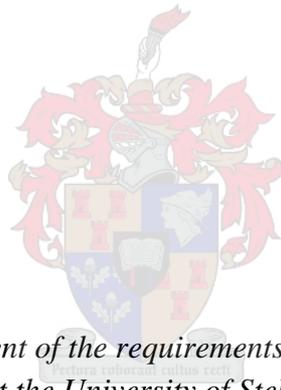


**Trampling on the Poor:  
Poverty as Violence in Amos 2:6-8, 5:10-13 and 8:4-6**



*Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree Master of Theology  
(MTh) at the University of Stellenbosch*

Tatenda Garande

Supervisor: Professor L. Juliana Claassens

March 2020

## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained thereon is my own, that I am the sole author therefore (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

March 2020

## **Abstract**

Poverty is a global phenomenon that is complex and multi-dimensional. Since the early 1990s, Zimbabwe has been going through a serious socio-political and economic crisis that reached its peak during 2008-2009. Current conditions in Zimbabwe indicate that the crisis is not yet over. This socio-political and economic crisis has plunged the majority of Zimbabweans into an abyss of poverty. In their quest to find a solution to their poverty, many Zimbabweans have turned to the Church. In particular, the Prosperity Gospel promoted by two popular preachers, Immanuel Makandiwa of the United Family Interdenominational Church and Walter Magaya of Prophetic, Healing, and Deliverance Ministries, has appealed to many Zimbabweans who are deep in poverty. The Prosperity Gospel proclaimed by these pastors claim that prosperity is a blessing and a sign of faith while poverty is deemed a curse and a sign of lack of faith. Conversely, poverty is also depicted as a demon that has to be exorcised. This understanding of poverty poses a challenge because it turns a blind eye on the historical and economic policies that caused poverty not only in Zimbabwe but also in other parts of Africa.

In our quest to understand poverty, the meaning we ascribe to the concept will determine how individuals, nations, organizations or the church will respond to and deal with this phenomenon. This study thus argues that poverty is violence against the poor and it is embedded in societal structures that benefit a few powerful elites at the expense of the weak and innocent poor. In addition, this study proposes that Prosperity Gospel is a form of cultural violence that legitimizes the structural violence associated with poverty. The study further argues that Prosperity Gospel is not peculiar to only Makandiwa and Magaya, but that the prophet Amos dethroned a similar kind of theological construction when he castigated the rich and powerful for violating the dignity and rights of the poor. Employing literary and rhetorical criticisms as exegetical tool, this study identifies hidden forms of violence in Amos 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6 that emphasize the basic assumption of this study which is that poverty ought to be understood as violence against the poor.

## Opsomming

Armoede is 'n globale fenomeen wat kompleks en multidimensioneel van aard is. Zimbabwe sedert die vroeë 1990's het 'n ernstige sosio-politieke en ekonomiese krisis beleef wat sy piek bereik het tydens 2008-2009. Huidige omstandighede in Zimbabwe dui op die feit dat die krisis nog ver van oor is. Die sosio-politieke en ekonomiese krisis het die meerderheid van Zimbabwiërs in die diepte van armoede gewerp. In hulle poging om 'n oplossing vir armoede te vind, het baie Zimbabwiërs hulself tot die Kerk gewend om 'n oplossing vir hulle probleem te vind. Veral die Voorspoedsteologie wat deur populêre predikers Emmanuel Makandiwa van die United Family Interdenominational Church en Walter Magaya van die Prophetic, Healing, and Deliverance Ministries spreek tot baie mense wat hulself in armoede in Zimbabwe bevind. Die Voorspoedsteologie wat deur hierdie pastors gepreek word hou voor dat voorspoed is 'n seëning en 'n teken van geloof, terwyl armoede 'n vloek is en 'n teken van 'n gebrek aan geloof. Armoede word ook gesien as 'n demoon wat uitgedryf moet word. Hierdie verstaan van armoede is problematies aangesien dit blind is vir die historiese en ekonomiese beleid wat aanleiding gegee het tot armoede in Zimbabwe en in die res van Afrika.

In ons poging om die konsep van armoede te verstaan, word die betekenis wat aan hierdie konsep toegeskryf word, 'n padkaart wat bepaal hoe mense, die land, 'n instelling of die kerk reageer op hierdie fenomeen. Hierdie studie argumenteer dat armoede geweld teen die armes is wat in die sosiale strukture ingebed is wat 'n paar magtige, ryk elite bevoordeel en die hulpeloos, onskuldige armes benadeel. Verder argumenteer hierdie studie dat Voorspoedsteologie 'n vorm van kulturele geweld is wat die strukturele geweld wat met armoede geassosieer is legitimeer. Hierdie studie toon verder aan dat Voorspoedsteologie is nie uniek aan die predikers Makandiwa and Magaya, maar dat die Profeet Amos 'n soortgelyke tipe teologiese konstruksie onttron het wanneer hy die ryk en magtiges kritiseer omdat hulle die waardigheid en regte van die armes geskend het. Deur middel van literêre en retoriese kritiek as eksegetiese benadering, identifiseer hierdie studie onderliggende vorme van geweld in Amos 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 en 8:4-6 wat die basiese veronderstelling van hierdie studie ondersteun wat argumenteer dat armoede verstaan behoort te word as geweld teen die armes.

## **Dedication**

All glory and honour to the Lord Almighty for His grace that has sustained me thus far.

This work is dedicated to three special women who gallantly raised me and shaped me to be who I am today. To my late mother, Florence Caroline Garande, for all the pain, struggle and humiliation you went through as a single mother to raise me and send me to school. I will forever be indebted to you, Mama. May your soul rest in eternal peace.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Research Background and Motivation

In his speech on global poverty, Nelson Mandela said, “Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity; it is an act of justice. Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”<sup>1</sup> Mandela presented an interesting view of poverty and challenged the people to focus on the role of human beings in making and perpetuating poverty. Mandela is not the only prominent person who has presented an interesting and critical view of poverty; Mahatma Gandhi also did the same. Although Gandhi’s view is not different from that of Mandela, as he also acknowledged the role of human beings in creating poverty, he further states that, “poverty is the worst form of Violence.” This research regards poverty as violence against the poor in the book of Amos, specifically in Amos 2:6-8; 5:7; 10-13 and 8:4-6. It investigates the idea of poverty in these texts as structural and cultural violence against the poor. This research idea was motivated by two experiences in my life.

I was raised by a single mother who struggled to make ends meet. My mother’s struggle to raise her children caused me to reflect on our socio-economic context. My mother’s struggles were not unique to her, but many other parents in our community also experienced similar hardships. Most parents could not afford decent meals for their children and struggled to send them to school because the fees were beyond their reach. The result was that a significant number of my peers in the community dropped out of school and were forced to go and work in farms to sustain themselves. It is against this childhood experiences and the high rate of school dropout in children that motivated me to investigate the concept of poverty in relation to my context.

In 2015, I did my post-academic training at Norton Presbyterian Church, which is in Norton, a farming town 40km west of Harare, along the major road that connects Harare and Bulawayo. My experience in this town as well as in the congregation stirred my interest in the issue of poverty. The demography of the congregation was a concern to me because only one of the 54 adult members in the congregation was employed formally as a teacher. This

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1482735/Poverty-like-apartheid-is-man-made-says-Mandela.html>.

did not surprise me though as the majority of the people in the town are unemployed and many engage in petty trading to make ends meet. In my interaction with the unemployed members of the congregation and of the community, I discovered that most of the Norton residents were employed on the fertile farms which surrounded the town, but some lost their jobs during the fast track land reform in 2000. Hunyani Paper Mills in Norton, which was one of the biggest companies in Zimbabwe, also closed down due to the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, which forced many people into unemployment and eventually into poverty.

A tour of the Norton Industrial area will reveal a number of booming private colleges and Pentecostal Churches which have taken over the buildings that once used to be vibrant companies. The example of Norton is not an isolated case but representative of the current situation in Zimbabwe. The local currency has been eroded utterly by inflation so much that the country does not even have its own currency any more. The country has adopted the multi-currency system with the United States Dollar as the major trading currency. Cash is now scarce, as people sleep in queues in order to access their money from the banks. Many people are suffering and struggling to put food on their tables as many basic commodities are now beyond their reach. They have no access to hospitals because the fees are beyond their reach and cannot afford to pay school fees for their children. Women and girls cannot afford sanitary pads; they now resort to using cow dung. In short, most Zimbabweans do not have access to basic commodities of life.

In the congregation where I served, I discovered that most of the congregants would attend two worship services on Sunday. They would attend the first service at the Presbyterian Church in the morning and attend a Pentecostal worship service afterwards. Fellow ministers in the Norton Zimbabwe Council of Churches Fraternal also witnessed the same phenomenon with their congregants. Through my engagement with these congregants and fellow ministers, I discovered that members go to Pentecostal Churches because they believed that they needed to be delivered from the demon of poverty. They had been exposed to prosperity gospel via free television gospel channels which often showed people giving testimonies of being delivered from the spirit of poverty. This was the only understanding of poverty to which they had ever been exposed. This experience led me to engage with the Old Testament text in order to comprehend its view of poverty. In particular, I realised that there was indeed a need for in-depth research on poverty in the Old Testament that will challenge the prosperity gospel views on poverty that are prevalent throughout my country.

My engagement with the book of Amos reveals that throughout the book, the prophet Amos denounced the rich powerful elites which accumulated ill-gotten wealth at the expense of the poor. The prophet condemned the rich for their actions, the moral decay that condemned the poor into deep poverty. Three texts caught my attention, namely, Amos 2:6-8; 5:10-13 and 8:4-6. While there are many passages that deal with the exploitation and oppression of the poor in the Old Testament and particularly in Amos, the use of expressions such as “trampling on the poor into the dust of the earth,” “turn aside the way of the afflicted,” “you who afflict the righteous,” “bring the poor to an end,” that appear in these three texts is remarkable. I observed that what these expressions have in common is the connotation of violence. In light of my reading thus far, it would be important for a study of the book of Amos to understand the view of violence in the book.

Mills (2010:158-159) notes that “the theme of violence permeates the book of Amos and can be characterized to consist of three strands: natural violence, human violence and divine violence.” This depiction caused me consider the three selected texts from Amos in terms of this powerful rhetoric language in order to understand how violence was perpetrated against the poor. I propose that in these texts, poverty is portrayed as a structural violence that is hidden under the guise of government policies which favour a few elite who get richer while plunging the majority poor into the abyss of poverty.

In Old Testament scholarship, the focus in the past has been more on direct violence than on indirect violence. With its emphasis on poverty as violence, this study will therefore contribute to the continuing conversation on violence in biblical texts by focusing on the important aspect of structural and cultural violence in Amos.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Zimbabwe has been going through a very difficult socio-economic phase since the early 1990s. The country has experienced a serious economic meltdown and recession that plunged many Zimbabweans into the abyss of poverty. In their quest to understand their predicament, Zimbabweans have turned to the Church for the solution to their socio-economic problems. The Prosperity Gospel promoted by popular prophets, such as Immanuel Makandiwa and Walter Magaya, has become appealing to many people. These two Prosperity Gospel preachers command a huge followership and much influence in Zimbabwe. Prosperity Gospel presents prosperity as a blessing and a sign of faith while poverty is deemed a curse and a

sign of lack of faith. Consequently, both prophets regard poverty as a demon that has to be exorcised. This understanding of poverty poses a challenge because it turns a blind eye on the historical and economic policies that engendered poverty not only in Zimbabwe but also in other parts of Africa. This leaves one with the question, “Is the Prosperity Gospel expounded by these two preachers a good theological response to the understanding of the concept of poverty?”

### **1.3 Research Questions**

It is imperative to ask the right questions; as such questions will form the basis of any research work. The following research questions therefore form the foundation on which this research is built.

- In what ways are recent views of poverty as violence helpful in understanding Prosperity Gospel as a theological response to the socio-political and economic situation in Zimbabwe?
- In what ways can poverty be considered violence against the poor?
- What new perspectives does this understanding of poverty as violence reveal in the interpretation of prophetic texts such as Amos 2:6-8; 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6?
- In what ways does this interpretation of poverty as violence in the book of Amos challenge prosperity gospel in Zimbabwe?
- What role can the understanding of prophetic texts such as Amos 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6 play in raising awareness about ways of creatively challenging and resisting oppressive circumstances being experienced today in the Zimbabwean context?

### **1.4 Research Objectives**

This study aims to investigate ways in which poverty in Zimbabwe is as a result of bad governance and is violence against the poor using these as a hermeneutical framework for reading and interpreting Amos 2:6-8; 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6 within the Zimbabwean context. These three texts have one common denominator, namely the “trampling on the poor” that captures the basis of the argument of poverty as violence. With these texts I will try to show how Amos dismisses the theological understanding of poverty as a curse and instead views poverty as man-made and violence against the poor by the elite. In addition, this thesis will

argue that poverty is a tool that is used by the elite to maintain economic and political inequality.

The objective of the thesis is to help people living in poverty in Zimbabwe to shape their view and response to poverty from a biblical perspective that is informed by ideological-critical and exegetical perspectives.

## 1.5 Methodology

In terms of methodology, the thesis will employ mainly rhetoric criticism which operates under the banner of literary criticism. Before embarking on an exegetical journey of the three selected texts in the book of Amos, it is imperative to first understand briefly what is understood under rhetorical criticism that forms part of literary criticism. According to Tate (2008:183),

Literary criticism refers to an approach that interprets the biblical texts as literature and can be described as an approach that is grounded in the assumption that biblical scholars were imaginative, creative crafters of art employing structural elements, literary devices usually associated with poetics of literature.

Thus, this study will examine the characters in the text, their portrayal and relationship to other characters as well as the setting of the oracles. Using literary criticism, the discussion will focus on the portrayals of the poor, the rich and God in the three selected texts from Amos. In addition, the portrayal of the relationship between the poor and the rich, between the rich and God and between the poor and God in the three texts will be investigated.

Rhetorical criticism as part of literary criticism also focuses on the final form of the Biblical text and is concerned with the effect that the use of language has on an audience. It is an art of persuasion, which exerts a positive influence on the audience. According to Clines (2008:152),

Rhetorical criticism operating under the banner of final form of the text, concerns itself with the way the language of texts is deployed to convey meaning and its interests are in the devices of writing, in metaphor, parallelism, in narrative and poetic structures, in stylistic figures.

Human beings use language to communicate their intentions. Rhetorical criticism is concerned with the way language is used to convey his or her message to the recipients of this message, focusing on the intentional use of words, and metaphors. Using rhetorical criticism, the study will analyse Amos' use of language as a tool of persuasion in the selected

texts and the effect of his words on his audience. Special attention will be given to metaphors and hyperboles that Amos uses in the three selected texts. Gowan (2015:531) points out that two striking characteristics of the book are more obvious to the contemporary reader, namely, the power of its language and the passion of its concern for the oppressed. The book of Amos is very rich in the way it uses languages to convey its message to the people which **invites the use of rhetorical criticism in interpreting the selected texts from the Book of Amos.**

## **1.6 Outline of Chapters**

This study is comprised of five Chapters that are structured as follows,

Chapter One introduces this research and provides the background and motivation for the research. Two personal experiences inform the research interest, namely, my growing up in a poverty-stricken community and family, and my experience in Norton during my Post-Academic Training (probation). These two experiences motivated me to investigate the concept of poverty from a biblical perspective and in relation to my context. The chapter further presents the problem statement, research questions and objectives as well as the research methodology.

In Chapter Two, the conceptual framework of poverty as violence against the poor is discussed. The chapter argues that, for violence to be deemed violence, the primary determining factor should not be the use of vigorous and excessive force but the nature of harms. It is argued that violence violates the dignity of a person. The poor or underprivileged people experience poverty because they have little or no access to resources that would enable them to attain a good and acceptable standard of life. The failure to access resources by the poor stems from the unjust socio-economic, legal and political structures created by a few powerful, politically connected and privileged elite. In this sense, then, poverty can be viewed as structural violence against the poor. The dignity and rights of the poor are violated through structures which are enacted in the form of policies that favour the few elite at the expense of the poor. Moreover, this chapter discusses the concept of cultural violence which acts as a tool that legitimizes the unjust socio-political and economic structures.

In Chapter Three, this study discusses Prosperity Gospel as a theological response to the understanding of poverty in Zimbabwe. The teachings of two prominent Prosperity Gospel

preachers in Zimbabwe, namely Immanuel Makandiwa and Walter Magaya, will be probed to determine the impact of their sermons on the understanding of poverty in Zimbabwe.

Prosperity Gospel views poverty as a curse, a state of sin and a sign of lack of faith, while wealth and prosperity are seen as a blessing and the sign of faith in God. However, such an understanding of poverty poses a challenge, as it makes the people turn a blind eye on the socio-economic and political issues that push the majority of Zimbabweans populace into an abyss of poverty. The chapter will further argue that Prosperity Gospel as propounded by these two prominent preachers constitutes cultural violence and makes people turn a blind eye on the unjust socio-political and economic structures that condemning them to a life of poverty.

In Chapter Four, a detailed exegetical analysis of Amos 2:6-8, 5:1-13 and 8:4-6 is presented. First, the literary aspects of the selected texts are probed while focusing on how the poor and the rich are portrayed in the text by the prophet Amos. Chapter Four will also employ rhetorical criticism as a hermeneutical framework to consider the strategies which Amos uses to influence his audience and the reader. The book of Amos is very rich in terms of how it uses languages to convey its message to the people. Metaphors and hyperbole like “trampling on the poor,” “turning away the way of the poor,” in the three selected texts will be analysed. With the understanding of poverty as structural violence, and using literary and rhetorical criticisms as hermeneutical framework, the study seeks to prove that the language that Amos uses exposes the hidden acts of structural violence against the poor in these three texts.

Chapter Five attempts to answer the question: in what ways can this understanding of poverty in Amos be used to help raise awareness in Zimbabwe? The three selected texts from Amos do not just talk about the plight of the poor and tell us that God is concerned about their plight but they challenge the people of Zimbabwe to question not only the view of poverty promoted by some Prosperity Gospel preachers but also to speak against the structural violence that has condemned many people into poverty. The three selected texts from Amos demystify the Prosperity Gospel’s understanding of poverty as a curse and a demon and enjoin the people to shift from a spiritual understanding of poverty.

## Chapter Two

### Poverty as Violence

#### 2.1 Introduction

Poverty is a serious and major socio-political and economic issue which has traumatized millions of people throughout the world, particularly in the sub-Saharan African region.

According to Lotter (2008:17):

Poverty has been called the world's ruthless killer and the greatest cause of suffering on earth. The effects poverty has on human beings are so drastic that the phenomenon of poverty merits the undivided attention of governments, human and natural scientists, aid agencies, relief organizations, and ordinary citizens everywhere.

Lotter's remark above shows how serious and sensitive the issue of poverty is. Different disciplines have come up with several theories to try and explain, define and understand the concept of poverty. Various theories have also been advanced in efforts to understand the causes of poverty some of which are natural and beyond the control of human beings, for example, drought. However, some causes of poverty are man-made and these include factors such as corruption, war and unequal distribution of resources. Some scholars also view poverty as a spiritual issue, thereby, adding a religious dimension to the discussion.

Poverty has a negative and catastrophic effect on people in various parts of the world and developed countries are no exception, as they also have their own share of poverty. From the few causes of poverty mentioned above especially bad governance, corruption, unequal distribution of resources, one can deduce that the poor or underprivileged are in poverty because they do not have access to the resources that would help them to live an acceptable and decent life. This is due to the social, economic, legal and political structures enacted by those who are in power and who enjoy certain privileges. In this sense then, poverty can be said to be the result of structural violence against the poor. Lee (1999:4) shows that,

Poverty results in a whole range of serious physical and psychological harms: higher risks of disease, shortened life spans, stunted mental and emotional development, and inadequate opportunity to lead a meaningful life and these are primarily institutionally imposed harms, because they are the result of the enforcement of systems of social, political, legal, and economical (*sic*) rules.

In this chapter, I seek to argue that violence is not necessarily the use of excessive force but the violation of human dignity through structures enacted by those in power in the form of

policies that benefit the few elite at the expense of the poor. The people have turned a blind eye on the effects of policies enacted by the government that have condemned them to poverty. As a point of departure and with regards to the structure of this chapter, a conceptual framework for poverty, violence, structural and cultural violence will be pursued. An understanding of these concepts will form the basis for considering poverty as violence against the poor. Like so many of our ideas, the meanings we ascribe to an abstract concept “reflect our way of looking at, thinking about, and making sense of our world” (Myers 2008:57). Thus, the meaning we ascribe to poverty, violence or structural and cultural violence will reflect on our view of poverty and will help us to formulate our response to poverty.

## **2.2 Poverty**

### **2.2.1 Defining Poverty**

Poverty is not only a socio-political, economic and social issue but it is also an emotional and spiritual issue. Poverty has divided sharply the rich and the poor. This is how serious and sensitive the issue of poverty is. It is therefore imperative to define poverty and its causes. Myers (2008:57) points out that, “Like so many of our ideas, the meanings we ascribe to an abstract reflect our way of looking at, thinking about, and making sense of our world.” The meaning we ascribe to poverty will reflect on how we view and understand it and will help us also on how we will respond to poverty. Any attempt to define poverty in any context will shape how that particular society will respond to and enact policies.

One could be tempted to come up with a single definition of poverty; but poverty has many facets and that makes it difficult to narrow it down to a single definition. According to Mpofo (2014:2),

Economists sometimes use indexes and formulas to back up their theories that may be very confusing to historians, while sociologists and development workers may feel they have the monopoly of writing about poverty because of the proximity of their work to the poor in societies and also because they have at times used the word poverty as a catchword for some of their programmes.

This means that each discipline uses different lenses to define and approach poverty thereby making it difficult for researchers to come up with a single definition.

Nonetheless, using multiple lenses to view the concept may also be considered positive, as the various approaches help to broaden our understanding of poverty. At the same time, one needs to avoid the danger of regarding one lens or one definition as the correct one. The quest for a single definition can be futile and different definitions that have been advanced using a single lens or focusing on a single aspect of poverty have not enhanced the understanding of the complex phenomenon. However, the complex nature of poverty should not hinder one from considering a multi-dimensional definition. In order to arrive at a multi-dimensional definition, it is imperative to consider briefly the historical development of defining poverty.

Early attempts to define poverty understood it as the lack of material or basic things that are essential for life such as food, clean water, good sanitation and proper shelter. The absence of these basic needs of life has a negative impact on one's quality of life. This understanding of poverty as material lack suggests that if the material needs are met, then, poverty is eradicated. However, Whelan (1995:80) argues that, "people may experience particular needs (like homelessness or cold) without this being sufficient to constitute 'poverty' – though needs are still clearly important as primary indicators of poverty." In other words, there is more to poverty than meets the eye and a shift from viewing it as material lack then becomes necessary.

After the early understanding of poverty as the lack of material things, there was a shift in perspective and poverty was classified into two—absolute and relative poverty with the assumption that the distinction would enhance the understanding of the concept. Therefore, the distinction between absolute and relative poverty was based on income and the lack of basic needs. According to UNESCO (2018), "absolute poverty is measured in relation to the amount of money necessary to meet the basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter." The aspect of material lack is maintained in this definition of absolute poverty but it further attributes the material lack to inability to earn sufficient income to meet the basic needs of life.

Thus, people who live below the set and accepted standard of living in a particular society, region or country are considered poor. However, the accepted or set standard of living varies from one place or country to another. Relative poverty is measured according to the set or minimum income in a particular country, city or region. This set income is known as the poverty datum line. Relative poverty can also change from time to time depending on the prevailing economic condition in that particular area. Relative poverty therefore focuses on

the income of a person or family. Defining poverty in terms of income also does not do much justice to the understanding of poverty. Both definitions of relative and absolute poverty seem to agree that poverty is the lack of something, in this case, the lack of income. Therefore, both definitions view financial lack as poverty.

It is important however to move away from limiting the definition of poverty to financial lack. Financial lack has a negative effect on people. The lack of adequate financial resources prevents poor people from participating actively and freely in the society, and this can be a useful lens to view the concept of poverty. According to Nolan and Whelan (2004:13), “poverty is the inability to participate in society owing to lack of resources.” The focus on the inadequate financial resources to meet basic needs such as health needs, food, and water means that both definitions are not far off from the early understanding of poverty as material lack.

The implication of inadequate income is that people may end up excluding themselves from participation in social activities. Such exclusion may have a psychological effect on the poor as low self-esteem can develop. The exclusion of the poor from the social activities can be regarded social poverty, which is defined as “exclusion from the mainstream of life. There are barriers that exclude the poor not only from work and opportunities to make a living but from generally sharing in the life of the society” (Taylor 2003:4).

It is imperative to note that not every situation of need or lack may be classified as poverty. Therefore, reducing the definition of poverty to needs or lack of material things is not helpful in the quest for a multi-dimensional approach to poverty. Poverty manifests in all spheres of life and restricting its definition to one sphere will be doing an injustice to the concept. There is a need therefore to move beyond the classification of poverty as absolute and relative to a multi-dimensional approach that takes into cognisance the multi-faceted nature of poverty.

### **2.2.2 Towards a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty**

An understanding of the concept of poverty that covers all spheres of life such as the economic, material, spiritual, ethics and justice is essential as it presents a move away from the understanding of poverty that is based on income and material to a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty. For Verster (2012:1), “the concept of poverty includes poor health, lack of good education, lack of decent standard of living, denial of political freedom, lack of human rights, vulnerability, exposure to risk, powerlessness and voicelessness.” All the

issues that Verster mentions are essential to our understanding of poverty and determine our response to it.

Poverty has a negative effect on one's quality of life. When a person has poor health, lacks education, is denied political freedom and access to resources, and is powerless, then, that person's quality of life is compromised. The life expectancy of the poor becomes very low; psychologically, the poor become miserable, and they are at a higher risk of contracting avoidable diseases such as tuberculosis, cholera and typhoid. In addition, because they do not have adequate income, the poor exclude themselves from actively participating in societal issues as they suffer from low self-esteem, they are looked down on and dehumanized, and their dignity is violated. Lotter (2008:53) explains that, "poverty is a dehumanizing condition that deprives its sufferers of many of the basic requirements that enable people to enjoy a good quality of life." In short, poverty can be regarded as the violation of human dignity.

Similarly, Claassens (2016:103) cites Amartya Sen who demonstrates that poverty entails a systematic or structural denial of basic capabilities that include basic freedom to avoid hunger, disease and illiteracy. The above definitions have moved away from defining poverty in relative and absolute terms and embraced a holistic approach that covers moral, spiritual and psychological aspects of life. However, the 1998 United Nations definition of poverty as a multi-dimensional issue seems to do justice to the concept of poverty:

Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

However, poverty cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the power relations that surround it. Power is the central part around which the evil aspects of exploitation and oppression evolve. In Mpofu's (2016:2) words, "poverty is a state of deprivation and powerlessness, where the poor are exploited and denied participation in decision making in matters that intimately affect them." This emphasis on powerlessness, deprivation, and exploitation reinforces the point that any discussion of poverty must consider the issue of power.

## 2.3 Violence

Violence is everywhere—in our homes, communities, countries and the entire world, on television, social media and even in the print media. Biblical texts are not an exception when it comes to violence, as acts of violence permeate the Hebrew Bible. There is no doubt that we live in a world marked by violence in both private and public spheres and that violence is a fact of our lives whether we seek it or not (Haak 2013:21). It is therefore important to define violence and the meaning we ascribe to it will help our response to as well as our understanding of poverty as violence. On power and violence Galtung (1990:291) explains that,

Just as political science is about two problems—use of power and the legitimation of power—violence studies are about two problems: the use of violence and the legitimation of that use. Therefore, our understanding of violence has to be focused on how the violence is used (structural violence) and how it is legitimized (cultural violence).

