

Reclaiming Gender Rights: A Greimassian Analysis of a Biblical Narrative

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Abstract

Gender studies actualise gender equality and equity using varied methods of textual analysis amongst which are transgressing, deconstructing, re-constructing, recovering, reclaiming and multi-modal approaches that are commonplace in feminism, gender and sexuality studies, etc. While there are many gender readings of narratives, not many gender studies have explored how gender plays out in biblical narratives. To fill this gap, this study analysed a biblical narrative on the female heirship of Zelophehad's daughters using an adapted version of the Greimassian model of narrative analysis. The analysis revealed some intricacies in the strategies employed by the daughters (subjects) to achieve their goal (object) and subsequently revealed how gender equality and equity can be reclaimed through transgression, negotiation, and appeal. These findings attest to the usefulness of a multi-modal approach to analysis in gender studies. In addition, the study shows the applicability of the Greimassian model to narrative analysis and thus contributes towards gender biblical narrative studies.

Keywords: *Reclaiming, gender rights, biblical narrative, Greimassian model*

1.0 Introduction

Achieving gender equality or redressing gender discrimination and/or actualising gender rights have been the focus of researchers in fields such as feminism, gender and sexuality, women's studies and gender (equality) rights, amongst others, based on the orientation of the school of thought or theory of the practitioners. Within feminism, for example, three orientations are often mentioned and explored – radical feminism, liberal feminism, and third wave feminism. While some are constructive in their approach, others are radical, thereby exploring confrontation and transgression, amongst other strategies. The success stories of these movements are undeniable although conflict and aggression often trail some of the struggles. One area that has witnessed several studies is gender narratives in literary works; however, researchers appear to have paid little attention to gender issues in biblical narratives. This investigation thus fills this gap by attempting an analysis of a biblical narrative where gender equality/rights are pursued in a Jewish community.

One other reason for the choice of the biblical narrative is the upheld view, in some quarters, that certain religious communities are resistant to gender mainstreaming. The belief is that in such communities, the entrenched patriarchal system makes it nearly impossible to actualise gender equality or reclaim gender rights. However, as the analysis would reveal, multi-modal approach to narratives of such communities may unveil a contrary reality.

2.0 Narratives and Biblical Narratives

Narratives are a very rich mine for exploring gender issues, whether they are rooted in the secular or religious domains. Narratives offer researchers different angles from which they can explore a text. For example, the interplay between narrative techniques, actors, and readers affords routes to arrive at the thematic preoccupation just as the resolution of the conflict enacted in narratives provides a laboratory for discourse analysts (Lanser, 2013).

Although the study falls within general narratives, it is pitched within biblical narrative studies, as a sub-discipline in narrative studies. Biblical narratives appear to have created a separate niche that is different in some ways from secular narratives. For example, some scholars take the historical narratives in the Bible as “His-story”. That is, such scholars read the Bible as God’s story or the account of His intervention in the affairs of mortals (His creatures or covenant people). This is not to dispute the fact that biblical narratives also involve both humans (terrestrial

creatures) and angels (celestial creatures). For example, the divine intervention in the family of Manoah and his wife that occasioned the birth of Samson involved an angel and members of the family (See Judges 13). The fact that many conflicts in biblical narratives are often resolved through divine or mysterious intervention (God), whether the name of God is mentioned or not might have informed the label His-story. For example, the narrative in the book of Esther in the Bible is an epic example, though the name of God is not mentioned in the account, yet God is seen as the Invisible Helper of His chosen people. Thus, biblical narratives have been described and termed God's story.

2.1 Gender and Biblical Narratives

As rich as gender narrative is in the literature, biblical narratives have not received enough attention among scholars, except for few studies such as Cornelius (2008), Vahakangas (2013), and Schmidt (2020). That apart, many of the previous analysis of gender narratives, especially in fiction, have extensively explored literary pieces in relation to description of gender as marks of social identities, roles, and behaviours as well as qualities of masculinity and femininity that have been associated with a specific sex (Lanser, 2013). Such studies often explore the (historically contingent) ways in which sex, gender, and/or sexuality might shape both narrative texts themselves and the theories through which readers and scholars approach them (Lanser, 2013). However, gender narratives in literature should go beyond such preoccupation to exploring how gender equality and equity have been achieved in communities (Sophie, 1994; Ezeigbo, 1996 among others). This is the focus of this study.

