but that it was important for the well-being of his body as a whole (Gleason, 1995:84).

Another physiognomical act that was related to masculine voice-training was rhetorical performances. Ancient rhetorical performances usually took place as a form of agonistic contest. Before a man would be able to participate in such an agonistic contest, he needed to acquire a certain level of *paideia* or education. In this way, rhetorical performance was all about the display of *paideia* (Gleason, 1995:xxi-xxii). Training in rhetoric was regarded as the highest level of education, and therefore this kind of education was strictly reserved for the elite class. The educational method was often regarded as a difficult way to virtue (Conway, 2008:32).

A rhetorical performance was one of the means by which men of power demonstrated their power and claim to the legitimacy of such power. It was an attempt to dominate other elite men through persuasive speeches and criticism. If a man was able to deliver a well-articulated speech, he gained more power,

recognition and allegiance from the audience. On the contrary, if he was not able to deliver a good speech, he had revealed his weakness or femininity, thereby inviting ridicule on himself and also on his close associates. In this regard, the masculine recognition and honour that one could gain in rhetorical performances was tremendous. However, the risk of failure to perform well in rhetoric was proof that one was feminine. To avoid being feminine, the weakest would therefore choose not to speak at all (Gleason, 1995:xxi-xxii; Myers, 2015:196).

### **3.2.5 Gender as a single spectrum**

The construction of masculinity becomes vague when the corporeal aspect remains untouched. Conway (2008:16) asserts that the body is the most evident entrée into issues of sexuality and gender. This is because, for most people, the relationship between sexual anatomy and gendered identity is clear. The prevalent belief is that male bodies signify men and masculinity, while female bodies signify women and femininity. However, this was not the case among the ancient Greco-Roman people. Ancient masculinity was determined by the shape of one's life, and not the shape of one's body. This simply means that, from an ancient Greco-Roman point of view, manliness was achieved through what one did, not what one's bodily shape was. Masculinity was mostly displayed through actions in public arenas and gatherings for people to assess whether such a person was really manly. Incorporeity was regarded as the ultimate standard of masculine achievement.

Sex and gender as we refer to them today were contained in the one-sex model. In the world of only one sex, to be a man or a woman entails that both must attain a social rank in the society or assume a cultural role. Sex and gender were not organically attained as is done today (Laqueur, 1990:8). Mayordomo (2006:5) therefore concludes that "manliness was not a birthright. It was something that had to be won over against the danger of being unmanly, which equals being feminine".

Even though the one-sex model is an important one, there were some contradictions. Conway (2008:18) explains that the most disturbing implication of this model is the fear of gender slippage, especially moving from the male spectrum to the female. Under this belief, women are only regarded as incomplete versions of men, and it thus becomes important to prevent men from sliding down from the male

gender into the female one on this continuum. It therefore is important to understand what this gender spectrum entailed.

During the ancient Greco-Roman period, there was nothing more worthy than being manly, while effeminacy was the most detestable thing any ideal man could think of (Osiek & Pouya, 2010:46). Myers (2015:196) describes femininity as being characterised by weakness that prevents one from having self-control. Femininity signifies permeability; an openness to absorb all kinds of influence. With these descriptions, no one would like to be referred to as feminine in areas where manliness is cherished. There was furthermore a belief that both masculinity and femininity were situated on two different poles of a single spectrum. Gender in the ancient time was thus not divided as a binary of two fixed and opposite sexes as it is today. Rather, it was a dynamic spectrum or gradient of relative masculinities. The one end of this spectrum is known as the positive end, while the other is the negative. Located at the positive end are the true men or fully masculine, while on the negative end are the true women, who lack masculinity. The utmost challenge faced by men at the other end was to avoid sliding down the slippery slope of feminisation (Anderson & Moore, 2003:68; Burrus, 2007:4; Osiek & Pouya, 2010:45; Thatcher, 2011:11).

Also, on this gender slope one has to be aware of the category of groups known as the unmen. People classified as unmen were females, boys, slaves, eunuchs, sexually passive or effeminate males, and barbarians. Females and children were the most vulnerable people. Slaves were without gender and had no honourable status and no rights. Slaves, whether male, female or child, at any rate did not have control over their desires and bodies (Osiek & Pouya, 2010:47-48). Conway (2008:22) and Mayordomo (2006:7) explain that being a man in ancient time was closely linked to the role of being an active agent rather than a passive one. Being active was very important in all spheres of life – in war, in sports, in rhetoric as well as in the field of sexuality; what made an individual a man was his active control of the situation. On the contrary, the unmen assumed the role of passivity.

It is worth noting at this juncture that, even as the ancient construction of masculinity was enshrined in interesting characteristics that one could strive to achieve, it was also characterised by numerous contradictions. Martin (2001:83) affirms that these

contradictions however did not weaken the ideology, but rather enabled it to function so efficiently. And, as Connell (1995:185-186) opines, one of the contradictions of masculinity construction is the fact that it is obviously perceived as a fluid, unstable, contestable and changeable concept. This was also one of the problems faced by men of the first-century Mediterranean world. They were faced with the problem of how they could defend their manhood whenever it was challenged by their fellow men. The prominent socio-cultural ways in which this was put into practice was their ancient pivotal values known as honour and shame. It is within this social context of honour and shame that Jesus' masculinity would be seen as being challenged by his opponents. Also, within this social context the status of women would be portrayed in order to determine whether they mattered or not when it comes to the construction of masculinity.

### **3.3 Honour and shame: Pivotal values for the defence and challenge of masculinity**

#### **3.3.1 Definition of honour**

Honour and shame are abstract concepts. Therefore, for one to have a better understanding of them, it is important to take note of their three defining features of authority, gender status, and respect (Malina, 2001:29-30).

Honour is defined as a person's positive value in his or her own eyes as well as the positive recognition the person receives from his or her social group (Busatta, 2006:76; Charlesworth, 2016:39; Malina & Neyrey, 1991:25; Moxnes, 1996:20). Maré (2014:1) adds that, in the first-century Mediterranean world, nearly everything relating to relationships, a person's identity and social standing was determined by honour. Honour was perceived to be the substance of someone's reputation and position in society; and also a symbol of one's power and superiority in that society. As a core value of the ancient Mediterranean world, it was the goal and the desire of all who aspired to excel. To many, but particularly to the elite of ancient society, it was cherished as life itself. Even at the level of daily living, one's honour status determined practically everything in life (Rohrbaugh, 2010:109). Considering the definition above, honour can be described as having two interdependent components or aspects. Bond (2012:210) and Rodriguez Mosquera (1999:2) term

these two interdependent components as inner and outer honour. Malina and Neyrey (1991:25) summarise that, when a man claims a certain status that is sustained by power and gender, he claims honour.

### **3.3.2 Definition of shame**

The inhabitants of the Mediterranean societies had two opinions about shame. On the one hand, shame was viewed as an unpleasant concept that men must avoid and fight against. Mahlangu (2001:90) and Rohrbaugh (2010:112) explain that for one to be referred to as being shamed means one suffers a loss of face and honour, defeat, and contempt. This is referred to as negative shame. From this perspective, shame is referred to as actions that are disgraceful.

On the other hand, shame was considered a positive cultural value for women (Mahlangu, 2001:90; Malina & Neyrey, 1991:41). Rohrbaugh (2010:112) affirms that the positive value of shame is the concern that a woman has with actions that could lead to shame. Moxnes (1996) adds that the positive connotation of shame is the fact that it was perceived as a state of being modest and humbled. In summary, shame is the loss of honour, and therefore a negative experience for men. For women, shame is the defence of honour, and therefore a positive value. If a woman is referred to as shameless, however, it means exactly what being shamed means for a man.

The reason for the above distinction is, as explained by Giordano (2005:42), that men were considered superior to women in Mediterranean societies. In all conceptions of honour, the inferiority of women was very obvious. Not only were they inferior to men, they were also regarded as weak and vulnerable. Being weak and vulnerable, women were forbidden to appear in public places, which were strictly reserved for men.

### **3.3.3 Ways of gaining and losing honour**

There were two major ways of gaining honour – it could be ascribed or acquired (Esler, 1994; Malina, 2001:32-33; Moxnes, 1996:20).

Ascribed honour is the socially accepted claim to worth that befalls a person. It happens when someone is born into an honoured family, or is granted by notable



people of power (Malina, 2001:32). In general, ascribed honour is made up of different characteristics. Mbuvi (2010:754) views it as a group value where different persons who make up the group share the same value of honour. He explains that this occurs as a result of the strong connection of kinship ties, with the common honourable ancestor as the binding factor. For example, while the phrase attributed to God, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", gives permanency to the one and the same God of Israel, it also reflects on the eminence of common ancestry. Malina (2001:32) maintains that one of the major reasons why genealogies are elaborated in the Bible is to set out a person's honour lines and thus locate the person on the status ladder. Similarly, honour could be replicated in blood and name. Malina and Neyrey (1991:25) explain that this kind of relationship consists of the person and all members of his biological or fictive family. As family or blood relatives, a person can always trust them. Outside the family circle, all people are assumed to be dishonourable or guilty. It is all those who are outside the family circle with whom one must engage in honour contests. Similarly, since honour is replicated in blood, the good name of a family shows how honourable a family is; hence, men are acknowledged by the name of their fathers and their kinship groups. When one's family name is known, one's honour rating is known too.