The issue of how violence is used and how it is legitimized becomes critical to our understanding of violence.

### 2.3.1 Direct Violence

Many definitions of violence have been advanced but most focus on direct violence. Direct violence is often a once-off or continuous action in which the perpetrator and victim are easily identified, and it involves the application of vigorous force with the intention of harming the victim. Tilly (2015:70) shows that, “Violence as episodic social interaction that immediately inflicts physical damage on persons or objects, results at least in part from coordination among persons who perform the damaging acts, occurs at least partly in publicly accessible spaces.” However, this definition of violence is restrictive as it only recognizes violence when the perpetrator is visible and held responsible for the harm.

Several definitions of violence therefore restrict the understanding of poverty by seeing violence as a once-off or continuous action. Violence involves the use of force to inflict pain and harm on either persons or things. The harm that results from the violence can be physical or psychological. According to Parsons (2007:1), “Violence is typically conceptualized as physical and psychological harm and injury caused by direct and in some case intentional action through the application of vigorous or extreme force.” Thus, whenever extreme force is used, psychological or physical harm is inevitable.

The role of the user of extreme force is central and the user could be a person, a group or even a government. In this way, direct violence can be grouped to inter-personal violence, group violence and state violence. According to The International Encyclopaedia of Political Science (2011), “violence is the use of force to inflict injury on a person or persons or cause damage to property and manifests itself in forms as different as homicide or state violence.” However, state violence is sometimes deemed not to be violence especially by many governments. For instance, state police which unleashes violence on protestors can be deemed to be defending the state against unruly elements that are a threat to national security and their action may not be classified as violence. On the other hand, those who support the protestors may see the use of extreme force by the police as violence against unarmed and innocent people who are exercising their right. The implication is that even when vigorous or extreme direct force is applied, people’s definition of direct violence may differ.

The above definitions of violence focus on the application of direct force to an object that causes bodily or property harm when the subject can easily be recognized. The definitions also suggest that for violence to be recognized and be named as violence there has to be a use of vigorous force that results in a person or a thing being harmed, injured or destroyed. However, Allen (2001:45) argues that, “it is important that the definition of violence shift from one that concentrates on criminal acts toward people or property to one that includes discrimination, economic inequality and social injustice.” Allan’s statement therefore proposes that our understanding of violence should not be limited to the visible direct application of vigorous force, but it should also consider economic equality and social justice. Thus, a critical look at indirect violence could lead to a broader understanding of violence.

### **2.3.2 Indirect Violence**

It has been noted above that a shift from the visible direct application of vigorous force cannot be the only determining factor in understanding what constitutes violence. It is also important to consider how people are hurt or harmed and how they are affected by the use of extreme force. In addition, how to eliminate the things that make violence possible and inevitable is also critical to understanding violence. Galtung (1990:291) argues that, “We must include indirect harms when locating and naming violence (like people dying from lack of access to proper medical care or from the application and enforcement of economic sanctions.”

The use of vigorous force cannot be the only determining factor in naming violence, injuries or harms done are equally important. Using the example of how sanctions work, Galtung (1990:293) argues that,

To some, this is 'nonviolence', since direct and immediate killing is avoided. To the victims, however, it may mean slow but intentional killing through malnutrition and lack of medical attention, hitting the weakest first, the children, the elderly, the poor, the women.

Sanctions are not a direct application of vigorous force but it is their consequences on the people who are sanctioned that then portray the sanctions as violence against the poor. However, harm could be done also when vigorous force is not applied. Therefore, application of vigorous force should not be the sole determining factor in defining poverty. Galtung therefore frames the terms structural and cultural violence as types of violence.

## **2.4 Structural Violence**

Structural violence is not violence that is perpetrated at once or as an event like war or a shooting, but it is a process that is initiated through different policies that are enacted by those in positions of power. "Structural violence is then a process that works slowly through general misery, eroding and ultimately killing human beings, sometimes without even the awareness to do so." (Lee 1999:11). This process of structural violence is not visible and it is hidden within the normal structures of a society, thereby, making structural violence appear normal in the eyes of many. Farmer et al (2006:452) further sees "structural violence as a pattern of collective social actions within institutional practices, law, economic policies and other habitual elements" and notes that these structures materially manifest through facilities such as roads, server systems, and hospitals. It is imperative then to understand the nature of structures.

Different scholars and disciplines have used different lenses to understand violence but of interest to this study are structuralists who understand violence from a structuralist view of the world. One structuralist scholar, Landman (2006:45), notes that a "structuralist focuses on the holistic aspects of society, including interdependent relationships among individuals, collectives, institutions, and it is interested in the social, political and economic networks that form between and among individuals." This means that structures play a critical role in shaping the identity and decisions that an individual makes. If the structures are restrictive, then they will have a negative impact on the individual.

Social structures are based on different factors such as sex, tribe, or race, and these do influence the people's decisions and identities as well as the relationships they have with one another. Ho (2007:2) asserts that,

Structuralism asserts that individuals and states do not make decisions solely on the basis of rational choice, instead individual actors are not completely free agents capable of determining particular outcomes; rather individual are embedded in relational structures that shape their identities, interests and interactions.

Galtung (1990:291) describes these structures as sinful social structures characterized by poverty and steep grade of inequality, including racism and gender equality. Galtung's description of these structures as sinful suggests a moral aspect to structures, hence, the need to examine these structures critically for the presence of the hidden hand of violence and its impact on the people. This is important because things that are considered normal in life are taken for granted but such issues, especially poverty, should be viewed also from the perspective of structural violence.

Farmer *et al* (2006:2) observe that, "Structural violence is often embedded in longstanding ubiquitous social structures, normalized by stable institutions and regular experience, and because they seem so ordinary in our ways of understanding the world, they appear almost invisible." The above observation implies that structural violence is hidden and may not be noticed easily. The hiddenness of structural violence means that victims of this kind of violence cannot decipher the violence which may even appear normal to them, making it difficult for the victims to actually realise or notice that they are victims of violence. Du Nann and Leighton, (2001:89) remark that, "Unfortunately even those who are victims of structural violence often do not see the systematic ways in which their plight is choreographed by unequal and unfair distribution of society resources." This well-choreographed inequality and unfair access to the resources of the society put a few elites at an advantage while disadvantaging the majority of the poor populace who are pushed into an abyss of poverty.

Galtung (1990:292) presents a very good example of structural violence as follows:

If a person dies from tuberculosis in the eighteenth century it would be hard to conceive this as violence since it might have been quite unavoidable, but if he dies from it today, despite all the medical recourses available, then this is structural violence.

This highlights the point that if one fails to live up to one's potential for any reason that is avoidable, then, one is probably a victim of structural violence. Galtung (1990:292) asserts

that, “structural violence is the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or impairment of human life which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which otherwise be possible.” In other words, when the avoidable happens, then, violence is present.

However, one has to investigate the factors that caused the avoidable to happen and that means critically examining the social order —who has the power and who has no power. What roles do the people with power play in making the avoidable happen to those who do not have power? Alternatively, what are the forces that deprive people of the opportunity to reach their full potential? One can therefore talk about power relations, about who has what, and about what they do with what they have. According to Galtung (1990:296),

A deprivation of goods may mean avoidable denial of what is needed to satisfy the fundamental needs; to deprive people of cultural stimuli or to create societies, however rich, with a division of labour that forces people to stay in the same profession for life are forms of violence.

Therefore, there is a need to examine critically the concept of power and of power relations.

Power involves a subject and an object, for example, the state can be the subject and exercise its power over its citizens who in this case are the objects. However, in most cases, the subject is in a privilege or advantageous position whereas the object is at the mercy of the subject. According to Carr and Sloan (2010:21),

Power refers to the capacity and opportunity to fulfil or obstruct personal, relational, or collective needs and we distinguish among power to strive for wellness, power to oppress and power to resist oppression and strive for liberation. And in each instance exercise of power can apply to self, others, and collectives; and can reflect varying degrees of awareness with respect to one’s actions. Power has different types, there is psychological and physical power and also in the Christian fraternity there is spiritual power.

One can also talk of power levels such as individual power, group power, community power, citizen power, state power, and so forth.

However, Carr and Sloan’s definition stresses that the privilege enjoyed by the subject in a power relationship with the object may be used to fulfil or obstruct needs and this means that power can be exercised in a positive or negative way. In order to apply Carr and Sloan’s notion of power relationships, the people who have the privilege of power and resources may therefore use their power in a negative or positive way over the underprivileged. Those in the position of power who have access to and control resources may use their power and

privilege deliberately or structurally to deny the underprivileged access to resources. This negative exercise of power by the privileged to access resources means that those in power would dominate those who have no power and would make decisions on behalf of the less privileged.

Powerful and privileged people usually use their power to maintain their dominance and the status quo which favours them. The desire to maintain their status and continue to enjoy the fruits of power, that is, maintaining unfair advantage in accessing resources at the behest of the powerless, means that the use of their power and influence over others is intentional and deliberate, although it is done systematically and in a hidden way. According to Parson (2007:8),

Domination can be understood in terms of intentional and unintentional ways that structural arrangement benefits dominant groups and disadvantage subordinate groups. Dominant groups intentionally use their influence and power over others to preserve the ways that organized relations and practices benefit their own interests and keep subordinate groups powerless to change such relations.

The intentional and deliberate use of power and influence over others by the dominant groups means that oppression and exploitation are possible. The powerless are therefore at the mercy of those dominant powerful groups who make decision for them and are forced to comply with the interests of the dominant group. Galtung (1990:293) demonstrates how those in power can structurally exploit their subjects. He argues that,

The archetypal violent structure has exploitation as a centre piece; this simply means that some top dogs (elite or rich), get much more out of the interaction in the structure than the underdogs who are disadvantaged that they die (starve, waste away from disease) from exploitation.

Galtung's analysis shows that the underdogs end up in a sad and miserable condition that may include chronic diseases and avoidable diseases such as cholera and typhoid, which may result in early death or a decline in their life expectancy. In other words, the quality of life of the underdogs is compromised and they suffer a great deal because of the disadvantage they have in their interaction with the social structures.

While Carr and Sloan talk about power relations, Friedman talks about powerlessness. According to Friedman (1992:31), "powerlessness is a lack of access to social power." Friedman employs the idea of power relations to focus more on the plight of the powerless, while using the household as the social unit of the poor. He further explains that, "the household is embedded within four overlapping domains of social practice: state, political

community, civil society, and corporate economy and each has a distinctive type of powers: state power, political power, social power, and economic power.” Thus, Friedman defines poverty in relation to lack of social organization and lack of access to political power. The poor are deprived of access to the fundamental social and political power and do not therefore have a say in decisions that really affect the quality of their lives.

The poor lack the social and economic power to improve their status quo. It has been argued in the previous paragraph that the privileges enjoyed by the subject in the power relationship with the object may be used to fulfil or to obstruct needs, and this means that power can be exercised in a positive or negative way. The obstruction may be done in a hidden structural way that makes the poor blind to the violence being done to them. If then this notion is applied to Friedman’s understanding of poverty, the powerful state, the powerful politicians, and the powerful economic elites obstruct the needs of the poor. The poor are powerless and do not have the means to change their situation; they therefore depend on those in power to decide for them.

According to Chambers (1997:131-135), “powerlessness is often overlooked as it is discomforting to the powerful, even to development practitioners. Powerlessness is an invitation to exploitation by the powerful.” Chambers’ point here is that the powerful structurally deprive the poor of access to social, political, economic power, which renders the poor powerless and cause them to be dependent on the powerful. The state of dependence and powerlessness renders the poor vulnerable and it is in that position of vulnerability that the poor are exploited. Chambers goes further to state that,

There are four elements that contribute to vulnerability of the poor households; the poor are subjected to social conventions such as dowry, bride price. These social requirements create permanent demand for money lenders; with usurious rates ensure permanent poverty.

From Chamber’s assertion above, it is clear that social demands and lack of resources drive the poor into powerlessness so that they become dependent on the powerful. Those with resources, for example, the money lender, will plunge the poor into further debt by offering higher rate loans that the poor will spend the rest of their lives servicing.

In the context of poverty, we concern ourselves, respectively, with power to fulfil basic needs, to restrict access to basic needs and to resist forces of destitution (Carr & Sloan 2010:21). Although Carr and Sloan focus on the restriction of access to basic needs, it is very important to move beyond these restrictions to social, political and economic freedom. To

understand poverty in Zimbabwe as violence against the poor, one has to go beyond the restriction to basic needs and examine the social, economic and political freedoms which are necessary for alleviating poverty in the country. Lustig (2001:85) affirms that, “without opportunities and freedom no amount of good can reverse the effects of structural poverty.”

In other words, restrictions to opportunities and freedom plunge people into poverty. Sen (1999:70) frames poverty in terms of capability and opportunity and states that there is a relationship between personal capacities and the environmental factors. For Sen, the environment plays a very crucial role in one’s effort to reach full capacity in life. If the environment is not conducive for reaching full capacity, then, it will be impossible for the person to reach full capacity. This then fits well with the power relationship between subject and object. The state creates an environment that may or may not be conducive for the subjects to reach their full capacity. The state therefore creates a good or bad environment for its citizen through the policies and laws it enacts as it exercises power over the citizens.

Sen (1999:72) proposes five types of freedom that are crucial for human development namely political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantee and protective security. For Sen, these freedoms of right and opportunities are crucial for people to reach their full potential. These are structures which may lead people into or out of poverty. Whereas Sen proposes five types of freedom that are crucial for human development, Friedman (1992:67) proposes what he calls eight basis of social power which are available to the poor as avenues for creating social space and influence. These are social networks, information for development, surplus time, instruments of work and livelihood, social organization, knowledge and skill, defensible life space and financial resources. Both Sen’s and Friedman’s proposals are an effort to create political, social and economic access for the poor, and these are very crucial for the poor to reach their full potential. The failure by any government to provide these five important freedoms and create the eight basis of social power makes it difficult to respond to and eradicate poverty. The effect of structures on people results in the gap between the potential and the actual fulfilment of rights (Ho 2007:1).

## **2.5 Cultural Violence**

Galtung (1990:291) defines cultural violence as those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language, art, empirical science and formal science that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. For

Demmers (2012:81), culture teaches and dulls us into seeing repression and oppression as normal or rather not see it at all. Galtung (1990:295) echoes the same sentiments by stating that, “the culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all.”

Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, or even feel, right—or at least not wrong (Galtung, 1990:291). People lost in their daily routines, and guided by symbolic orders, and notions of normality and common sense, are incapable of perceiving the greater, systematic nature of socio-economic exploitation that cultural hegemony makes possible. According to Galtung (1990:294), “a major form of cultural violence that ruling elites indulge in is blaming the victim of structural violence who throws the first stone, not in a glasshouse, but to get out of the iron cage and then seen as the aggressor.” This resonates very well with the prosperity gospel notion that people poor because of their lack of faith and sins. As ideology, it forms a critical part of cultural violence; it legitimizes structural violence and makes it look normal. Galtung (1990:299) points out some instances of how ideology in religion legitimizes structural and direct violence thus:

Combine the ideology of the nation-state with a theologically based Chosen People complex and the stage is set for disaster. Israel (Yahweh), Iran (Allah), Japan (Amaterasu-okami), South Africa (a Dutch 'reformed' God), the United States (the Judeo-Christian Yahweh-God) are relatively clear cases; capable of anything in a crisis Capitalism is capable of sustaining itself not just through violence, economic coercion and political repression but also ideologically, through hegemonic culture in which values of the dominant classes have become the common sense values of all.

## **2.6 Poverty as Violence**

As noted earlier, the multi-dimensional definition of poverty by the United Nations states that poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. If therefore poverty is understood as violence, then, it would help to probe how choices and opportunities are systematically denied in order to deny the poor the right to participate fully in society and how systems or policies implemented by governments or those in power are used to plunge the poor into an abyss of poverty.

In this regard, Allen (2008: 45) affirms that, “Mahatma Gandhi emphasized the need to understand violence in its more passive forms, as discrimination, oppression or exploitation. Conversely, he also emphasized the need to understand poverty in its more physical or active

form, as violence.” The idea that vigorous use of force is a primary determining factor in defining violence rules out the idea of poverty as violence since there is no application of vigorous force. However, Lee (1999:7) argues that it is wrong to reject the claim that poverty is a form of violence on the grounds that the harms resulting from poverty are not brought about through the application of vigorous force. This then calls one to move away from the notion of direct vigorous application of force to consider poverty as a form of structural and cultural violence. Garver (1968:2) argues that, “Violence in human affairs is much more closely connected with the idea of violation than with the idea of force and what is fundamental about violence is that a person is violated.” This notion of violence as a violation of a person steers one in the direction of defining poverty as violence. There is the absence of the use of extreme force, but the nature of the harm is that people’s rights are violated. It is this violation of the people’s rights that makes poverty violence.

Galtung (1990:292) argues that, “violence is avoidable insults to basic human needs and more generally in life, lowering the real needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible.” To define poverty as violence, therefore, one has to go beyond the understanding of violence as the application of vigorous force and consider the nature of harm:

To understand poverty, one must concentrate on the individual’s real opportunity to pursue his or her objectives and therefore account would have to be taken not only of the primary goods the person respectively holds, but also of the relevant personal characteristics that govern the conversion of primary good into a person’s ability to promote his or her ends (Sen 1999:6).

Sen’s understanding of poverty above resonates well with Galtung’s (1990:291) statement that, “violence is what causes a gap between the potential and actual, ‘what could have been and what is’.”

Therefore, a critical assessment of the potential that a person has is very important particularly of what causes the person not to actually reach that potential. For Galtung, then, violence occurs when one fails to reach the expected potential even though the resources are available. On the definition of poverty cited earlier, Lee (1999:4) argues that the poor or underprivileged experience poverty because they do not have access to resources that would enable them to live a decent and acceptable life. The failure to attain a decent and acceptable standard of life by the poor is a result of unjust social, economic, legal and political structures enacted by those who are in power and are privileged. In this sense then, poverty is structural violence against the poor, and violence is not necessarily the use of excessive force but the

violation of human dignity. The dignity and rights of the poor are violated through structures which operate in the form of policies that favour the few powerful and privileged elite while disadvantaging the powerless and voiceless poor. The poor view these unjust structures and policies as normal and do not see them as the cause of their poverty, that is, as hidden structural violence.

The unjust socio-economic structures favour the few powerful and privileged elites who use the same structures to exploit and oppress the powerless and the voiceless in order to enhance their power and wealth. The exploitation and oppression of the powerless are well choreographed and deliberately structured in a way that indeed makes it difficult for people to notice the violence against them. Galtung (1990:293) demonstrates that those in power can structurally exploit their subjects:

The archetypal violent structure has exploitation as a centre piece; this simply means that some top dogs (elite or rich), get much more out of the interaction in the structure than the underdogs who are disadvantaged that they die (starve, waste away from disease) from exploitation.

The structures that benefit the top dogs condemn the powerless into poverty as they starve and become vulnerable to avoidable diseases.

Victims of structural violence often end up in a miserable, avoidable and painful state that erodes their dignity and self-esteem. Galtung (1990:293) points out that,

The underdogs may be left in a permanent, unwanted state of misery, usually including malnutrition and illness and the way people die in Third world countries from diarrhoea, and immunity deficiencies, in developed countries, avoidably and prematurely, from cardiovascular disease and malignant tumours.

Unfortunately, malnutrition, diarrhoea and immunity deficiencies are recipes for premature death which means that the life expectancy of the powerless and voiceless—the victims of structural violence—is lowered. When avoidable diseases such as cholera, tuberculosis and malnutrition prevail, it is clear that violence against the powerless and voiceless poor people is present.

The ability by the poor to enjoy an accepted standard of living that upholds their dignity is compromised due to unjust socio-economic structures that disadvantage them. According to Lotter (2008:20),

People, who are forced through a lack of resources to live below a generally accepted appropriate standard of life, experience a profound sense of denial of their human dignity. They feel they are regarded as human beings who ought to be treated with certain minimum level of respect for their rights and concern for their wellbeing.

The implication of this notion is that due to poverty, the dignity of the poor is violated, their morale and confidence are affected and they could develop an inferiority complex. The quality of life they enjoy is inferior and not up to standard. In addition, the poor are seen as powerless and irrelevant. This is what Taylor (2003:4) refers to as psychological poverty. He asserts that, “Psychological poverty has to do with the inner feelings of poor people and their states of mind.” There is a state of low self-esteem, constant feelings of humiliation, and a sense of shame among the poor. Wink (1992:101) affirms that, “the poor are systematically excluded as actors, their voice is regarded as damaged goods, and the powerful do not expect the poor to have anything to offer, and the poor are often labelled as lazy, ignorant, or unworthy.” This is the kind of mentality that the poor embrace and regard as the reality of their plight, which according to Christian (1998:264), is a web of lies. He states that, “The identity of the poor is distorted, and is kept distorted; by a web of lies that entraps the poor in ways far stronger and insidious than physical bonds or material limitations.”

Poverty primarily harms social order; hence, it is fitting to regard it as a form of violence, despite the general absence of vigorous force in the actions which produce it (Lee, 1999:6). Therefore, applying vigorous force is not a key criterion in identifying poverty as violence against the poor. What is imperative to identifying poverty as violence against the poor is that harm is done. Poverty harms people physically, psychologically and spiritually. As noted above, poverty is a deliberate and systematic restriction of choices and opportunities as well as access to resources—it is a violation of human dignity. The harms that befall people because of structural denial of choices and the legitimation of those structures ideologically and religiously distort the identity of the poor and violate their dignity.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The concept of poverty cannot be limited to a single definition, given that it is a multifaceted concept. The chapter has argued that poverty goes beyond the issue of inadequate income or the lack of material things but it also is determined by lack of access to resources and, social, political and economic power. The lack of access to social, political and economic power results in the vulnerability of the powerless poor who are forced to depend on the powerful elites who in turn exploit them and make them feel powerless to change their situation. It is

argued that such exploitation is structurally designed and hidden in such a way that the poor themselves do not even notice the structural violence against them. In addition, structural violence is legitimated by religious groups and ideologies that make structural violence acceptable to the poor.

Further, poverty is seen as violence against the poor. The discussion in this chapter moved from the understanding of violence as the direct application of excessive force and showed that the use of excessive force should not be the only determining factor in defining violence. Instead, violence is a deliberate and systematic, structured denial of access to basic needs and resources for living an acceptable and respectable life that upholds the dignity of any person. In the next chapter, the argument that poverty can be said to constitute violence will be taken further to show that the phenomenon of Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe is a form of cultural violence against the poor which is being used to legitimate the structural violence of poverty.

## Chapter Three

### Poverty as Violence in the Context of Prosperity Gospel Preachers in Zimbabwe

#### 3.1 Introduction

Zimbabwe has been going through a painful socioeconomic and political crisis since the early 1990s. The economic crisis in Zimbabwe is marked by a high rate of unemployment that is estimated to be above 75%. In addition, poor health service delivery, high mortality rate, low industrial production, and high rate of imports that surpasses local production and exports, as well as poor remuneration that is below the poverty datum line in both the public and private sector characterize the long list of problems affecting the country. The effects of natural disasters such as long droughts and the Cyclone Idai and outbreaks of avoidable diseases like cholera, typhoid, malaria and tuberculosis confirm the depth of Zimbabwe's crisis. An upsurge in chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes and hypertension is also a factor in the torrid and painful situation in Zimbabwe. Amidst the crisis, desperate Zimbabweans have resorted to Prosperity Gospel preachers for solace and solution to their problems. Kariati (2015), in an article in one of the main daily newspapers in Zimbabwe, notes that, "Hundreds of thousands of people are now flocking to churches fronted by prophets like Immanuel Makandiwa and Walter Magaya and most of them say they are seeking assistance from the prophets on their economic and family problems."

In this regard, Chitando *et al* (2013:353) explain that, "where people are faced with challenges that are beyond comprehension such as death and incurable diseases and poverty, they appeal to forces that are greater than them." Therefore, the poor people of Zimbabwe appeal to the two prominent prophets Makandiwa and Magaya for solace and solution to their problems. The two prophets command a large following because of their focus on prophecy, healing and deliverance. Their Prosperity Gospel message that seems to offer a solution to the Zimbabwean people's socio-political and economic woes provides a good platform from which to determine whether their message is a theological response to the understanding of poverty in the Zimbabwean context.

The view of poverty by these two prominent prophets shapes how many Zimbabweans conceive and cope with poverty. Therefore, it is imperative to consider critically their understanding and the remedies they prescribe for people to cope with the situation of

poverty which coerce people into passive submission to the prophets and the social structures (government and the elite). Ayeboyin (2011:79) confirms that, “the enthusiasm and willingness of New Pentecostal Churches to address people’s problems like sickness, poverty, attacks from evil spirits, barrenness, loneliness and all kinds of unproductiveness and misfortune demonstrates why people are attracted to them.” Therefore, Prosperity Gospel becomes an ideology that is used to legitimize structural violence against the poor. As Karl Marx said of religion, “Religion becomes the opium of the people manufactured by the ruling class to keep the oppressed masses happy.”

### **3.2 History and Development of Prosperity Gospel**

Understanding the context of Zimbabwe’s Prosperity Gospel is imperative but it cannot be done in isolation of the history and development of the Prosperity Gospel movement in the world. According to Sarles (1986:329),

Prosperity gospel is a broadly-based variegated movement that overlaps both the charismatic and non-charismatic spectrums and it seems to be a blending of the positive thinking emphasis of a Norman Vincent Peale or a Robert Schuller and the faith healing ministry of Oral Roberts.

Prosperity Gospel can be described as a faith movement that comprises of various independent ministries which primarily focus on positive confession. Positive confession involves a positive belief in what you want or desire with the determination that you will get it (it is best understood in the phrase, “what your mouth confesses is what you get”). In addition to positive confession, the movement is strongly focused on the doctrine of healing and prosperity.

The origins of Prosperity Gospel cannot be pinned exactly to a group or an individual. However, Ur Essek William Kenyon who was a pastor of the Bethel Bible Institute is regarded by some scholars as the pioneer of the Prosperity Gospel movement. Kenyon was ordained, first, as a minister in the Methodist Church before he decided to leave and found Baptist Church linked churches. According to Walker (2007:237), “Kenyon was influenced by the Christian Science movement which believed that sickness, sin, and death are illusions and thus can be cured through right thinking.” This signals the beginning of Kenyon’s view that positive confession can bring healing and that a person can possess what he wants if the mind thinks positively. Kenyon’s belief that the mind has the power to overcome sin and illness also entails that a positive thinking mind would make a person immune to evil spirits, any sickness or poverty.

Kenyon's teaching on the power of the human mind influenced Kenneth Hagin, a Pentecostal preacher. Hagin fused Kenyon's teaching on the positive mind with his Pentecostal beliefs to create the popular Word-Faith Movement whose message focused on divine healing, protection and prosperity as good fruit of positive faith. Gifford (2009:62) notes that,

The prosperity gospel entails that God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ and every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty; a believer has a right to the blessings of health wealth won by Christ and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith.

Consequently, sin, sickness and poverty are the result of failure to tap into Christ's victory on the cross. Prosperity is a sign of one's positive faith in God and a sign of God's blessing while the opposite is also true.

Gifford (2015:84) adds that, "the essence of the faith Gospel is that Christ has restored to us the blessings of the covenant of Abraham, which include health and wealth and all-round victory." Some of the terms that are popular within the Prosperity Gospel context are increase, enlargement, improvement, enhancement, multiplication, and success. These terms cover some aspects of spiritual development but they are used mostly in the sense of material prosperity. This kind of prosperity teaching has its foundation in the covenant God had with Abraham, in which God promised Abraham material prosperity on the condition that Abraham would be obedient to God. Thus,

Its erratic codes of "naming" and claiming" divine blessings merged with idea of seed faith, the imperative of sowing and reaping expected divine blessing in connection with giving financial means to God and the church: the more you sow the more you will reap (Gifford 2015:16).