The few studies of gender narrative in the Bible have investigated the story of Mary and Martha in the gospel of Luke as well as that of Zelophehad's daughters (Schmidt, 2020). The narrative of the five daughters of Zelophehad which constitutes the data for this study, has been identified by scholars to be significant in several ways. Schmidt (2020:103) explains that the event is significant for two reasons. One, the narrative was recounted in relation to the two censuses in Numbers 26, which immediately precedes Numbers 27, the location of the narrative data. Two, the narrative presented an unusual act of naming Zelophehad's daughters (Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah) rather than listing them only via a male relative. Litke (2002) (cited in Claassens 2013:14) submits that 'the narrative makes a remarkable statement about the dignity and value of women and children as members of the congregation of Israel. Particularly because

of the generally negative textual witness in the Hebrew Testament about women, this unique text is an important countercultural witness to a different point of view'. For Weingreen (1966) (cited in Schmidt 2020:104), the story of the daughters of Zelophehad should be understood as a legal action intersecting with two social and cultural principles: the patriarchal ordering of the family unit and the economic implications of the inheritance laws.

Arguably, the five daughters of Zelophehad were proactive women who could sense the possibility of being denied the right to inherit their father's property and thus promptly acted to forestall such. Consequently, having considered that their father died without a male heir, they promptly took their fear and request to Moses and the other elders. Relevant here is the *Sifre* account of Numbers 33:

Then came forward the daughters of Zelophehad.... When Zelophehad's daughters heard that the land was being divided among the tribes, to the males but not to the females, they gathered to decide what to do. They said, 'God's mercy is not that of flesh and blood. The latter's mercy is for the males more than the females, but He who spoke and the world came into being is not that way. His mercy is for males and females. His mercy is for all, as it is said, '*He gives food to all flesh*' (Ps 136.25); '*He gives beasts their food*' (Ps 147.9); '*The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is on all He had made*' (Ps 145.9). (Cited in Claassens 2013:331)

Apart from these few studies, there appears a dearth of studies on biblical narratives that are domiciled outside the theological or exegesis arena. Perhaps, the conservative view about religious communities that often resist gender issues might be adduced for the scarcity. This observation partly motivated our study, especially as the narrative focuses on gender rights and female heirship in a religious community. The daughters' discourse strategies in the narrative and the feat that attended their effort call for a detailed study of the narrative. To unpack the intricacies in the narrative, a Greimassian model of analysis is adopted for our analysis.

3.0 Theoretical Orientation

As revealed in the preceding sections, the Greimassian model is adopted for the analysis put forward in the study. Greimassian model is a semiotic approach to narrative studies which Taylor and Van Every (2000) (as cited in Hobyane, Kanonge, & Jordaan, 2018:2) declare to be analytical approach that has proven to be the most fully elaborated and subtle of any they have

encountered. The analysis of narrative texts within the Greimassian model is undertaken from three levels: figurative, narrative and thematic.

At the figurative level, analysis is concerned with figures or characters which people the story and how they are constructed in the text as *actors within space and time*. This level is investigated by gathering figures and observing figurative oppositions (Everaert-Desmedt 2007:30 cited in Kanonge 2014). The second level of narrative analysis, the investigation focuses on the organisation of a text as discourse, the unveiling of different functions of actants, and the tracking of the course of the subject across the narrative (Hobyane, Kanonge, & Jordaan, 2018:2). The thematic level, which is the third stage of analysis, according to Kanonge (2014), unveils “the fundamental values that generated the text”. Kanonge (2009 as cited in Hobyane, Kanonge, & Jordaan, 2018:2) points out that these values are thereafter investigated syntagmatically and paradigmatically by means of a semiotic square. Our analysis, being an adaptation of the model, did not, however, explore the semiotic models.