On the other hand, acquired honour could be actively sought and achieved, most often at the expense of one's equals in the social contest of challenge-riposte (Malina & Neyrey, 1991:30). Malina and Neyrey (1991:30) further explain that the social patterns of contesting for honour do not allow everyone to engage in the contest. The challenge must be done in such a way that all perceive the interaction as a challenge. Thus, an inferior on the ladder of social ranking, power and sexual status does not have enough honour to withstand the affront of a superior. In this regard, women were not allowed to participate in such contests. Arlandson (1997:156) proposes one of the reasons why women were excluded from such contests. He maintains that a man's problem was compounded if a woman from a lower class played a role in his public shame. When this happened, he risked irreparable social damage, not only in the eyes of his associates, but also in the presence of those over whom he exercised power.

Honour was often acquired through challenge-riposte exchanges. In challenge-riposte exchanges, which were a kind of communication, a message could be sent by someone by means of a culturally recognised channel to a receiving individual, and this would produce an effect. The sender of the message here is the challenger, while the message is a symbolised thing or event, or both. The channel of such communications usually occurred in public, and the publicity of the message entailed that the receiving individual would react, since even non-action was publicly interpreted as either a riposte or a loss of honour (Malina & Neyrey, 1991:30). Hellerman (2000:219) explains that such interactions included both positive and negative advances of challenge-riposte. Insults and verbal attacks were the most noticeable examples of negative challenges to one's honour. Positive challenges included everyday happenings, such as offering someone a gift, inviting them to a dinner, engaging in legal debates, mutual assistance, exchanging material goods such as food and clothing, and arranging marriages. In each case a challenge has been made – a claim to enter into the social space of another person. The person who receives the challenge, in turn, must interpret the challenge and respond in a culturally appropriate manner in order to defend his honour.

Consequently, Malina and Neyrey (1991:30) elaborate that there are four typical features of a challenge-riposte exchange.

First, there must be a *claim* for honour.

Secondly, there will be a *challenge* from an equal for the claim to exist.

The third step in the interaction concerning the reaction to the challenge involves the receiver's behaviour that enables the public to pass a verdict. The receiver's behaviour in this regard is his *riposte* to the challenge.

The *verdict*, which is the last stage, is either a grant of honour taken from the person who received the challenge and awarded to the successful challenger, or a loss of honour by the challenger in favour of the successful recipient of the challenge.

Ripostes can be done in different ways: a positive refusal to act, acceptance of the message, and a negative refusal to react. It should be noted that, when the person

who is challenged is not able to make a counterchallenge against his opponent, he loses honour in the eyes of the public. People will say he cannot or does not know how to defend his honour (Malina & Neyrey, 1991:30).

The ancient world is described by scholars as a highly agonistic society (Hellerman, 2000:219; Malina, 2001:89; Neyrey, 2007b:214-216; Santos, 2008:209). As a result, the ancients competed vigorously and unceasingly for success, and thus for the reputation and honour that it brings. Foster (1965:296-297) provides a reason for this struggle. In a theory he terms “the image of limited good”, Foster states that, “if Good exists in limited amounts which cannot be expanded, and if the system is closed, it follows that an individual or a family can improve a position only at the expense of others”. Malina (2001:89) expresses a similar idea. For him, challenge-riposte is motivated by the fact that honour is considered to be a limited commodity that can neither be increased nor destroyed.

### **3.4 Reading John 7:53-8:11 as a challenge-riposte exchange**

The previous sections have provided a background to how masculinity was constructed in the Greek and Roman worlds and how it could be challenged in the honour and shame society of the Gospel of John. According to Neyrey (2007b:152), “the narrative of John 7:53-8:11 is choreographed in terms of a challenge-riposte exchange”<sup>42</sup> and can therefore be analysed according to the typical structural elements of challenge-riposte identified by Malina and Neyrey (1991:30). These steps are: a claim to honour, challenge, riposte, and public verdict. Reading John 7:53-8:11 as a challenge-riposte exchange will provide important insights into how Jesus would have been evaluated as a masculine character from the socio-cultural perspective of the Gospel of John.

#### **3.4.1 Step One: A claim to honour**

Jesus’ claim to a position of honour is not explicitly asserted in John 7:53-8:11. However, as stated above (section 2.6), the Gospel of John presented Jesus’ character in several ways as a man whose honour was ascribed by God. Importantly, in John 7, Jesus not only upheld the honourable status ascribed to him,

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<sup>42</sup> Hellerman (2000:224) also made use of this model to analyse Mark 11:27-33.

but he pointed out people who seek honour in cunning ways. By saying this, Jesus makes a direct comparison of his honour status with that of his opponents. Unlike the Jewish religious leaders, who sought to gain honour through false ways, Jesus' honour was not attained through such means. This claim to honour was a big blow to Jesus' enemies who were listening. Apparently, such a proud honour claim will not go unchallenged, as the following step explains.

### **3.4.2 Step Two: The challenge of the Pharisees and the Scribes (John 8:3-5)**

This step introduces the challenge staged against Jesus by the Pharisees and the Scribes. In the text, it is obvious that the Pharisees and the Scribes were using religious offices (institutional power) to first of all gain honour for themselves and thereby challenge Jesus' honour.<sup>43</sup> The tool for their challenge is also clearly stated: the adulterous woman. Why is the woman not called by her name? Holmes and Winfield (2003:146) explain that, in an honour and shame culture, naming is important. Naming conveys someone's identity and reveals relationships. Malina (2001:37) also affirms that, in the Mediterranean world, one's good name is one's honour. A good name holds the central concern of people in every context of public action and gives meaning to their lives. A good name is equivalent to money. For this woman to be termed as an adulterous woman clearly explains the state she is already in.

An important issue that is not clarified in this episode is why the adulterous woman is being accused by non-family members. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:292) explain that, by custom, "adultery refers to dishonouring a male by having sexual relations with a woman embedded in his honour, whether a betrothed female or a married wife". Malina and Rohrbaugh further illuminate that "Mediterranean culture allows a male dishonoured by another male in this way to defend his honour by challenging the offending male and taking his life". If this woman was truly married, as indicated

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<sup>43</sup> According to Charlesworth (2016:46), since the Jewish leaders had control in the first-century era, if any of the Jewish leaders was not ascribed honour through birth or endowment, he might have sought to acquire it through religious office. These words of Charlesworth explicate the affirmation by Connell (1995:77) that "hegemony is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power".

by Newman and Nida (1980:259),<sup>44</sup> it would be strange if her husband did not want to defend his honour at the very moment when his honour was at stake. On the other hand, if the woman was a professional prostitute who had been divorced by a former husband, she would still be a member of her family.

Holmes and Winfield (2003:150) dispute the idea that the woman was a prostitute, because a professional prostitute cannot be indicted for adultery. But if it is assumed that this woman was divorced and thereby indulged in an adulterous habit, she was still a member of a family. Therefore, based on the Mediterranean cultural values, it was still in order for the family members of the adulterous woman (especially men) to defend their family honour and name when she is accused. After all, the honour of the man is involved in the sexual purity of his mother, wife, daughters and sisters (Malina & Neyrey, 1991:44). Therefore, in regard to the Mediterranean culture and practice, there was no single reason why the Pharisees and the Scribes (non-family members) would voluntarily choose to carry out a responsibility that belongs to another family. According to Deuteronomy 22:13-30, in which marriage and sexual regulations are clearly stated, the task of summoning an adulterer or adulteress before the town elders at the gate belongs exclusively to family members of the offender.<sup>45</sup> These impositions by the Pharisees and the Scribes reveal how they made use of every means available to legitimise hegemony.

Standing before Jesus, the Pharisees and the Scribes commenced with a positive challenge to the honour of Jesus by addressing him as Teacher. Similar positive challenges are also noted in the Synoptic Gospels, where Jesus in turn gives a sharp riposte to each of the challenges. In Mark 10:17, Matthew 19:16 and Luke 18:18, a rich man approached Jesus and addressed him as a “Good teacher”. Jesus

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<sup>44</sup> According to Newman and Nida (1980:259), “this woman” in John 8:4 would have been a married woman, because according to the Jewish Law, adultery had to do with the unfaithfulness of the wife. An unmarried woman who had sexual relations with a married man was not considered an adulteress.

<sup>45</sup> Deuteronomy 22:13-30 makes mention of “the girl’s father/parents” repeatedly. This implies that it was the responsibility of the parents to report such matters to the town elders. In verse 21, it says a virgin who commits a sexual offence must only be stoned to death by “men of her town”, simply put, her family members. Besides, the stoning must be done “at the door of the virgin’s father’s house”. This means that the family is given much responsibility in dealing with adultery, even in the Torah.

objected by rebuking him that “no one is good except God alone”. Similarly, in Luke 12:13, someone in the crowd addressed Jesus as Teacher, and thereafter asked Jesus to tell his brother to share an inheritance with him. Here also, Jesus responded by telling the man that he is neither a judge nor an arbiter.

It is appropriate to take note of what Malina and Neyrey (1991:30) have said in regard to this kind of address in an honour and shame society that uses courteous language: “Interactions in honour challenge include both positive and negative advances” (Malina and Neyrey 1991:30). It could be that the Pharisees and the Scribes addressed Jesus in such a courteous manner to cunningly create an apparent friendly setting for their challenge. They pretended to have a genuine reason for approaching Jesus: “this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery” (verse 4b). The problem that arises here is how these Jewish leaders knew about the woman’s adultery. Were they at the scene where the sinful act took place? If adultery was an abominable practice, as claimed by the Pharisees and the Scribes, one must take every precaution not to be caught so easily. It seems that the easy way in which the woman and her partner in crime were caught indicates that it was a setup (if the man was caught at all). Derrett (1970:160) describes a possible scenario:

The situation raises a doubt whether the whole thing was not planned beforehand. It seems that the husband had suspected his wife, and had his suspicious confirmed, and had called some respectable citizens to hide and to watch. The woman was caught, it seems almost certain, in a trap.

