

THE CHALLENGES OF WIDOWHOOD IN THE NIGERIA CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of widowhood is attributed to death of a husband which causes are varied. In contemporary societies like Nigeria, causes of widowhood are also numerous, the first notable variety of death worth considering due to its profound and immediate impact on widowhood in terms of creating many widows at a given time is war or armed conflict. Ethnic and religious conflicts such as the Tiv riots of the 1960s; the Tiv-Jukun crises and other crises causes' death rendering wives widows, moreso, death by natural cause also has led to widowhood status. The dehumanizing activities against widows in the traditional Tiv society can be seen as a conspiracy which calls for the attention of the church to play a significant role. This paper focuses on conspiracy against widows in Tiv society. The study adopted the primary and secondary method of data collected which made use of the descriptive method of analysis. The theory of feminism (motherism) has been used in this paper. Widows in Tiv society are been neglected and treated without prior recognition in the society. It was also found that the church has a significant role to play in ensuring that widows are properly taken care of. It was also shown that it will be out of place for widows to be neglected in the church. The paper therefore recommends that the church should set aside a specific charity committee that specifically caters for the welfare of the widows and at the same time sensitizes the society on widow conspiracy.

Keywords: Widow, Widowhood, Conspiracy.

INTRODUCTION

Across different cultures and religious tradition in Africa, there exist harmful traditional widowhood practices which have attracted the attention of the global struggle in general on conspiracy against women. Sufficient evidence suggests that widowed women are severally

affected financially, psychologically, sexually and socially (Stillion, 232; Afolayan, 20). The severe effects of widowhood in Nigeria are rooted in cultural and traditional practices as well as the socialization processes that condition women to passivity and dependence. These conditions have created enormous difficulties for women to creatively and stoutly initiate new robust relationships with both men and women in social and economic spheres upon widowhood. The debilitating conditions of women are worsened by societal factors that instrumentally feed into the situation ranging from loss of livelihood upon widowhood, and the fact that “widows are less likely to remarry than widowers” (Stillion, 285).

World War I and II, the Ibo pogroms of 1966, the violent political crisis in Western Nigeria in the mid 1960s, the Nigerian civil war of 1967 – 1970 all produced more widows and orphans than any period in modern Nigeria (Agena, 231). Ethnic and religious conflicts such as the Tiv riots of the 1960s; the Tiv-Jukun crises of the early 1990s and 2001; the Ife-Modakeke crisis of 2000, the Amuleri-Aguleri in South-Eastern Nigeria in 2001; the Maitatsine religious crisis of the 1980s that erupted in Kaduna and spread across northern Nigeria with flash points in states like Kano, Bauchi and Plateau; the recurring religio-ethnic crises in Jos, Plateau State and Kaduna metropolis since 2000 have all combined to produce additional widows and orphans in huge numbers in the Tiv society (Alubo, 43, Hembe, 56).which forms the basis of this study where it seeks to examine the conspiracy against widows viewing from the Christian perspective.

THE CONCEPT OF WIDOWHOOD

The loss of a loved one is a source of intense emotional stress, yet the bereaved need to express and deal with their feelings of loss before they can reorganize their lives. Normal grief often follows a fairly predictable pattern (Schulz, 78). First a few weeks after a death, survivors react with shock and disbelief. Second, as the fact of the loss sinks in, this initial numbness gives way to overwhelming sadness. Some people cry almost constantly, many suffer physical symptoms like insomnia, shortness of breath and loss of appetite. Some fear that they will have an emotional brake-down; some drink too much or sedate themselves with tranquilizers. Third, beginning about 3 weeks after the death, continuing for about 1 year, survivors often relive the death in their minds, in an obsessive search for its meaning. They may hallucinate the presence of the dead person – seeing the face hearing the voice. Fourth, at the start of the 2nd year after the death, the survivors become more active socially, getting out more, seeing people, resuming their interest. At this point, survivors feel stronger, knowing that they have gone through an ordeal. However, there are other cases in which the survivors find it very difficult to cope and adjust to their new status in life (Schulz, 19).

Reactions to the death of a man as husband or a woman as wife are culturally determined. Each culture determines the rationality of practices relating to widowhood and mourning rites. The

phenomenon of widowhood is attributed to the death of a husband which causes are varied. In contemporary societies like Nigeria, the first notable variety of death worth considering due to its profound and immediate impact on widowhood in terms of creating many widows at a given time is war or armed conflict. Like in Tiv culture, this may be refer to as; '*kuswendegh*' which means the source of death is unquestionable or suspicious.