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Data description and methodology

The biblical narrative which constitutes the data for the study can be found in Numbers 27:1-7 (cf. Numbers 26:33; 36:1-11; Joshua 17:3-6). The narrative surrounds the Jewish family of a late father, Zelophebad, and his five daughters, in the census that should determine the sharing formula for family possessions in the land of Canaan. Since the traditional census only usually counted and/or recognised fathers and their male children, the five daughters of Zelophebad (Mahlah, Noah, Haglah, Milcah and Tirzah), whose father died without any son, anticipated that Moses and the other leaders may not allocate any land possession to the family of their late father because he left no male heir and therefore took some proactive steps to avert the situation.

The setting is the Jewish community on a pilgrimage to the Promised Land, a land that is God-given under the human leadership of Moses, God’s representative, who was supported by the elders who held to both the law and the Jewish/Eastern tradition. The daughters, realising the implications of the unwritten laws of family inheritance, most probably without the support of the community, approached Moses, questioning the unwritten tradition that prohibits female heirs of their father’s inheritance. Considering the complexity of the case (as there was no given law statutes, or commandment by Yahweh backing the exclusion of women), the sensitivity of the matter, and the audacity of the female characters (since no female folk had ever taken such a bold

step to confront the leadership of the community), Moses had to approach God for resolution. Surprisingly, God gave his words in support of the daughters: “The daughters of Zelophehad are right; you shall give them an inheritance among their father's brethren and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them...” (Numbers 27.7-11). The divine resolution thus distinguished between human-established tradition and the divine order that created humans as both male and female without discrimination.

In terms of methodology, the analysis in the study is a text-centred one. In essence, the analysts, employed the close reading of the text before analysing the text at different levels of the Greimassian narrative analysis with the hope of uncovering the strategies which the five daughters of Zelophehad employed to reclaim gender rights, equality, and equity in the text.

4.2 Textual analysis

In this section, the discourse strategies provided in Griemassian model is used to analyse the narrative in this section, identifying how gender equality and equity/rights are reclaimed by the Zelophehad daughters.

4.2.1 *The figurative*

Kanonge (2014:69) notes that figurativization is conducted by gathering figures and observing figurative oppositions. By this, the figurative analysis involves the identification of the main figures in the story in terms of actors, space, and time and establishing the oppositions between them. At the figurative level, the actors in narrative text are far from being figurative unlike what may be found in secular and imaginative narratives. While it is generally believed that biblical events are factual, some scholars like Aaron (2009) are of the opinion that the event is a fictional one, probably crafted to illustrate some of the legal rules of inheritance.

a. Symbolic figures in the text

Narrative characters, in the Griemassian approach are construed as figures “in terms of actorialisation, spatialisation and temporalisation.” Characters may be the visible actors who inhabit the world of the narrative. At the *actorialisation* sub-level, therefore, the visible actors in the narrative are the five Zelophehad daughters, Moses (as well as Eleazar the priest, the princes of Israel and all the congregation), and the invisible One, God, who was consulted for resolution.

Aside the visible actors, Hobyane, Kanonge, and Jordaan (2018:2) reveal that characters within a narrative may be figurativised in that the characters are constructed in relation to abstract ideas or values. This implies that characters are constructed as symbolic representatives of a class of characters or as possessing some defining qualities, at the application level of the narrative. On this ground, Moses and the elders of the Israel community are symbolic gatekeepers of human cultural traditions and values. Thus, Moses, as the supreme human leader of Israel in the wilderness, is symbolic of the heads of communities, governments and nations of the world who can be appealed to whenever there are grey or contentious issues that do not have ready answers in the constitutions of the nations or the traditions of peoples.

The daughters who brought the contentious matter to Moses represent individuals or agencies advocating gender equality, equity and rights. Such individuals or agencies usually appear as if they are questioning the stereotypes or inherited cultures and traditions that stand in the way of actualising gender equality and equity as their object. Read another way, the daughters are representatives of the oppressed folk in human societies however, they are the exceptionally oppressed who dared to confront or question the established unwritten traditions that excluded certain groups of persons from commonwealth. Beyond this, the five daughters' audacious quality is symbolic of an essential quality that anyone trying to cause a change against the usual and recognised norm must possess.