These words of Derrett do not mean that the woman’s husband could truly have suspected her of cheating on him; it is just the uncertainties that surround the alleged adulterous act that have called for the suspicion. And, if the fact of the woman’s husband is ruled out, could any anonymous spy have seen the incident and reported it to the Pharisees and the Scribes? This is where the role of gossip in honour and shame societies comes in. According to Van Eck (2013:8), in the first-century Mediterranean world, competition for honour went hand in hand with gossip. Gossip was one of the weapons that those who considered themselves higher in status (in this respect, the hegemonic group) used to put those whom they considered lower in their ‘proper’ place. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:308) add that gossip could be both

positive and negative. Positively, gossip confirmed and spread honour, while negatively, it tended to undermine others. In the same vein, Cooney (2014:96) also observes that gossip plays a central role in honour violence, specifically honour killing.<sup>46</sup> In gossip-inclined societies, people are naturally interested in the lives of others and routinely share news, exchange opinions, and pass judgement on others. Viewing gossip from this perspective, it becomes clearer that the Pharisees and the Scribes were relying on gossip in order to capture their prey. They relied on gossip about Jesus and how to demean him. They also relied on gossip about the trap they were going to set for Jesus.<sup>47</sup>

In a disrespectful manner, they staged a second challenge: “And in the law, Moses commanded us ...” (verse 5a). In his comparison of glory language in John 17:1-26 and Sirach 44:23-45:5, Gupta (2014:68) explains that, in the book of Sirach:

You will not find anything like the depiction of Moses by Ben Sira, where he is discussed in such superlative terms. His (Moses) glory even came to approximate that of the angels.

Therefore, it could be that the ancient Israelites thought of Moses as having an honourable status that was above that of Jesus. The Pharisees and the Scribes thus reminded Jesus of Moses, one of their most honoured Patriarchs, in order to challenge Jesus’ honour, because the Gospel of John had testified to Jesus’ greatness as compared to Moses’ in the early chapters of John’s Gospel, where he says, “For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Neyrey (2007a:548) also upholds that what Jesus says in John 1:17 is “to affirm that he is a superior broker of better blessings than Moses”. In John 3:14, Jesus reiterates his greatness in relation to Moses by saying, “If Moses lifted up a serpent that saved Israel from death by snakebite, He (Jesus) must be lifted up to save humanity from death itself by giving it eternal life.” These are clear

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<sup>46</sup> Honour killing refers to a situation in which female members are killed as an act of restoring the family’s honour in the face of perceived severe reputational damage. Honour killings are pre-planned and may be carried out by parents, husbands, siblings or extended family (Abu-Odeh, 2010:919; Helba, Bernstein, Leonard & Bauer, 2014:4).

<sup>47</sup> The adulterous woman was only a trap to be used against Jesus.

indications that, according to the narrative of John, Jesus' honour was incomparable to that of any of the Israelite Patriarchs. In the context of honour and shame, it must be acknowledged that Jesus elevating himself above Moses and a Patriarch like Jacob (later Abraham in John 8:52 and 56)<sup>48</sup> might have been the reason why the Pharisees and the Scribes chose to challenge him.

### 3.4.3 Step Three: Jesus' riposte (John 8:6b-8)

Uncommonly for the Fourth Gospel,<sup>49</sup> Jesus remains silent in John 8:6b. From a first-century context, there could be reasons why Jesus remained silent. Firstly, as noted above (sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4), one of the most important ideals of masculinity was how good a man was at anger management. Also, in the field of physiognomy, men's rhetorical abilities related not only to how outspoken they were, but how even-tempered they were. And, in most cases, men expressed their manhood through conversations in a low voice. Secondly, Jesus' silence was a form of challenge to his enemies' manly claims. Specialists in communication, like Saville-Troike (2003:117), acknowledge the significance of silence in communication by stating that to be silent does not entail the absence of speech. Silence can produce a communicative act. In a related manner, Ephratt (2008:1912) elaborates on what he terms *eloquent silence* by maintaining that "eloquent silence is an active means chosen by the speaker to communicate his or her message". Ephratt elaborates further that eloquent silence is different from unmarked silence, like stillness, pauses and silencing. Similarly, Kenny (2011:22) adds that eloquent silence could also be referred to as pregnant silence, which is used in order to express thoughts or feelings that someone might have the intention to express but has decided not to do so. Consequently, it can be argued

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<sup>48</sup> In John 4:13, Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman, "Everyone who drinks water from this well will be thirsty again", signifies that Jesus is greater than Jacob. In a related vein, in John 8:52 and 56, Jesus argues that Abraham came into being and died. Implicitly, Jesus is comparing himself to Abraham. The message that Jesus intends to communicate is that, unlike Abraham, he (Jesus) is uncreated and imperishable (Neyrey, 2007a:547).

<sup>49</sup> There are several places in the Gospel of John where Jesus responds sharply to challenges by his close associates and others. For example, in John 1:50 – to Nathanael; in 2:4 – to his mother; in 3:3 – to Nicodemus; in 5:48 – to a royal official in Capernaum; in 6:26-58 – to a crowd in Capernaum; and in 7:6 – to his brothers. Each of these ripostes was made by Jesus with regard to the challenges (positive or negative) made against him. There are other places that cannot be mentioned here for lack of space.



that Jesus' silence could be a riposte to the challenge of the Pharisees and the Scribes. Jesus expressed a similar riposte with an eloquent silence in Matthew 15:22, where a Canaanite woman came to him to request the healing of her little daughter who was possessed by an evil spirit (cf. Mark 7:24-30).

However, contrary to the story in Matthew 15:21-28, where Jesus later complied with the Canaanite woman's request despite his initial eloquent silence, in John 8:6b and 8 Jesus not only reacts with eloquent silence, but also performs a visible act: "He bent down and wrote on the ground." According to Ergaver (2015:112), in honour-embedded societies, indirect gestures could indicate mockery. Culturally, for Jesus to write on the ground at a time when the Jewish leaders expected an answer to an important and urgent question could be a sign of contempt and a challenge to their honour. But the Pharisees and the Scribes apparently considered Jesus' silence a concession that he was confused, so they pressed on. Jesus stood up, faced them, and said: "Let the one sinless among you cast the first stone at her" (John 8:7b). Hellerman (2000:224) makes a comment in his analysis of Mark 11:27-33 that also could apply to the challenge-riposte in John 7:53-8:11:

Jesus does not directly interact with the content of the leaders' questions. Instead, he forcefully takes charge of the broader challenge-riposte scenario.

By requesting the Pharisees and the Scribes to cast the first stone, Jesus is responding to their question by giving them a duty to perform: to cast a stone. Jesus essentially created a ground rule for the challenge. It is this ground rule that Jesus will use to defeat his enemies. The enemies had no option but to discontinue their violent intent. Kiambi (2012:10) explains that this is the only text in the Bible that portrays patriarchy admitting its wrongdoings and therefore abandoning its evil intentions. The defeat is expressed in the following step.

#### **3.4.4 Step Four: The public verdict (John 8:9)**

The public verdict is not overtly given by the people in the story, as required by the rules of a challenge-riposte exchange. Nonetheless, Neyrey (2007b:152) asserts that the proof that Jesus won the challenge is that the Pharisees and the Scribes depart silently: "And having heard him, they went out one by one, having begun from the oldest, and he was left alone, and the woman being in the middle" (John 8:9).

Hellerman (2000:225) expresses a similar thought on Mark 11:27-33 that could be applied here:

The Jewish leaders had come to challenge Jesus's honour. Now the tables are turned, and the opponents suddenly find themselves with only one way to preserve their own honour rating in the midst of this heated public exchange. By leaving Jesus and the woman at the scene, they publicly place Jesus in a position of honour wholly unparalleled and unassailable. This proves Jesus wholly victorious in the challenge-riposte engagement.

As clearly elucidated in the challenge-riposte contest, Jesus is being shown as an honourable person in an honour and shame context by John. Within this context of honour and shame, the claims made by the narrator of the Johannine Gospel concerning Jesus in the previous chapter are thus validated. Jesus was not only the true Son of God; he had proved it among his enemies as well.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the socio-cultural world of the Gospel of John was examined in order to ascertain how they would have understood John's characterisation of Jesus as a masculine figure. After giving an overview of how masculinity was constructed in the socio-historical context of the Gospel of John (section 3.2) and of how masculinity was performed (section 3.3), John 7:53-8:11 was read as a challenge-riposte exchange (section 3.4).

In evaluating John's depiction of Jesus as a man it must be taken into consideration that even though masculinity in the Greek and Roman worlds was expressed through courageous performances in the public arena, it was also expressed through virtues acceptable to the society. In other words, even though manliness was seen as a display of strength and vigour, the virtue aspect of it was also important. According to Conway (2008:18), ancient Rome also believed that true men would lose their dignity through a violent demonstration of anger against another. The conduct of an angry man could thus turn him into an undignified and unmanly character. Applying this to John 7:53-8:11, it can be deduced that the Pharisees and the Scribes fell short of what it meant to be an ideal man because they believed that

violence was the only way they could achieve their manliness in that they wanted to kill the accused woman. Jesus, however, expressed his manliness in this pericope by remaining in control of himself and by winning the challenge-riposte exchange. This is in line with how Jesus is depicted in the Gospel of John – as the Saviour and friend of women, and of the less-privileged, who always acts in their favour.<sup>50</sup>

It can thus be argued that, from their socio-cultural perspective, the Gospel of John views Jesus as an honourable man who defended an innocent woman. The question that arises at this point is of a twenty-first century nature. How can we relate these first-century socio-cultural perspectives of manhood construction to the contemporary society so as to address the menace of violence against women? As a result, in chapter 4 the next dialogical partner of this study will be introduced, namely feminist criticism. Within this context, the aim of feminist perspective of John 7:53-8:11 is to relate the narrative and its socio-cultural world to the twenty-first century's context, so as to distinguish between values that should be rejected and those that should be retained or emulated.