However, the belief that material prosperity is a sign of one's faith in God and of God's blessing implies that poverty is a sign of lack of faith in God and the result of sin. This understanding is problematic because it forces the poor to believe that they are poor because of their disobedience and lack of faith. The rich may also pride themselves in their 'superior' faith. The view implies that "the more material things I have the greater is my faith, the less material things I have the less faith I have." Similarly, the poor who do not have much or any seed to sow will reap little or nothing at all (Young 1996:5).

The principle of positive confession has its roots in Mark 11:22-24 which says that whatever one asks in prayer and believe that one has received, one will obtain that thing. This led to the introduction of church slogans such as "claim what belongs to you" or "what your tongue

claims or confesses is what you get.” The many adherents of the Prosperity Gospel believe that prosperity comes through positive confession, as Gifford (2015:17) shows,

African Christians believe that success is determined by your faith and prosperity gospel preachers have moved beyond traditional Pentecostal practices of speaking in tongues, prophesying, and healing to the belief that God will provide money, cars, houses, and even spouses in response to the believer’s faith – if not immediately, then soon.

The belief that prosperity or success is determined by one’s faith may lead to serious divisions in the Church as those who are successful may see themselves as spiritually superior to those who are unsuccessful (the poor) but are spiritually weak and inferior. This stratification could also cause the poor to blame themselves for their situation and may affect their self-esteem and spirituality. Young (1996:3) affirms that,

The view that faith is measurable by the material results it achieves leads to the possibility of grading Christians according to their material success. This, in turn, introduces the concept of a superior class of believers who can and do effect this prosperity in their lives.

In situations of failures and lack, Prosperity Gospel proponents place the blame not only on a person’s lack of faith, but also on an evil spiritual force, a demon or a generational curse. Some poor people are made to believe also that their failure to give in church is the reason for their poverty, and that they need a breakthrough in their lives. The much-needed breakthrough would come when one sows a seed or gives in church or to the Man of God. Ehioghare and Olanrewaju (2015:71) note that,

Characteristic of many of these prosperity preaching churches is the concept of breakthroughs in diverse areas of life. This may include breakthroughs in the form of healing, finance, marital success, promotion in the workplace and other favours from God. To give these teachings a Biblical basis verses, such as found in Malachi 3, are elaborately expounded to build the case for life breakthroughs.

Thus, giving is not an end in itself, but a means to financial or prosperity breakthrough for the giver. This notion has also resulted in popular slogans by Prosperity Gospel proponents such as “You reap what you sow.”

### **3.3 Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe**

The majority of Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe subscribe to the doctrine of Prosperity Gospel that emphasizes that wealth is a sign of obedience to God, strong faith in God and blessing, while being poor is a sign of sin and lack of faith in God. However, Makandiwa and Magaya are not the pioneers of Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe, hence, the need to consider

also the history and development of Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe. It is difficult to trace how the prosperity gospel movement arrived in Zimbabwe. In his discussion on the rise of prosperity Gospel in Nigeria, Obadare (2016:12) notes that,

Pentecostalism in Nigeria became ascendant at precisely the same moment that the country was witnessing perhaps its most exacting period of economic upheaval since independence in 1960. Put differently, the promise of untold riches found a willing audience among subjects experiencing acute deprivation and general uncertainty, and for the first time, the message was insistently broadcast that one's chances of (material) success had less to do with social structures creating opportunities, and more with pernicious, ubiquitous spirits (e.g. 'the spirit of unemployment'), which can only be combated and brought to heel through faith in the power of prayer.

The same can be said about the rise of Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe. Since the early 1990s, Zimbabwe has been experiencing a decline in its economic situation. Koch (2014:7) states that, "The poor are mostly the adherents of prosperity Gospel because it promises the opportunity for upward mobility and act as an opiate for the poor." The socioeconomic and political situation in Zimbabwe has been on the decline since the early 1990s, with the decline intensifying in 1998. However, in the period of 2007-2008, the country experienced its lowest point socioeconomically and politically, with the inflation percentage rising to over a million. According to Forbes, "In 2008 Zimbabwe suffered the second most severe episode of hyperinflation in recorded history, with the annual inflation rate reaching 89.7 sextillion per cent."<sup>2</sup> The Guinness Book of Records recorded also that in 2008, Zimbabwe introduced the highest denomination banknote of \$100 billion, which was enough to buy two loaves of bread.<sup>3</sup> Chitando *et al* (2013:187) write that,

In that context, a new breed of prophets arose, who sought to understand local contexts and culture in the light of Scripture, but they do so by retaining a literalist approach to biblical hermeneutics. They look for correspondences between their own life situations and the Bible, and expect Biblical texts to have practical relevance and problem-solving potential. Thus, they could be said to follow more contemporary reading strategies, which stress the role of receiving communities.

Most adherents of Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe are the poor who desire to change their condition of poverty into a state of prosperity. It is therefore not a coincidence that, in the midst of economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, new faith movements such as UFIC and Prophetic and Healing emerged and flourished as they seem to offer an attractive solution to the socio-economic crisis in the country. The socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe

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<sup>2</sup> [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com).

<sup>3</sup> [www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/highest-denomination-banknote](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/highest-denomination-banknote).

provided a good platform for Prosperity Gospel preachers such as Prophets Emmanuel Makandiwa of UFIC and Walter Magaya of PHD Ministries to become popular.

### **3.4 Immanuel Makandiwa and the United Family Interdenominational Church**

#### **3.4.1 Background of Makandiwa and the UFIC**

Immanuel Makandiwa's UFIC is regarded as one of the foremost and most influential church movements in Zimbabwe of the past decade. According to Mapuranga *et al* (2012:299), "the prophetic activities have been present in Zimbabwe from the rise of African Initiated Churches in the 1930's and were adopted and adapted by mainstream Pentecostal Churches such as AFM, ZAOGA and the Family of God Church." However, the prophetic movement gained momentum only around 2007. Gunda (2012:342) asserts that prophetic activity scaled to new heights between 2007 and 2008 with the emergence of indigenous mega churches led by individuals who labelled themselves as "man of God" and "the anointed one."<sup>4</sup>

Emmanuel Makandiwa was formerly an ordained minister in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM). During his time as a minister in the AFM Chitungwiza Unit F Assembly, he initiated a lunch-hour Inter-Denominational Ministry in Harare in 2008. The lunch-hour ministry had a huge and positive response from the people which caused it to move from the CBD in Harare to the Harare City Sports Centre, a bigger and spacious venue. However, "what attracted and still attracts followers to him among other things is the Prosperity Gospel, sometimes called the 'health and wealth' gospel or the 'faith gospel.'" (Chitando *et al* 2012:301). Makandiwa's ability to perform miracles and to prophesy is at the core of his rise and ministry. In 2010, he officially inaugurated the UFIC and left the AFM.

Makandiwa was reportedly accused of spending much of his time and focus on his newly formed inter-denominational church while depriving his Hebron AFM Chitungwiza assembly of his time. It was evident that soon his devotion to the interdenominational activities would affect his ministerial work at the Hebron assembly as rumours went around that Makandiwa was contemplating starting his own church, Makandiwa's spokesperson did not dispel the rumour but fuelled it with some comments he made to the media. Makandiwa's right hand

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<sup>4</sup> These titles are used by their followers to indicate the holiness, power and anointing of the man of God. Papa which can literally be translated "father" is another widely used title that designates a particular man of God as a father figure to his followers.

man, Pastor Rukwati is quoted as saying, “Makandiwa prophesied about this ministry when he hinted that at times ministers are confined to assemblies when they have been made national ministers” (Masvotore 2016:50). This was an indication that Makandiwa was already planning to start UFIC while he was still in AFM. It appears also that he foresaw the inevitable tension with the AFM leadership in Zimbabwe because of his interdenominational activities.

It is alleged that as Makandiwa engaged in the interdenominational services in Harare, he had no time for the AFM Hebron assembly parishioners who were now complaining. They claimed that they had only received Holy Communion twice at Hebron from 2006 to 2010. This drew the ire of the executive of the AFM:

The AFM executive then decided that the situation had to be controlled. The executive prepared a document that circulated to all ministers in AFM with conditions that demanded all ministers engaged in any activity under the banner of the church to present an official report to the AFM church. Subscriptions were to be paid for any assembly or gathering under the name of AFM (Masvotore 2016:45).

Masvotore further argues that this was done in order to force Makandiwa and his interdenominational lunch-hour gathering to pay subscriptions to the AFM. The document also stated that if anyone wanted to start a ministry, it had to be distinct from the AFM that is, in terms of doctrine and the statement of confession. Makandiwa was asked to choose between the AFM and his interdenominational ministry but he chose the interdenominational ministry and left the AFM.

In 2010, Makandiwa renamed his Inter-denominational meetings as United Family International Church (UFIC) in 2010. Since then, the ministry has grown into one of the largest churches in Zimbabwe. According to the UFIC website,

The Church is a prophetic movement that is on a mission to establish and expand the Kingdom of God on earth. Equipping individuals and families with Bible inspired wisdom and knowledge that enables them to unlock their divine potential and live victoriously in all spheres of life; UFIC services are Spirit- filled and we continue to witness the amazing power of God.” The mission of the Church is, “To build a God society of all people and all nations and reaching out to the lost, the broken hearted and the less privileged. We engage in transformational projects and charity works for our communities, those in dire need and the less privileged; allowing the love of God to flow through us to the world.

Makandiwa has not only founded a church but he has gone the extra mile to found a business entity called Brand Makandiwa, which was launched on June 3, 2016 at a very fancy and colourful ceremony that was graced by Makandiwa’s spiritual father Victor Boateng, his

biological parents, foreign delegates and local business executives. According to the brand managers led by Randy Bediako of Ghana, “Brand Makandiwa seeks to celebrate Makandiwa’s achievement through various products that will be released on the market, such as books and branded wares, among others.” Speaking also at the launch of the brand, Makandiwa’s Ghanaian spiritual father Kwasi Boateng said,

Let us rise and preserve what is ours, and here it is... this as a Movement called Makandiwa. I am here to challenge all Zimbabweans, let us rise and tell the world that we have a noble man, a man of principles, a man of love, a man of God, who is not just for us, but for generations to come. It is starting as brand, but in its totality, it is a movement. This is a movement we cannot match.

The primary attraction to Makandiwa’s church is the Prosperity Gospel he preached and his ability to perform great miracles. Chitando *et al* (2013:302) note that, “Makandiwa’s supposed ability to perform miracles that can lead to believers becoming materially rich has resulted in significant controversies between believers and critics.” He has performed miracles such as the miracle of money, of the three months’ old baby and of weight loss. The case of a miracle baby was reported in November 2012 in which a barren woman claimed that after meeting Makandiwa, she conceived and gave birth to a baby after three months. Pindula, an online newspaper reported that,

A woman claimed that she had normal menstrual periods which ended on 15 November 2012. On 18 November 2012, the couple went to the UFIC and when Makandiwa was praying for female congregant whose pregnancies had complications, he then declared that there was to be a miracle pregnancy which was to be delivered within a space of hours, days and weeks. The prophecy came to pass but the baby died mysteriously.

This miracle divided the citizens of Zimbabwe, believers and unbelievers alike, as some questioned the authenticity of the prophet and some of his followers defended him, claiming that he was called by God to do these mighty works.

However, Makandiwa is not a stranger to controversy as his lavish lifestyle has been at the centre of debate between his followers and his critics. Zimunya and Gwara (2013:187) point out that, “Unfortunately the sharp contrast between the lavish living of the pastors and the poverty of their audiences become a source of scandal.” Makandiwa is alleged to own several assets and live lavishly at the expense of his poor followers. “Although he has not publicly declared his net worth, Emmanuel Makandiwa has also done well for himself as he is believed to personally own shares in blue chip companies as well as prime real estate especially in Harare” (Herald 2017).

### 3.4.2 Makandiwa on poverty

Emmanuel Makandiwa, in one of his sermons, declared:

The Lord gave me the power to break poverty. Do not tell me to preach something else, which, is not prosperity. My mission is to take people from one place to another. My mission is clear, to deal with poverty. I will not change my gospel message. I said industry will reopen and it shall reopen. Poverty is a demon. We should not entertain poverty. Even the devil knows that the more one is blessed, the more he becomes close to God. If a person is broke, there are more chances of backsliding.

Makandiwa's view of poverty in this sermon is that poverty is a demon which means that he spiritualises poverty and shifts the blame to the devil. In his opinion, poverty can be directly attributed to some sin or a curse in the spiritual life of the individual. If poverty then is a demon, then, one needs exorcism to be delivered from it as implied by his statement that God gave him power to break poverty.

Not only does Makandiwa claim that poverty is a demon but he also claims to have power to exorcise the demon which means that poor people who already believe that poverty is a curse or a demon would trust him to deliver them from the demon of poverty. According to Obadare (2016:4),

Pentecostal pastors have profited from mass anxiety produced by deepening economic uncertainty. They do so not only, as already indicated, by attributing Africa's economic crisis to a variety of spiritual perversions but they also almost invariably position themselves as the only agents with the spiritual wherewithal to provide the solution.

This idea that Makandiwa is a deliverer who has power to deliver people from poverty is reinforced in one of his sermons on Exodus 7:1-4. Expounding on Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, he said, "This scripture explains my God-given purpose to liberate masses from poverty." In that sermon, Makandiwa claimed that he is the liberator, a Moses, given power by God to deliver people from the bondage of poverty.

In another of his sermons on poverty, Makandiwa again said the following:

In Chapter 24:3, we see three things that God uses to punish nations. If a nation angers God, He uses famine, defeat by enemies and incurable diseases, so when we try to remove poverty from the lives of people, we are trying to remove the anger of the Lord from the people.

From the above quote, it is clear that for Makandiwa poverty is an instrument of punishment by God to sinful people. This view resonates well with the Prosperity Gospel assertion that being poor is due to disobedience. This assertion that poverty is a punishment is not new in

the Zimbabwean Pentecostal circles, as one of the pioneers of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, Dr Ezekiel Guti of ZAOGA Forward in Faith, also asserted in 1989 that poverty is punishment from God. Guti said, “Any nation or country, which worships idols or animals, will have problems. Go to any nation where they worship idols or cows, these countries have problems and are poor. I say let’s start with God” (in Maxwell 2006:204).

One may wonder, therefore, that in a nation that is considered 80% Christian, why are people so deeply stuck in the pit of poverty? Is it because individuals who are experience dire poverty worship idols and animals? The problem with this idea of poverty as punishment from God is that the state of poverty is blamed on the nation’s or the individual’s worship. Young (1996:9) argues that,

If materiality prosperity is a responsibility of a believer to claim and it is the will of God for all his people, then this necessarily means that poverty and sickness are not only evil in themselves, but those in such situations are somehow in a state of sin.

The problem with such an assertion is that it presumes that being materially rich means that one has no sin.

Clearly, Makandiwa’s view of poverty an evil spirit and demon that needs to be exorcised blames the poor for their poverty. However, “equating poverty with the work of the devil and individual choice is unfortunately very simplistic: it makes it impossible for people to critique poverty as a socio-political and economic process connected with structural relations and with an ideological basis” (Zimunya & Gwara 2013:187). Two important points are noted about the implication of the spiritualization of poverty namely structural relations and ideology. Understanding poverty as the work of the devil blinds people from seeing how social structures have pushed the people of Zimbabwe into an abyss of poverty.

Any theological understanding of poverty that ignores the socioeconomic and political structures in Zimbabwe condones these structures and, in that sense, it becomes cultural violence against the poor. It legitimizes structural violence and renders people passive and blind to the reality behind poverty. Thus,

At the root of social problems such as the prevalence of crime, substance abuse, alcoholic lifestyles and juvenile delinquency lies the fundamental structural crisis of economic injustice and elite policies that only serve those with economic might, political power and social privileges (Banda 2017:6).

The powerful and privileged minority elite who benefit from the socio-economic structures amass wealth and, in the process, impoverish the majority—the disadvantaged and powerless poor. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen increasingly. The social, political and economic structures in Zimbabwe benefit the few elites and Prosperity Gospel legitimizes this by recognizing their unfair advantage as a blessing and a sign of faith in God.

In the previous chapter, we have shown the importance of cultural violence through the understanding of poverty as violence. Galtung (1990:291) notes that by,

cultural violence, we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence, exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.

One can therefore argue that Prosperity Gospel is cultural violence against the poor and it is used by Makandiwa to legitimize structural violence against the poor. Prosperity Gospel becomes an ideology that is used by Makandiwa to prevent people from criticizing the social structures around them. Banda (2017:5) argues that, “indeed, biblically and theologically, it cannot be denied that poverty and economic injustices are ultimately spiritual problems resulting from the fall of humanity.”

However, issues of poverty cannot be restricted to these spiritual issues and one can argue that it is irresponsible of Makandiwa to claim that poverty is simply an evil spirit and demon while turning a blind eye on the government that runs the country’s socioeconomic structures which have prevented many people from reaching their full potential in Zimbabwe. Makandiwa seems to condone the ever-rising corruption, poor service delivery, continuous outbreak of cholera, declining health facilities and the decay and continuous looting of key parastatals like NSSA, ZESA, and Air Zimbabwe by equating poverty with the work of the devil. According to Chitando & Manyonganise (2011:101),

Church leaders in Zimbabwe often shun critical reflection on the details of socio-economic situations and uncritically seek divine intervention in a way that absolves human beings of their responsibility in creating the crisis as well as their role in its resolution.

### **3.5 Walter Magaya and Prophetic, Healing and Deliverance Ministries**

#### **3.5.1 Background of Magaya and PHD Ministries**

Walter Magaya is one of the most influential and renowned charismatic prophets in Zimbabwe. Magaya started as a member of the Catholic Church and was part of Catholic

Charismatic group called Blood of the Lamb Christian Community (BLCC) where he served for several years before he began a new chapter in his ministerial journey. However, a trip to Nigeria turned out to be the turning point in his ministry. According to PHD's website, "Prophet Walter Magaya's visit to Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN) in Nigeria marked the birth of P.H.D Ministries as he was guided by his God-given mandate by the Holy Spirit through Senior Prophet T.B Joshua."<sup>5</sup> Magaya therefore refers to T.B. Joshua as his spiritual father.<sup>6</sup>

The "PHD Ministries started with only 45 members but gradually grew bigger and bigger such that Magaya had to constantly shift in search of bigger venues to accommodate the welling numbers" (Chibango 2016:62) The ministry first used the Chitungwiza Unit L Community Hall as its place of worship but had to relocate to a different venue before finally settling at the current PHD premises that are situated along Simon Mazorodze Road, opposite Zindoga Shopping Centre. According to Mahohoma (2017:3), "every Sunday, the prophet collects a lot of money, an average of US\$300 000."

The PHD website reports that, "The first notable miracle was that of Mr Nyandoro, who was blind for 3 years and got his sight restored by the power of Jesus Christ of Nazareth working through the Man of God Prophet Walter Magaya." After this miraculous healing, Prophet Magaya only shouted, "MBIRI KUNA JESU" (meaning, "glory to Jesus"), as the whole congregation screamed for joy at what the Lord had just done. From that point, Magaya became well known for his performance of great miracles.

Magaya holds a high-level series of All-Night Prayers termed Nights of Turnaround which are attended by foreigners and government officials. Banda (2017:5) notes that, "A common feature with prophets Emmanuel Makandiwa and Magaya includes spectacular all-night meetings that often attract many foreign visitors." Makandiwa is famous for hosting the annual New Year's Eve vigil commonly known as Cross-over Night which marks the end of a year and the crossing into a new year. Makandiwa delivers several prophecies about God's plans to individuals and to the nation of Zimbabwe as a whole w. Magaya also hosts an all-night vigil under the banner "Night of Turnaround" that has also become an annual event.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.phdministries.org/prophet-w-magaya/>

<sup>6</sup> Charismatic Prophets in Zimbabwe follow prophets from either Nigeria or Ghana whom they call spiritual fathers and who act as their advisors on spiritual matters. They argue that the concept is based on the Elijah-Elisha relationship in which Elijah was the spiritual father of Elisha.

These prominent vigils hosted by the two prophets attract thousands of people annually, which include government ministers, members of parliament and chiefs who expect to find financial breakthrough or to be healed of an illness. The events also attract many foreign visitors who also hope to have their spiritual problems solved by these two men of God.

These high-profile all-night events have generated much criticism from those who see the events as fund-raising gimmicks. Mahohoma (2017:3) states that “the all-night gatherings tend to be fund raising rather than Gospel preaching.” The two prophets separately run guest houses that accommodate the people who attend the programs especially the international guests. These guest houses undoubtedly would generate high revenue.

Magaya is also known to be a philanthropist who is involved in a lot of charity works. He helps informal local traders and vendors by providing them with capital to start off a business that would become self-sustaining. In addition, Magaya also promotes local musicians by inviting them to perform at his church events. Magaya’s charity work is not limited to helping informal traders and musicians, but he also supports different sporting activities, and on many occasions, he has helped the Zimbabwe Football Association through donations that totalled about \$56,000. Additionally, he has bailed out the National Women’s Soccer team from its financial woes, and his hotel in Waterfalls has become home to the Zimbabwean national soccer teams. Lastly, he is also famously and controversially known for buying a book that chronicles in pictures the life and work of the former First Lady Grace Mugabe on her birthday. Magaya bought the book for \$50 000 after outbid other potential buyers.

Chibango (2016:69) notes that, “Magaya has afforded to build himself an empire—a clear evidence of material prosperity, even amidst of the current Zimbabwean socioeconomic crisis.” It is believed that Magaya owns several assets including his Yadah TV Channel for televangelism, the guest house at Yadah Village for congregants in Waterfalls who wish to meet and see the prophet outside the normal worship services on Sunday and Wednesday, and a soccer team, Yadah Football club, which is currently playing in Zimbabwe’s top soccer league. An online news site report that,

The US\$8 million hotel is not open to everyone who requires accommodation. It is an exclusive place for Christians who want to have a one-on-one encounter with PHD leader prophet Walter Magaya as they seek healing, prophecy and deliverance and visitors have to fork out between US\$300 and US\$900 to spend three days at the leafy facility.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://nehandaradio.com/2016/10/16/house-magaya-built/>.

### 3.5.2 Magaya on poverty

In one of his sermons on poverty, Magaya said,

When one is rich and they have truly given their life to God they worship God truly. When one is poor they cannot worship God. It is in the mission of the devil to destroy people through poverty because he knows that when you are in poverty you will become a complaining machine instead of fulfilling your true purpose which is to worship God.<sup>8</sup>

Here, Magaya blames poverty on a spiritual being, the devil, thereby, spiritualizing poverty. As noted above, Magaya's contemporary, Makandiwa, also views poverty as a demon and their understanding of poverty as demon means that a poor person needs to be exorcised. Thus,

The doctrine of the Spirit of Poverty states that believers remained poor because of their spiritual condition and it accounted for the experience of never been able to accumulate: a new shirt burnt by the iron; car always breaks down; the money vanishing from a person's pockets with little sense of where it goes (Maxwell 2006:203),

In the same sermon, Magaya further states that,

The spirit of poverty ensures that those around you are there to take away from you and never to give you. You are surrounded by people who are destined to take away from you. When you are under this spirit you are ever fighting and it ensures you cross the path of your blessing so that they walk out on you and you remain in poverty. Time and chance happen to them all and how you respond to the person who is supposed to bless you is what determines your success.

Magaya sees poverty as a spirit that possesses and torments the poor which needs to be exorcised. He believes that God is not poor and he is there to break the chains of poverty spirits. Such an understanding of poverty poses a challenge as it spiritualizes poverty and apportion the blame for being poor to either the devil or lack of faith. By so doing, the Prosperity Gospel proponents exonerate the structure and ignore its role in perpetrating poverty among the people of Zimbabwe. Banda (2016:167) uses the term "de-economization" to refer to the spiritualization of poverty; "it refers to the tendency of disconnecting the reality of poverty from its prevailing socioeconomic and political context, which can also be called de-politicization or de-historicization."

Therefore, de-economization by these two Prosperity Gospel preachers spiritualizes poverty and relates to Galtung's notion of cultural violence. Poor people are forced to feel guilty

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.pulse.ng/communities/religion/walter-magaya-poor-people-cant-worship-god-popular-zimbabwean-pastor-says-id3996731.html](http://www.pulse.ng/communities/religion/walter-magaya-poor-people-cant-worship-god-popular-zimbabwean-pastor-says-id3996731.html).

about their state of poverty which Prosperity Gospel doctrine claims is due to lack of faith or disobedience.

Prosperity Gospel becomes cultural violence against the poor in Zimbabwe because it legitimizes the exploitation and oppression of the poor by the government and the rich elite whilst exonerating these oppressive social structures from any wrongdoing and holding the poor responsible for their own predicament. Galtung (1990:295) argues that, “The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all.” One can argue then from Galtung’s notion of cultural violence that Prosperity Gospel by Mkandwiwa and Magaya blinds their followers from seeing the real socioeconomic and political structures that have been used to condemn them to a life of poverty. A proper theological response to poverty in the Zimbabwean context cannot be divulged from the socioeconomic and political situation in the country. Obadare (2016:7) argues that, “because of its emphasis on the individual believer’s direct, unmediated relationship with God, Prosperity Gospel is bound to ignore social structures and its attitude towards the state is extremely permissive.”

The PHD’s statement of faith sets the tone for Magaya’s understanding of poverty, which is rooted in Prosperity Gospel. He claims that, “Deliverance is the casting away of evil spirits setting you free from tormenting demons and the evil spirits. It frees you from all spiritual, physical and economic bondage.” For Magaya, the only way to be free from poverty is to be exorcised.

Magaya further claims in the same sermon that,

Even if you are given a thriving business it fails in no time because of the spirit of poverty. The poverty spirit allows you to get capital but you will buy stock that is not on demand. When the spirit of poverty loses your life, you should be able to marry school or venture into business free from poverty. Your car developed a problem not because it is faulty but because of the spirit that is upon your life. Your child falls sick monthly is due to the spirit of poverty and it is leaving your life today.” One can argue that this an ideology that is used to coerce people to depend heavily on the prophets and make the people desperate and vulnerable that they will do anything to get out of their poverty misery. The fear of the evil spirits, the effects of poverty coerces the people to find refuge in the prophets.

Therefore, it can also be argued that Magaya’s Prosperity Gospel is a form of cultural violence against the poor. One of the things that Magaya uses to cast out the spirit of poverty

is anointing oil. The anointing oil, which in most cases is olive oil, is believed to carry God's power to heal any sickness and protect people from any form of evil. According to Banda (2017:1),

Pentecostal prophets employ what they call 'anointing' as a means of passing miraculous power onto their followers to attain prosperity in wealth, health and to overcome all spiritual threats to the human well-being." Prophets usually anoint different items like oil and water and usually they are sold to the desperate people.

Magaya explains the function of the anointing oil thus,

Anointing oil is a physical symbolism of God's healing and deliverance power. It is a point of contact in spiritual warfare and is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It protects from deadly dangers and traps, and it does the cleansing and purification. It is the anointing of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit which is a powerful tool in spiritual warfare (in Banda 2017:1).

The belief is that the anointing oil has power to destroy or break any spiritual chain caused by the devil. The devil is viewed as the source of all evil spirits, diseases, poverty, barrenness, failure to get married, unemployment, etcetera, and there is a need to use anointing oil to break the devil's chains and yoke. The anointing oil is therefore seen as a powerful tool that breaks spiritual curses and limitation and restores people to a place or position that God initially intended them to be, that is, having dominion and power over the earth. Magaya therefore prescribes anointing oil as a solution to the people's fear of evil spirits and of poverty.