Spatialisation

Ahiamadu (2007:300) leans on Ashely's tripartite division of the book of Numbers to establish that the event surrounding the five daughters happened in the plains of Moab. While the general spatial location of the event is the wilderness, the daughters particularly came before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the princes, and all the congregation by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. The event did not just occur in the wilderness before Moses and the elders by the door of the Tabernacle, but importantly occurred within the Jewish community that held on to both the Yahweh laws and their inherited Eastern traditions. That the community operated both the laws of their God that Moses received and the inherited Eastern traditions explains why the daughters approached Moses and the leaders at the entrance to the tabernacle rather than enter the tent. Schmidt (2020: 108) avers that "the daughters' presentation of their request strategically

followed cultural protocols without violating them” and this established the daughters as strategic leaders who know “what not to do as well as what to do.”

Temporalisation

This sub-level concerns the fact that the event happened at the time of the second census which preceded and determined who would have a share in the land distributions to family heads and members after the departure of Moses. Ahiamadu (2007: 301) submits that the priestly editor “placed this pericope (Num.27:1-11) against the background of the second census (Num.26:52-55) to highlight its importance for the subsequent partitioning of the Promised Land based on those listed by name.” Claassens (2013: 332) explains that the Zelophehad daughters “[found] themselves in an exceedingly vulnerable situation: the daughters are orphaned; the death of their male relative in the socio-cultural context of their time jeopardizes their chances of survival; without land, without a means to make a living, their future looks bleak.” In essence, the timing of the event was very crucial and significant in the history of the Jews. Had the daughters slackened about the time to act, they could have been completely denied of inheriting their father’s land and their means of survival.

b. Figurative oppositions in the narrative

Zelophehad’s daughters’ objective clearly opposed the tradition and customs of the Jewish people where, as found in Deut. 21:15-17, a father’s property is passed on to the male heirs with the oldest of them receiving a double portion whereas neither the widow nor the daughters received any portion of the estate. It can be assumed that the elders must have asserted that culture and vehemently opposed the objective of the daughters who were seeking to a claim to their father’s inheritance. Coincidentally, Moses, the highest authority, could not provide a ready answer in the law of Judaism and so could not stand behind the elders nor deny the daughters and thus resorted to the Invisible God to resolve the matter. At the higher level, there is the figurative opposition between what the community upheld and what the five Zelophehad daughters desired.

At the narrative level, the *relations between actants* either as addressers versus addressees; subject versus object; and helpers versus opponents constitute the subject of analysis. Within a considerable length of the narrative, the five daughters are the addressers whereas Moses, the elders and the community before the Tent of meeting are the addressees. The position of the

daughters as addressers is highly significant to gender matters since there seems to be a reversal of roles as women are usually the silent listeners rather than the active speakers in culture.

When Moses took the matter to God for resolution, Moses became the addresser while God was the addressee. But at the point when God addressed Moses on the resolution, God was the addresser and Moses became the addressee. Finally, when Moses conveyed the resolution that God gave to the entire community of Israel in the wilderness, the people, including the elders and the five daughters, became the addressees. Thus, there is a chain of communication where no particular character remains an addresser or addressee throughout the text. This chain ensures active participation by all members of the community, movers and opposers alike. Thus, all the characters were fully involved in the negotiation and resolution processes.

c. Subject and object

Kanonge (2014) reveals that, within the Greimassian approach, the subject of a story is the actor longing for the object. In the case of our text, the five daughters long for gender equality and equity/rights thereby qualifying them as the subject of the narrative. The object of the text is the change in the value system that will recognise both males and females as heirs of family possessions.

d. Helpers and opponents

Some actants constitute the helpers who made the five daughters succeed in their quest for gender equality and equity by allowing them to bring the matter to Moses. Similarly, Moses also helped by taking the conflict to God, their invisible ultimate Leader rather than leaning towards the position of the elders and the community. Thus, the elders and Moses are the ‘unwilling’ helpers in the object of the protagonists. Of course, the verdict of God ultimately helped the five daughters in their quest while the elders who had excluded the daughters and/or the family of Zelophehad and countered the object of the daughters were their opponents.