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<sup>50</sup> The Gospel of John presents Jesus as demonstrating a lot of love and kindness towards women. For example, in John 4:7ff, he spoke very kindly even to a strange woman he saw at the well of Jacob. This could be the reason why his disciples are amazed.

# Chapter 4 – A feminist reading of John 7:53-8:11

## 4.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, an analysis was done of how masculinity was viewed and constructed from a first-century viewpoint. It was maintained that, despite the fact that masculinity was considered to be a publicly performed act of being courageous, it was also constructed through virtues, practices and by holding certain beliefs. Relating this to John 7:53-8:11, the Jewish religious leaders are portrayed therein as displaying their manhood in a violent manner, in line with the manner in which masculinity is constructed in a patriarchal setting. On the other hand, Jesus is described as exhibiting his masculinity in a different, non-violent manner.

In this chapter, the text will be read from a feminist critical point of view. A feminist critical point of view aims to take cognisance of the patriarchal elements embedded in a biblical text in order to challenge them (Russell, 1985:11-12; Thistlethwaite, 1985:99). For example, when interpreting biblical texts that seemingly encourage violence against women, there is a need to emphasise the liberatory elements (if any) found in the text instead (Sakenfeld, 1985:56; Schneiders, 1995:352-353). Using feminist viewpoints and the frameworks of Baloyi (2010), O'Sullivan (2015), and other scholars who have worked on John 7:53-8:11, this chapter thus intends to uncover the patriarchal features that are embedded in the text.

It is clear that, in terms of the communication process outlined in section 1.6, the focus here is on *the world in front of the text* and *the contemporary reader of the text*. In view of this shift in perspective, therefore, the world in front of the text will first be described briefly (section 4.2), as well as what a feminist critical viewpoint entails (section 4.3), before John 7:53-8:11 is read from a feminist perspective to unveil elements of patriarchy and violence in the text (section 4.4).

## 4.2 The world in front of the text

The *world in front of the text* can also be referred to as the reader's world (Shillington, 2002:208 Tate, 2008:4). It focuses on the role that readers play in deriving meaning from a text (Tate, 2008:4). A text exists because there is an author who has written it, and the reason why such a text was written is in order to serve as a communication medium from which a particular message is derived. The individual whom this message is expected to reach is the *intended* reader, and it is this reader who must make vital decisions on what the text says (Shillington, 2002:208; Tate, 2008:189). The text, however, is often also read by subsequent readers who are not the intended readers of a text, and who also do not share the worldview of the implied reader. They furthermore *read a text the way they deem fit*. Even if this is not done intentionally, it happens unintentionally because every reader is located within his or her respective cultural setting and these readings are influenced by their cultures and personal experiences. Their diverse presuppositions lead them to construe meaning from the same text differently (Green, 1995:8). It is therefore important to take the presuppositions of a reader seriously.

Tate (2008:192) states that reading must not be a process in which the text alone speaks to the reader. It must be the other way round – a dialogical process. It is dialogical because it is regarded as a process in which both the text and reader participate in a dialogue. In this dialogical process, or inter-act reading as Shillington (2002:208) terms it, the reader is the one who is always the leading speaker. It is the reader who first of all imagines the text in his or her conscious mind and heart before any other action. This kind of imagination by the reader entails that he or she starts the reading process *from the world in which he or she lives before moving into the world of the text*. The meaning that has been encoded in the text cannot automatically pass from the text through the reader's eyes into the brain as a train that moves through the countryside to its station without the reader being involved. Reading is not an automated or a mechanical act. It is an operation that consciously occurs through human imagination (Shillington, 2002:208).

Approaches that focus on the reader and the world in front of the text are: reader-response criticism, autobiographical criticism, and ideology criticism. Ideology criticism comprises feminist criticism, womanist criticism, queer criticism, and gender

criticism (Green, 1995:350; Tate, 2008:229-237). Among these critical views that fall under this category, this chapter will use *feminist criticism*, which is briefly discussed in the next section.

#### 4.2.1 Feminist criticism

Ehrensperger (2009:136-137) explains that feminist criticism does not consider itself as a supplementary method for studying a text. Rather, it considers itself as a paradigm shift that implies that all interpretations are contextual or influenced by social location, such as gender, class, race, age and sexual orientation. From this perspective, emphasis is laid on the “hermeneutical presuppositions” that are usually influenced by the interpreter’s context. Feminist criticism thus does not operate from the notion of objectivity or a situation where a text is left to speak for itself; instead, the reader is given the task of engaging with the text with the help of his or her experiences. In this regard, feminist scholars have maintained that the most peculiar feature of feminist criticism and other kinds of liberationist hermeneutics can be summarised under what is referred to as “the feminist consciousness” (Ehrensperger, 2009:137; Farley, 1985:45-48; Schneiders, 1995:349-350; Tate, 2008:237). Within this “feminist consciousness”, the main avenue from which the Bible is understood is by first of all recognising women’s own experience.

There furthermore are two primary convictions that are taken into consideration: “the conviction of equality” and “the conviction of mutuality”. On the one hand, the conviction of equality stipulates that the interests of women must be as valid as those of men. From this perspective, any sort of gender inequality must be discouraged and discarded. On the other hand, the conviction of mutuality maintains that each and every person must be regarded as a human being, be it a man or a woman. Feminist critics are thus careful to promote the fact that all women are human and must be treated as such. As a result, any passage in the Bible or any kind of biblical interpretation that undermines women should not be regarded as a divinely revealed text (Tate, 2008:237).

In consideration of the feminist consciousness explained above, Tate (2008:237-238) and Thistlethwaite (1985:99) assert that the Bible in particular was written within the framework of patriarchy. Also, the way the Bible was translated has been done within the context of patriarchal power. Within this patriarchal context, women are in

several ways dehumanised, marginalised, and treated as inferior beings. The fact is that women are often treated as instruments for achieving patriarchal goals. As a result, feminist interpretation aims at depatriarchalising the biblical texts and, at the same time, challenging those theological traditions and systems that are underpinned by a patriarchal interpretation of the Bible.

Schneiders (1995:350) and Thistlethwaite (1985:99) continue that, from a feminist point of view, the Bible does not seem to be a liberation text for women, but rather a part of the problem. As a result, the feminists' hermeneutical agenda of transformation aims not only for the liberation of the oppressed, but also the liberation of the biblical text from its own validation of women's oppression. Not only the Bible, but also the church that persists in modelling, underwriting, and legitimating the oppression of women on the basis of the biblical stories, need to be transformed. A special focus of feminist scholars has been the so-called "texts of terror". It is important to take note of this concept.

#### **4.2.2 Biblical texts of terror**

Questions have been posed by feminist scholars such as Sakenfeld (1985:56), Thistlethwaite (1985:97), Tribble (1982:116-118) and West (2004:160) on whether some biblical texts can be ascribed liberatory characteristics. For Sakenfeld (1985:56), for instance, the Bible has a highly embedded, explicit patriarchal bias. Therefore, in studying any biblical text, feminists must be alert not only to this patriarchal bias, but also to any evidence of an androcentric perspective by the biblical authors. Similarly, historical accounts, as proven by Burrige (2007:1-3) and Shillington (2002:1), have shown that the Bible has been an instrument in the past that was used by people to endorse oppressive, immoral acts against humanity. For instance, slavery and imperialism were endorsed by adherents of these evils by using biblical verses to support their claims.

In order to address this problem that is usually posed by biblical texts that are believed to be oppressive, Russell (1985:11-12) suggests that it has become obvious that "the scriptures need liberation". The liberation of the scriptures is not only applicable to how they are interpreted, but also to the manner in which the biblical texts themselves are clearly patriarchally biased in themselves. A further liberation needed by the Bible is its interpretation, which is usually characterised by a

one-sided view. For Russell (1985:17), however, the Bible has already been liberated due to the fact that it bears the testimony of God's redemptive action through Jesus Christ. What is left for the contemporary readers of the Bible is to consider ways in which this liberation can be properly manifested.

For this liberation<sup>51</sup> to be accomplished, feminist critics have developed a number of strategic approaches to use in interpreting a biblical text.

The first strategy is to focus on biblical texts with liberating potential. In this regard, feminist scholars place their emphasis on texts in which women figure prominently or are presented positively (Schneiders, 1995:352-353).

The second strategy is to unveil the hidden feminine elements in the Bible. There are some biblical texts that are obviously liberating in nature, but women are conspicuously excluded as beneficiaries of these texts (Sakenfeld, 1985:56; Schneiders, 1995:354).

The third approach is to reveal or extract from the Bible the secrets about women. These are secrets that have been suppressed by androcentric values. These include the hidden history of women, which has largely been falsified or misrepresented, and even erased, by male control of the biblical tradition. Feminist scholars do this by pointing to some of the facts that remained unnoticed or even neglected by biblical interpreters (Schneiders, 1995:354).

The fourth approach focuses on rescuing the text from misinterpretation. Feminist interpretation, in this way, aims at discerning and challenging the patriarchal, androcentric, misogynist and sexist misinterpretations that have been sustained over the years within New Testament scholarship (Schneiders, 1995:355).