The process of widowhood is believed to represent a life phase; Nwachukwu viewed a widow from the perspective of her plight as a person who, by certain circumstances, is in distress (92). Thus, to him a widow is one who finds herself in the middle of the ocean of life, struggling to survive. Technically, a widow is a woman who survives her husband and has not remarried (Oniye 20). She is known as '*kwasekyosun*' or '*kwasechovul*' in Tiv as the case may be, meaning she is no more with a husband therefore needs to be treated fairly and some level of respect.

Abolarin defined widowhood as the state of mourning the loss of one's husband or wife through death (33). The stress of this phenomenon is as real as those of loneliness and divorce. Widowhood is thus seen as a life event with wide range of consequences. For instance, widowhood is known to be responsible for the poor health status of widows and widowers, with minimal long-term consequences (Ferraro, 85). Widowhood is also associated with intense grief and anger expression, especially among more widows than the divorced (when) compared (Kitson&Zyganki, 97). This is possibly because of deprivation following loss of spousal intimacy through death. It can thus be concluded that widowhood by implication is a stressful life event demanding practicable support systems. In the opinion of Goldman and Lord, mourning and widowhood are opposite sides of the same coin with wide range of implications for those affected (183). Gbenda has observed that widowhood is an issue that affects more women than men (97).

Widowhood experiences are generally a trauma but in some African societies, they are considered more as an experience of deprivation, subjugation and humiliation. Ironically, the disorganization and trauma that follow the death of a spouse seem to be greater on the women than on the men whenever either loses his or her spouse. In the case of the loss of the husband, the wife becomes the primary suspect as the cause of the husband's death and is thus treated accordingly. On the other hand, where a man loses his wife, the man is almost immediately offered a substitution to comfort him and douse the impact of the grief of bereavement. Nowadays, in most cases, men 'kill' their wives by having extra-marital affairs with other women, keeping outside wives (sophisticated polygamy) and threatening the wife to marry a second wife. The cause of this is not farfetched. It has been rightfully observed that "The differentiation between men's and women's role in Nigeria as with other societies is one of complementary and superior relationship in favour of men. It involves a hierarchy in which men

are given greater leverage over decision making and resources than women. The result is a cultural setting that invariably promotes male domination and female subordination” (Ahosi, 2). Men hardly involve women in decision-making. Sokpo and Sokpo also maintain that women have contributed immensely in our various societies; however, women have been ‘perpetually and continuously seen as weaklings who moan, wail or cry in the face of adversity without rising up to the challenge’(22).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminism is a development and movement in critical theory and in the evaluation of literature which was well under way by the late 1960s and which has burgeoned steadily since. It is an attempt to describe and interpret (and reinterpret) women’s experience as depicted in various kinds of literature – especially the novel, and, to a lesser extent, poetry and drama. It questions the long-standing, dominant, male, phallogocentric ideologies (which add up to a kind of male conspiracy), patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature (and critical evaluation of literature). It attacks male notions of value in literature – by offering critiques of male authors and representations of men in literature and also by privileging women writers.

Ogundipe-Leslie’s definition of feminism gives us enough leeway to encompass various types of feminisms, according to Ogundipe-Leslie, include: right-wings, left-wings, centrists, left of centre, reformists, separatists, liberal, socialist, Marxist, non-aligned, Islamic and indigenous (547). Indeed, there are many feminisms, depending on the centre from which one is speaking or theorising. These feminisms have to be theorised around the junctures of race, class, caste and gender; nation, culture and ethnicity; age, status, role and sexual orientation.

In this paper, the authors adopted a strand of feminism called womanism. Womanism is the concern for women and their role in their immediate surroundings (be it family, local community or work place) and more global environment. Ogunyemi maintains that womanism is black-centred. It is accommodationist. It wants meaningful union between black woman and black men and black children, and will see to it that men will change from their sexist stand. This ideological position explains why women writers do not end their plots with feminist victory (5). Walker defines a womanist as a “black feminist or feminist of colour” who loves other women and/or men sexually and/or non-sexually, appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility and women’s strength and is committed to “survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female” (Walker, xi). She firmly locates womanism within black matrilineal culture deriving the word from *womanish* used by black mothers to describe girls who want to “know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for anyone” and whose behaviour is “outrageous, courageous or wilful” (Walker, xi). Acholonu states that motherism

advocates ‘love, tolerance, service, mutual cooperation for the sexes, not antagonism, aggression, militancy or violent confrontation plus protection and defence of family values’ (111-112).