Although God did not act directly to resolve the matter, He spoke to Moses who thereafter passed God’s resolution to the people. In other words, the five daughters did not achieve the feat through their efforts but relied on their human leader and ultimately God who intervened. However, the daughters’ ability to mute the idea and push it further to be decided upon by God is outstanding in a traditional community that silenced the other sex group, or expected its womenfolk to be

passive. If the ladies had not summoned the courage to voice their desire, thereby challenging the existing culture/tradition, the old system would have been retained and upheld in the community. Using the words of Gruen (2002:172), “Success does not lie in his (human) capability, but depends on God's inspiration.” In this case, it might be interpreted that God inspired the daughters and convinced Moses on what to do, leading to the success of the daughters’ quest.

4.2.2 The narrative syntax

This section focuses on the journey of the daughters in the narrative which consists of the narrative programme and the canonical narrative schema. Both focuses are discussed in the subsequent sub-sections below.

The narrative programme

The narrative programme constitutes the series of actions from when the daughters rose against the discriminatory culture/traditional practice to the final stage when the resolution that favoured them came from God. Within the narrative programme, the daughters transformed from their initial docile state to their latter final active state of speaking out against a longstanding culture which finally led to their being adjudged to be right and to having their request granted. The ladies thereby upturned the culture that discriminated against female heirship. This resolution reclaimed the gender rights of women in Israel and thus introduced a new gender-sensitive culture that favours both male and female heirship in the nation.

a. The canonical narrative schema

The canonical narrative schema details the evolution of the daughters as heirs in the narrative. The schema may be said to consist of four stages of contract, acquisition of competence, performance, and sanction. The contract describes the moment the daughters realised how anti-human and discriminatory their tradition was toward the feminine gender for prohibiting female heirship. Although that moment of realisation was not captured in the narrative, it may be assumed that either their instincts or divine inspiration from God moved them to object the part of the inheritance law that discriminated against females. Following that realisation is the public airing of their view which the elders, as the representatives of the various families in Israel, opposed.

While some biblical stories can be described as *explicit contract*, where God speaks directly to an individual and gives them a mission to accomplish (Kanonge, 2014), the contract in the narrative data is an implicit contract since there was no direct revelation from God to the five Zelophehad daughters. As an implicit contract, the daughters were moved by a mission rather than a duty. Kanonge (2014) reasons that “God's manipulation in this case (as in *Susanna*) is indirect and consists of *laissez faire*. It might be concluded that the implicit contract established between God and the daughters first inspired them or gave them the inspiration to pursue their object. The daughters were further moved to utter their displeasure with the culture that prohibited female inheritance and to swing into action by developing a sense of “duty” to speak up and pursue their objective.

The acquisition of competence is inherent in the daughters' rising to become the subject to resist gender insensitivity. Beyond developing their sense of duty, the daughters also moved to the level of power such that they were able to utter their opposition to the entrenched human law and to insist on their conviction which could not be silenced by the elders. Their power and action could be attributed to their being divinely enabled by the Invisible God. As a matter of fact, there is no way to explain the audacity of the Jewesses to confront not just the elders but the established culture of the entire people, if not that they were divinely enabled. Miriam's case, as the only woman in the history of the Israelites who dared to confront Moses at a private level and earned a divine punishment of leprosy in return, is a point of reflection here.

In addition to being divinely enabled, the daughters' testimony about their father that he was never caught in the act of disobedience, treason or rebellion against the laws of God was another source of power that emboldened them to oppose the custom of the land and made it difficult to misinterpret their rising against gender insensitivity as act of disobedience or rebellion. Thus, there is a progression from the level of duty and desire to the level of empowerment that came from the good character of their late father and from divine enablement. Aside the case of the daughters, there seems to be no other case where women came this way before Moses throughout the wilderness journey.

In relation to performance as the third stage in the canonical narrative schema, Martin and Ringham (2002 as cited in Kanonge, 2014: 83) submit that “the term...designates the event to which the story has been leading. It is by carrying out the performance that the subject acquires (or fails to acquire) the object of value.” Here, the daughters had to assess their abilities to appear

before Moses and utter their desire or their displeasure with the gender-insensitive law. The five daughters approached Moses, the elders and princes of Israel, and the entire congregation at the door of the tabernacle meeting. Here, they performed their speaking up within the confines of the theocratic laws of the land by standing at the door of the tabernacle rather than entering in. They also used their abilities to wait for Moses who went to God to ask for His verdict.