Sakenfeld (1985:56) adds that, for feminists, men and women must be seen as partners working together in God's liberating action, which has been accomplished through Jesus Christ.

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<sup>51</sup> This refers to the liberation of the biblical texts from being viewed as documents of perpetrating violence against women, along with the liberation of all forms of violence against humanity.



These and many more are the few approaches suggested by feminists on how to interpret a biblical text. However, the notion that biblical texts of terror are dangerous to human peaceful existence still remain. The question that arises here is how we can find positive ways of approaching these presumable biblical texts of terror. This is what the section that follows focuses on.

### **4.2.3 Approaching biblical texts of terror**

Biblical texts of terror are not only harmful to women, but also to humanity in general (Dillen, 2011:168). West (2004:164) asserts that these texts have the capacity of instigating violence on women and overturning an inclusive working theology.<sup>52</sup> But how are these texts approached? Dillen (2011:168) suggests three ways: diabolization, banalization, and ethnicization.

#### *4.2.3.1 Diabolizing biblical texts of terror*

Diabolization as an attitude maintains that scriptural texts that seem to instigate terror on humanity must be considered as absolutely evil. Therefore, such texts of terror should be withdrawn from the Bible. If it is impossible to withdraw them, the Church should desist from using them in liturgy, catechesis, or education. By extracting these texts from the Bible, they cannot be used to encourage abusive practices on humanity anymore. However, Dillen (2011:168) expresses the impossibility of removing scriptural texts from the Canon due to the fact that the general consensus of the Christian community is required before any biblical is removed.

General speaking, this radical attitude of diabolization is not the solution to the problem biblical texts of terror, because even though these texts cease to be read

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<sup>52</sup> Phiri (2000:279-288) has carried out a case study on a Malawian female minister known as Bishop Yami, whose church ministry was taken away from her by the use of a biblical text. According to Phiri (2000:279), Bishop Yami started her church through her sole efforts, but decided to join her ministry to that of a male pastor, whose name is Lumwira. Later in November 1995, a letter was sent to Bishop Yami from Pastor Lumwira, requesting her to resign. The prime reason why Bishop Yami was asked to resign was the biblical fact that a woman is not authorised to be a church leader. The biblical text which Pastor Lumwira used to legitimate his claim was 1 Timothy 2:8-15, where the Bible forbids women from teaching or exercising authority over men.

due to the fact that they perpetrate violence, they would continue to exist and to exert influence on the meaning of the Bible. Besides, by insisting on removing these texts, it would rather give the impression that the texts are central to the Bible so that no other solution is available. Therefore, diabolizing attitude does not answer the question or solve the problem of how to interpret biblical texts of terror (Dillen, 2011:169-170). It is, therefore, significant to consider if other approaches would solve the problem.

#### *4.2.3.2 Banalizing biblical texts of terror*

Dillen (2011:170) explains that the banalizing attitude attempts to explain the scriptural texts of terror from cultural and historical perspectives or contexts in which they were developed. The aim of banalizing these texts is in order to express that the patriarchal elements should not be considered as today's problems, but a problem of the historical past. Simply put, banalization of the texts of terror does not really see any serious problem with the texts of terror themselves, but the manner in which these texts have been misused or misinterpreted through history.

#### *4.2.3.3 Ethnicizing biblical texts of terror*

Ethnicization as a strategy in dealing with texts of terror does not acknowledge any evil elements in a biblical text as the basis for deriving moral or good ethical action. In an analogous manner, ethnicization of the biblical texts of terror aims at changing the patriarchal legacy legitimated by these texts into constructive entitlement, so that the elements that have played a role in the past and present oppression of humanity need not determine the future. In this perspective, the reader criticizes any form of historically conditioned violent elements of the text (Dillen, 2011:172, 175).

This process of ethnicizing biblical texts of terror can be related to West's (2004:160) "taming" of texts of terror in which he referred to "taming texts of terror" as a means to free or to liberate biblical texts from the idea that these texts could only be viewed from an oppressive point of view. West (2002:243) adds that in order to recognise the existence of the poor and marginalised women, we ought to read the Bible against its "dominant ideological grain" which is characterised by androcentric and patriarchal tone. West (2002:245-254) continues that even if the final form of the biblical text does not explicitly express the experience of women in the text, it is the

task of a reader to break the silence of the women that apparently occurred in the text. Failure to break this silence is the same as “gynocide”.

It is worth noting that ethnicization or taming of texts of terror is the basic approach used in this work. In the following section, the above feminist insights (sections 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3) will be applied to John 7:53-8:11

### **4.3 A feminist critical reading of John 7:53-8:11**

In view of the previous section, it is not clear whether a text like John 7:53-8:11, which is underpinned by violence and androcentric values, can be regarded as a liberatory text. The androcentric underpinnings of John 7:53-8:11 can be detected by asking the following questions: Why should the Pharisees and the Scribes choose a woman as a trap? Why not a man? Beside, the man with whom the woman committed adultery is conspicuously absent in the episode. So, does this mean that men are superior and should not be apprehended, even when it is obvious that they have committed an offence? If so, what makes them superior? Similar to these questions, Toensing (2003:167) adds that the questions that Jesus asked the woman: “Where are they?” “No one condemns you?” (8:10), simply reinforce the accusations being laid against her and, by doing this, Jesus was also being androcentric.

West (2004:160), who has also confronted texts of terror in his work, “Taming texts of terror: Reading (against) the gender grain of 1 Timothy”, asks a very important question: “What do those of us who are committed to God’s project of liberation for women do with texts like [these]?” For Mosala (1989:30) and West (2004:160), oppressive texts cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberatory texts. This is because biblical texts that seem to be oppressive usually have an ideological grain that sustains patriarchy. However, Thistlethwaite (1985:102) has a different position. She argues that even the biblical texts that are ignorant of women’s existence or hostile to them can be modified so as to portray messages that are liberatory for abused women. One of the essential catalysts for achieving this is to give women the assurance that they belong to the category of the oppressed, the poor and the outcast. Thistlethwaite (1985:100) reiterates that the Bible was written from the viewpoint of the powerless. The powerless in this regard are the people of Israel,

whom God chose as his people. It is interesting to note that, even though they were a chosen people, they were just a mere “ragged band of runaway slaves” (Thistlethwaite, 1985:100). Burrige (2007:334) adds that, by regarding these people as his chosen ones, God revealed to us that he is a God who always takes sides with the powerless and the defenceless. With regard to this, powerless people could be used as a metaphor for people who are valued by God. It is also worth noting that Jesus’ ministry also continued this notion of identifying with the poor as the chosen of God.

With these affirmations, one could deduce that Jesus’ mission was characterised by his love for the powerless. We cannot, however, deny the fact that Jesus was a man born in a specific culture and that he would sometimes act according to the culture into which he was born. For example, in John’s Gospel, Jesus might be acting violently, as in his cleansing of the temple, or in other patriarchal ways. To engage with these patriarchal depictions of Jesus in the text, West (2004:167) asserts that a biblical critic has to consider the socio-historical aspects of the text in order to examine how cultural beliefs and practices of the first century influence the Bible story, as well as the people, of that era. By understanding a text within its socio-historical context, along with the conduct depicted therein (e.g. Jesus acts as expected of a man in the violent culture into which he was born), one can engage in what West calls the taming or liberation of the text so as to enable it to convey its true meaning.

In considering this suggestion by West (2004:167) for taming the oppressive nature of some biblical texts from their socio-historical backgrounds, it is appropriate to consider whether the situation in John 7:53-8:11 is influenced by its socio-cultural background, as well as to reflect on the effects of this on women in our contemporary era by using a feminist hermeneutic. In terms of John 7:53-8:11, O’Sullivan (2015:2) gives the following reasons why a feminist hermeneutic is relevant and how this approach is informed by the world behind the text.

First, the violence being perpetrated by the men against the woman in the pericope is done in the name of religion. In the text, the Pharisees and the Scribes, who brought the woman before Jesus, belong to a religious and social group that discriminated against women in the way they ordered gender conduct and enforced

it. From a feminist point of view, it can be deduced from the text that religious and cultural values can also be used in our contemporary societies to legitimate violence against women by similar religious authority figures. This is unfortunately often the experience of Nigerian women.

Secondly, O'Sullivan (2015:2) adds that, from a feminist viewpoint, it is very important that the person who is being accused in John 7:53-8:11 is a woman. Adultery is per definition committed by two partners. In John 7:53-8:11, however, it is only the woman who is summoned for judgement. For feminist interpreters, this negative focus on the transgressions of women is not just restricted to the androcentric and kyriarchal society into which the woman in John was born. It is still a present reality for women (O'Sullivan, 2015:2).

It is thus clear that engaging with the text from a feminist perspective alerts the reader to aspects in the narrative that have a bearing on his or her present context.

#### **4.4 Unveiling patriarchy and violence against women in John 7:53-8:11**

As argued earlier in this study (sections 4.1 and 4.2.2), one of the focal points of feminists is to challenge the patriarchal elements embedded in biblical texts. As was made clear by O'Sullivan (2015:2) in the previous section, this is also the case with John 7:53-8:11. It is therefore important to read the passage from a feminist perspective in order to identify all the patriarchal features that are oppressive to women in the text.

##### **4.4.1 The choice of the temple as the place for the accusation**

Considering the social world of the temple and its significance to the Jews, it can be argued from a feminist point of view that the choice of the temple by the Pharisees and Scribes was to humiliate the woman. The temple was a place where people were classified according to their social status. According to O'Sullivan (2015:2) and Witherington (1990:8), the Jewish temple was divided into different precincts.