Magaya justifies the use and importance of anointing oil with several biblical texts, for example, 2 Samuel 6:1-11. He preached a sermon titled, Overtake and Maintain, based on this text. This is a tragic story about David and the thirty thousand men who went on a mission to bring back the ark of the Lord. Tragically, Uzzah died after he tried to prevent the ark from falling; for God killed him. David then took the ark to Obed-Edom who kept it in house for three months. In the sermon, Magaya cautions that, "You should respect the anointing of God and never get used to it like Uzzah did. He thought he could assist God when in actual fact God does not require our assistance. The anointing of God changes your life."

Magaya sees Uzzah as the villain who tried to help God but did not have the anointing to do so. However, Obed-edom is a hero whose anointing changed his life. However, Magaya's interpretation and application of the text poses a challenge, as he completely ignores the context of the text and also fails to recognise the centrality of David in that particular story, a

king who had anointing but failed in this mission. One can conclude that Magaya is proof texting here, making the text confirms his understanding of anointing. According to Banda (2017:3),

For Magaya, Obed-Edom serves as an example that the anointing of God changes your life. The implication is that anointing leads to a state of blessedness. Therefore, it is something that every Christian hungering for economic success must earnestly seek after.

The hunger for economic success that Magaya has created to people through such an understanding of anointing creates a demand for the anointing oil that people believes it can change their lives. Anointing oil has become an attractive solution to the people when it comes to their socio-economic and spiritual problems and it became the main reason why so many desperate, prosperity seeking Zimbabweans have thronged these church leader's churches (PHD and UFIC).

It is imperative to note that, for the anointing oil to be attractive and be taken seriously by people, the prophets ascribe divine authority to the oil. In one of his teachings on anointing oil, Magaya is quoted by a weekly newspaper The Sunday Mail saying,

The oil that we are now using is different from the one we have been using previously. We got an instruction from God to do so, so that is why we have set aside this day to distribute the oil and everyone who gets it- God acts on their situations.”<sup>9</sup>

Magaya's claim that he was instructed by God to give out the anointing oil gives credibility to the oil and people take it seriously, believing that it holds the key to their financial and spiritual breakthrough. Magaya goes further to state that,

It is a point of contact in spiritual warfare and is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It protects from deadly dangers and traps, and it does the cleansing and purification. It is the anointing of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit which is a powerful tool in spiritual warfare. The anointing oil destroys or breaks the bondage, burden and oppression caused by the devil because the enemy's yoke connects and binds you with sin, poverty, disease and limitation. The anointing oil therefore breaks all the yokes the devil is using to steal the promise God made to us, that of having dominion over earth and being seated in the heavenly places. In P.H.D Ministries, the anointing oil is one of the major anointed mantles of the Ministry that has brought thousands of testimonies.

The inscription on the bottle of anointing oil further reinforces Magaya's understanding of anointing oil. It reads, “The oil offers prosperous life. Your past dark life is over; the anointing is opening a new healthy prosperous life, in Jesus Christ name.”<sup>10</sup> This is a very

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted from the Sunday Mail of 7 November 2014.

<sup>10</sup> This can be found on the packaging label of the anointing oil from Prophet Magaya and PHD Ministries.

irresistible message to most of the desperate suffering Zimbabweans. However, Chibango (2016:70) argues that “the emphasis on achieving everything one wants through miraculous ways is problematic and it encourages a spirituality or culture shortcuts.” Furthermore,

A spirituality of short cuts dispenses the society from giving a scientific and systematic account of its value production as wealth is instantaneously created through miracles and in the end the society aspires for a miracle economy whose model would not require any scientific explanation (2016:70).

Chibango’s argument is confirmed by an incident in which Prophet Makandiwa performed “miracle money” and one of his followers, who believed in miracle money, went to a supermarket to pay for purchases and her money changed into leaves at the till. Asked about the source of the money, the unemployed woman remained mum but her child chipped in and revealed the source. *“Mamha vanotemha mari mumuti”* (loosely translated, “Mum’s money grows on a tree”), shouted the toddler in front of the police.<sup>11</sup> The Prosperity Gospel idea of poverty as an evil spirit and a demon is a form of de-economization that has led people to find solace in the healing and deliverance of Magaya and Makandiwa with the hope that their poverty situation would be turned around. One can argue that both Magaya and Makandiwa carry out a form of cultural violence against the people through Prosperity Gospel. Spiritualization of poverty causes people to fear evil spirits and demons, thereby, forcing them to depend on these men of God for survival. The ideology behind anointing oil also makes people believe in the prophets and turn a blind eye on the social structures and relations that have condemned them into utter poverty.

Chibango (2016:71) further argues that the spirituality of shortcuts resonates with “immediatist” disillusion, which is a culture of pretending to create immediate and tangible outcomes and victories. The doctrine of anointing and of the anointing oil produces such immediatist disillusionment. Instant miracle money is a very good example of such immediatist disillusionment. Therefore, people tend to abandon the idea of working hard and expect money to miraculously appear in their bank accounts. Politicians also have not been spared from this immediatist disillusion as some Cabinet Ministers were made to believe that there was miracle diesel oozing out of the rock in Chinhoyi. However, this turned out to be a trick that was played on them by a traditional healer. This story of the miracle diesel is a clear example of how the people of Zimbabwe and even the politicians have become so desperate

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<sup>11</sup> Makandiwa is said to have performed a miracle in which people mysteriously received deposits in their bank account and also physically found money in their pockets. This became popularly known as the Miracle Money.

that they seek immediate solutions that would get them out of their pit of poverty. The story of the woman who went to the supermarket to buy goods with avocado leaves believing they would turn into money mentioned above is also another good example of how, in the midst of their suffering, people are forced to look for quick and tangible solutions which are promised by Magaya and Makandiwa.

Preying on people's desperation, Magaya and Makandiwa use the doctrine of anointing and their ability to solve the people's problems via the anointing oil to cement their prophetic status. Their actions echo Galtung's concept of cultural violence, as the two Prosperity Gospel preachers claim to be God's chosen prophets and make people submit to them without any questioning. Furthermore, the people accept their subordinate role and pledged their loyalty to the prophets, who then coerce them by spiritualizing their poverty and making them feel guilty that their poverty is due to lack of faith or disobedience.

In one of his sermons, Magaya explains that,

Whenever you are anointed enough there is a certain level that you could reach and you will attract a certain group of people. The higher the anointing is, the higher the level. You will only get married when you are anointed enough for marriage and you will also have a house if you are anointed enough for it. When the anointing comes it will change your levels, friends and even your environment and it will bring good news to your life.<sup>12</sup>

It is evident that people are pushed into desperate situations which make them vulnerable to exploitation by the prophets who claim to have power and authority to help them navigate their way out of poverty through exorcism and anointing oil. People are forced to part with their hard-earned cash to buy anointing oil and regalia that are anointed by the prophets, and also offer huge amounts for enough anointing to enable them get married, get a job, and get a house or a car. However, miracle money and wealth are not the solution to Zimbabwe's socioeconomic and political crisis and there is a need for the prophets and the people to look critically at how structures have condemned people into poverty. Banda (2017:6) affirms that, "Behind economic injustice are human structures, human institutions, people, policies, practices, beliefs, attitudes, convictions and habits that need to be confronted, challenged, abandoned and transformed."

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<sup>12</sup> An extract from a YouTube video of Magaya's sermon entitled, "Overtake and Maintain," based on 2 Samuel 6:1–11.

Besides anointing oil that Prophet Magaya prescribes to people as a solution to their predicament, the doctrine of sowing seeds is also prescribed as a way for people to navigate their way out of poverty.

In one of his sermons, Magaya says,

Whatever is on your mind is what limits you. The first problem that you have is that you are looking for money and the second problem is that you are working for money. You should not work for money, money should work for you. Money is spiritual; it notices your heart's desires before you handle it.<sup>13</sup>

This concept of sowing seeds by Magaya poses a big challenge in that it is coercive and manipulative. Congregants who are desperate are coerced and manipulated into paying huge sums of money to have their prayers answered by God. In addition, faith is substituted by money as a condition for God to answer prayers. The implication of this practice is that the poor are blamed for their poverty because they do not give much, hence, they have little. In addition, God is portrayed as a God who segregates the poor. The poor have to bear the burden of guilt that they cannot have their prayers answered because they do not have money.

The poor are exploited by Magaya as they are desperate for God's answers to their prayers. The more a person spends on sowing seeds, the more the returns would be as the prophets claim that the seed or money is a prerequisite for God to answer the person's prayers. The economic woes in Zimbabwe force the people to believe that the more they part with their hard-earned money, the greater the chances that God would solve their problems. Mahohoma (2017:4) remarks that,

Financial contributions are prerequisite for God to solve human needs. This stimulates the congregants to support the prophet with money in a kind of competing style because each wants recognition by the prophet. And to be recognized by the prophet is to be recognized by God who heals and rewards through the prophet.

The desire for quick and divine solutions to the economic challenges and the desire to be recognised by the man of God cause a person to be desperate and vulnerable to exploitation and oppression.

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<sup>13</sup> From: [www.//iharare.com/prophet-magaya-teaches-about-the-importance-of-money/ykooooo](http://www.//iharare.com/prophet-magaya-teaches-about-the-importance-of-money/ykooooo).

### 3.6 Conclusion

The chapter has explored the concept of Prosperity Gospel in the context of poverty in Zimbabwe. The two major charismatic prophets in Zimbabwe, Walter Magaya and Emmanuel Makandiwa, see poverty as a demon, which should be tackled through exorcism. This is a spiritualization of poverty. They also view poverty as a punishment from God for the sins of poor people. Their understanding of poverty therefore puts the blame of poverty on the poor and on the devil. This understanding shows that in Zimbabwe, poverty is viewed from a Christian Prosperity Gospel perspective and that Prosperity Gospel is an ideology, a tool for cultural violence, which is used to legitimize structural violence against the poor.

The two prophets command a large followership, which means that their understanding of poverty shapes the way their followers also view poverty. From the above discussion, one can conclude that the Prosperity Gospel that is advanced by Magaya and Makandiwa is not a good theological response to Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic woes. The followers of these two prophets have been rendered passive and cannot challenge the socioeconomic and political crisis in Zimbabwe because they are blamed for their own poverty while the few rich and powerful are exonerated from guilt.

Although this chapter has argued that Prosperity Gospel advanced by two prominent preachers in Zimbabwe, Makandiwa and Magaya can be viewed as cultural violence that legitimizes structural violence the government of Zimbabwe is committing against the poor, it is important to take note also of the positive contribution Makandiwa and Magaya have made through preaching Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe. One of the key areas in which Prosperity Gospel has positively contributed towards poverty alleviation is in championing entrepreneurship. The two proponents of Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe, Makandiwa and Magaya have been on the forefront in planting the spirit of entrepreneurship into their followers and encouraging them to embark on self-sustaining projects. According to Togarasei (2011:345), "entrepreneurship is one way to promote sustainable development in contexts where unemployment is rampant and contributes significantly to poverty alleviation". In addition, Prosperity Gospel proponents have encouraged their followers to start societies and provide capital for its followers to start income generating projects. One of the Pentecostal Churches, ZAOGA, has run a successful programme of societies in which widows and single women are empowered to sustain themselves financially. However, despite the positives outcomes noted above, for entrepreneurship to bear the desired fruits, it

remains a question what role the structures and policies of the government play in ensuring the recovery of Zimbabwe's economy so as to provide a conducive environment for entrepreneurship to bloom.

In the next chapter, the study will investigate elements of hidden violence in the in the three selected texts from the book of Amos by arguing that poverty can be viewed as violence against the poor. By exposing the hidden violence in the structures of his time, the prophet Amos decries the similar theology (Deuteronomic) that was used by the elite to oppress the poor.

## Chapter Four

### Poverty in Amos

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the preceding two chapters, this study has argued that the use of excessive force should not be the primary determining factor in defining violence. In other words, violence is the violation of human dignity and therefore poverty should be seen as violence against the poor. Chapter 3 of this study considered the view of poverty that is promoted by two prominent Zimbabwean Prosperity preachers who use their interpretation of biblical texts to legitimize structural violence against the poor. It was shown that the brand of Prosperity Gospel by these two preachers, who appeal to biblical texts in their sermons, constitute a form of cultural violence against the poor.

The present chapter will, investigate the depiction of poverty by the prophet Amos. This study contends that a careful exegetical analysis of selected texts from the book of Amos, namely Amos 2:6-8, 5:10-13 and 8:4-6, will offer a richer understanding of poverty as structural violence. Using literary and rhetorical critical hermeneutical frameworks, this chapter will establish that the language employed by Amos exposes the hidden acts of structural violence against the poor in these three texts.

The Old and New Testaments speak candidly about violence—both human violence and divine violence (Fretheim 2013: 18). According to Mills (2010:158-159), the theme of violence which permeates the book of Amos can be characterized into three strands—natural violence, human violence and divine violence. The focus in Old Testament scholarship has been on direct violence, and very little study has been done on hidden violence, accordingly, on structural and cultural violence. This study will consider how violence is hidden in biblical texts by focusing on the language that is used by Amos to convey his message to his audience.

In order to achieve this goal, this chapter as noted in Chapter 1 on the discussion on methodology will mainly employ rhetorical criticism that operates under the banner of literary criticism. Although this study mainly employs rhetorical criticism as its main exegetical tool, some selected aspects of literary criticism such as the structure of the text, plot, setting and, characterization will be used. In addition, the analysis also considers the

characters in the text, their portrayal and relationship to one another as well as the setting of the oracles against the nations.

The main and important approach to the idea of poverty as violence in the book Amos that is adopted here is rhetorical criticism. According to Clines (2008:152),

Rhetorical criticism operating under the banner of final form of the text, concerns itself with the way the language of texts is deployed to convey meaning and its interests are in the devices of writing, in metaphor, parallelism, in narrative and poetic structures, in stylistic figures.

By using rhetorical criticism, this chapter will focus on the language that Amos uses as a tool of persuasion in the selected texts and the effect of his words on his audience and the reader. With regard to the language that Amos uses, Gowan (2015:531) states that, “more obvious to the contemporary reader, however, are two striking characteristics of the book, the power of its language and the passion of its concern for the oppressed.” Paul (1991:5) also remarks on Amos’ rhetoric prowess as follows:

Amos exhibited a great finesse in rhetorical forms and dynamic oratory skills. His rich imagery was influenced by his profession and by his acquaintance in nature, his similes and metaphors are abundant, and he also adeptly employed the literary convention of irony.

However, it is important to bear in mind that no single method can be deemed as the correct interpretation of a biblical text. Barton (1996:5) argues that, “the quest for a correct method is... incapable of succeeding.” Moeller (2003:24) reinforces this point with reference to the interpretation of the book of Amos by stating that,

My promotion of rhetorical criticism should not be understood as suggesting that this is the correct method for the interpretation of Amos, however rhetorical criticism is a useful tool that allows us to focus on some important aspects hitherto have been largely neglected.

In this chapter therefore, rhetorical criticism will be considered a useful tool to probe the largely neglected aspect of indirect violence in the book of Amos. An important point to note concerning the use of the Greco- Roman rhetorical strategy that will feature in this chapter is that this study is not making a historical argument in arguing that the author of the Book Amos knowingly made use of this particular rhetorical strategy. Rather, as a reader of the book of Amos, in conversation with the essay by Mamahit and Venter (2010), I have found this particular rhetorical strategy helpful in understanding the argument Amos advances in the three selected texts.

## 4.2 Situating the Book of Amos

### 4.2.1 Introduction

The book of Amos, which is the third book in the collection of the Twelve Minor Prophets, is highly regarded as unique among the prophetic books of the Old Testament canon. However, the position of Amos in the order of the Twelve Minor Prophets differs in the Masoretic Texts from the Septuagint. In the Masoretic Hebrew canon, the book is positioned between Joel and Obadiah, and the reason for this is the striking similarity between Joel 4:16a and Amos 1:2 and between Joel 4:18a and Amos 9:10b. Amos 9:12 also makes a reference to Edom which is the primary subject of the oracle in Obadiah 1:9. However, the Septuagint places Amos between Hosea and Micah because the Septuagint arranges the books according to their length.

The book of Amos is considered the first prophetic book to be written, and this causes it to get much attention from scholars of prophetic literature. Fretheim (2013:111), like several other scholars, argues that, “Amos is the first prophet whose writings have been preserved, though we cannot be certain that he was the first prophet to commit his message to writing as some may have been lost along the way.” However, some scholars argue against this generally accepted notion, for example, Houston (2008:1) who claims that, “the notion that Amos is the first of the writing prophets is rather a misleading way of expressing it. It would be better to say that Amos is probably the earliest of the prophets who have books named after them.” One can conclude from the two different views that Amos remains one of the earliest prophetic books written and named after the prophet.

The book of Amos has received so much attention in prophetic literature studies especially in contemporary times for two reasons, namely its preoccupation with the issues of injustice, exploitation and oppression, and Amos’ shocking pronouncement of judgement and punishment against Israel. Amos’ intense and hard-hitting criticism of the Israelite society is unparalleled in the Old Testament. Hasel (1991:18) affirms that, “Amos invectives against the rich and his defence for the poor, the widow, and orphan stand as an unequalled testimony in Israelite testimony.” The book’s concern for and sympathetic portrayal of the poor and a hard-hitting critique of the ways the rich and powerful elite accumulate wealth whilst impoverishing the poor make the book attractive to any prophetic literature scholar interested in issues of social, economic, legal and political justice. In addition, Amos’ language prowess

and rhetorical skill draws one to examine the message of the prophet to his audience on social and economic injustice.

Amos' shocking pronouncement of judgement and punishment, came at a time when Israel believed that YHWH would not judge or punish her because of her special relationship (covenant) with YHWH. According to Fretheim (2013:111) "because Amos is the first prophet who addresses Israel as a whole, and also the first prophet to pass judgement on all Israel and even envisions the end of God's chosen people, Amos is worthy of special attention." The shocking pronouncement challenged the theological beliefs that the people of Israel of Amos' time used to justify their acts of social and economic injustice against the poor. The prophet's condemnation of the people's theological beliefs also makes the book of Amos relevant to a critical and theological understanding of poverty, exploitation and oppression in the book.

The ever-increasing harsh realities of poverty, exploitation and oppression today provide a good reason to continue the extensive study of the book of Amos and its relevance to the world's socio-political and economic status. In addition, Amos' excellent language skills and portrayal of how the rich powerful elite treat the poor, for example, in the statement, "you who trample on the poor," portrays the acts of the rich as violence against the poor. Thus, one is persuaded to investigate the prophet's use of rhetorical language to uncover the hidden violence that the rich committed against the poor by exploiting and oppressing them. According to Andersen and Freedman (1989:25), "Amos has received so much attention in our time because he is a useful and power-driven agent for third world, black and feminist liberation theologies." This assertion by Andersen and Freedman makes the book of Amos one of the most powerful theological tools for understanding the concepts of poverty and violence and how to resist social and economic injustice.

#### **4.2.2 Literary analysis of the book of Amos**

Before embarking on an exegetical journey of any biblical book, it is imperative to identify the different units in the book that offer the literary context for a particular text. It is important to identify how the units are constructed and arranged to drive home a point or argument in that unit or book. According to Mamahit and Venter (2010:1), "rhetoric criticism has two foci, namely to determine the boundaries of the larger unit in order to pinpoint its start and end to avoid the danger of fusing together separate elements." It is therefore crucial

to identify the rhetorical units in the book of Amos and how the prophet Amos drove home his message. Of particular interest here is how the rhetorical units of 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6 advance the argument that poverty is violence against the poor. Moller (2003:37) states that, “characteristic for the concept of rhetoric unit is that it can be applied to sections of varying length and complexity; starting with the smallest, in the book of Amos these would include metaphors, hymns, oracles, etc.”

The literary division of the book of Amos has always been subject to debate among scholars. In terms of structure, Stuart (1987:287) divides the book into three literary sections:

- 1:2-6:14 which consists of the first group of oracles,
- 7:1-8:3 which consists of visions with related narratives, and
- 8:4-9:15 which consists of the final group of oracles.

It seems that Stuart’s outline is based on his understanding of the materials found in Amos, namely, the oracles and visions. The book, however, contains other materials such as hymns which are not accounted for in his structuring of the book.

Simundson (2005:152) proposes a four-part division of the book as follows;

- 1-2 which covers judgements against the nations,
- 3-6 which consists of three collections of sayings, each beginning with “hear this word,”
- 7:1-8:3 which covers visions and an encounter, and,
- 8:4-9:15 which is another section that begins with “hear this.”

The division of the book into four major parts seems to be a given although the basis for the division may differ. Andersen and Freedman (1989:23) maintain the four-part division of the book but differ from Simundson on what is covered by the four divisions. Thus, they present the following outline:

- The Book of Doom (1:1-4:13),
- The Book of Woes (5:1-6:14),
- The Book of Visions (7:1-9:6), and
- The Epilogue (9:7-15)

From the different division above, one can observe a familiar and consistent trend which is that scholars seem to agree on dividing the book of Amos into four parts:

Chapters 1-2 as the introduction,

Chapters 3-6 commonly referred to as “the words,”

Chapters 7:1-9:10 commonly referred to as the “visions,” and

Chapter 9:11-15 as the concluding section.

It is helpful to bear in mind that it is a difficult task to agree on a single outline for any biblical book, as this may be determined by the hermeneutical approach one uses. However, because this study employs rhetorical criticism as its methodology, Moeller’s literary division of the book of Amos will be adopted. According to Moller (2003:61), “due to its general structure, it is not sufficient for a detailed analysis of the book. Even the classification into “words” and “visions” is not entirely appropriate in that Amos 7-9 contains some “non-visionary” material as well (8:4-14). Moller therefore proposes the division of the book into nine literary sections, and states that “in addition to a historical superscription in 1:1, and a motto in 1:2, the book of Amos consists of nine major rhetorical units:

- i) The first of these is the introductory series of oracles against the nations in 1:3-2:16;
- ii) The introductory series of oracles are followed by three sections in 3:1-15, 4:1-13, 5:1-17, all of which are introduced by “hear this;”
- iii) Two elaborate woe oracles in 5:18-27 and 6:1-4;
- iv) which in turn lead to the vision-cum-narrative series in 7:1-8:3;
- v) Another “hear this” section in 8:4-14; and
- vi) The book’s dramatic conclusion in 9:1-15

### **4.2.3 Rhetorical situation**

After establishing the rhetorical units in the book, it is important to establish the rhetorical situation of the argument or message that the author or speaker is trying to convey to his or her audience. One cannot therefore turn a blind eye on the circumstances and events that caused Amos to address issues of social injustice in Israel. The crimes that Israel is accused of in 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6, are not addressed in isolation, but Amos’ message responds to the circumstances and events of his time. In other words, the question which ought to be asked is: what were the social structures that facilitated the exploitation and oppression of the

poor? What were the theological beliefs of the people of Israel in Amos' time and what impact did those beliefs have on the relationship between the rich and powerful elite and the poor? In this study, the rhetorical situation or context is therefore divided into two parts, which are the historical context and the socio-political, religious and economic context. These two contexts provided background and context for the message that the prophet Amos was conveying to his audience in Amos 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6. We should note that the selected texts cannot be interpreted independently from the rest of the book; therefore, the historical and theological contexts are extracted from other chapters of the book of Amos.

#### **4.2.4 Historical context**

It is difficult to establish the period that Amos served as a prophet in Israel. The historical context of the prophetic messages in Amos has been subjected to debate, but most scholars seem to agree on the last ten years of the reign of Jeroboam II, that is, 787-747 B.C.E. Amos 1:1 sets the time of Amos' ministry in the reign of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam II the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. Fretheim (2013:112) argues that, "a more precise time within this period is difficult to discern. But reference to an earthquake in 1:1, while scant knowledge is available, has suggested a time of Amos' ministry in the period of 760-750 B.C.E." Jeroboam reigned from 793-753 B.C.E in Israel and Uzziah reigned from 791-740 B.C.E in Judah. However, it is also important to consider the historical contexts that prevailed during the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah as both kings enjoyed long reigns of forty-one years and fifty-two years, respectively. The period of the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah is often described by many scholars as the Silver Age of Israel, second only to the Golden Age of David and Solomon in terms of peace and prosperity. However, Judah was overshadowed by Israel during this period, hence, the focus on Israel and Jeroboam II.

The unprecedented peace and prosperity that both Judah and Israel enjoyed under the reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam II respectively can be attributed to the prevailing foreign political situation at that time. Two major powers, Egypt and Assyria, were not a threat to Israel and Judah; hence Israel and Judah did not have to deal with the military prowess of these two nations. Assyria was preoccupied with problems at home and was not causing trouble for the small kingdoms at the east end of the Mediterranean. Thorogood (1971:3) notes that,

During the period from 800 B.C.E to 750 B.C.E the tribes in the Northern part of the Assyrian empire were restless, and eager to rebel. The Assyrians therefore concentrated their armies in that area and Israel had a period of safety.

The absence of these two superpowers provided a good environment for peace and stability to prevail in Israel and Judah. Thus, the absence of the threat of Egypt and Assyria on the international scene resulted in the freeing up of trade routes for both Israel and Judah. Judah and Israel capitalized on this much needed peace and stability to enhance their international trading. Stuart (1987:283) states that,

Israel reached what was probably its height in terms of economic prosperity. Agriculture flourished in spite of occasional crop failures (4:6-9), international peace in contrast to the frequent wars of the previous century, allowed Israel to gain wealth via international trade.

The wealth gained from the booming international trade meant that the economies of Israel and Judah grew and became stronger. The wealth gained via international trade is one of the two things that contributed greatly to the prosperity of Israel and Judah during the reigns of Uzziah in Judah and Jeroboam II in Israel.

Accumulating wealth via international trade was not the only prosperous thing that Israel and Judah enjoyed at that time; the two nations also enjoyed some reasonable success in their quests to expand their territories. In addition, Judah and Israel enjoyed a good relationship with each other which fostered cooperation between these two sister kingdoms. Israel under Jeroboam had embarked on a vigorous expansion of its territory east of the Jordan which was a success. Andersen and Freedman (1989:21) remark that,

We should suppose that Jeroboam and Uzziah acted in concert in their separate but associated enterprises. Whether there was formal alliance and whether they plotted their strategy together may remain uncertain, but it seems clear that they intended together to restore the classic boundaries of the united kingdom of David and Solomon.

The expansion of Israel during this period has been described by many scholars as one of the greatest expansions in the history of Israel. It appears that the absence of threat from Assyria and Egypt on the foreign political scene resulted in the stability of both Israel and Judah which spurred both kingdoms to embark on the expansion of their territories. The absence of the two superpowers in their territories also provided an opening for trade routes for both kingdoms, and especially for Israel, and it led to the rise of the merchants and a few rich and powerful elites who were keen on accumulating more wealth for themselves.

#### 4.2.5 Socio-religious context

The reign of Jeroboam II saw the growth of the economy of Israel as a result of the wealth that was gained via international trade and the expansion of the territory. What then led to the exploitation and oppression of the poor within the Israelite society? It is important to bear in mind that all societies are made up of different institutions which include families, tribes or clans, government institutions, educational procedures, markets, religious organizations, theological concepts and legal processes. These institutions function to meet the needs of the members of the society, providing the society a good environment to survive and perpetuate itself. How then did these structures perpetuate the exploitation and oppression of the righteous and of the weak innocent people?

The peace and stability that characterized Jeroboam's II reign and the growing economy had a great impact on Israel's social institutions, which meant that change was inevitable within the society and its structures. Whenever the structure of a society changes, the social institutions are also affected. The peace and stability in Israel aided by the growing economy led to urbanization. The process of urbanization had much impact on the nations' institutions, affecting the economic, legal and socio-political order. As noted by Garret (2018:64),

Urbanization and the development of state institutions, with the enrichment of state officials, gave opportunity to the powerful to gain further power and wealth through the abuse of patronage, corrupt practices, and simple violence, exercised primarily against those in poverty.