Having lodged their complaint against their exclusion from inheriting their father's inheritance, they maintained their position in the face of all oppositions and threats (of coming face-to-face with Moses and before God who is in the Tabernacle). Eventually, rather than being condemned, possibly to death, for raising such a case, the verdict from God did not only vindicate them but also led to the sanction of their position which subsequently instituted and ensured female heirship in Israel.

With regard to sanction, as the last stage of the canonical narrative, Kanonge (2014: 84) explains that "Sanction can be negative (blame) or positive (praise), depending on what is regarded as good or bad values." In the narrative, the daughters are sanctioned with the praise which was pronounced by God, as the addresser to the daughters at that time. Using the words of Kanonge (2014: 84), "Praise reveals that [the daughters'] achievement conformed to norms established by God – God is not gender insensitive, rather S/he is gender sensitive." The most important verdict, following their mission, is "no shameful practice (in this case, demand) was found in her (them)." By this, the daughters were found innocent and their conduct was commended by God as responsible Jewesses who advanced the cause of God on earth among His people.

4.2.3 The thematic level of analysis

In thematic analysis, the aim is to *map out the core values that generated the event in the narrative*. In other words, the analyst's concern is to unpack those fundamental values which "constitute the vital clues of the message of a narrative" (Kanonge, 2014). We shall devote attention to just two thematic issues in the subsequent subsection.

a. Opposition of values in the narrative

The two values in the text that generated the episode are the daughters' quest ('object') and the elders' tenacious hold unto the Jewish tradition of male heirship. What the daughters proposed was in opposition to what the elders and the community held. Thus, while the elders' value

appeared religious, the daughters' quest appeared secular. Also, while the daughters' quest appeared individual, the elders' value appeared communal as the elders were committed to the values of the Jewish community. In other words, the daughters might be seen as acting as non-Jews, while the elders were represented as true Jews upholding what was cherished in the community. However, because Moses could not find a right answer to the query in the Law, he had to seek the Invisible God who gave the Law and who is the Ultimate owner of the people of Israel.

b. Thematic itinerary

Tracking the thematic itinerary entails revealing the commendable values which generally complete their course in a narrative whereas the non-commendable values ones stop halfway (Kanonge 2010:5861). Tracking the thematic itinerary in the narrative reveals that the narrative naturally divides into three. The first division uncovers the census that excluded the family of Zelophehad because he had only female children. That exclusion could have gone unchallenged since that was the value held in the community. The second part of the narrative unveils the dissatisfaction of the five Zelophehad daughters with the entrenched Jewish tradition that prohibited female heirship. It was at this second stage that they voiced their dissatisfaction before Moses and the elders. Invariably, rather than daughters remaining docile and accepting what had always been, they were dissatisfied with the old value and subsequently nursed a desire or, better put, were inspired to nurse a desire which empowered them to voice their demand.

The events at this second stage ushered in the third and final stage, where Moses took the case to God for resolution. The final part of the narrative thus constitutes the resolution of the conflict with the Invisible God giving the verdict which upheld the quest of the five daughters and discarded the value of the elders. Thus, as the value and desire of the daughters was right in the sight of God, the value was introduced and daughters subsequently gained access to family inheritance. By this, both male and female children now have access to the family inheritance.

5.0 Summary of findings

The above analysis reveals, amongst others, the process of reclaiming gender rights concerning female heirship where there are no male heirs in the Jewish community. The model of analysis used has helped immensely to unveil not only the narrative strategies but also the intricacies in

the process of reclaiming rights. It has also revealed the symbolic figures - Moses, the elders, the five figures and the Invisible One. We also see the figurative oppositions between the elders as the gatekeepers of the traditions of the land, on the one hand and the five daughters, on the other hand. The rotational process in a chain of activities involving the daughters as addressers, the Invisible One as the addressees, the elders and the community is highlighted. Through the analysis, the opposition of the subjects (the five daughters and their object – reclaiming gender rights that is female heirship where there are no male heirs) are unveiled including the helpers and their opponents. The narrative schema revealed the quest of the story (should female heirs be accepted where there are no male heirs). Finally, the analysis revealed not only the opposition of values which generated the episode in the narrative but also the sanction of praise of the daughters' 'object' by the Invisible One.