LANGUAGE AND TYPES OF WIDOWHOOD

The language used by widows, though loud and clear, does not receive any attention. People consider widows as nagging, complaining and noise-making creatures whose agitations should not be addressed or adhered to. Contrastively, a woman whose husband is alive is recognised in the society. People accept her opinions and provide solutions to her demands. It is therefore clear that language, too, is a yardstick that is used in measuring the speech made by widows and non-widows. The following are the types of widows used in this paper: man-made widows, passive widows, complaining widows and intentional widows.

Man-made widow: In this type of widowhood, the husband is alive but literally speaking, a wife is widowed. A woman lives in her husband’s house but no attention is given to her. She suffers excruciatingly in her husband’s house or in some cases, stays on her own. Characteristically, this type of widowhood is caused by women folk to their fellow women. In the olden days, we witnessed few instances of this type of widowhood. When Sarai discovered that she could not bear children for Abram, she surrogated Hagar to Abram (Genesis 16:15). After Hagar’s conception, she treated Sarai with contempt. Temporarily, Sarai’s stay in Abram’s house was like a woman without a husband. On obtaining permission from Abram, Sarai maltreated her Egyptian maid who was heavily pregnant with Ishmael to leave for the unknown destination. Both women experienced their temporary widowhood in Abram’s house. In addition to that, Leah was sexually starved by Jacob. Rachel had forbidden Jacob from sleeping with Leah. At that moment, Leah’s life was sexually and psychologically traumatized. On receiving mandrakes from Reuben (Leah’s first son), Rachel permitted Jacob to go into Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, ‘Give me, I pray, some of your son’s mandrakes’. But she (Leah) said to her, ‘**Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband?** Would you take away my son’s mandrakes also? Rachel said, ‘**Then he (Jacob) may lie with you tonight for your son’s mandrakes**’ (Genesis 30:14-15). The above two sentences clearly showed that a slave in Jacob’s slave – Bilhah was superior to Leah.

Furthermore, in Ogenyi’s *The Devil is a Young Lady*, Ekinyi’s secretary (Rhoda) who craftily became a ‘house-help’ in Chief Idibia’s house later betrayed and dispossessed her mistress, Ekinyi, and became pregnant for Chief Idibia. As graphically presented in the play, Rhoda is a devil incarnate –she connected those that wanted to become rich overnight, those that wanted to date rich men and those that wanted to commit abortions.

In the contemporary society, most women are passing through harrowing experiences in their husbands' houses. Legitimate wives have gone through agonizing situations because their husbands have allowed 'the devil' to have access to their households. As the devil comes, it is the woman who is attacked and finally devoured. A journey to dispossessing the rightful married wives is mostly done by older women who in most cases are widows. These women, as a matter of fact, are deeply rooted in occultic powers and would explore all available sources (spiritual, physical, psychological) to dispossess innocent women to be supplanted by their worthless daughters. When a prayer-less husband who is morally bankrupt, a cheat to his legitimate family also a hiding Casanova in hypnotized or enfeebled by those older widows, such a no-nonsense cannot resist any form of temptation. Ladies who snatch other women's husbands are mostly high-class university girls who are often called 'Slay Queens'. These ladies have tormented marriages and lecturers in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning, especially universities. They have sophisticated charms that could easily emasculate men who have affairs with them. They reduced the husband, wife and children to nothing. More agonizingly, after chaining and barricading men with their magical powers, they wait to extinguish whoever that may want to come to the victims' aid. Those groups of ladies never pass examinations on their own unless they go 'sleeping examination' instead of writing. No matter how many lecturers who sleep with them in the same department, they will always drag a male examiner for academic favours. When they finally succeeded in their wicked behaviour, their cliques applaud them with a slogan: 'Queeneta has caught a fish'. How foolish are men becoming fish for such whores? 1 Corinthians 6:16&18 admonishes us 'Do you know that he who joins to a prostitute becomes one with her? ... Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body'. Swande and Ishima affirm that in the desire for absolute power, you 'see one woman charming, manipulating and seducing other women to kill, all with the intention to fill her selfish desire. The ultimate end is a triumvirate presentation of evil versus good as well as the power of seduction. Victims are left at the mercy of kind hearted men and Almighty God.