Urbanization meant the loss of agricultural land for some of the people in Israel which also meant that they could no longer produce food by themselves but rather became dependent on the few people who owned land from whom they also bought food. The loss of strong kinship networks through urbanization also made them less able to resist exploitation. One can further argue that the rise of urbanization meant that rural residents found themselves in a position where they had to produce greater amount of food with fewer resources. Doorly (1989:34-35) asserts that, 'those who worked and produced had less and less to show for their labour and the power and wealth of the land became centred in two rich urban centres, Jerusalem and Samaria.' Loss of land therefore resulted in the failure by the poor to produce enough food for themselves, which made them more dependent on the markets for food and prone to oppression and exploitation by those who were privileged to own land and control the markets.

Urbanization did not only cause loss of kinship, creating dependence by those who had lost land on the few elites who now had land, but it also created a sharply stratified society, sharply divided between the rich and the poor especially in the urban areas where the divide between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak was glaringly obvious. Garret (2018:164) identifies and describes the rich and powerful elite thus:

Those in a position to exploit the poor would have been equally varied: officials responsible for taxation or for the crown estates, judges in the royal courts, owners of the land in the neighbourhood of the capital, or indeed in any part of the country, who lived in the capital for its advantages in access to power and convenience.

Amos accuses the rich of living luxurious lives at the expense of the poor, meaning that the powerful elite used the poor innocent people as a means to their end, which is to accumulate more wealth for themselves. Excessive wealth and a vigorous quest for further accumulation of wealth meant that the gap between the rich and poor continued to grow. According to (Stuart 1997:283), “excessive wealth led to the creation of a leisured upper class who increasingly adopted a decadent lifestyle (2:8, 4:1, 6:1-6). But other forms of unfaithfulness to the covenant were rampant as well, including sexual immorality (2:7) and idolatry (8:14).”

A stratified and urbanized Israel meant that power and wealth were centred in urban areas, particularly, in Jerusalem. The elites used their power to accumulate more wealth, pervert justice, and exploit and oppress the poor. The stratification of Israel’s society during Amos’ time therefore was not just between the rich and the poor but also between the powerful and the powerless. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, Carr and Sloan (2010:21) show that, “power refers to the capacity and opportunity to fulfil or obstruct personal, relational, or collective needs and we distinguish among power to strive for wellness, power to oppress and power to resist oppression and strive for liberation.” Applying Carr and Sloan’s understanding of power relationships in Amos’ socio-religious context, one can conclude that the elites who had the privilege of power and resources used their power in a negative way against the underprivileged. Since the elites had access to and control of the resources, they used their power and privilege to deny the underprivileged access to resources deliberately or structurally.

The exploitation and oppression of the poor became embedded in the economic, social and legal structures of Israel. The social-economic structures perpetuated the exploitation and oppression of the poor by denying them equal access to resources, specifically, the land. The loss of land and inability to produce food meant the poor were prone to exploitation by the

greedy rich who controlled the markets and made grain expensive and beyond the reach of the poor. The poor were forced into huge debts that they could not service and ended up being sold into slavery while their properties were confiscated and their dignity was violated. The legal structure denied the victims of exploitation and oppression their right to justice, as the elites perverted the justice system by paying bribes to the judges. As noted in Chapter 2 of this study, “structural violence is often embedded in longstanding ubiquitous social structures, normalized by stable institutions and regular experience” (Farmer *et al* 2006:2). Therefore, Amos’ message in the three selected texts can be understood within the context of structural violence in the society.

However, both the socio-economic context and the theological context of Amos’ time are important to the interpretation of the selected texts. The theological ideas of the people formed the basis of their moral behaviour and gave the impetus to the elite to exploit and oppress the poor. In other words, the theological ideas served as cultural violence against the poor, as they legitimized the exploitation and oppression of the innocent poor by the powerful elites. Hutton (2018:52) argues that “Amos’ message makes no sense unless his contemporaries in Israel held certain beliefs about their God.” As noted in Chapter 2 above, Galtung’s (1990:291) definition of cultural violence shows that theology can be used as a tool for perpetrating cultural violence, that is, it can be used to legitimize structural violence—to support or perpetuate structures that exploit and oppress people. If the beliefs held by Amos’ people shaped their moral behaviour, then, it would be helpful to consider critically the nature of such beliefs.

The most important and commonly held theological concept in Israel at the time of Amos was that Israel was in a special relationship with YHWH who was Israel’s God while Israel was YHWH’s chosen people. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 plays a very pivotal role in the understanding of the theology of election and of covenant which is also rooted in the Exodus event. The people of Israel therefore believed that they were YHWH’s chosen people. Amos 3:1-2 can be understood as the interpretation of Israel’s special relationship with YHWH. In the two texts, YHWH claims, “against the whole family brought you out of the land of Egypt (3:1b),” and “you only have I known of all the families on earth (3:2a).” Mamahit and Venter (2010:3) confirm that, “Amos seems to challenge the common belief of his listeners that they are the chosen people of God, who therefore enjoy more privileges from God than any other nation on earth.”

Amos challenged this common belief in Israel that they were the chosen people of YHWH because Israel had two misconceptions about the covenant-election theology. Israel thought that the covenant was a status without responsibilities and that because of the covenant it was immune to God's judgement and punishment. These two theological misconceptions of the covenant theology are important in reading the message of Amos in its socio-religious context, as they shaped the behaviour of the rich and powerful elite. Amos' message also addressed these misconceptions. The themes of the Day of YHWH and the call for justice to flow reinforce the point that Amos was bringing a counter message to the commonly held religious beliefs of the people. Hutton (2018:62) argues that,

If Amos condemns people in the Northern Israel in his time, who were looking forward to an occasion or event they referred to as the Day of YWH, then this must have formed a part of widespread popular expectation, otherwise his condemnation would not have made sense at all.

For the people of Israel, the covenant meant that they were immune to YHWH's judgement and punishment. This misconception suggests that Israel believed that there was no consequence for their wrongdoing, in this case, the social injustice. Thus, Amos employs the Oracles against the Nations (OAN) as a rhetorical tool to shock Israel that YHWH would judge and punish her for exploiting and oppressing the poor. Israel never expected that the prophet would pronounce judgement on her or equate her crimes with the crimes against humanity that the foreign nations are being accused of. Thang (2014:35) argues that, "the context of Amos 3:2 shows Israel's wrong theological concept of election. They thought that they would be protected in all circumstances and also YHWH would never bring the covenant to an end." They could not fathom that YHWH would hold them accountable and judge them with the same standards as the so-called foreign nations. The shock could have been further compounded by the fact that Israel was mentioned in the same oracle as the foreign nations.

Amos reinforces his message of judgement and punishment by challenging Israel's interpretation of the concept of the Day of YHWH. Israel's misunderstanding of the Day of YHWH is understandable considering that even scholars do not agree also on the meaning of the Day of YHWH. Barton (1980:14) argues that, "the day in question must be a cultic or liturgical occasion, a festival in fact." Barton's assertion is based on the fact that, in 5:21, Amos denounces the festivals. However, the problem with this assertion is that 5:21 is not

part of the pericope of 5:18-20 which calls for justice to roll down. Von Rad (1959:99) argues that,

The Day of YHWH means the Day of YHWH's battle. Just like the Day of Midian in Isaiah 9:4, the Day of YHWH was the name of a day when Yahweh routed his enemies on the battlefield and give victory to Israel- or rather the day on which he would do so in the future.

Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact meaning of the phrase, it is clear that Amos challenged Israel's belief about the day of YHWH. For Amos, the day of YHWH was not going to be a good day as Israel expected, but it would be a day of calamity and pain contrary to what the people in Israel believed. It is would be a day of disaster and punishment.

In addition to Israel's misconception of immunity to judgement, Israel mistakenly or wrongly understood its covenant with YHWH, as that of status with no responsibilities or consequences. This misconception led Israel to disregard its social obligations and to engage in the exploitation and violation of human dignity of the poor. Wright (1983:36) states that, "the covenantal relationship entails the concept of justice and righteousness and thus practicing them is the legal demand of YHWH who brought Israel out of the land of Egypt." The elite were so immersed in a false sense of security that they had no covenantal obligation to YHWH's that they oppressed and exploited the poor without any hesitation. Their failure to realise that they had social obligations to one another meant that YHWH would punish them and contrary to their belief, there were actually consequences for their deeds.

Israel's religious beliefs at the time of Amos were also not detached from the economic issues. Israel understood the economic prosperity as a sign of divine favour. Deuteronomy 28 provides the backbone for this understanding of their economic prosperity. The powerful elite seem to have understood their accumulation of wealth and exploitation of the poor as a sign of divine favour. Amos' castigation of the social injustice was to remind the elites that they were not enjoying divine favour, but actually committing violence against the poor.

### **4.3 Poverty as Violence in Amos 2:6-8**

As noted above, this analysis will identify the rhetorical units of the book of Amos and how Amos used them to drive home his message to his audience. The oracle against Israel is part of the OAN, which form a larger rhetorical unit in Amos 1:3-2:16. According to Gowan (2015:551) "the oracle against Israel is explicitly connected to the preceding series by the introductory formula 'for three transgressions... And for four I will not relent...' but

thereafter differs in every aspect.” The oracle against Israel is longer than the other oracles, and is different from the oracles against the foreign nations in that the crimes of the other nations were international crimes whilst Israel’s crimes were domestic crimes of socio-economic injustice.

Amos 2:6-8 is a demarcated small rhetorical unit that belongs to the large rhetorical unit of 2:6-16, which is an oracle against Israel. The sub-unit of 2:6-16 can also be further divided into three subunits, which are:

2:6-8 —a description of Israel’s specific sins,

2:9-12 —Israel’s rejection of God’s good acts, and

2:13-16 —God’s punishment for Israel.

Although Amos 2:6-8 is a sub-unit of 2:6-16, which is an oracle against Israel, it cannot be understood or interpreted outside the larger context of the OAN.

#### **4.3.1 Amos 1:3-2:16 — Oracles against the Nations**

It has been noted above that any interpretation of 2:6-8 should be done in the context of OAN. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how Amos employed the OAN as a rhetorical tool to pronounce judgement and punishment against Israel. Amos began the OAN by pronouncing judgement on foreign nations before narrowing the pronouncement down to Israel. Without paying attention to whether the foreign nations are arranged in a deliberate order or not, Israel’s position as the last nation and the length of the oracle seem to suggest that Israel was the intended target of the pronouncement of judgement. Amos began with the foreign nations in order to build momentum that would culminate into a climax, the shocking judgement pronounced on Israel. Barton (1980:4) reinforces this idea by arguing that, “The purpose of the oracles on the nations is to lead up to the oracles on Israel in 2:6ff; it was intended by the prophet as the climax to the whole cycle.” Although the foreign nations would be judged and punished, Israel was the intended target of the prophet.

How does Amos use the OAN as a precursor to the climax, which is the oracle against Israel? Firstly, the judgement against the nations focuses on issues of human justice, the violation of human dignity and rights, and it was scandalous for Israel to be accused of the crimes that the foreign nations, their protagonists were being accused of. Amos used the element of prophetic shock to highlight the hidden violence that the rich and powerful elite were

perpetrating against the vulnerable and defenceless poor people. On the rhetoric skill used by Amos, Simundson (2005:17) notes that, “They listen to the now familiar formula. Whose name will come up next? And then the shock of hearing Israel, ‘are we too, in the same category with the likes of Phoenicia, Philistia and the rest?’” The questions for Israel in this case would be, “are we also committing the same inhuman acts these nations have committed? Are we also guilty of the same human dignity violations?” Amos brings the element of shock to Israel by equating Israel’s socio-economic crimes with the foreign nations’ crimes against war prisoners, thereby exposing the hidden violence that Israel was committing against the innocent poor —the same violation of human rights and dignity as the nations.

Secondly, the OAN are employed here as a rhetoric tool to remind Israel that their failure to conform to the known standards of social justice has led them to the point of inevitable judgement that befell the other foreign nations. God is consistent in His dealings with injustice and Israel is not special but will suffer the same fate as the other nations. Amos, through the OAN, challenged Israel’s misconception of the covenant-election theology that Israel was special and immune to YHWH’s judgement. Fretheim (2013:116), from a creation theology perspective, argues that,

Amos’ OAN reflect the belief that knowledge regarding matters such as social justice is available to those outside Israel; all nations will be held accountable to such a created moral order. The predominant theme of the OAN as well as the oracle against Israel is one of judgement and justice bespeaks a word to Israel: God is consistent in the way in which God acts in the world. God’s word of judgement and concern for justice with respect to Israel is part and parcel of God’s ways with nations more generally.

## 4.4 Poverty as Violence in Amos 2:6-8

### 4.4.1 Translation of Amos 2:6-8

English Translation	Hebrew Text
6) “Thus, says the Lord, for three crimes of Israel to four, I will not turn back because they sell the righteous for silver and the	כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה עַל־שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעַי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל־אַרְבָּעָה <sup>14</sup> לֹא אָשִׁיבֶנּוּ עַל־מִכְרָם בַּכֶּסֶף <sup>15</sup> צְדִיק וְאֶבְיוֹן בְּעִבּוֹר נַעֲלִים:

<sup>14</sup> Prepositional phrase with על is used causally

needy for a pair of sandals	
7) They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and <sup>17</sup> they deny justice to the oppressed. A man and his father, use the same girl to profane my holy name.	הַשְׂאֵפִים עַל-עַפְר־אֲרֶץ בְּרֹאשׁ דְּלִים וַיִּדְרֹדוּ עַנְוִים יָטוּ וְאִישׁ וְאָבִיו יִלְכוּ אֶל-הַנְּעֻרָה לְמַעַן סַלֵּל אֶת-שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי:
8) And they lie down beside every altar on the garments taken in pledge, and they drink wine taken as fines in the house of their god.	וְעַל-בְּגָדִים חֲבֵלִים יָטוּ אֶצֶל כָּל-מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּין עֲנוּשִׁים יִשְׁתּוּ בַּיִת אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

#### 4.4.2 Micro structure of Amos 2:6-8

Amos 2:6-8 is a sub-unit of the oracle against Israel (2:6-16) and it is also a sub-unit under the sub-unit of the OAN. In addition, 2:6-8 can be considered an independent literary unit or complete rhetorical unit as it focuses on specific sins of Israel, in this case, social injustice against the innocent, the weak and the poor. However, the list of Israel's transgressions is much longer than in the other oracles against the foreign nations. Amos 2:6-8 can therefore be sub-divided into smaller internal units, that is:

2:6a Introduction that is marked by the prophetic formula, “thus says the Lord”

2:6b the indictment that is introduced by the Numeric Formula

2:6b-8 a list of Israel's sins

A closer look at the unit of 2:6-8 shows that Amos rhetorically structured this text to convey his message to his audience. Amos carefully arranged his message in a way that would appeal to his audience by starting his oracle with the prophetic formula that draws the attention of the hearers, as Amos' message is credited to YHWH. After getting the attention of his

<sup>15</sup> The preposition **בְּ** often marks the price of something or could express the cause or reason for something and in this case, it marks the little price for which the poor were being sold into slavery after they failed to pay their debts.

<sup>16</sup> The Qal Infinitive Construct of **מָכַר** and preposition **עַל** are used causally.

<sup>17</sup> This sentence is rather ambiguous as it literally reads, “the ones who trample on the dust of the earth at the heads of the poor”. Further discussion of this accusation is done in the exegesis part of the accusation. However, since the discussion argues that Amos is using this as a metaphor hyperbolically to bring out the hidden violence in the text, this sentence is then understood in way it has been translated here.

readers, Amos then indicts Israel for her sins, which would result in YHWH not relenting on his punishment and then finally lists the sins of which Israel is guilty. Mamahit and Venter (2010:3-4) argues that,

[In] 2:6a the prophetic formula is considered as the introduction (exordium), the numeric formula indicates the statement (narration) of the transgressions, the conclusion (peroration) that is marked by the phrase “I will not revoke the punishment” and connoting the result of the indictment, then the body of the speech (probatio) which elaborates the crimes Israel is guilty of.

#### **4.4.3 Genre of Amos 2:6-8**

As noted above, 2:6-8 belongs to the rhetorical unit of 2:6-16, which is an oracle against Israel. The implication of this notion is that since 2:6-8 is part of an oracle, it should be approached as the indictment part of the oracle against Israel. The use of the OAN is not unique to Amos, as other prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah also employed this genre as a rhetorical tool in their messages. The oracles in Amos seem to follow an organized structure, an introduction that starts with the prophetic formula “thus says the Lord,” then a numeric formula, “for three transgressions of... and for four I will not revoke the punishment because...” In addition to the introductory prophetic formula and the numeric formula, a list of the crimes of each nation follows and then the pronouncement of judgement.

According to Hayes (1968:91), “an oracle against a nation is generally composed of stipulations (in the treaty), penalties and curses and delivered by a prophet as part of the royal-court procedure.” The oracle against Israel fits very well the description of an oracle against a nation. Interestingly, the crimes that Israel is being accused of are crimes that are in tandem with the violation of the covenant Israel has with YHWH. Thus, Amos announced the punishment against Israel for her crimes against the weak and innocent poor.

##### **i. Amos 2:6a: Introduction (*Exordium*)**

In rhetoric discourse, the exordium is the introduction or beginning of a discourse that prepares the audience for what follows. The exordium therefore appeals to the audience or it draws the attention of the audience to listen to what the speaker wants to say. Amos began the oracle against Israel by employing what is known as the prophetic formula, “thus says the Lord” to give divine credibility to his message and get the attention of his audience. Although there is debate as to whether the phrase can be referred to as a prophetic formula or a messenger speech, there seems to be agreement amongst scholars that the prophetic formula gives divine credibility to the message. In addition, the prophetic formula or the messenger

speech also lends authority to the message the speaker conveys after the formula. The reason Amos used the prophetic formula was to convince his audience that what he was about to say to them came from YHWH and to get their attention. In this regard, Mamahit and Venter (2010:1) note that, “Rhetorical analysis is also concerned with the way in which the author persuades his audience, for example the mode and manner that he uses to convince or simply ‘the proofs’ of a speech or writing, called invention.”

**ii. 2 Amos 2:6b: The statement (*Narratio*)**

In rhetorical discourse, a *narratio* is an argument or a statement that a speaker makes which provides a background to the *probatio* (the body of the speech) that the speaker makes. In other words, a *narratio* explains or states the nature of the matter in question, in this case, the crimes by Israel. One can therefore argue that in this particular text, the numeric formula indicates the statement (*narratio*) of the transgressions of which Israel is guilty. The phrase therefore sets the tone for the list of crimes for which YHWH would indict Israel. Mamahit and Venter (2010:5) note that, “Amos uses the phrase “for three transgressions of Israel, even four” as a statement of the case or as *narratio*, purposely setting the direction in which the crimes will be named.” After the statement, Amos now provides proof or evidence of the crimes that they have committed and by listing specifically the social and cultic crimes of which Israel is guilty.

**iii. Amos 2:6b: The conclusion (*Peroratio*)**

The conclusion in rhetorical discourse sums up the whole argument that the speaker makes in his or her speech and normally makes an appeal to the conscience of the audience so that they will be persuaded or prompted to act. Mamahit and Venter (2010:4) agree that, “the phrase “I will not revoke my punishment” serves as the conclusion (*peroratio*) of this rhetorical discourse.” YHWH would not turn back on his decision to punish Israel and judgement is inevitable. The punishment is inevitable because of the crimes that Amos listed in 6c-8. Amos therefore uses the phrase “I will not revoke punishment” as a conclusion of the crimes of which Israel is accused. One could rephrase this as, “because of the following crimes, I will not revoke punishment.” One may argue further that Amos uses this phrase to make Israel know that there are consequences for the socio-economic crimes.

**iv. Amos 2:6b-8: Body of the Speech (*Probatio*)**

As part of the rhetorical discourse, a *probatio* expands or explains the *narratio* by giving proof, evidence or facts that support the speaker’s argument or statement. To support his bold

and shocking statement about the guilt of Israel and the impending punishment, Amos specifically lists Israel's crimes. So far in this chapter, it has been argued that Amos used the oracle against the nations as a rhetorical tool to build a climax, which is the accusation against Israel. Further, in the oracles against the nations, the transgressions the nations are accused of include the violation of the dignity of the helpless prisoners of war. By using the oracles against the nations, Amos was preparing his audience for a shocking list of accusations. The prophet appealed to the moral emotions of his audience to pass judgement on their neighbours only to hear that they were guilty of far worse acts than those of their neighbours. The implication of this then is that for Amos, the transgressions of Israel are acts of violence against their own fellow people. The big question then is what kind of violence was Israel being accused of? It is therefore crucial to pay attention to the list of accusations in 2:6-8 as well as to the words and rhetorical tools that Amos used to deliver the message to his audience. The transgressions of Israel in 2:6-8 include selling the needy, trampling on the poor, turning away the afflicted, engaging in sexual exploitation, keeping garments taken as pledges and drinking wine taken as fines.

*a) Selling the righteous needy (Amos 2:6b)*

The first allegation that the prophet levels against the people of Israel is that they sell the righteous needy for silver and a pair of sandals. Those who are accused of selling the poor are not mentioned by their name, but interestingly, the victims of the sale are designated specifically as the righteous and the needy. The righteous are the direct object of the verb translated as selling and the needy are mentioned in parallel. According to Stuart (1987:316), the righteous and the needy are mentioned in parallel, not because they are strictly synonymous, but with the effect of associating them: "the righteous needy." It is possible that Amos' audience knew the people who were accused of selling the righteous needy, hence, the prophet did not mention them by name. In addition, it seems that by mentioning the righteous needy by name as the victims of the sale, Amos is more concerned about the plight of the poor within Israel's social structures. Amos shows this concern for the poor by describing them as the righteous needy. The Hebrew word translated as righteous literally means "the innocent or guiltless party." For Amos to use the two words righteous and needy together means that the victims of the sale are weak and innocent and they are vulnerable to the oppression and exploitation of the powerful.

Many scholars consider the Hebrew text about selling the righteous needy for silver and a pair of sandals to be obscure and unclear. The Hebrew verb used here and translated as selling is a *qal* infinitive used with the preposition ‘for,’ which is used causally. The punishment came about because they were selling the needy. The preposition ‘for’ in Hebrew often marks the price of something and it could also express the cause or reason for something. This opens up the phrase for two possible interpretations. Firstly, the preposition may be understood as marking the price, which would then mean that the righteous were being sold for silver and the pair of sandals denotes how little the amount the poor were being sold for. Secondly, the preposition may be understood as expressing cause or reason, which then means that the poor were being sold for profit or for money. The two possible meanings of this accusation open the text to three possible interpretations that are discussed below.

Firstly, some scholars have argued that the selling of the poor is linked to bribery in the courts, where the judges are accused of accepting bribes to deny the innocent and weak justice. Paul (1991:77), relating this accusation to bribery by some exegetes’ states that, “the judges are reproached for accepting bribes for silver from the guilty parties, resulting in the innocent being sold out. Justice has been perverted and the innocent become the victims of a distorted paid for verdict.” However, Rudolph rejects such an interpretation of the text based on how the verb *mcr* is used in the Hebrew Bible. He argues that, “there is a challenge in this interpretation as judges do not sell the accused and nowhere in the Bible is the verb *mcr* employed in the context of bribery.”

The second possible interpretation of this accusation is that, the righteous needy are sold into slavery for profit. This line of interpretation seems to insinuate that those who were innocent in the eyes of the law were being sold for profit despite being legally right. Simundson (2005:173) claims that, “Amos is condemning the selling of human beings into slavery for the purpose of making money or acquiring property. The victims are the righteous, those who are right in any legal dispute. What we have here is a miscarriage of justice.” However, the parallel “for a pair of sandals” obscures this line of interpretation. If the parallel is understood to mark price, the price of a pair of sandals would not make sense to anyone who wished to make a profit.

Can the parallel therefore be understood literally or metaphorically? The meaning of the parallel “for a pair of sandals” becomes very important to understanding this first accusation. The exact meaning of this parallel line is ambiguous, and considering that the value of a pair

of sandals is too little, this parallel line seems to create a challenge. Two important questions are posed by this parallel line. Are the poor being used as a source of income by the rich powerful elites? Or are their lives regarded as of no value? According to Sidmundson (2005:173),

“A pair of sandals” should not be read literally, as an indication that the wicked are so callous that they would send one into slavery for an insignificant piece of clothing. The phrase may actually be an idiom for the legal transfer of land, in which case it is property that the powerful are taking by unfair means.

The other possible interpretation of this first accusation is to understand the parallel line “for a pair of sandals” as a hyperbole that indicates the insane lower prices for which the poor were sold. The parallel line can also be understood to refer to the symbolic sandal transfer that sealed property exchanges in early times in Israel. Thus,

What Yahweh denounces through Amos is not benevolent slavery, but some kind of legal impression-indenture in which corrupt courts aided unethical rich by making available slave labour to them. Poor people who lost rigged civil or criminal court cases were fined heavily, unable to pay, they were then sold into slavery (Wolff 1971:288).

The court and the buyer profited, but the covenant was violated, justice was denied to the poor. Were the poor really, literally being sold for a pair of sandals? Tucker (1978:57) argues that,

Sirach 46:19 explicitly treat sandals as something of very little value. This should rule out the idea that this person was sold for the price of sandals; whatever his oppressor thought of him, would want to get as much money as possible.

The three possible interpretations of the first accusation throw light on this accusation. The aspect of bribery however does not suit the context as the judges did not do the selling. In addition, the understanding that the poor were sold into slavery for profit is defeated by the parallel, as the price of a pair of sandals is too little for greedy people. However, considering the context of this oracle against the nation of Israel, Amos used the OAN to build up the climax that shocks Israel and brings to the attention of Israel that she is equally guilty of the same human rights violations by the foreign nations; the third possible interpretation makes more sense. Therefore, one can conclude that the best solution is to assert that the poor are sold into slavery for a very small debt that they cannot pay, such as for the price of a pair of sandals. The poor are being sold into slavery for a small debt and the justice system is not fair to the cause of the poor, and this act deprives the innocent poor the potential to reach their full capacity. However, if Amos used the metaphor of sandals hyperbolically, then, one can

also conclude that Amos was trying to show his audience how extreme the selling of the poor was. One can ask then why the poor in Amos were unable to pay small debts.

In Chapter Two of this study, it is argued that poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. Poverty is also a state of deprivation and powerlessness, whereby the poor are exploited and denied participation in decision-making about matters that intimately affect them. The emphasis on powerlessness, deprivation, and exploitation means that we cannot talk of poverty without considering the issue of power as it is the main axis around which oppression and exploitation evolve. Amos' description of the poor as the "innocent" portrays the poor as victims who are at the mercy of the powerful fellow wealthy countrymen. In addition, it portrays the innocent poor as vulnerable and being exploited by the powerful wealthy elites.

According to Houston (2008:65),

The social context of Amos is that of a state with a relatively simple but stratified class structure, in which urbanization and the development of state institutions, with the enrichment of state officials, gave opportunity to the powerful to gain further power and wealth through the abuse of patronage, corrupt practices, and simple violence, exercised primarily against those whose poverty and loss of kinship network, again through urbanization, made them less able to resist exploitation.

Houston's brief description of the social context of Israel in Amos' time identifies key issues such as abuse of patronage, corruption, vulnerability which made the poor less capable of resisting exploitation and simple violence. Houston has already identified the predicament of the poor as their state of poverty. The text shows that the wealthy elite were in a position of power and how they exercised this power and used the structures to exploit and oppress the righteous needy should be investigated.