6.0 Discussion of findings

From the analysis, it appears that religious communities sometimes hold values that do not directly emanate from God and that might oppose the design of God for human existence. This is clearly demonstrated in the fact that Moses and the elders could not provide an immediate answer from the Law given to them by God to support the tradition that female children could not inherit their father when the daughters expressed their dissatisfaction with their exclusion from the census to be used for the distribution of inheritance to the families.

It is also significant to note that the daughters nursed the good desire or were inspired by the Invisible One for a new order that respects the rights of both male and female heirs – gender equality, equity and rights that favour women folk. Although the advocated new order or value was in opposition to what the community upheld, the act of standing up for what they desired might be interpreted as a form of transgression because females were rarely permitted to be the vanguard for a new order in the community. The analysis reveals the movement of the daughters from the level of nursing a value to uttering the value, though it is in opposition to what the community practices. This strategy attests to how transgressing could be used to reclaim gender equality.

The audacity to operationalise their dissatisfaction and their desire is also evident in the analysis. That is, their 'power' to utter their desire, withstand the opposition of the elders, and be willing to come before Moses are unbecoming of traditional Jewish women. Interestingly, Moses was unable to provide a ready answer from the Law. Rather than dismiss the case, however, he took

the case to God. This indicates how sincere to God and His people Moses was as a leader as he sincerely sought to know more, where he lacked knowledge, and was non-sentimental to declare the verdict he received from God, even though the verdict was in opposition to the previous communally shared value. Thus, the daughters' value which is valid in the sight of God had to be introduced and maintained in the community. The entire episode reveals how the daughters moved from the level of competence to that of performance. In the end, they reclaimed gender equality and equity through negotiation and an appeal to the highest body in the community. The result is that the hitherto long-held tradition that had suppressed female heirship was abolished and a new order that favours both feminine and masculine heirship was introduced.

At the discourse level, the Griemassian model revealed three features that are apparent in the biblical narrative. One, we see negotiation that is anchored on the existing law – every family must be apportioned a lot so that no family's name will be lost. The daughters appealed that law by asking: “why should our father's name be lost in Israel?” By this, they also appealed to reason that the absence of male children should not overturn the existing law. In addition, the daughters appealed to the history of their father's innocence who was guiltless in the series of rebellions that took place in the community.

The second feature of discourse in the narrative data concerns discourse participation. There are addressers and addressees though there are figurative opposition and opposition of values that brought the participants to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Three, the daughters were less confrontational as they were prepared to receive the verdict from the highest authorities in the community, that is God, the Yahweh, the Great One. Thus, through petitioning, negotiation, participatory discourse and openness to the divine verdict, the daughters reclaimed the gender rights of female heirs in Israel.

7.0 Conclusion

The preoccupation of the study was to unveil the discourse strategies that the Zelophehad daughters explored in reclaiming gender equality and equity in a community that had smuggled human-made tradition and culture into their religious and social community. To reclaim the divinely intended value (gender sensitivity and gender rights) that is progressive and contributory to human existence irrespective of sex, the daughters engaged in narrative discourse strategies and openness that finally yielded the desired result. This indicates that those who uphold obnoxious values should be willing to subject their positions to authorities that hold the absolute

power such as the rule of law and justice. To reclaim gender equality from a culture that is oppressive to the other sex group and that has consequently imposed its inhuman, discriminatory, exclusive, insensitive and oppressive gender order and values on its people, proponents of better values should be ready to utter their dissatisfaction and desire and pursue their proposed values to a logical conclusion without unhealthy aggression.

Also, the study revealed figurative and representational leaders like the symbolic figures in the narrative must be open to new ideas rather than being fixed to traditions and customs. Just as the daughters are ready to follow the due process of going to the leader and the elders and to awaiting the verdict of the Invisible God, those who are in the vanguard for reclaiming gender equality and equity/rights must be willing to follow the due process. Both agents of gender equality and equity and the gatekeepers of traditional and/or cultural values must be open to the superior verdict of the law and justice that will emerge.

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