Entrance into the inner precinct was prohibited for women and for some men, such as proselytes and foreigners.<sup>53</sup>

One of the reasons why women were restricted from entering the main part of the temple was the belief that they were naturally unclean (Witherington, 1990:8). Surprisingly, then, in John 7:53-8:11 an unclean woman who has been caught in the very act of adultery is allowed to go near the holy Jewish temple. What is interesting here is the manner in which this woman is being led by people who are conversant with Jewish traditions and rules, and the consequences of not abiding by these rules. O’Sullivan (2015:2) argues that, if the woman was truly involved in an adulterous act – as the Pharisees and the Scribes claimed, it could be that their sole intention in taking her to the temple was to humiliate her in front of those gathering by the temple. Also, if the woman was really guilty of the sin she was accused of, could it be that the reason why she was charged in the temple was to indicate just how sinful she was? If not, why charge her in a holy place? Even if these questions remain unanswered, they give us a glimpse into how those who want to sustain the oppression of women would use every means at their disposal to achieve their goal.

#### **4.4.2 Exaggerating the woman’s sin**

According to John 7:53-8:11, the Pharisees and the Scribes saw the woman committing adultery (cf. John 8:4 “this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery”) – a very serious sin that deserved capital punishment according to the law. The adjective *αὐτοφώρῳ*, meaning “in the very act” (verse 4),<sup>54</sup> has a very offensive and violent connotation. Originally, *αὐτόφωρος* was used in order to refer to a thief (*φώρ*). Later users of the word started using it with other meanings, like evildoers and adulterers (Abbott-Smith, 1973:70). By using this word in reference to the woman in John 7:53-8:11, it can thus be argued that John depicts her accusers as describing her sin as being as grievous as that of a thief (*φώρ*).

#### **4.4.3 The deliberate exoneration of her male partner**

As expressed above (section 4.4.2), the woman is accused of committing a crime in which she was “caught in the very act”. However, her partner with whom she was

<sup>53</sup> Proselytes were recent or new converts to Judaism.

<sup>54</sup> *Αὐτοφώρῳ* is a dative singular neuter of *αὐτόφωρος*.

caught committing adultery was deliberately not apprehended. Baloyi (2010:3) speculates that the Pharisees and the Scribes were afraid of taking the man to Jesus because, according to the Jewish custom, men were more highly respected than women. Even though they committed the same transgression, it is only the woman who is publicly shamed and threatened with extreme violence.

#### **4.4.4 The misuse of the woman as a trap**

It is possible that the punishment of the woman is not the true intention of the Pharisees and the Scribes, but that for them she is simply a means by which to trap Jesus. If he agrees that she needs to be killed, they could report him to the Romans. If he did not sanction her death, he could be accused of not having respect for the law. The woman in this view is thus of no value as a person. She is simply an object to be used.

If the reason given by John's narrator, namely that the Pharisees and the Scribes were using the woman as a trap, is true, it is pertinent to reiterate these questions: Why should the Pharisees and the Scribes choose a woman as a trap? Why not a man? To these questions, Young (2005:3) answers:

The image of woman has not ceased being that of the Other: the surface that reflects fantasies and fears arising from our human being as vulnerable bodies. Just because images and expectations about women make us asymmetrically associated with sex, birth, age, and flesh, we have little voice to express our own point of view on this fleeting existence or on the social relations that position us.

According to Young, the woman is simply an object with which the men want to achieve their own ambitions. This argument can be related to Hearn and Whitehead's (2006:45) assertion that men are only concerned about how they can excel over other men in society. As a result, they do not care when women are dehumanised by others or themselves. The Pharisees and the Scribes are thus not concerned about the woman at all. All they want to do is to trap Jesus in order to strip him of his honour.

#### **4.4.5 A wrong quotation and application of the Law to achieve a patriarchal purpose**

In John 8:5, the Pharisees and the Scribes make a reference to Moses' law: "And in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such." This was a deliberate attempt to emphasise just how important their accusation was.

By observing the law, which they referred to specifically, one can however detect lapses in the way they were quoting the law of which they claimed to be custodians. Under normal circumstances, Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22 advocate the death penalty for adultery for both men and the women. The problem with their quotation from the Torah is that the law stipulates that, if a *virgin* who has been betrothed to a man commits fornication, she must be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:23-24); however, John 7:53-8:11 does not describe the woman as being a virgin betrothed to someone else. Secondly, and contrary to the Law that the Pharisees and the Scribes claimed to observe, the man was conspicuously left out of their accusation. The Pharisees and the Scribes thus deliberately neglected all these stipulations of the law.

Commenting on whether the Pharisees and the Scribes using the law to discourage adultery, Kinukawa (1995:89-90) emphasises that if the main issue here by the scribes and the Pharisees is the definition of the legal measures of adultery, the principal offender in this case should surely be the man who committed adultery: he, after all, is the one who has infringed on another man's property and honour. It would seem that the woman should be questioned only after the man is charged. However, the way the scribes and the Pharisees describe the law presupposes that women are generally the ones to whom the death penalty is applied. It is clear that the accusation laid against the woman is androcentrically-motivated. The manner in which the law is applied differently to women than to men is in line with the way patriarchal societies often use their laws to discriminate against women.

#### **4.4.6 An accusation without a witness**

There are several instances in the Bible that state that, before one is condemned to death for a crime committed, there must be two or more witnesses who can testify against such a person (Numbers 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15). Bakon (2014:175) states



that the weakness of this legislation is that witnesses can sometimes conspire in order to testify against an enemy. He notes the biblical incidence where Naboth, who was innocent, was murdered because of the evidence of two false witnesses (1 Kings 21:13). Therefore, in order to prevent any form of conspiracy by the witnesses, precautions had to be taken. Friedell (2009:666) states that one of these precautions was that, before witnesses could testify against a person, they must first warn the person. They must not only warn him or her, they must also caution him/her about the punishment of committing such an offence. In addition, the witnesses must be in agreement with their testimony (Watson, 1999:101). It is thus strange that the Pharisees and the Scribes called no eyewitnesses at all, according to John, or if they themselves were the witnesses they give no indication of having warned the man or woman about the consequences of their action.

#### **4.4.7 Summary**

This reading of John 7:53-8:11 has showed that common patriarchal practices and predispositions that oppress women are present in the narrative of the woman accused of adultery. By reading the text from a feminist perspective, it is obvious how men, who zealously try to sustain patriarchal hegemonies, could use every means available to legitimate these. Sometimes, men might be aware of the wrong acts and the abuse they perpetrate against women, but in order to prove their supremacy they keep on with their cruel acts. From the analysis done so far, it is clear that, inasmuch as the Pharisees and the Scribes were learned in their so-called traditions and Torah, their quest for the destruction of both Jesus and the woman blindfolded them. It is pertinent to imply here that, in most cases, the suffering that women face day in and day out at the hands of men is a pre-meditated act by the male counterpart.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on a feminist reading of John 7:53-8:11. The chapter analysed John 7:53-8:11 in order to describe the full extent of the violence perpetrated against the woman. However, in the passage, Jesus overturns the violent inclination of the text into a liberatory episode. As the woman was liberated from the oppressive hands of her accusers, the Jewish leaders were also liberated

from committing a murder, and thereby also from their violent culture. In this sense, the redemptive act performed by Jesus in the text is a complete one, despite the fact that the Pharisees and the Scribes were his hostile opponents. This portrays the nature of the work that Jesus came to perform. The liberatory act performed by Jesus, and why it is important for men to emulate Jesus, are summarised in section 5.5.1.

# Chapter 5 - Conclusion

## 5.1 Introduction

The motivation for this study was the violence I have personally seen committed against women in Nigeria. Along with a number of African scholars this study argues that the suffering that Nigerian women are experiencing at the hands of men can be related to the story of the woman accused of adultery in John 7:53-8:11. In his work on John 7:53-8:11, which puts the emphasis on the adulterous act that the woman in the text is accused of, Ottuh (2014:61-62), for example, argues that this text portrays the type of violence that Nigerian woman (especially in the Urhobo tribe) are still experiencing today. This assertion by Ottuh (2014:61-62) resonates with my experience concerning my two mothers' sufferings, which I shared in section 1.2. Today, many Nigerian women are still subjected to different forms of violence, which are often justified by an appeal to culture and religion. These physical and theological claims cannot be allowed to continue.

Since the abuse of women is often theologically motivated, it is important to address the norms that justify the abuse of women through sound exegesis. This study therefore has attempted to study a text, John 7:53-8:11, which depicts violence being perpetrated against an unnamed woman in the name of manhood construction. The focus on John 7:53-8:11 stems from Burrige's (2007:4) reflections on how to use the Bible from a non-violent and an inclusive point of view. He maintains that, to suitably apply the New Testament to today's world, the interpreter must start with Jesus. What Jesus does or says in a text, in other words, must be the focal point of any New Testament study of the Gospels. The reason for this kind of approach, as explained by Burrige (2007:1), is to express that all human beings (men and women, the vulnerable and the oppressed) are equal before God through Jesus. This approach can be seen in Burrige's (2007:334) words on the summary of the Gospel of John, when he states: "The overriding theme of John's Gospel has been the love of God, coming to dwell among human beings in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and to teach his divine truth". For Burrige (2007:334), it is from this perspective that Jesus is seen in the Gospel of John as "the friend of sinners". John

7:53-8:11 was selected for this study because it depicts Jesus as the “friend” of a particular sinner – the woman accused of adultery.