As noted in Chapter Two above, Carr and Sloan (2010:21) "distinguish among power to strive for wellness, power to oppress and power to resist oppression and strive for liberation." One can deduct from the first accusation that the powerful exercise their power in a negative way by oppressing the innocent poor and obstructing their capacity to fulfil their needs. The poor are hindered from reaching their full potential; therefore, they fail to pay small debts to the powerful who in turn sell them into slavery for a small amount, thereby, condemning them in a simple way to a life of poverty. What seems to be a normal system of patronage and debts is being abused and becomes harmful to the poor who are made to lose their dignity. The rights of the poor to justice are violated; the law cannot protect them even if they are

legally right. Structural violence thus appears to be normal to the victims but it deprives them of the opportunities to reach their full potential.

***b) Trampling on the poor (Amos 2:7a)***

After accusing the powerful of selling the poor for silver, Amos levels the second accusation against Israel, accusing the elite of trampling on the poor. In this second accusation, Amos again does not mention the perpetrators by name, but the victims are identified as the poor. Amos consistently employs this deliberate naming of the victims to show his concern for them and for their plight. The description of the victims as poor again puts them in a place of weakness and of vulnerability to the oppression and exploitation of the powerful and privileged people. Wolff (1977:166) argues that,

The Hebrew word translated “the poor” standing alone as a designation for one who is lowly, weak, and helpless appears nowhere else in the Old Testament with such frequency as it does in wisdom sayings. The antonym of the poor is rich, in three instances the injustices perpetrated against the poor is described as oppression or violation.

It is against this background that the prophet Amos indicted those whose actions trampled upon the head of the poor. The use of the word poor by Amos is therefore deliberate as he wants his audience to be aware that their oppression of the weak and the helpless is a violation of their dignity.

The understanding of the phrase “trampling on the poor” is ambiguous as it literally reads, “the ones who trample on the dust of the earth at the heads of the poor.” There is debate amongst scholars as to how this phrase should be understood. In its literal reading, the phrase does not make any sense but that this is an accusation against those who oppress the poor is clear. The meaning of this second accusation against Israel by Amos hinges on how the phrase “trampling on the poor” is understood. Can the trampling be taken literally or as a metaphor? The phrase is open to two possible interpretations; literal and metaphorical. Firstly, the understanding of the phrase in its literal sense denotes direct physical violence against the weak. The implication of a literal understanding of the phrase is that the elite were physically abusing the poor by trampling their heads on the ground. However, considering the context of 2:6-8 that the accusations are socio-economically related, a literal understanding of trampling seems to be too exaggerated.

Secondly, the phrase can be understood metaphorically, meaning that the phrase implies that the treatment of the poor by the powerful elite carries a violent connotation. The implication

of a metaphorical understanding of the phrase “trampling” is that it rules out direct physical violence, but introduces the notion of indirect violence into this accusation. It has been noted above that the Hebrew word for poor in this verse denotes people who are vulnerable to oppression or violation and this may suggest that the word “trampling” amplifies the idea of oppression or violation of the poor. Mahamati and Venter (2010:6) explain that:

The word trampling here connotes that the Israelites “step upon the heads of the poor as though they are stepping on the ground, this means that they treat the underprivileged with contempt and abuse. The Israelites are therefore charged for their mistreatment of the poor and the weak by exploiting them socio-economically.

If the poor are being treated with contempt, it means that the rich and powerful elite treated the poor as worthless and vile people and they abused them.

Trampling on the poor should therefore be understood as a metaphor used hyperbolically and rhetorically to convey the idea of structural violence which the powerful directed at the poor. Trampling is an act of violence and by using this metaphor hyperbolically, Amos was trying to draw the attention of his audience to their acts of violence which appear to be normal to both the powerful and the victims. Furthermore, since the oracle against Israel is the climax and it is supposed to convey the element of surprise and shock to his audience, the metaphor of trampling on the poor shocks his audience as they now realise that their extreme actions are actually acts of violence. In addition, by rhetorically using the metaphor, Amos highlights the hidden acts of violence against the poor. Thus,

The rich powerful elite were accused of trampling on the poor *saap*, the hyperbole *saap* literary means that the rich were exploiting the poor, with the result that increasingly needy people were apparently dying of starvation, selling themselves into slavery, suffering ill health and other maladies of malnourishment and lack of proper clothing and shelter (Stuart 1987:383-384).

The social, legal and economic structures in the Israelite society were a stumbling block to the poor’s quest to attain their full potential. The structures encouraged the rich and powerful elite to oppress and exploit the poor, driving them into huge debts. The poor become vulnerable, lose their dignity and are sold into slavery. The social structures also forced the poor to become dependent on the few powerful elites as they could no longer produce enough food for themselves. Therefore, starvation, malnourishment and ill-health, which were avoidable, became reality. Fretheim (2013:125) asserts that “the rich and powerful foster social economic system that favours their pocketbooks but grinds the poor to the ground, pushing them into gutters of life like so much trash.” The poor were condemned into a life of

poverty by the structures of the society that favoured the rich and powerful elites. In other words, the structures denied the poor the right to land, food, good health, shelter and clothing.

As noted above, trampling on the poor meant that the powerful elite treated the weak, innocent and voiceless poor people with contempt and abuse. The Israelites mistreated the poor and the weak by exploiting them socio-economically. Galtung (1990:292) argues that,

The archetypal violent structure has exploitation as a centre-piece. This simply means that some, the top dogs, get much more out of the interaction in the structure than others, the underdogs. There is 'unequal exchange', a euphemism. The underdogs may in fact be so disadvantaged that they die (starve, waste away from diseases) from it or they may be left in a permanent, unwanted state of misery, usually including malnutrition and illness.

The first allegation has already shown that the powerful prevented the innocent poor from reaching their full potential whereas the second allegation points out exploitation of the weak and poor people by the wealthy. In addition, the weak are treated with contempt, their dignity was violated and they were kept in a state of misery, starvation, and malnourishment, being prone to diseases.

*c) Turning aside the needy (Amos 2: 7a)*

The third accusation against Israel is that the powerful do not only trample on the head of the poor, they also turn aside the way of the needy. Again, the meaning of this phrase is obscure. Can it be understood literally or is Amos continuing with his rhetorical style of using metaphors and hyperboles to drive home his message of violence against the poor? Literally, this may mean that the members of the arrogant governing elite brush the poor aside as they pass them (Houston 2008:13). However, considering the context and previous charges against Israel, which expose the hidden violence, it will not make any sense therefore to point to the direct visible violence out of nowhere. Although the literal meaning connotes that the elite looked down on the person of the poor and physically push them aside, the literal meaning is difficult to reconcile with the preceding charges of the violation of the rights and dignity of the poor.

The phrase “turning aside the needy” can therefore be understood as a metaphor that Amos used to expose the hidden violence against the poor who were obstructed by the powerful elites. Interestingly, in his allegations against the elites, Amos has consistently identified the victims with names that denote their condition and position of vulnerability. The Hebrew word that is translated “the needy” in this text refers to a person who is in dire need of help.

Jeremias (1998:36) shows that “the term, the needy, occurring especially in the Psalm, quite frequently implies a claim for help. Are desperate persons robbed of their only means of defending themselves against injustices that they may have suffered?”

Amos seems to use the word in a similar manner especially in the two accusations about selling the innocent righteous and the trampling of the poor. The people being sold into slavery and who were denied of their rights to food, land and good health found themselves in a miserable situation and in need of help, possibly from the justice system. Stuart (1987:317) argues that, “the turning aside of the road, in Exodus 23:6 and Isaiah 29:21, refers to hindering access or progress.” If the same phrase is used in the two texts in Exodus and Isaiah, it is highly likely that Amos used it with the same purpose and meaning. The vulnerable, oppressed and exploited poor people’s access to the legal system and to socio-economic opportunities and the right to attain their full potential in life is being strategically and structurally denied by the rich and powerful elites.

It has been noted above that poverty is a state of deprivation and powerlessness, whereby the poor are deliberately and systematically denied their right to participate in decision-making in matters that concern them. The powerless and vulnerable poor people are obstructed from obtaining justice at the courts, as the justice system favours the wealthy and perpetuates the exploitation of the poor. The right of the poor to a fair trial and justice is violated; meaning that the last line of defence for the poor is no longer there. Paul (1991:81) remarks that “the figurative expresses the idea that the underprivileged class is bullied and oppressed by the wealthy, which deprive and block them from obtaining the privileges and prerogatives to which they are naturally entitled.” There is a deliberate and structural denial of the privileges and rights of the poor by the elites and it is this violation of the fundamental rights that Amos used the figurative expression, “turning aside the needy,” to foreground in this text.

#### *d) Abuse of young women (Amos 2:7b)*

In this fourth accusation, Amos accused a father and the son of going in to the same girl. The meaning of the phrase “going in” does not pose a challenge to the understanding of this text as the phrase has sexual connotations. Therefore, Amos accused a father and his son of having sexual intercourse with the same girl. However, the character of the girl and the result of this immoral act which profanes the holy name of YHWH present a challenge to the interpretation of this act. Was Amos accusing Israel of cultic prostitution or the abuse of innocent and defenceless young women? Mamahiti and Venter (2011:7) argue that, “the key

to understanding this phrase is the word הַנְּעִמָּה which literary means “young woman.” The Hebrew word is open to several interpretations, for example, a prostitute who has nothing to do or no link with any cult. Therefore, understanding the meaning of “young woman” provides a key to whether Amos is accusing Israel of cultic prostitution or the violation of young women?

Some scholars have argued that this accusation is cult related, as Israel was profaning the name of YHWH via the immoral act of cultic prostitution that took place in cultic places (cf. Nogalski 2011:285). Andersen and Freedman (1989:318) argue that the verb “walk” used in v.7b suggests a religious pilgrimage. In religious pilgrimages, possibly to Bethel, such immoral acts in which a father and son have intercourse with a cult prostitute were not uncommon. The understanding of this accusation as cultic prostitution seems to fit nicely with v.8 which castigates the profanation of cultic places. However, this interpretation of the term “young woman” as a cultic prostitute poses a challenge, because even though the term carries the connotation of prostitute, it has no link to any form of cult. In addition, the woman involved in this accusation is not referred to as a cult prostitute but simply as a young woman. The absence of the specific word for cult prostitute in this text and the use of young woman in this text rules out the possibility that Amos was accusing Israel of cultic prostitution.

A further probe of the Hebrew word translated as young woman in this text provides a key to the interpretation of this accusation. The Hebrew word translated as “young woman” generally refers to a girl, a youth or a minor woman. If the accusation refers to a young minor girl, then, Amos was accusing a father and son of having sexual intercourse with a minor who could not defend herself against the two powerful men. Paul (1991:82-83) asserts that, “the female referred to in Amos is not a harlot or slave, but just a young woman who belongs the same category as the righteous poor previously mentioned, just one more member of the defenceless and exploited human beings in Northern Israel.” This notion by Paul reinforces the idea that the accusation is not cult-related but refers to the violation of the dignity of young and defenceless women.

Amos consistently shows his concern for the poor as he again used terms that denote the vulnerable position of the victims of social injustice in the society. Simundson (2005:173) affirms that,

Amos’ concern for the weak and defenceless suggests that here he is referring to the violation of the rights and dignity of a defenceless girl, a person who is without power to resist the sexual advances of her master or other members of the family. At any rate, for a father and

son to have sexual relationship with the same woman, no matter who she is, would be a very distasteful, ugly act of promiscuity and would not be acceptable in the society or eyes of God.

The understanding of the phrase as the exploitation and violation of a defenceless and weak young girl by both father and son is consistent with the previous accusation against Israel in this pericope, in which Israel is accused of violating the rights and dignity of the righteous poor.

*e) Exploitation of the destitute for pleasure (Amos 2: 8)*

The fifth accusation Amos levelled against Israel in this oracle is that the rich were exploiting the helpless and destitute poor for pleasure. Many scholars divide this accusation into two namely, seizing of the poor's garments taken in pledge and misuse of the wine fines of the poor. However, in this study, I will take this accusation as one, the exploitation of the destitute for the rich's pleasure, because the two allegations focus on the lifestyle of the rich at the expense of the weak, righteous and defenceless poor people. Jeremias (1998:37) argues that, "in this accusation Amos focuses on the ruthless treatment of the indebted." The indebted innocent poor were ruthlessly treated by the rich powerful elites and used to fund their pleasures in cultic places.

*f) Seizing cloaks of the poor (Amos 2:8a)*

The first act of ruthless treatment of the poor that funded the pleasure of the rich is the seizing of the cloak of the indebted poor people which the rich used for reclining in sanctuaries. The Hebrew word translated as spread out is in the *hiphil* and is to be interpreted as a reflexive. The implication of the *hiphil* reflexive translation is that "the rich powerful elite stretched themselves out." The preposition  $\text{עַל}$  demonstrates that it was not the garments that were being spread out, but the powerful elites were stretching themselves on these garments. Amos' concern is that the exploitation and oppression of the innocent poor was also happening at the cultic shrines and the elites do not seem to care that their selfish and exploitative behaviour violated the rights and dignity of the innocent poor. The ruthless treatment of the indebted poor by the rich elite seems to have been widespread and continuous, as Stuart (1987:86) has stated:

Amos by stating that the action takes place by every altar and by expressing this offense by the use of the imperfect verbs in both stiches clearly indicates that the taking of basic necessities for reclining and feasting was extremely widespread at this time, thereby poignantly emphasizing how abhorrent their action was.

The powerful elites, having condemned the innocent into debts, further seized the cloaks of the poor who failed to pay or honour their debt obligations. The Hebrew verb translated “take” seems to suggest that Amos was concerned with the manner in which the cloaks were taken as it insinuates that it was a violent action. Paul (1991:85) states that,

Several studies have clearly shown that both in juridical context (Exod 22:25, Deut 24:6, 17) and in wisdom literature (Prov 13:13, 20:16, 27:13, Job 24:9) the verb *habal* applies to distraint (seizure of property – that take place only when the loan falls due and the debt is defaulted).

The powerful elites violently seized the cloaks of the poor, leaving them with nothing to cover themselves with, thus violating their dignity.

Amos was concerned not only about the cloaks being used for reclining, but also about the violation of the law, as the cloaks were taken for more than one day thereby exposing the poor to the cold of the night. In Exodus 22:26, the law codes stipulated that the cloak of a poor man or widow should not be taken as a pledge overnight. Amos was concerned that this law was being violated by the elites who seized the cloaks and used them overnight for reclining. Cloaks were seized when a person failed to pay or honour a debt in time and the creditor seized whatever he or she wanted from the debtor. According to Wolff (1977:169), when Amos speaks of garments taken in pledge, he refers “to the items which, in the case of the widow, may not be taken at all, and in any case may be kept overnight.” The powerful elites reclined on the cloaks of the poor at the expense of the dignity of the poor. The rich did not care for the dignity or welfare of the poor; hence, they took their cloaks for more than the stipulated time and used them for the pleasurable act of reclining.

Chapter Two of this study cited the 1998 United Nations definition of poverty as the structural and systematic denial of access to equal opportunities and access to resources. Thus, the poor are driven into debts that they cannot service, leaving them in a position of vulnerability and susceptibility to the ruthless actions of the powerful elites, who violate their dignity by taking their cloaks which are the only items they have to preserve their dignity. In light of the above, one can argue that for Amos, poverty is violence against the poor.

*g) Abuse of wine fines for pleasure (Amos 2:8b)*

The prophet goes to the second part of the accusation, accusing the wealthy elites of indulging in wine paid for by temple taxation. The powerful elites used the wine that was

brought into the temple as fines for their own pleasure. It is most likely that these fines were paid by the poor. According to Paul (1991:86),

The expression עֲנוּשִׁים נִיִּין appears only here. The root נוֹשׂ refers in the Bible to monetary fines and indemnity. It is preferable to view עֲנוּשִׁים as a passive participle, paralleling the previous מְבַלְלִים, and to translate “wine obtained by mulcting,” that is wine bought with money received from exacting fines from the poor.

Amos does not question the legality of the system of fines, but he accuses the rich of deliberately exacting fines from the poor to fund their indulgence. Jeremias (1998:38) states that,

Just as little does Amos in verse 8b attack the collection of fines (*sic*) as such, as provided by law especially in the case of violence against women as compensation for damages (Exod 21:22, Deut 22:19). Here too, he is not discussing the appropriateness of the compensatory payments- as one might conclude the presence of the particular severity from the analogy with verse 8a- but instead puts emphasis on the purpose and goal of such coercive measures, namely to enhance one’s own revelry and drinking”

The poor were being coerced to pay these heavy fines, which were not used for the usual purposes but instead to fund the luxurious and immoral lifestyles of the wealthy elites who show no compassion for the poor.

The accusation is further identified with a location, in this case, “the House of their God.” The house of their God was not to be used as a shrine to some pagan religion, some god other than the Lord, God of Israel. The elites who misused the wine fines in the temple probably did not see anything wrong with their actions. In the discussion of the socio-religious context of Amos, it was noted that Israel had some theological misconceptions of the covenant-election theology. Therefore, the elites who misused the wine fine in the temple probably thought they were being faithful to YHWH. According to Simundson (2005:175),

The guilty might be convinced that they are faithful to one true God, but their behaviour implies a perversion of their perception of God and what God expects from them.” This paints a picture a people who believe or appeal to their relationship with God to legitimise what they are doing. According to Galtung (1990:291), by cultural violence we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language, art, empirical science and formal science that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.

The wealthy elites in Amos used the covenant and special relationship with God to legitimize the exploitation and oppression of the poor.

## 4.5 Poverty as Violence in Amos 5:7, 10-13

Earlier in the chapter, we acknowledged the difficulties related to the literary structure of the book of Amos. However, this study adopts Moeller's division of the book into eight (8) rhetoric units. In Moeller's outline, Amos 5:1-17 stands alone as a rhetoric unit and falls within three sections in 3:1-15, 4:1-13, 5:1-17, all of which are introduced by "hear this." Paul (1991:158) affirms that, "5:1-17 is a composite collection of independent short prophetic oracles that are structured according to an overall chiasmic pattern." Stuart (1987:344) also views 5:1-17 as an independent rhetoric unit and argues that, "there is every reason to consider 5:1-17 as a unit as it begins with the announcement of a lament for the nation in verse 1 and ends with a graphic portrayal of a nation at mourning."

### 4.5.1 Macro structure of Amos 5:1-17

The unit of 5:1-17 therefore may be divided also into sub-units as follow:

Verses 1-3, a dirge

4-6, an oracle that consist of the twice repeated call to "seek the Lord that you may live"

7, 10-13 that expounds on the iniquities of Israel emphasizing the absence of justice and righteousness

8-9, Short hymn of praise

14-15, Exhortation on seeking the Lord

16-17, a dirge

Dorsey (1992:281), however, sub-divides this rhetorical unit into six parts and in a chiasmic form,

A (5:1-3) Mourning over Israel

B (5:4-6) Exhortation to seek YHWH and live

C (5:7) Injustices of some in Israel

D (5:8) the power of YHWH in nature

C (5:10-13) Injustices in Israel

B (5:14-15) Exhortation to seek YHWH and live

## A (5:16-17) Mourning in Israel

In this pericope, Amos employs a chiasmic pattern as a rhetorical tool to put the judgement of Israel on the spotlight. The chiasmic pattern does not only repeat the major issues in the Israelite society, but it also develops these ideas. Further, that Amos uses the chiasmic form here as a rhetorical tool to advance his argument that the society and justice system have been perverted and judgement is inevitable. According to Houston (2008:22),

This rhetorical unit integrates in a remarkable way the proclamation of death in the A and C elements with exhortations carrying conditional promises of life in the B ones. It is now absolutely clear that this is deliberate and not just the accidental effect of a jumble of disparate material.

## 4.5.2 Hebrew text and translation of Amos 5:7, 10-13

English Translation	Hebrew Text
7) Those who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground	הַהֹפְכִים לְלַעֲנָה, מִשְׁפָּט; וְצִדְקָה, לְאָרֶץ הַנְּיָחוּ.
10) In the gates, they hate the one who reproves and the one who tells the truth, they despise.	שָׂנְאוּ בַשַּׁעַר מוֹכִיחַ וְדַבֵּר תְּמִים וְתִעְבוּ:
11) Therefore, because you trample on the poor and you forcibly take grain from them. You have built stone mansions, but you will not live in them. You have planted splendid vineyards, you will not drink their wine	לָכֵן יֵעַן בּוֹשְׁסֵכֶם <sup>18</sup> עַל-זֶל וּמִשְׁאֵת-בֵּר תִּקְחוּ מִמֶּנּוּ בָתֵּי גִזְיֹת בְּנִיתֶם וְלֹא-תִשְׁבוּ בָּם כַּרְמֵי-חֶמֶד נִטְעַתֶם וְלֹא תִשְׁתּוּ אֶת-יַיְנָם:
12) For I know how many are your crimes and how great your sins are. You oppress the righteous, taking bribes, turn aside the poor	כִּי יָדַעְתִּי רַבִּים פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם וְעֲצָמִים חַטָּאתֵיכֶם צָרְרִי צְדִיק לְקַחֵי כֶּפֶר וְאֶבְיוֹנִים בַּשַּׁעַר הִטּוּ:

<sup>18</sup> The understanding of this word has been subject to debate. Some scholars view it as a Poel Infinitive Construct of *bus* while some others like Paul (1991:173) suggest that it should here be pointed as a cognate of the Akkadian *sabasu sibsas*, to extract a grain tax, and be pointed as a Qal infinitive construct. Here, however, it is taken as the Poel Infinitive Construct, an accusation that the poor are being trampled on by the exaction of exorbitant grain tax.

in the gate	
13) Therefore, the prudent man keep quite is in this time, for this time is evil	לָכֵן הַמְשֻׁקֵּל בְּעֵת הַהִיא יִלָּם כִּי עֵת רָעָה הִיא:

#### 4.5.3 Micro structure of Amos 5:10-13

The sub-unit 5:10-13 can further be divided into smaller units as follow:

- 5:10- Israel rejects legal justice
- 5:11- Riches of oppression will not be enjoyed
- 5:12- God knows the oppressors
- 5:13- Oppression of the poor leads to disaster

However, Wolff (1977:233) argues that verse 7 and verse 10 belong together and that we are probably dealing with a woe oracle which even in the limited extent represented here can certainly be an independent rhetorical unit. In addition, Simundson (2005:195) also concurs with Wolff that verses 7 and 10-13 give a good summary of Amos' critique of all that was wrong in Israel's society. One can deduce that the theme of social injustice provides the link between verse 7 and 10:13. Jeremias (1998:92) also echoes the same sentiments but goes a bit further to state that, "the perversion of justice about which verse 7 had spoken in a fundamental metaphorical fashion, depicted in verse 10 and 12 through concrete examples taken from the administration of justice in the city gate." However, one interesting question to ask is, why is verse 7 separated from the unit of verses 10-13? Jeremias (1998:90) argues that verses 10-12 directly followed verse 7 in the earlier book of Amos. Although there it is still difficult to understand the authenticity and positioning of verse 7, one cannot ignore the notion that it provides an insight into the interpretation of verses 10-13.

Verse 7 presents a setting for understanding verses 10-13. From a rhetorical analysis perspective, this rhetorical unit of 5, 7, 10-13 can be sub-divided as follows.

Verse 7a as the *exordium*: Although this woe oracle does not start with the usual 'alas' that characterizes woe oracles in the Hebrew Bible, the introductory participial clause shows that it is a woe oracle. The rest of verse 7 serves as the *narratio* and 10-13 serves as the *probatio* that provides proof that Israel has perverted the justice. Finally, verse 13 serves as the *peroratio* (conclusion) of this woe oracle.

#### 4.5.4 Genre of Amos 5:7, 10-13

Amos 5:1 begins this rhetorical unit with a dirge, mourning the fall of Israel in advance. The whole rhetorical unit is a woe oracle which means that the demarcated text for this study, Amos 5:7, 10-13 is part of a woe oracle. Verses 7 and 10 are connected by the theme of perversion of justice and this connection shows that we are dealing with an independent rhetorical unit. The pericope of 5:7, 10-13 expounds on the iniquities of Israel, placing emphasis on the perversion of justice, and according to Eidevall (2018:55), “the introductory participial clause, “they who turn justice into wormwood” looks like a continuation of a woe exclamation.” Although in 5:1, there is the absence of the usual ‘alas’ that begins a woe oracle, 5:1-17 is considered a *qinah* because of the participial clause. A funeral song (*qinah*) was a song of grief, mourning the death of a person in Israel and it was the main part of the funeral. The song therefore sets the tone for 5:7, 10-13 which provides the reasons for the mourning, that is, death of the justice system.

##### i. *Exordium* (Amos 5:7)

Amos already levelled six allegations against Israel in Amos 2:6-8 all of which have to do with the oppression and exploitation of the poor and the violation of their rights and dignity by the powerful elite. Amos is consistent in his oracles which portray the innocent poor as being at the mercy of their arrogant and powerful wealthy countrymen. In the discussion of 2:6-8, we have noted that the rich trampled on the poor, violating their rights and dignity. The justice system which was the last line of defence for the poor was corrupted while the poor were plunged into an abyss of poverty. Amos is consistent with his concern for the innocent poor as he again levels allegations against Israel which have to do with social injustice; but this time, the allegations are four. However as noted above, one cannot focus on verses 10-13 while ignoring verse 7 which serves as the main allegation against Israel, that is, the perversion of the justice system. Verses 10-13 then confirms that the justice system has been perverted.

It has been noted above that an exordium is the beginning of a rhetorical discourse that attempts to draw the audience’s attention to what the speaker, in this case, Amos wishes to relay to them. However, despite the absence of the usual ‘alas’ in this woe oracle, the beginning of this verse with a participial clause is proof that it a woe oracle. Wolff (1977:241), argues that, “the introductory elements of 5:7 probably repeat the chief word of the funerary lament.”

## ii. *Narratio* perversion of justice (Amos 5:7)

Again, in rhetorical discourse a *narratio* is an argument or a statement that a speaker makes that serves as the backbone for the *probatio*. The accusation against Israel states that justice has been perverted and the poor people's rights are being violated by the powerful elites. Amos is consistent with his use of metaphors as a rhetoric tool to drive home his message. In this pericope, Amos bemoans the perversion of justice in Israel. Justice has been turned into wormwood and righteousness is cast down to the earth. The details of how the justice system was turned into wormwood and righteousness cast to the earth are found in verses 10-13.

Amos accuses Israel of perverting justice, making it bitter like wormwood. According to Wolff (1977:245), "by justice Amos means that order which establishes and preserves peace under the law; this order is realized in practice through the legal decisions made at the gate, where matters of jurisdiction were settled." However, the justice system which is supposed to be the last line of defence for the poor, has been turned upside down and is now a tool of impoverishing the weak and innocent poor. Wormwood is a bitter plant with a repulsive taste and it is this repulsive taste that it is associated with poison though the plant is not poisonous. The plant's association with poison connects this allegation with 6:12 which accuses Israel of turning justice into a poisonous weed.

The justice system was supposed to provide freedom for the wronged and oppressed and be the last line of defence for the poor, but it has actually become the opposite, as it is now a tool for the oppression of the poor. The justice system was now a poisoned chalice from which the innocent, weak people were now drinking. Wolff (1977:246) argues that, "the legal order was supposed to be the medicinal herb which Yahweh had granted for the purpose of restoring those wronged and freeing those oppressed." Instead of being the herb that heals the victims of oppression and exploitation by protecting them, the justice system is now a poison that makes the body sick, meaning the justice system further compounded the woes of the poor by plunging them into an abyss of poverty.