Man-made-widows are psychologically traumatized (what is on their minds is different from what they say or do); spiritually bankrupted (they have dwindling spirit and some indulge themselves in vices such as adultery or prostitution, drinking of alcohol to ease tension); emotionally unstable (they transfer aggression to her children, become angry and restless); physically vulnerable (they appear dull as if they have just buried their living husbands, may fight with the intruding lady and may sometimes look pale as if sick) and socially withdrawn (such a widow's social life is in jeopardy, not mingling with her friends).

Passive Widow: These widows tend to be passive in their life prior to their husband's death. They usually are not progressing in their grief work for a variety of reasons. They tend to sit and

express their grievances. They do not seem able to define a clear direction and appear unwilling or non-interested in changing. They often come across as needy to others and frustrate those who try to help them because they are so dependent. Many of them come to learn that you either walk through grief or it walks all over you. These widows are waiting for someone else to make it better and might remarry too quickly only to find that their new marriage does not resolve their grief. They often do seek help, but after their lives and issues are even more complicated (Trathen, 19).

Complaining Widow: They tend to stay too long in the feelings of victimization and anger, resentment, and sometimes bitterness, and struggle with taking personal responsibility for their own grief work. Instead they move through a series of crises blaming everyone else for their condition. They appear unwilling to change, or take action. They expect others to change by accepting their perspective. They tend to frustrate those that try to help because they are so negative and drive others away (Trathen, 20).

Intentional Widow: These women certainly struggle with passivity and anger at times. The passive and complaining widows tend to experience more complicated and prolonged grief. Grief work for a widow is hard work. Some say it is the hardest work they have ever done. Remember, either you walk with grief or it will walk all over you (Trathen, 20).

INHUMAN TREATMENT OF WIDOWHOOD IN NIGERIAN CULTURES

Widows are seen as ritually unclean at the demise of their husband and so they could not touch any object, including them without defilement. So sticks were given to them to scratch themselves to avoid defilement by touching their body. Nwezi (19) also found out that fines imposed on widows by female members of their husband's patrilineage were substantial in comparison to what they earn in rural economy. The fine was found to range from x300 (x10 to x300) depending on the gravity of offences committed when their husbands were alive or dead. They were locked in with their husband's corpse for several hours and lying down for about ten minutes beside the corpse of their deceased spouses.

Widowhood in Yoruba land

Johnson described widowhood in Yoruba land. According to him, widows are expected to lie over the grave without even a mat for three months. On the seventh day, the widow is led out of her town by an *Egungu* to a place where a mound of earth had been raised, with a yam placed on it (76). There is an extra mound on which a yam is placed and this represents the deceased. The widow is led out in rags with both hands on the opposite shoulders, her head being left bare. The widow takes a yam from the heap and this is understood to be the last subsistence she should

expect to receive from her departed husband. After this, she returns home weeping, and is expected to remain indoors for the period of three months with shaved hair and dress unchanged.

At the expiration of this period, on an appointed day her hair will be shaved and thrown away. The widow is expected to parade the streets dressed in her best, singing and dancing in honour of the dead and calling at one house after another to return thanks to sympathizers. The final ceremony is the division of the property of the deceased and this includes sharing his wives amongst his male relatives.

Widows in Nigeria are subjected to a number of cultural taboos and practices which are overwhelmingly oppressive and dehumanizing. These practices include wearing black material, staying indoors, shaving of hair, not bathing, not plaiting hair, keeping hair for seven days, staying indoors for 40 days according to Muslim rites, sleeping on the floor not sleeping during the day, dancing around town with a black dress, not being allowed to eat, rubbing on charcoal, made to swear with husband's corpse.

However, the most exploitative practice concerns the disposal of property. In the event of a husband's death, and in the absence of an older son, his brother or male relations embark on what is tantamount to looting his property or asset quite in total disregard of the widow's joint or independent contribution. Under customary law, which governs most marriages in Nigeria, a wife has absolutely no right to the husband's property or income (Boparai, 15).