The text was first studied in terms of how it fits into John’s narrative (Chapter 2). Then it was analysed in terms of how men at the time of the writing of the Gospel of John constructed their masculinity (Chapter 3). Thereafter, the text was read from a contemporary feminist perspective (Chapter 4). Each of the different chapters and the methods used therein attempted to answer the research questions stated in section 1.3:

- How is masculinity constructed in John’s *narrative* of Jesus in general?
- How is masculinity constructed in John 7:53-8:11 in terms of the *socio-cultural world of the text*?
- Is John 7:53-8:11 a “text of terror” from a *feminist perspective*?
- What can engaging with the text in a multifaceted way contribute to the *liberation of women in Nigeria*?

The manner in which the respective chapters answer these questions is outlined briefly in the following sections.

## **5.2 How is masculinity constructed in John’s narrative of Jesus in general?**

In Chapter 2, the world created by the text (section 2.2) was discussed, after which narrative criticism as method was introduced (section 2.3), along with how a narrative can be analysed (section 2.4), before a narrative analysis of John 7:53-8:11 was undertaken (section 2.5). In section 2.6, the manner in which Jesus is depicted as the ideal man was discussed.

In terms of *the first research question* – on how is masculinity constructed in John’s narrative of Jesus in general – Chapter 2 argued that Jesus is depicted as the Son of God, who is honoured above all other masculine figures. For John, Jesus is a static character,<sup>55</sup> who illustrates what it takes to be an ideal man who does the will of God

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<sup>55</sup> The notion that Jesus is a static character in the Gospel of John has been elaborated upon in chapter two (specifically section 2.5.4).

by taking the side of those who are oppressed. The narrative analysis of John 7:53-8:11 shows that, in line with the rest of John's narrative, Jesus' status as the ideal man was challenged by his Jewish enemies, of which the Pharisees and the Scribes were the most prominent. Jesus' defence of the accused woman indicates that he remained true to his identity as the ideal man.

### **5.3 How is masculinity constructed in John 7:53-8:11 in terms of the socio-cultural world of the text?**

The second research question (how is masculinity constructed in John 7:53-8:11 in terms of the socio-cultural world of the text?) was addressed in Chapter 3. In order to understand how the socio-cultural values of John's Gospel would be evaluated in regards to the character of Jesus as depicted in the narrative thereof, an overview of how masculinity was constructed (section 3.2) and performed (section 3.3) in the Greek and Roman worlds was given, before John 7:53-8:11 was analysed as a challenge-riposte exchange (section 3.4).

In terms of the second research question, Chapter 3 argues that, in John 7:53-8:11, the Pharisees and the Scribes fell short of what it meant to be an ideal man in the Greek and Roman worlds (the world behind the text), because they resorted to violence. Jesus, however, expressed his manliness in this passage by remaining true to his identity as the ideal man and by winning the challenge-riposte exchange with the Pharisees and the Scribes.

### **5.4 Is John 7:53-8:11 a “text of terror” from a feminist perspective?**

In Chapter 4, John 7:53-8:11 was read from a feminist critical point of view that identified the patriarchal elements embedded in the passage in order to challenge them (section 4.4). From a feminist perspective it is also important to be critical of the notion that masculinity can be constructed in terms of men being courageous in defending themselves, and those under their protection, from other men (see section 3.5). The reason for being critical of this way of constructing masculinity is that it reduces women to being helpless victims in need of male help. In this de-humanising process, women become mere objects with which men can prove their masculinity. This is true of the male characters who use the woman as a trap for Jesus.

The question that arises is whether an alternative way of constructing masculinity can be undertaken on the basis of John 7:53-8:11 and what Jesus positively does in the text. If this can be done, men in the twenty-first century could be encouraged to emulate the exemplary life of Jesus as portrayed in John 7:53-8:11 without unintentionally also entrenching a patriarchal worldview. In order to do this, it is important to engage with the text in a multifaceted manner.

## **5.5 What can engaging with the text in a *multifaceted way* contribute to the liberation of women in Nigeria?**

It is evident from sections 5.2 to 5.4 that engaging with John 7:53-8:11 from a multifaceted approach results in both the confirmation of insights into the text, as well as the challenging of certain interpretations. It is thus important to reflect further on the value of engaging with the text in a multifaceted way (section 5.5.1), before its contribution to the liberation of women in Nigeria can be considered (section 5.5.2).

### **5.5.1 Engaging with a text in a multifaceted way**

In the introduction it was argued that Biblical texts presuppose three “worlds”: the world behind the text, the world within the text, and the world in front of the text, and that it was important to bring these three “worlds” into conversation with each other. It therefore is the intention of this section to bring the different readings undertaken in this study in terms of the different “worlds” into conversation with each other. Or, stated differently – to read the text in a multifaceted way. The intention is not that the meaning derived from reading the text in terms of one world (e.g. the world behind the text) should be taken as the definite, or only way, of reading John 7:53-8:11. It is rather that the different questions the biblical “worlds” evoke should stimulate new questions and deeper reflection on the text.

As already stated, it was argued in Chapter 2 that Jesus is depicted as the Son of God who is honoured above all other masculine figures in the Gospel of John, and that in John 7:53-8:11 he is challenged as ideal man by the Pharisees and the Scribes. In the passages, however Jesus successfully defends the accused woman, thereby defending his identity as the ideal man. In the world in the text created by John’s narrative, Jesus is thus depicted as an ideal man who does not resort to violence.

In Chapter 3, the text was read from the perspective of the socio-cultural world of John 7:53-8:11, in other words, the *world behind the text*. Since the text does not explain these values, it is believed that these socio-cultural values are embedded within the narrative. From the perspective of the world behind the text, the narrative of John 7:53-8:11 is about an unnamed woman accused of adultery and brought before Jesus by a group of Pharisees and Scribes in order to challenge Jesus' honour.<sup>56</sup> In order to prove that he is an ideal man in accordance with the first-century masculine ideology, Jesus therefore first had to display his manhood before his enemies. The question is if the way Jesus is described as acting in the passage would have been considered to be honourable as the socio-cultural ideals in which John was writing (the world behind the text) require. From this perspective, it is a different question from asking if the narrative of John (the world in the text) depicts him as acting honourably (see Chapter 2).

In the ancient world, masculinity was viewed by men as the identity they have achieved by being courageous and physically strong. This can be related to the words of Whitehead (2005:414-416), where he says:

Defining masculinity as heroism in broad terms allows for the individual man's conformity to or departure from masculinity, depending on how he has internalized it and how much he has invested in it. ... The individual man internalizes masculinity as a heroic self, therefore, there is always the pressure on the individual man to display manliness in all circumstances. Also, the sense of being a man becomes important. A problem arises only when he feels his manhood is under threat, for example, in a situation where he comes into conflict with another man, as a man. The foundation of masculinity on the base of heroism has particular implications for man to man violence since the hero cannot exist without his counterpart, the villain. The villain hereby becomes the figure against which the hero shows his courage.

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<sup>56</sup> Honour and shame are often considered pivotal values of the ancient Mediterranean culture (Malina & Neyrey, 1991:22; Moxnes, 1996:19). Honour is defined as a situation in which a man has positive value in his own eyes, as well as among the social group to which he belongs (Busatta, 2006:76; Charlesworth, 2016:39; Malina & Neyrey, 1991:25; Moxnes, 1996:20).

It was argued in Chapter 3 that Jesus, from the socio-historical viewpoint of John 7:53-8:11, was depicted as a courageous, heroic man who was able to defend the woman. From this viewpoint, one can deduce how heroic masculinity could easily encourage men to be violent in their engagements with other men, as well as women. It is within this context that Jesus' manhood is scrutinised in order to determine whether he was influenced by the socio-cultural ideals he grew up in or not, and if the influence was positive or negative.

Referring to the communication model discussed in the introductory chapter (section 1.6.1), there is thus broad agreement between a reading of John 7:53-8:11 from the three perspectives of the world in the text, the world behind the text, and the feminist perspective (*the world in front of the text*). The reason for bringing together these three perspectives is that there is a negative side to masculinity being viewed as a heroic venture. Hearn and Whitehead (2006:47) assert that, when masculinity is perceived in this way, women become mere objects or commodities with which men can actualise their own heroic ambitions. By referring to women as commodities, Hearn and Whitehead (2006:47) thus not only refer to the ways in which women are dehumanised so as to make them powerless to challenge men's claims of masculinity.<sup>57</sup> They also refer to the way women are used as commodities by men in order to prove to other men how masculine they are. *From a feminist perspective, it can thus be asked if John 7:53-8:11 does not indicate that Jesus dehumanised the woman in that he used her to prove his masculinity and that the text thus encourages men to do the same?*

The value of bringing the three perspectives together, is in order to encourage men to make the right choice of how to construct their manhood even when they are influenced by certain social factors. It is clear that, despite the fact Jesus is presented in a heroic manner in many instances in the Gospel of John, he is still presented as a role model whom his followers (and thus also men) must imitate.

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<sup>57</sup> For example, "if he hits a woman, he is not hitting a human being but a bitch" (Hearn & Whitehead, 2006:47). The female partner of the individual man becomes a commodity for him that is only useful in regulating the emotional instability endemic to being a man in cultures where manhood is exemplified in heroic terms. He thus instantaneously transforms her from woman to object, simply in order to maintain his ideal masculinity.



According to Burrige (2007:334), the dominant theme in the Gospel of John is the “love of God”. This love of God came in the person of Jesus Christ to dwell among human beings in order to impart his divine truth to them. As a manifestation of God’s love that was sent to save the entire world, Jesus is depicted as having to prove this through the way he interacted with people. In this regard, the Gospel of John narrates numerous conflicts between Jesus and his opponents.