The perversion of justice in Israel has a negative impact on the poor as they are condemned into a life of poverty; the justice system favours the oppressor and not the weak innocent righteous poor. Typical of Amos in the book and in the previous accusations, the victims of the perversion of justice are called the "righteous." The Hebrew word *tsadiq* (righteous) means someone who is declared legally right or innocent in a court. By referring to the victims of the perversion of justice as the innocent poor, Amos portrays the victims as

innocent people in the courts but who are being regarded as the opposite by the perverted justice system.

The use of the phrase “cast to the earth” has a violent connotation and the righteous are being brought down to earth forcibly by the evil doers who are the target of this woe. In other words, the perversion of justice has a destructive effect on the poor. According to Wolff (1977:246), “the phrase cast to the ground, is also used in Isaiah to refer to the destructive effects of flood waters.” For Amos, the way the justice system appropriated power was violent, like casting the poor on earth. In addition, if the phrase is being used in a destructive manner as in Isaiah, then it means that the perverted justice system was destroying the poor as it was a stumbling block that prevented the poor from accessing justice. Verse 7 therefore provides the setting for the acts of hidden violence mentioned in detail in 5:10-13.

### iii. *The Probatio (Body of the Speech)*

#### a) *Antagonism towards the honest people at the courts (Amos 5: 10)*

Amos accuses Israel of hating the person who reproves in the gate. The preposition *beit* is locative and the gates represent the law courts. The legal hearings in the Israelite justice system were heard at the gate of the city which was where justice was also administered by the elders. The identity of the person who is hated is not clear in verse 10. However, Garret (2008:150) claims that, “the *Hiphil* participle of *ykch* (to rebuke) is used substantively and not as a predicate here. This is a person who openly criticizes corrupt practices during court proceedings, a modern-day whistle blower.” If the person was indeed a whistle blower who openly criticized corrupt practices, the person was championing the cause of the innocent, weak people and he or she was persecuted for calling out corruption. Those who advocated the case of the poor against the rich were hated and abhorred.

The good qualities of reproving and telling the truth are hated and abhorred. At the gates, those who were entrusted with dispensing justice compromised and hated those with integrity who spoke the truth because they threatened their insatiable appetite for profits. This resonates well with the main allegation in verse 7 in which the righteous are allegedly cast to the earth. The poor are subdued strategically by the powerful elites who perverted the justice system. Andersen and Freedman (1989:499) offer insight into what went on at the gates which pertain to both justice and business, commercial as well as criminal proceedings. He shows that, “The transactions of buying and selling were supervised and certified by a

quorum of citizens of seniority and standing; and as men of property and prestige they would one day be the magistrate and the next day the merchant.”

In Chapter Two of this study, the definition of poverty by Lee (1999:4) shows that poverty results in serious physical and psychological harms. One can therefore argue that the legal system prevented the poor from having access to adequate opportunities to lead a meaningful life and that failure to get justice also may lead to mental and psychological harm. The rich commit structural violence against the innocent poor but the violence is embedded in the perverted justice system. For Amos, the place at which justice was to be found was no longer a place of justice and instead any voice of protest or the truth was met with hatred and abhorrence.

*b) Trampling on the poor (Amos 5:11)*

The position of this verse (5:11) has been subject to debate by many scholars. Some scholars have argued that the verse was not part of the original oracle but the work of a redactor and a later addition. Jeremias (1991:93) argues that,

Verse 11 is an insertion that once constituted an independent rhetorical unit, since it is introduced in this context rather circumstantially (therefore because) and also concludes with its own oracle of disaster in contrast to verses 7, 10, 12 and 13.

This assertion that the verse was a later addition and the work of a redactor seems to be based on the uniqueness of the verse. Although the verse appears to be unique, the charge in the verse does not move away from the effect of the perversion of the justice system in Israel. Even if the charge has changed, it remained part of the prophetic condemnation of the immoral and inhuman behaviour of the powerful elite. Jeremias (1998:93) argues that,

Rather than introducing a new theme, verse 11 positioned as it is between the verses addressing the bending of justice, intends to make it clear that such perversion of justice causes the entire social order to collapse, since the actions of the powerful are no longer subject to any functioning control.

One can therefore deduce that rhetorically the positioning and insertion verse 11 in this colon serve as a figurative reinforcement of the extent of the exploitation of the poor by the elite.

The perversion of the justice system and the hatred and abhorrence of those who defend the plight of the poor make way for the economic exploitation and oppression of the poor. The accusation that the prophet levels against Israel is that the poor are being trampled on, and it moves away from the first accusation which deals with the attitudes and actions of the elite,

that is, trampling on the poor and exacting taxes from them as well as building houses of hewn stones.

The exact meaning of the word translated as trampling or treading on the poor is a complex one and several propositions have been advanced towards the understanding of this word. The verb is assumed by some to be derived from the root *bus* or *bss* which means to trample down (cf. Isaiah 14:25, 63:6 and Psalm 60:14). Another proposal is that this is a conflate reading of the two different verbs *bus* and *ssh*, both meaning to plunder. However, verse 11 is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where *yaal* (because) immediately follows  $\text{יָאָל}$  and the verb  $\text{בִּישַׁבַּח}$  is often regarded as a *poel infinitive construct* of *bus*, “to trample” (Garret 2008:151). The word is probably a cognate of Akkadian *sabasu sibsa* (exact a grain tax or to extort taxes). A similar accusation of trampling on the poor was levelled against the rich by Amos in 2:7. In the discussion of the possible meaning of the word in 2:7, it was argued that the word “trampling” is a metaphor used hyperbolically by Amos to bring out the acts of hidden violence the powerful elite were committing against the innocent poor. A similar understanding of the phrase “trampling on the poor” is suggested here when one considers that Amos is continuing with the same context of perversion of the justice system and the exploitation and oppression of the poor.

How then is hidden violence perpetrated against the poor? Amos accuses the elite of exacting or extorting heavy taxes from the poor and the preposition *al* suggests that the taxes were coerced and a burden to the poor. In Mesopotamia, taxes were collected from the cultivated lands and harvests but it seems that the elite heavily taxed the poor to sustain their lavish life. According to Garret (2008:151-152), “officials of the royal government apparently taxed peasants exorbitantly and also skimmed off some for themselves.” It is this act of charging exorbitant taxes and the skimming that drove the poor into debt so that they sold themselves into slavery. This is considered a violent act hence the prophet describes it as trampling on the poor.

Structurally, the elite used the corrupted justice system to exact taxes from the poor, thereby, plunging the poor into more poverty. The heavy taxes were a huge burden to the poor. Again, Galtung’s (1969:170) definition of structural violence as an injury is worth revisiting here. Important aspects of structural violence that Galtung has highlighted in his definition show that injury that is caused by indirect violence is built into the social structures and manifests as inequality of power. Thus, in Amos, indirect violence is built into the trusted structure of

the courts which are however corrupt and create inequality of power, with the elites maintaining access to resources and legitimizing the exploitation of the poor. The justice system was being used to coerce taxes from the poor. Galtung further describes these structures as sinful social structures which are characterized by poverty and steep inequality. In this way, he brings the moral aspect of structural violence to the fore. It is therefore understandable that Amos castigates the corrupt courts and the elite for trampling on the poor while seeing their acts as sinful.

The perversion of the justice system and the payment of the bribes by the elite meant that they were no longer held accountable for their actions and were free to exploit the poor. In Carr and Sloan's understanding of power relationships, the people who have the privilege of power and resources could use their power in a negative or positive way towards the underprivileged. Those in the position of power who have access to and control of resources therefore use the power and privilege deliberately or structurally to deny the underprivileged access to resources. The elite in Amos have perverted the justice system and were now using the system to exact heavy taxes from the poor who could not get justice from courts. Rather, the exploitation of the poor is being legitimized by the corrupt courts, while the elite enjoyed the freedom to exploit the weak and the poor.

*c) Exacting grain taxes (Amos 5:11)*

This accusation of exacting grain taxes from the poor is not clear in the Hebrew text. Garret (2008:154) states that, "the verb take, receive is neutral, but its salient meaning is to obtain legitimately, as by purchase. It does not mean or even imply fraud or theft." The noun *masat* which means a gift or ration further complicates the understanding of this accusation. According to Koehler and Baumgartner (2001:640), the noun *masat* is used in Gen 43:34, 2 Sam 11:8 and Jeremiah 40:5 to refer to a gift that comes from a superior and is seen as a bounty. The meaning of this noun however does not fit into the context of Amos 5:11 and it is unclear how best one can understand this vague accusation.

Andersen and Freedman (1989:501) propose that,

This noun can be understood by round and elaborate explanation. Because the victims are poor, not workers deprived of a daily allowance, the powerful elite had the obligation towards the poor a hand-out that was supposed to preserve the dignity of the poor.

The implication of this understanding is that the powerful elite imposed a burden on the poor and coercively through the perverted justice system took the measure of grain that was

entitled to the poor. As discussed in the previous chapters, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. The poor here were deprived the opportunities to reach their potential and the little they had that could be used to preserve their dignity was being taken away from them in the form of imposed taxes. Again, the violation of the dignity of the innocent poor by the elite, who coercively took the very things that preserved the dignity of the poor, is a recurring theme in the book of Amos.

In 2:8, Amos accused the powerful of taking the cloaks that that were meant to preserve the dignity of the innocent poor and used them to recline as they enjoyed their luxurious life. In 5:11, Amos now accuses the powerful elite of doing the same with the grain that was extorted from the poor instead of their cloaks. The grain tax is another tax or duty imposed on the yeomen and paid in kind with grain (Garret 2009:152).

The taxes actually did more harm to the already heavily taxed and impoverished innocent, weak and poor people. Clearly, there is hidden violence in coercive actions. Using metaphors to express the hidden violence inherent in the heavy taxes exacted from the poor, Amos further accuses the elite of also exacting grain taxes from the poor. The more taxes that were exacted, the farther the already vulnerable and weak poor people were being driven into the pit of poverty. Jeremias (1998:93) observes that “the poor were burdened with excessive levies of natural produce that threatened their very existence.” The taxes were actually doing more harm to the already heavily taxed and impoverished innocent, weak and poor people.

Interestingly, in 2:6-8, Amos accused the powerful elite of driving the weak and innocent poor into debt, to the extent that the poor would sell themselves into slavery. If 2:6-8 is to be reconciled with the accusation in 5:11, it means that the misery of the indebted poor people was further compounded by the corruption of the justice system and the heavy taxes that were imposed on them. One may further argue that Amos consistently portrays a sorry picture of the state of poverty in which the innocent righteous poor find themselves. A picture of inequality is visible in the text, because of heavy taxes and a poor justice system that deprived the poor of the resources that are necessary for them to reach their potential. There is no equal distribution of resources and the prevailing environment does not favour the poor but the rich.

Amos does not end by just accusing the powerful elite of exploiting the poor and corrupting the justice system, he offers reasons why the powerful elite were exploiting the poor. The

powerful elite support their lavish lifestyle, building houses of hewn stones and splendid vineyards at the expense of the heavily indebted and impoverished poor. Again, Amos repeats the theme of the powerful elite exploiting the poor, and living lavishly at the expense of the weak and the poor. In 2:8, the powerful elite are accused of condemning the poor into massive debts, impoverishing them, taking their cloaks that are meant to preserve their dignity and using them for reclining.

The powerful elite sustain their lavish lifestyle by exploiting the poor. Amos describes the expensive assets of the powerful elite have—hewn houses and splendid vineyards which they acquired by exploiting the poor. According to Paul (1991:173) the underprivileged are made to finance the indulgence of the wealthy by paying taxes collected at harvest time. Houses in Israel were built with clay bricks that crumbled easily:

The method of building houses with hewn stones was perhaps learned from the Phoenicians, was used for the first time in Israel when Solomon built the temple and palace in Jerusalem. Splendid vineyards were desired for their location and layout that portrayed the vast land a person had (Andersen and Freedman 1989:500).

Amos could have simply accused the powerful elite of exploiting the poor to fund their lavish lifestyle, but he rhetorically describes the particular assets that the powerful acquire at the expense of the poor:

The building of hewn stone houses and the planting of vineyards are uniquely the undertakings which establish for a man a free and independent life, but the leading class of Amos' contemporaries are carrying out these ventures in a pretentious manner previously unknown (Wolff 1977:247).

For Amos, the elite did not care about the dignity and welfare of the poor, but focused on accumulating wealth and living a lavish lifestyle. Amos therefore accused the powerful elites of greed and violating the dignity of the poor.

After accusing the powerful elite of living lavishly at the expense of the poor by perverting the justice system, exploiting the poor, exacting taxes, and violating the dignity of the poor, Amos pronounces punishment on the powerful elite. Amos rhetorically employs what is known as a futility curse to pronounce punishment upon the powerful elite. A futility curse is a situation where someone else will gain the benefit of what they had hoped to use themselves (Simundson 2005:197-197). Stuart (1987:243) also notes that, “futility curses are found outside the Bible in ancient Near Eastern treaties. They describe a punishment for those who do not keep the stipulations of the treaty and are also found in the Bible, Deut

28:30, 38-40, and Micah 6:14-15.” The implication of this curse is that the powerful elite would not enjoy the fruits of their greed and cruelty; they would not live in the hewn stone houses they have built and would not drink the wine from the splendid vineyards they have acquired.

If the futility curse was used in the ancient Near East in the form a treaty, then, Amos here is referring to the covenant and because the elite have violated the covenant, punishment is inevitable. The law of Yahweh, which emphasizes fair treatment of everyone in the courts (Exod 23:1-3, 6-8), is no hindrance to those who see a chance to get rich at the expense of their neighbours (Nogalski 2011:243). The powerful elite are guilty of violating the covenant they had with Yahweh, and the futility curse brings reminds them that by exploiting the poor and violating the poor’s dignity, they are in breach of the covenant. Thus, the consequence of their greed and cruelty is that they would not enjoy the fruit of their labours.

*d) Persecution of the innocent (Amos 5:12)*

Amos 5:12 returns to the motif of perversion of justice in the gate that began in verse 11 and Israel is accused of persecuting the innocent. The verse has also been subjected to debate as it is unclear whether it is a later addition and work of a redactor or it was part of the original oracle. The verse takes us back to the motif of the perversion of justice in verse 10, and its link with verse 10 may probably be understood as further proof that justice is being perverted in the gate. The hatred and abhorrence of the one who reproves and speaks the truth in the gate paved way for the persecution of the innocent at the court. Paul (1991:174) argues that verse 12 should not be interpreted as a later addition or as a new oracle, but as an integral part of the prophet’s detailed description of the wealthy class against the defenceless population of northern Israel. Paul (1991:174) further shows that, “verse 12 should not be interpreted as a later addition or as a new oracle, but as an integral part of the prophet’s detailed description of the wealthy class against the defenceless population of northern Israel.”

The speaker in this verse is not clear whether it is YHWH or Amos who is speaking, but what is clear is that YHWH has knowledge of all the crimes that Israel is committing against the defenceless poor. However, Garret (2008:153) argues that, “the crimes of Israel are grammatically governed by *yadatii*, rhetorically implying that these crimes are undeniable by the virtue of being objects of divine knowledge and *kii* indicates that this is the justification for the afore mentioned punishment.” For Garret, Yahweh is the speaker in this verse. For

Stuart (1987:349), “Yahweh is surely the speaker here, and knows the corruption in the courts of Israel.”

If Yahweh is the speaker here, who then is being accused of these crimes of perverting the justice system? Verse 10 provides the context of the courts in the gate, and the elders of Israel, who had the responsibility of administering justice, had now become corrupt. Instead of rendering justice, they were persecuting the poor by taking bribes and subverting the cause of the needy. Verse 12 can be taken as one accusation of persecuting the innocent or it can be divided into three accusations of persecution of the innocent, taking of bribe and subversion of the cause of the needy. I support the position that this be taken as a single accusation, which is the persecution of the innocent, and that the actions of taking bribe and subversion of the cause of the needy only reinforce the persecution charge.

The verse begins with an emphatic preposition **כִּי** which indicates that this accusation of the persecution of the righteous is a justification of the futility curse in verse 11. The reason why those who have built house of hewn stones and planted lavish vineyards will not enjoy them is that they persecute the poor, by taking bribes and subverting the cause of the needy. Those who are tasked with the administration of justice take bribes and live lavishly at the expense of executing justice for the poor.

The victims of these unjust crimes are the **צַדִּיקִים**, the ones who are practicing righteousness, the people who are blameless before the courts. The innocent, blameless people who strive and practice righteousness were being treated with hostility by the corrupt elders. The word translated as afflict or persecute, **צָרַר**, is translated literally as “press hard” or “constrict,” and refers to the military adversary who surrounds his enemy. Therefore, the righteous man whose case is before the court is considered right. The righteous would approach the courts to have their cases of exploitation against the powerful elite, but the corrupt elders would constrict the poor and rule against them.

The elders of Israel had the task of administering justice in the gates, to determine which party was right but, instead, they were accused of persecuting the righteous. The elders and the jurists are accused of taking bribes. According to Paul (1991:174), “**כֶּסֶף** is not a bribe to overlook or disregard an offence, but rather a payment made for the purpose of erasing or wiping away guilt incurred by the offence.” The implication is that the bribery makes them to declare he innocent guilty or to dismiss their case as having no merit while the guilty party

gets a favourable judgement. The court is the last line of defence for the poor; when they are oppressed and exploited, they seek redress from the courts, but their oppressors also control the justice system by paying bribes. One observes the systematic oppression of the poor here; the rich financially oppress the poor by exacting taxes in a way that violates their dignity, and when the poor seek legal recourse, they are denied justice and a fair hearing.

The corrupt elders are not the only ones who are guilty of perverting justice here, the rich and powerful elites are also guilty of the same offence, as they oppress the poor and deny them justice by paying bribes to the elders. Stuart (1987:349) argues that,

The acceptance of bribes, thereby persecuting the righteous, was a direct covenant violation (Exod 23:1-8, Deut 16:18-20 and Mal 3:5). Amos places great emphasis on the court system of Israel that is supposed to be impartial yet scurrilously the opposite.

It is clear that the elders and the powerful elite are in breach of the covenant; hence, the pronouncement of punishment against them.

The elders of Israel in the court are also accused of persecuting the poor by undermining the cause of the needy in the gate. Amos used the same expression, “turning aside the poor,” in 2:7, but this time, he used the word ‘poor’ instead of ‘the afflicted.’ The word *avenim* translated as ‘the poor’ is derived from *abh* (the needy), and it often connotes financial poverty. Amos is consistent here about his concern for the poor whom he portrays as the victims of financial exploitation by the elite.

#### *e) Silence of men of integrity (Amos 5:13)*

The position of verse 13 has been debated by scholars. It is unclear whether it is part of the original accusations or a later addition and its relationship to 5:10-12 is also uncertain. According to Paul (1991:175), “verse 13 is generally interpreted as either a late wisdom or apocalyptic gloss or assumed to be misplaced in its present position.” Jeremias (1998:94) also argues that this verse is a later addition after the exile and that it came from the wisdom circles. There is therefore a general agreement that verse 13 is a later addition that is drawn from the wisdom tradition. The verse is attached to 5:10-12 by the particle *lch* (therefore), which could help to understand how this verse is linked to verses 10-12. Jeremias (1998:94) argues that, “the particle *lch* in Amos always introduces the actual verdict, an actual verdict. Therefore, if one is to take the article as introducing the actual verdict, then the implication is that silence of the prudent is part of the judgement.” According to Stuart (1987:349), “the particle *lch* introduces a curse, a general curse of fear, terror or horror; it will be a terrible

time, so great will be the horror, the thoughtful person will either wail or stunned to silence.” One can make sense of verse 13 here by linking it with the futility curse in verse 12, meaning that the rich and the powerful will be stunned into silence. The rich will be stunned into silence because they will not be able to enjoy the fruits of their oppression and exploitation of the poor. However, the question is, does the prudent refer to the powerful elite?

Garret (2008:155) argues that “the particle (therefore) leads into the consequence of the aforementioned situation.” Garret suggests that the particle *lch* leads to the consequences of the perversion of the justice system. The implication of this notion by Garret is that the perversion of the justice system, has silenced men of integrity; they cannot oppose such a system for fear of reprisal and because no one in power listens to them. Garret’s notion of understanding the particle *lch* as an indicator of a consequence of the accusations in verses 10-12 makes sense when one considers that Amos 2:12 condemns those who sought to silence the prophet. Nogalski (2011:318) affirms that, “because the wealthy and the powerful hate those who speak the truth, the wise remain silent out of a desire for self-preservation.” Amos therefore condemns the prudent for being silent in the face of evil being perpetrated by the powerful elite. Their silence actually worsens the situation. The silence of the prudent signals another collapse of Israel’s moral community.

## **4.6 Poverty as Violence in Amos 8:4-6**

### **4.6.1 Macro structure of Amos 8:4-14**

According to Nogalski (2011:344), Amos 8 presents something of a montage, combining and rearranging images, phrases, and themes that the reader has already encountered. Many scholars consider Amos 8:4-14 to be an independent rhetoric unit. This study has adopted Moller’s literary division of the book of Amos into nine literary units. Although scholars differ on the literary division of the book, interestingly, 8:4-14 is viewed by many as an independent rhetoric unit. Moller (2003:89-90) identifies four rhetoric units in Amos, namely, 3:1-15, 4:1-13, 5:1-17 and 8:4-14, all of which are introduced by *shema*. Stuart (1987:382-383) also views 8:4-14 an independent rhetoric unit and argues that,

The recognition that 8:4-14 is a unity depends on the observation that prophetic judgement oracles do not normally exist apart from indictments, God rarely announces punishment for covenant breaking without providing some sort of evidence or reminder of how the covenant was broken.

The judgement that is announced in 8:7-14 is the result of the covenant breaking as well as the oppression and exploitation of the innocent, weak, and poor in 8:4-6.

Amos 8:4-14 can be further sub-divided into sub-units, thus:

4-6 as the indictment,

7-14, the judgement which is the result of the indictment in verses 4-6

#### **4.6.2 Micro structure of Amos 8:4-6**

Interestingly, Amos 8:4-6 focuses on the notion of exploitation and oppression of the poor and this time the prophet goes beyond the perversion of justice and the violation of the dignity of the weak, to talk about the financial exploitation of the weak and vulnerable as well as slave trade. The prophet has continued with the theme of exploitation and oppression of the poor and the violation of their dignity. The powerful rich elite continue to amass more wealth at the expense of their poor, innocent and weak fellow citizens. The exploitation, oppression and violation of the dignity of the weak poor continued to expose the greed, fraud, cruelty and hypocrisy of the rich. Andersen and Freedman (1989:800-801) write:

Here the prophet continues with his famed social criticism which is now focused on those who buy and sell in the market place, who combine unseemly greed and avarice with all of the well-known forms of cheating culminating in unscrupulous, flagrantly illegal, and immoral dealing in human beings.

The recurring theme of violence against the poor is strong in Amos, as the prophet continues to accuse the rich of trampling on the poor. In this sub-unit, Amos accuses the rich of trampling on the poor by cheating them in the marketplace and buying the poor for a pair of sandals. These acts involve the violation of the poor and the other crimes include the violation of the Sabbath, which is a religious violation.

### 4.6.3 Hebrew text and translation of Amos 8:4-6

English Translation	Hebrew Text
Hear this! You who trample the needy and who do away with the poor of the land	שְׁמְעוּ-זאת השׁאֲפִים אֶבְיוֹן וְלִשְׁבִית עֲנוּי-אֶרֶץ:
Saying, when will the New Moon be over, that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath that we may offer wheat for sale, make the ephah small and make the shekel heavy to cheat the price with dishonesty scales?	לֵאמֹר מָתִי יַעֲבֹר הַחֹדֶשׁ וְנִשְׁבְּרָה שֶׁבֶר וְהַשַּׁבָּת וְנִפְתָּחָה-בַּר לְהַקְטִין אֵיפָה וְלִהְגִּדֵּל שֶׁקֶל וְלַעֲוֹת מֵאֲזַנֵּי מִרְמָה:
To buy the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals and selling the sweepings of wheat	לְקַנֹּת בַּכֶּסֶף דְּלִים וְאֶבְיוֹן בְּעֵבֶר נַעֲלִים וּמִפֵּל בָּר נִשְׁבְּרָה:

### 4.6.4 *Exordium* (Amos 8:4a)

The oracle in this rhetorical unit starts with a call to attention that is indicated by the verb *shema* (hear this). The imperative *shema* (hear this) is used here by the prophet to attract the attention of his audience. The *shema* usually takes the imperative form and induces a desire or prompts the hearer to act or respond to what is being said (Paul 1991:256). Amos uses the *shema* (hear this) formula therefore to draw the attention of his audience and to challenge them to act. By using the imperative formula of *shema* (hear this), the prophet tries to draw the attention of the powerful elite, calling them to act or respond to the accusation against them or face the impending judgement pronounced in verses 7-14. The prophet then rhetorically uses the indictment and pronouncement of judgement to get that attention.

Amos uses the *shema* formula to draw the attention of his audience, and the question then is: who are the recipients of this message? Amos does not specifically name the tormentors of the poor. The direct object of the imperative *shema* is the rich and powerful elite who trample on the poor. For Andersen and Freedman (1989:800), “note should be taken of the extraordinary echoing pattern that resonates between this passage and 2:6, where these miscreants are first identified, only group in the entire list to be specified twice.” One may

therefore deduce that the elite, who the prophet had indicted first in 2:6, are the same group that is now being accused, not of perverting justice this time, but of crimes of economic exploitation.

#### 4.6.5 *Narratio*

##### i. **Trampling of the poor (Amos 8:4a)**

After drawing the attention of his audience by using the “hear this” formula, Amos makes his argument or statement, accusing the rich of trampling on the poor. The word translated as trampling here is a *qal* active participle which functions as a vocative and is the object of *shema* (hear). The participle here indicates continuous action, meaning that the rich are not being accused of the crime that they committed in the past but a crime they are still committing. According to Garret (2008:238), the verb metaphorically represents the upper class of Samaria as dogs sniffing at the ground while hunting the prey, with the poor being described metaphorically as the prey of the powerful. As noted in 2:6, trampling is an act of violence and, by using this metaphor hyperbolically, Amos is trying to draw the attention of his audience to the acts of violence they are committing which appears to be normal to the powerful and their victims.

The prophet rhetorically uses the metaphor of trampling to bring to the attention of the powerful elite the hidden acts of violence that they are committing against the poor that force the poor to an abyss of poverty. How the rich plunge the poor into poverty is described by the brutal, senseless and immoral acts that the prophet describes in detail in verses 5-6. According to Stuart (1987:383),

The rich powerful elite were trampling e.g. exploiting the poor, with the result (thus the *hiphil* infinitive) that increasingly needy people were apparently dying of starvation, selling themselves into slavery, suffering ill-health and other maladies of malnourishment and lack of proper clothing and shelter etc.

After accusing the powerful elite of violence against the poor in this pericope, Amos continues to make use of the infinitives. The *hiphil* infinitive *svt* (to put an end or exterminate) indicates purpose or motive. If the verb is then taken literally, it means that the powerful elite were trampling on the poor with the aim of exterminating them. However, such an understanding does not make any sense, as the greedy elite cannot exterminate the poor who happen to be their source of income. One can argue that Amos is accusing the rich elite

of trampling on the poor so that the poor will sink further into poverty and become so helpless as to sell themselves into slavery.

The issue therefore for Amos is not cutting throats or murdering people or committing genocide but denying fellow Israelites of their rights and simply letting them suffer in the abyss of poverty. Jeremias (1991:283) asserts that, “there was a methodical destruction of the independent existence of small farmers and tradespeople and reference to them as needy people shows that they cannot help themselves.” The key word in Jeremias’ statement is “methodical” which one may replace with systematic. This implies that the violence against the poor was structured and embedded in the perverted justice system that empowered the elite to commit structural violence against the helpless poor.