In order to prove that Jesus is worthy to be imitated, John’s Gospel – more than the other Gospels – portrays him as showing his *intimate* love for people. While in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ relationship with sinners is expressed in him being seen either eating or drinking with them, in the Gospel of John the relationship between Jesus and other characters is more personal. Jesus is namely portrayed as interacting with people more intimately in one-on-one relationships. Some of these characters in John’s Gospel with whom Jesus came into contact on a personal level are: Nathanael (John 1:45-51), Nicodemus (John 3:1-10), the Samaritan woman (John 7:26), and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11) (Burrige, 2007:335). This depiction of Jesus engaging intimately with characters does not support the notion that the narrated Jesus objectified men or women.

Burrige (2007:337) argues that, since it was Jesus’ custom to treat men and women in the Johannine Gospel within a personal relationship with love and kindness, the woman accused of adultery should not be seen as an exception. In the passage, Jesus is described as not caring for his own reputation and as treating the woman with tenderness. This is in line with how the narrative of John depicts Jesus’ interaction with numerous women, all of whom who are treated with dignity by Jesus. Examples of female characters Jesus engages with are: Mary, his mother (John 2:1-12; 19:25-27), Mary and Martha in the city of Bethany (John 11:1-44), and Mary Magdalene at Jesus’ cross and his empty tomb (John 19:25-27 27; 20:1-2, 11-18). In all these instances, Jesus is depicted as expressing his love and full acceptance of these women. This, in turn, resulted in the confession of faith made by Martha (John 11:27) and the positive role of Mary Magdalene at Jesus’ resurrection (John 20:18), which made her the first apostle of the resurrection (Burrige, 2007:337). The women in John’s narrative are thus depicted as responding positively and with love

and loyalty to Jesus, which is not how one would expect objectified women to respond.

Another point to consider is how John depicts Jesus as redeeming those he encountered in John's narrative. In John 7:53-8:11, one of Jesus' redemptive actions can be deduced, for example, from the expression "and having looked up" (John 8:10a). In Greek, the participle, ἀνακύψας, is derived from the verb ἀνακύπτω, meaning "stand up", "straighten up" and "look up" (Newman, 1971:11). O'Sullivan (2015:4) explains that, considering the context of John 7:53-8:11, this word denotes two things. On the one hand, the word refers to the act of bending down, which Jesus does in verse 8. Jesus has bent down to write on the ground; in verse 10, Jesus stands up in order to see what the Pharisees and the Scribes would do concerning the stoning of the accused woman. On the other hand, as Jesus stands up, he also lifts up his eyes toward the woman. Malone (1985:34) explains that Jesus thus "looked up" at the woman; he did not "look down" on her.

The last words that Jesus said to the woman are also important: "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no longer" (John 8:11). According to O'Sullivan (2015:4), for Jesus to say "sin no longer" does not mean he also condemns the woman. Jesus was only expressing God's predisposition towards salvation. He explains that the intention of God for humanity, whether sinful or not, is that all of humanity should obtain complete redemption from oppression, poverty and sins. Therefore, as the woman was redeemed from men's violence and oppression, she also needed to be encouraged to live her life afterwards in line with her salvation.

*The valid questions posed by feminism thus contribute to a deeper understanding of Biblical texts and how to apply this understanding to contextual situations. The response given above to the questions raised will, in turn, give rise to new ones from feminist critics and, in this manner, the conversation about the meaning and effect of the text will continue.*

### **5.5.2 Applying John 7:53-8:11 to the experience of Nigerian women**

Violence against women is a problem that cannot be eradicated easily. This is especially true in the Nigerian context, where patriarchy has ruled for so long. But

the good news is that, if Jesus' redemptive work is taken seriously and interpreted well, men could be encouraged to stop being violent against women. This is where the church comes in. Although religion and culture are often tools that support patriarchy and hegemony, they should instead be used to encourage masculinities that are transformed and saved. By doing this, these kind of masculinities will help challenge the belief that masculinities cannot be changed. Because they are socially, culturally and historically constructed, they can be challenged and changed for the better (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:7; Hlatywayo, 2012:124; Togarasei, 2013:2).

In this regard, Hlatywayo (2012:124) specifically refers to "Church leaders" as saviours of women:

Church leaders must condemn the oppression of women, gender-based violence and aggressive masculinities. They must undertake programmes to promote positive masculinities.

The church is thus needed as a reinforcing agent since, in the African context, religion/church plays a vital role in changing the lives of people (whether negatively or positively). Baloyi (2010:6) and Hategekimana (2012:66) opine that it is thus high time the church try as much as possible to restore the lost dignity of women. The church therefore has a responsibility to teach and sustain equality before God. Women must be shown that they were also made in the image of God and must be treated as equals of men.

Men's contribution to this task is very important. According to Maluleke and Nadar (2002:15), women are not going to be relieved from suffering unless more men are encouraged to join the struggle against women's oppression. Maluleke and Nadar (2002:15) state that men should be encouraged to emulate Jesus' example and his positive attitude toward women. By doing this, men will learn how to value women and therefore treat them as human beings. If men start to challenge violence against women, they are portraying an image of men that Chitando and Chirongoma (2012:1) term "redemptive masculinities". According to these authors, redemptive masculinities have two main connotative notions.

First, redemptive masculinities can be seen as men who act quickly to save women from their suffering.

Secondly, it is a concept that has a dual meaning. Redemptive masculinities do not only save women, but they *save themselves from the negative mentality of patriarchy*.

In this sense, it could be inferred that, as men strive to set women free from the menace of patriarchy and hegemony, they themselves will be redeemed from beliefs that trap them in negative ways of being a man (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012:1). In this regard, it is accurate to maintain that *redemptive masculinities* are in opposition to hegemonic and harmful masculinities. Uzodike and Isike (2012:45) state that real masculinity is not only about the use of strength, courage, bravery, etc., but it also means to show affection and respect towards women. According to these authors, being respectful to women is a masculine virtue that can make men responsible and respected partners in the sight of women. Women, in turn, cherish men who display these masculine virtues of love and affection to them rather than men who prove their manliness through violent means. Ewusha (2012:79) adds that God's primary assignment to manhood was to create a man that would be caring and responsible. Therefore, "redemptive masculinities" could also be viewed as men who are ready to challenge hegemony in any form, despite the fact that men are generally seen to be the ones who perpetrate hegemony over women. These are the kinds of men whom Coles (2009:41) and Williams (1977:112) refer to as the "counter-hegemony" or "alternative hegemony". According to these authors, there are other dominant masculinities in the field of masculinity that are not in conformity with hegemonic masculinity. Implicitly, and despite the fact that men are seen to be perpetrators of violence against women, not all men promote violence. Many act alternatively and many others are willing to join this movement.

There are ways in which men could be encouraged to portray the redemptive status suggested above. Men should learn to love women unconditionally, as Christ did. The love of Christ for women and mankind is unconditional. Therefore, men should also learn to love women unconditionally. Men's unconditional acceptance of women is not of what women are or can do, but because they are a special gift from God. The love that men have for women must be expressed verbally so that women know that men value and respect them. In John, Jesus also did not just talk about serving others; he demonstrated what a servant does by washing his disciple's feet (John

13:1-17) (Burrige, 2007:343). Daniel-Kirk (2011:78-79) asserts that being a follower of Jesus is simply about learning to love; to love God and to love others (women inclusive) too. Men should thus learn to cherish what women desire, and work towards meeting these desires. Being loving men and servants to women will not denigrate their manhood. These are just a few of the ways in which men could emulate the redemptive role of Christ (Ewusha, 2012:79).

Men of the twenty-first century are therefore encouraged to accept the fact that women have been subjected to violence for a very long time. In most cases, these violent acts against women are perpetrated by men. This is why it becomes necessary for men themselves to fight the problem of violence against women.

The challenge of women abuse has also been the task of feminist scholars for decades. While government regulations against women's oppression have been in place in some countries in the world, this is a major aspect neglected in the Nigerian constitution. The Nigerian government's restrictions on violence against women do not state clearly what would happen if a man abuses a woman (cf. Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999:31-41).<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, being a country that is very religious, and with Christianity being one of the major religions, it is the belief and hope of the researcher that using a biblical text to uncover a similar occurrence of violence in the Bible, and by instigating a multifaceted conversation about the text, the time shall come when the abuse of women in Nigeria will end.

## 5.6 Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, two hypotheses were formulated (section 1.4)

The first is that John 7:53-8:11 is characterised by patriarchal hegemonic strands that dehumanise women, but that Jesus chooses to act differently through his exemplary redemptive and liberal acts toward women. The second is that a possible way to challenge hegemonic structures and violence against women in

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<sup>58</sup> In the Nigerian constitution, even the section (articles 33 to 46) that deals with the fundamental human rights of Nigerian citizens does not state clearly how women abuse will be dealt with.

contemporary societies like Nigeria is through the divine love of God, as shown by Christ in John 7:53-8:11.

This study has confirmed both of these hypotheses. In line with the assertions of O'Sullivan (2015:4) and Schneiders (2000:101), that Jesus in John's Gospel is God's revelation of salvation who does not approve of a violent act against a woman, it is apparent that, in John 7:53-8:11, Jesus acts in order to save the accused woman from the violence and oppression of men who planned evil against her. By doing this, Jesus rejected the hegemonic strand of the Jewish tradition that focused on dehumanising women, as is evident in the passage. It is also possible to denounce the biased treatment of women by men, as well as the laws, religion and cultural values that sustained the oppression of women. This study is thus in agreement with Oduyoye (2002:152), who refers to the Jesus of John as the "liberationist Jesus". As a liberationist, Jesus is the brother or kin of oppressed women in Nigeria who sets them free and who calls on all who follow him to share the divine love with others.

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