As cited in Chapter Two of this study, Lee (1999:4) points out that poverty is embedded in social, political, legal, and economic systems.

Lee’s argument is that the poor or underprivileged are in poverty because they do not have access to resources that will enable them to live a decent life due to the social, economic, legal and political structures enacted by those who are in power and are privileged. In addition, Galtung (1990:292) shows that “structural violence is the avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or impairment of human life which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which otherwise be possible.”

Amos once again describes the victims of the trampling as the poor, a word that he has consistently used to show his concern for the victims whom he portrays as weak and defenceless people who are vulnerable to the exploitation and oppression of the rich elite.

#### **4.6.6 *Probatio***

##### **i. Violation of the Sabbath (Amos 8:5b)**

Amos in this case raises a religious accusation against the elite, accusing them of resenting the Sabbath and the Feast of the New Moon while going to the market to exploit and oppress the poor. Although this allegation is religious, it is not detached from the theme of exploitation and oppression of the poor in the marketplace which is the reason resenting the Sabbath and the Festival of the New Moon. Amos rhetorically uses the direct citation of the oppressors’ words to provide evidence of how deep the greed of the oppressors is. Their words are self-indicting and prove their hypocrisy and greediness. The rich elite have

developed a negative attitude towards the Sabbath, as the length of the Sabbath has become a hindrance to their greediness and quest for making more profits.

According to Amos 8:5, the New Moon and the Sabbath were supposed to be work free. Amos 5:8 mentions the Sabbath and the New Moon festival in juxtaposition, and one may ask the question, what was the link between the Sabbath Day and New Moon festival? Does the New Moon festival function the same way as the Sabbath? Thang (2014:125) explains that,

Amos' contemporary prophets Isa 1:13-14 and Hosea 2:11 cited the New Moon Festival in association as religious festival and both take up a negative perspective, stressing YHWH's condemnation of their meaningless offerings and feasts without any concern for the oppressed and the needy.

The New Moon festival was a monthly festival that took place on the first day of the month and was popularly observed in 1 Samuel 20:5, 18 and 24-25. There is no indication however in Numbers 10:10, 28:11 that work had to stop during the festival of the New Moon as the text only indicates that it had to be celebrated with offerings as part of YHWH's worship. Interestingly, it is Amos who clarifies that business activity was forbidden on this festival day. On the other hand, work was forbidden on Sabbath which was a day of rest.

The juxtaposition of the Sabbath and New Moon by Amos probably meant that rest on the Sabbath and worship on the festival of the New Moon meant that on their day of rest the people were to commit themselves to YHWH in celebration and giving offerings. Thang (2014:127) argues that,

It is possible that the reason for the restriction of work on New Moon and Sabbath could be taken from their observance by giving offering and sacrifice and paying attention to YHWH in which normal work stops on that occasion.

However, because the rich powerful merchants were so obsessed with profits, their focus and priority were not on the primary goals of the Sabbath and the New Moon Festival of rest, worship and sacrifices, but on the profits in the marketplace. The elite therefore did not participate in these religious rituals because they wanted to, they hypocritically did so, observing the Sabbath and New Moon, while their mind and attention were not on Yahweh but on the exploitation of the poor and making more profits.

Amos provides the malicious reason why the merchants are so eager for the end of the Sabbath and the festival of new moon; they want to cheat the poor in the marketplace, and trample on them. According to Paul (1991:258), "the rich powerful elites (merchants)

begrudge and resent the moratorium: time is money and they wish to sell grain and offer wheat for sale.” Here Amos condemns false and hypocritical behaviour of the merchants, who observe religious ritual, but oppress and exploit the innocent and vulnerable poor. New Moon feasts and Sabbaths, which were meant to call people together for fellowship with God, had become bothersome hindrances to self-enrichment. Thang (2014:127) concludes that, “the celebration of the New Moon and the Sabbath in Amos’ time had become disgraceful in the sight of Yahweh because of social injustice and religious idolatry in Israel.” It appears that these two religious festivals had lost their significance and connection with social and economic justice. Their false religious festivals and worship were meaningless because of their disregard for social and economic justice.

## **ii. Cheating at the Marketplace**

### ***a) Poor quality grain***

Amos continues with the self-indicting citation of the words of the merchants in order to expose their cheating of the poor. Amos 8:5a has indicated already that the commodities that were traded in the marketplace were grain and wheat. The cheating was not only in respect of the weighing but also of the quality of the grain that was being sold to the poor. In verse 6b, Amos accuses the rich powerful and greedy merchants of boasting about selling the chaff of wheat. Simundson (2005:228) asserts that,

The sweepings of the wheat are what is picked up from the floor, containing some wheat, but also dirt, chaff, or whatever other trash had fallen. Then, perhaps mixed with some clean grain, it is sold not as sweepings from the floor, but as a genuine product, pure grain.

The boasting in their own words by the merchants is an indication of that they deliberately exploit the poor and violate their right to fair trade while also compromising their diet by selling chaff to them.

The merchants did not care about the plight and welfare of the poor but for profit. They knew how vulnerable, defenceless, desperate and dependent the poor were and they took advantage of that knowing that the poor would settle for anything. Stuart (1987:84) describes the desperation of the poor and how the rich merchants took advantage of them. He notes that, “it was especially foodstuffs that a nonfarm urban populace would pay almost any price for.” It is this desperation that also made the populace prone to abuse and exploitation by the greedy elite as they could not avoid buying the inferior foodstuff. However, selling inferior chaff of wheat to the desperate, powerless poor is inhuman and violates their dignity, as they

are considered unworthy of quality food even though the quality of food affects the diet and health of the poor and the chances of malnutrition are real. Nonetheless, both the main accusation in this pericope, which is the trampling of the poor, and the act of selling inferior grain constitute violence against the poor.

***b) Small ephah and heavy hekels***

In addition to selling refuse grain to the poor, the elite continued to fleece the poor by using two kinds of balances, a small one for buying and another one for selling. In other words, the merchants sell short measures of grain and use oversize weight for payment of the grain. The motive for this deception again is to accumulate more profit at the expense of the poor. According to Wolff (1977:327),

The *ephah* was a dry measure approximately equivalent to forty litres, the reference here being its use in measuring the grain being sold. If its full capacity is diminished by placing something into it or changing its form and the buyer receives too little than what he or she is supposed to receive.

The merchants did not only tamper with the *ephah* to cheat the poor in the marketplace, they also tampered with the shekel which was used to weigh the grain that was to be sold to the poor. The shekel was the basic unit of weight whose normal weight was approximately 11.5 grams:

A shekel designated the weight employed in weighing the purchasing price, the silver, before minted coins were in use; such weights probably consisted of limestone balls flattened at the bottom. If the weights were enlarged in any way one could no longer call them just weights but deceitful weights (Wolff 1977:327).

Tampering with the scales was the third type of cheating the merchants employed in order to fleece the poor. The *piel* infinitive construct *avat* means ‘to bend’ or ‘distort.’ Wolff (1977:3270) indicates that “the word *avat* means to distort or bend, which in our context perhaps connotes not merely falsifying in general, but quiet specifically bending out of shape the crossbeam of balances.” The scales were slightly distorted in a manner that caused unequal weights to appear to be in balance; hence, Amos describes them as deceitful weights. The result of this bending was that the seller would take advantage of the buyer through this subtle cheating.

However, Amos’ problem with the rich elite was not only about their hypocrisy and cheating in the marketplace but about the violation of the covenant. The cheating is a clear violation of the law. The falsification of weights was clearly forbidden in the law and there were specific

laws against such practices (Deut 25:13-16; Lev 19:35-37; Simundson 2005:228). Falsification of weights was also a violation of the commandment against stealing (Exod 20:15). The condemnation of false weights is not unique to Amos, other prophets like Hosea (12:7), Ezekiel (45:9-15) and Micah (6:9-11) also spoke against this practice. In addition, wisdom literature condemns this fraudulent act of tampering with scales. Stuart (1987:384) notes that “the rigging of scales is also condemned in the wisdom writings (Prov 11:1, 16:11, 20:23 and Job 31:6) and denounces such fraudulent practices.”

#### *c) Buying the poor*

Amos’s final accusation of injustice against the rich and powerful elites is that, they buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals (cf. 2:8). The elites are not just eager to see the holy day come to an end so that they can cheat in the market, but they also wanted to buy the poor. The selling is condemned in 2:6b and here Amos also condemns the idea of purchasing people. As noted earlier in the chapter, Amos accuses the elites of driving the poor into debt and then selling them for a small price in 2:6b. Garret (2008:242) argues that, “the point is not that the merchants are buying slaves at the open market for silver, but that, by driving people into poverty and then lending them money, they can seize them as debt slaves.” The reference to silver and pair of sandals here denotes the little price these merchants were paying to buy the slaves. Thus, “for a trifle they purchase the impoverished who cannot afford to buy their own barest necessities” (Paul 1991:259).

### **4.7 Rhetorical Techniques by Amos to Portray Poverty as Violence**

The prime sin of Israel in the three selected texts is the abuse of the defenceless, weak and innocent poor. Impoverishment led to the loss of property, especially land, getting into huge debts resulting in the loss of cloaks, and losing one’s dignity through being sold into slavery. Those who had the task to administer justice also turned their backs on the weak and innocent poor by denying them justice and favouring the oppressors. Freedman and Andersen (1989:309) observe that,

For the oppressors to succeed in their crimes, they needed both the power and audacity to break the basic laws; also, the money and influence to bribe judges and subvert the process of justice. The poor were forced off their land, enslaved, and denied access to the courts.

The rights and dignity of the weak and innocent poor are violated, and for Amos, poverty is violence against the poor. In order to persuade his audience that poverty is violence against

the poor, Amos employs different techniques to bring out the hidden acts of violence that the elites commit against the poor.

Firstly, to bring out the hidden violence in the exploitation and oppression of the poor, Amos employs the use of violent metaphors. Amos' language is cloaked in metaphors. The choice of metaphor by Amos which is used hyperbolically is very crucial to understanding the actions of the rich towards the poor. The common metaphor in all the three selected texts is "trampling on the poor," which denotes an act of violence. However, the violence is not physical but indirect, and in this case, structural violence that is embedded in the structures of the society. According to Houston (2008:67), "Where there is disparity of power, the powerful often need not to use physical violence to achieve their ends. But the ethical vision of the texts, working through metaphor, uncovers the violence hidden in all coercive actions." Amos' deliberately focuses on the hidden violence that he shockingly brings out with this violent metaphor.

Interestingly the phrase, "trampling on the poor," in all three selected texts from Amos is followed by a list of socio-economic injustices, meaning that the socio-economic injustices are acts that trample on the poor. In other words, the acts of forcing the poor off their land, enslaving them, selling them into slavery and buying them, and denying them access to the courts were tantamount to trampling them. Amos could have used certain Hebrew words that imply direct physical violence to drive home his message, but by employing the violent metaphor of trampling, Amos warns his audience that their treatment of the poor violates the rights and dignity of the poor and it is violence against them. The poor have been driven into the abyss of poverty as they are denied resources that are essential for them to attain their full potential.

Secondly, in order to persuade his audience that their actions towards the poor actually constitute structural violence against the poor, Amos deliberately avoids identifying the oppressors but identifies the victims of the hidden violence as the poor, the righteous and the needy. Amos does not only show his bias towards and concern for the poor, but also paints a picture of weak, vulnerable and innocent people who are at the mercy of the unnamed elites. By being described as poor, needy and righteous, the victims cannot do anything about their plight as even their last line of defence, the courts are perverted. According to Houston (2008:72), this description of the poor as vulnerable and weak functions in a rather different way; "it does not serve to emphasize the class of the oppressors but the class of the weak and

vulnerable.” Amos deliberately refuses to identify the perpetrators of violence, so that his audience can decipher that the focus is on the plight of the weak and vulnerable whose lives are miserable because of the greedy actions of the powerful elites.

Thirdly, in order to convince his audience, Amos employs the rhetorical technique of hyperbolism. A hyperbole is an exaggerated statement or claim that typically is not meant to be understood or taken literally. The phrase “selling or buying the poor for silver and a pair of sandals” cannot be taken literally. As discussed in the analysis of 2:6-8 and 8:4-6, the reference to silver and pair of sandals denotes the little price these merchants were paying to acquire the slaves and for a trifle, they purchase the impoverished who cannot afford to buy their own barest necessities. This hyperbole is employed by Amos to drive home the message that the elites did not care about the poor, and they viewed them as worthless objects that could be sold or bought for a very small amount of money. The rich did not treat the poor with dignity but deprived them of their rights. The violation of the poor’s dignity and rights is actually an act of violence against the poor.

Fourthly, in each of the selected texts, Amos employs unique rhetorical techniques such as the OAN which provide a setting for the oracle against Israel. The OAN provides the setting for the pronouncement of justice against Israel. Amos rhetorically uses the OAN to bring to the attention of Israel that the nation is equally guilty of the violent crimes that violate the dignity of the defenceless prisoners of war. According to Barton (1980:4),

The purpose of the oracles on the nations is to lead up to the oracles on Israel in 2:6ff; though it is no longer clear where it ends, it was intended by the prophet as the climax to the whole cycle, and the overall effect is to produce surprise and horror in the intended audience. This is achieved by a rhetorical skill similar to that found in Nathan’s parable (2 Samuel 12), Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard (Isaiah 5), and Amos’ own visions in chapter 7.

Barton raises an interesting point about the rhetoric skill that Amos employs through the oracles against the nations which he compares to Nathan’s confrontation of David and Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard. The comparison insinuates that Amos deliberately condemns the foreign nations for crimes committed against military campaigns, and by mentioning the atrocities, Amos is trying to ensure that his audience experiences a sense of moral outrage similar to what David experienced in 2 Samuel 12, extreme outrage that will lead them to pass a judgement. However, one has to exercise some caution about this comparison, as the text in Amos does not indicate the reaction or the response of the audience. The point is that

Amos seems to be employing the same rhetorical skill here, appealing to the moral emotions of the Israelites by naming the inhuman atrocities committed by the foreign nations.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

The time of Jeroboam II and Uzziah was seen as a period of peace and stability, which witnessed the opening and control of international trade routes. The period fostered peace and stability in both Judah and Israel, which together with the trade routes, provided a good platform for economic prosperity and the quest for accumulation of wealth by the elite merchants. Due to their greed and selfishness, the rich exploited and oppressed the poor, pushing them into debt, cheating them at the markets and increasing the price of grain beyond the reach of the poor who were driven into poverty and could not fulfil their potential. In addition, the justice system, which was the last line of defence, was perverted and the poor were denied their right and access to justice.

Despite their ill-treatment of the poor, the rich and powerful elites continued to perform religious rituals hypocritically and attend religious festivals which they abhorred as they hindered their quest to accumulate more wealth. The rich and powerful elites violated the covenant which they misunderstood. The theological misconceptions included interpreting wealth accumulation and prosperity as divine favour. They believed that they were the chosen people of YHWH and they did not have any social obligation to one another. They also believed that they were immune to YHWH's judgement and punishment. These theological misconceptions served as the religious beliefs or ideology that legitimized the exploitation and oppression of the poor and the violation of their dignity. In summary, the misconceptions of the covenant-election theology by the elite was an act of cultural violence against the innocent poor. It is this theology that Amos denounced and countered by exposing the hidden structural violence against the poor.

The study of the above three texts has shown that the theme of hidden violence (structural violence) is a recurring theme in the book of Amos. Amos employs several rhetorical tools such as metaphors, OAN, hyperbole, self-indictment, and judicial rhetoric to bring out the hidden acts of violence which the powerful elite committed against the poor. In addition, Amos portrays the poor as victims of the greediness and brutality of the rich powerful elite. The actions of the oppressors in the three texts are theft, violence and perversion of justice, which is further compounded by bribery and dishonesty and the violation of the dignity of the poor. Houston (2017:37), Amos uses metaphors such as trampling on the poor and

persecuting the righteous but these descriptions are metaphorical. By using the metaphors of violence, the text demonstrates that there is hidden violence in all coercive actions. One can conclude from the discussion above that, for Amos, poverty is man-made; it is the result of a perverted justice system as well as of the exploitation and oppression of the poor. The legal, social and economic structures deprive them opportunities that could enable them to live a meaningful life. Amos deliberately employs metaphors of violence to expose the indirect, hidden acts of violence that the elite were committing against the innocent poor.

In addition to the several rhetorical tools named above, Amos portrayal of the poor and the rich is very clear as it distinguishes between the perpetrator and the victim. According to Houston (2017:36),

The way in which those guilty of injustice are referred to, is quite different as they are introduced or addressed by their actions e.g. you who trample the poor, and they are given no role or dignity beyond their treatment of the poor who are at their mercy.

Amos uses this negative portrayal of the powerful elite as protagonist as a rhetorical tool. Throughout the three selected texts, Amos consistently portrays the victims of exploitation and oppression as innocent or righteous poor. Amos successfully brings out the hidden violence by the rich and powerful elite against the poor which was legitimized by the theological misconceptions of the covenant-election theology.

Overall, Amos does not view poverty as a curse or disobedience on the part of the poor but as a result of the political, social, political and economic structures that favour the few elites at the expense of the majority poor. Amos diverts our attention from the understanding of prosperity as divine favour to and poverty as curse. The structure which favoured the few powerful elites was then thrown into the spotlight for scrutiny by Amos. In the next and last chapter, this study will draw conclusions based on the findings that poverty is violence against the poor in the book of Amos. In addition, the Chapter will offer recommendations about the possible role that prophetic texts such as Amos 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6 may play in raising awareness about ways to challenge and resist oppressive structures creatively in the Zimbabwean context of today.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary and review of all the arguments in this study. It is important to remember that like any other Masters Research thesis, this study does not claim to be exhaustive, but it constitutes a critical engagement with presuppositions that relate to Poverty and Violence, in particular, Structural and Cultural Violence. Lastly, the chapter will offer recommendations about the value of prophetic texts such as Amos 2:6-8, 5:7, 10-13 and 8:4-6 in efforts to creatively challenge and resist oppressive structures that are visible today in the Zimbabwe.

#### 5.2 Summary

This study aimed to prove that poverty is violence against the poor. Through a critical engagement with the idea of Prosperity Gospel as witnessed in Zimbabwe, a critical discussion of the concepts of poverty and violence, and a literary and rhetorical criticism of the three selected texts from the book of Amos, the study has shown that poverty is not a spiritual curse or a demon but it is violence against the poor which is embedded in the country's socio-political and economic structures.

The study began with the background and motivation for the research which is based on two of my experiences while growing up in a poverty-stricken farming town and family and while serving as Probationer during my PAT in Norton. Poverty is a phenomenon that is visible in any country and there is a serious need to use a different lens to view it. In Zimbabwe, some have viewed poverty from a theological perspective using Prosperity Gospel as a tool. Prosperity Gospel in Zimbabwe views poverty as a spiritual curse and a demon that needs to be exorcised as well as a sign of lack of faith on the part of the poor. This theological understanding of poverty via Prosperity Gospel poses a challenge as it blames the poor for their plight and turns a blind eye on the socio-political and economic structures that deprive the poor of equal access to resources that would enable them to live a full life.

In Chapter 2, I have engaged critically with Prosperity Gospel's teachings on poverty through the sermons of two prominent Prosperity Gospel preachers who view poverty as a spiritual curse and a demon as well as a sign of lack of faith. It was also established that the two

Prosperity Gospel preachers view poverty as a punishment from God for the sins of poor people. The two preachers' understanding of poverty therefore puts the blame of poverty on the poor and on the devil. Their theological understanding of poverty therefore provides this study a context to view poverty in Zimbabwe from a Christian Prosperity Gospel perspective and to see Prosperity Gospel as an ideology, a tool for cultural violence used to legitimize structural violence against the poor.

It was further established that because the two prophets command a large followership in Zimbabwe, their understanding of poverty shapes the way many Christians in Zimbabwe view poverty. Furthermore, the adherents of the teachings of the two preachers have been rendered passive and they cannot challenge the socioeconomic and political crisis in Zimbabwe because their poverty is blamed on them and on the devil, thereby, exonerating the socio-political and economic structures which are being used to condemn many into a life of poverty in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 3 offers a discussion of poverty and violence, especially of structural and cultural violence. I have argued that the meanings we ascribe to an abstract concept reflect our way of looking at, thinking about, and making sense of our world. Therefore, the meanings we ascribe to poverty and violence will reflect on our understanding of poverty response to poverty. The Chapter further shows that poverty is a multi-faceted phenomenon which cannot therefore be limited to a single definition. Consequently, any attempt to define poverty has to be multi-dimensional; its definition has to encompass the multi-faceted nature of poverty.

Additionally, the discussion in Chapter 3 shows that poverty is more than just a lack of income or material things but it entails the lack of access to resources and to social, political and economic power. The lack of access to social, political and economic power results in the vulnerability of the poor. The powerless poor people then become dependent on the powerful elites who in turn exploit them and make them feel that they are powerless to change their situation. However, the exploitation is structurally designed and hidden in such a way that the poor themselves do not even notice the structural violence against them. In addition, structural violence is legitimated by religious groups and ideologies that make it acceptable to the poor.

The chapter also considered the definition of violence as the direct application of vigorous force but argued that vigorous force is not the primary factor in defining violence. Instead,

violence is an avoidable insult to basic human needs and, more generally to life, lowering the real needs below what is potentially possible.

Employing literary and rhetorical criticism, Chapter 4 established that the prophet Amos was concerned with the plight of the poor and the state of poverty in which the people found themselves. This is evidenced by how the Prophet portrayed the poor with terms such as poor, righteous, the needy –terms that show that the poor were vulnerable to exploitation and oppression of the poor.

In addition, it was established that there were theological misconceptions of the covenant-election theology by the rich and powerful elite of Amos' time. These misconceptions served as a form of cultural violence that legitimized the exploitation and oppression of the poor through Israel's social structures. Therefore, Amos denounced this theology and countered it by exposing the hidden structural violence against the poor.

By means of Literary and Rhetorical Criticism it was established that that the theme of hidden violence (structural violence) is a recurring theme in the book of Amos. Amos employs several rhetorical tools such as metaphors, oracles against the nations, hyperbole, self-indictment, judicial rhetoric to highlight the hidden violence that the powerful rich elite mete out against the poor. In The metaphors of violence in the text suggest the presence of hidden violence and that the poor are in the abyss of poverty because of the actions of the rich powerful elites who deny them access to resources that would enable them to live a quality life. In addition, the poor are denied the right to justice by the powerful elites who pervert the justice system. Again, the metaphor of turning aside the way of the poor represents the systematic and structural ways through which the rich and powerful elite deny the poor access to resources especially to grain, hence, exposing the poor to malnourishment, disease and death.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

Firstly, the concept of poverty is complex and multi-faceted and it is difficult to reduce it to a single definition. Therefore, any attempt to define the concept has to be multi-dimensional and include the multiple facets of poverty. The meaning that we ascribe to poverty determines how individuals, organizations, churches and the government respond to this complex phenomenon. The key factors in defining poverty are identified as inequality, human rights and dignity, distribution of resources.

Secondly, the thesis affirms that the application of direct vigorous force should not be the primary determining factor in defining violence because the absence of the application of vigorous force does not mean that there is no violence. This study established that violence studies often focus on two problems—the use of violence and the legitimization of that use. Therefore, our understanding of violence has to consider how violence is used (structural violence) and how it is legitimized (cultural violence). These two aspects are critical to our understanding of violence. In addition, the study argued that the definition of violence should shift from the focus on criminal acts toward people or property to that which addresses discrimination, economic inequality and social injustice. The thesis recognizes poverty as a violation of human dignity and as violence against the poor which is embedded in the socio-political and economic structures that benefit a few powerful elites at the expense of the poor.

Thirdly, this study set out to challenge the understanding of poverty by Prosperity Gospel preachers as a spiritual curse and a demon that needs to be exorcised as well as a sign of one's lack of faith in God. Clearly, the Prosperity Gospel being promoted by two prominent preachers in Zimbabwe, Immanuel Makandiwa and Walter Magaya, has blamed the poor for their predicament and attributes poverty to the devil and evil spirits. In this way, the poor are made to turn a blind eye on the socio-political and economic structures that have plunged many people into an abyss of poverty. Through literary and rhetorical criticism, however, this study has established that the prophet Amos denounced a similar kind of theology that understood prosperity as a sign of faith in God. Amos shifted from blaming the poor for their predicament, and showed that poverty was the product of perversion of justice and of unjust social and economic structures that violate the rights and dignity of the underprivileged.

Fourthly, this study established that no discussion of poverty is complete without addressing the issue of power and powerlessness, especially how the powerful elite in Amos and in contemporary times exercise power in negative ways—exploiting and oppressing the poor, violating their right of access to food, clean water, education and to justice.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

In light of the conclusions above, the thesis has shown that the two prominent Prosperity Gospel preachers in Zimbabwe use sermons to respond to the socio-economic and political problems in Zimbabwe and drive home the message that poverty is a curse and a demon, and the result of lack of faith on the part of the poor. Therefore, this thesis recommends that

churches in Zimbabwe reconsider its prophetic witness in order to promote social justice in the country. Although the churches are not unaware of the plight of the poor, there is a need to revive and strengthen the prophetic voice to promote social justice but that voice is currently overshadowed by the Prosperity Gospel's understanding of poverty. Woodbridge and Semmelik (2010:84) agree that,

The church's prophetic witness can be a vital source of guidance for public discourse in the social arena, since through a knowledge of the scriptures, they know the indisputable moral truths on which a society depends, such as the dignity of every human being and a need for the poor to be protected against social injustices, a moral principle for which the biblical prophets stood.

Zimbabwean churches have been involved more in evangelism and less on their prophetic obligation to call for social justice. The church is required to speak against the abuse of power, wealth and privilege. The economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, the ever increasing rate of corruption in a context where no serious action is taken to ensure accountability, the widening gap between the few politically connected rich and the majority poor, and the sharp increase in the poverty rate are all a constant reminder to the Zimbabwean Church of its duty to speak against socio-economic injustice. Christian leaders and the Church in Zimbabwe need to be more visible as witnesses of hope in a hopeless situation. As Banana (1996:271) has shown,

Prophetic witnessing boldly and explicitly clamours for the Church to confront the social and economic injustice irrespective of which ideals and objectives that the government in power subscribes to and tries to achieve. The essence of this advocacy lies in the need for a Christian involvement in the struggles of the underprivileged in national and international contexts.

A significant number of Christians in Zimbabwe believe that the role of the church should be restricted to evangelism and soul-winning and that the church should not be involved in matters of politics. Although there is a debate about the definition of politics and the role of the church in politics, politics, in this sense, should not be viewed as party politics, but broad socio-economic and socio-political issues that would ensure the exercise of justice. Mungazi (1991:72) argues that "a Church should be wholly politically minded... the Church should defend the abuse of human rights, ease political and tribal conflicts and alleviate the suffering of the defenceless." This thesis therefore recommends that the church revive its prophetic voice, actively denounce all manner of evil and abandon the idea of simply bandaging the wounds of the oppressed; but like Amos did, it should challenge the prevailing understanding of poverty by Prosperity Gospel preachers.

Furthermore, there is a need for Zimbabwean churches, especially the so-called Mainline Churches to develop a relevant theology that would respond to the problem of poverty, social injustice, exploitation and oppression, economic imbalance and corruption. Although recent development in theology has seen the emergence of Liberation Theology and Black Theology, which seek to tackle issues of inequality and unfair distribution of resources that resulted from colonisation, a theology that is relevant to and can respond to post-colonial and socio-economic injustices has become a necessity. A major paradigm shift is therefore required in a post-colonial Africa where the oppressed have now become the oppressor.

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