Widowhood in Igbo land

For an African, no man dies from a natural cause, even at an old age. His death must necessarily be caused by someone and that person is likely to be his wife. Okogie concluded that given the patterns of inheritance in African societies which is patrilineal, it is likely for a woman to kill a man than for a man to kill a woman. In order to forestall such behaviors, widowhood has to be labeled evil and associated rites made dehumanizing and humiliating to forestall women killing their husbands. In effect, obnoxious widowhood rites are forms of social control mechanisms meant to dissuade women from harming their husbands. Because of the associated stigma and stress, Korieh argued that widowhood practices are associated with a process of communal and spiritual cleansing, thereby carrying with it spiritual and cultural significance for both the widow and the community (61).

Therefore, to ascertain her innocence, the woman is placed under an oath through the duration of the burial and sometimes through the mourning period, which is made up of the burial and the funeral. It is in this situation that widows are forced to remain with the body of the dead husband until internment (Sossou, 201-209). In some severe cases, perhaps, where the couples have been traditionally divorced, the suspicion becomes very intense and to prove her innocence, the

widow is made to drink the water used to bathe the corpse of the deceased husband. It is this exceptional practice that Akujiobi reports when he writes, „widows are made to drink the water used to bathe the corpses of their deceased husbands“ (1-14). Before, the decision to make the widow drink the water used to bathe the corpse of the husband, the widow is made to face what could be considered a tradition court session with immediate family members and the elders, members of the *umuada* group of the Igbos, some other relatives and any other interested party with the aim of investigating the widow. Olukayode gives a picture of what the court session or panel of investigation looks like in the following lines, „... they confront her with questions on how and when the deceased husband died, the circumstances that led to the death, what she did to save him from dying and her extent of contact with her husband’s family before his death“ (67-74).

At the end of the mourning period, the widow goes through a period of ritual cleansing. All materials and things used during the period of “NSO” or mourning are thrown into the ‘evil forest’ while the widow goes to the stream to wash away all impurities in a form of purification rite. After the mourning period, her hair is cut and the clothes she used that period burnt. Thereafter, the widow is considered clean and to re-enter normal life. In most communities, the mourning ends with purification rites. In this way, it is believed that the spirit of the dead husband had been adequately appeased or taken care of and the land also cleansed.

Some others have argued that widowhood rites are actually in the interest of the widow, since the sole aim is to protect her from the wandering spirit of her late husband who might want to come to take her away if she is not properly protected. This belief explains why in some cultures the women are disguised by being rubbed with charcoal, wearing rags, carrying bows and arrows, cane, brooms cutlass etc. These are meant to scare away late husband’s spirit. In some cases, some medicinal herbs believed to have the effect of scaring spirits are left burning at the entrance of the room to prevent the spirit of the husband from coming after her.

According to Erinoshio a recent survey under the auspices of the Better Life Programme (BLP) in Imo, Benue, Plateau, Rivers State etc reveals that widows are deemed to be ritually unclean at the demise of their husbands (20). They could not touch any object without defilement and were provided with pieces of stick to scratch their bodies to avoid defilement. Widows reported that their impurity extended to all aspects of their lives. To give an example, their meals were cooked in old pots rather than those normally used for cooking for other members of the family. They had to sleep on old mats placed on wooden planks or old doors. The rationale for restricting widows to the use of old items is because the items are to be disposed of or burnt at the end of the mourning period.

The maltreatment of widows is wide-ranging. Young children of widows are forced to drop out of school, work, and become destitute due to lack of access to their fathers' resources. The tendency has been to discriminate against female children, especially as regards schooling even when the kin of the dead (mostly brother, male cousins and uncles) allocate some of his resources for the upkeep of children (Osimiri, 90). Widows go through all of the harmful pre and post - burial rites whereas widowers do not.

Another ritual of purification and by extension separation starts immediately after the burial with the *umuada* patrilineal daughters taking the widow to some secluded part of the compound where they cleanly shave the new widow even to her pubic part. After the shaving, the widow takes a ritual bath and her rags are removed and she is dressed in new mourning attire. In the case of a pregnant widow, the hairs and the rags she was wearing during her seclusion are buried on the ground, for the non-pregnant widow the hairs and rags are burnt with fire. Both the shaving and the burning of both the hair and the dress/rag symbolize the beginning of disconnection process between the deceased and his widow. After these first set of rituals after burial, the widow resumes another set of minor seclusion and this lasts for about 4(four)market days totaling about twenty-eight days. Nzewi gives a vivid report of these practices among the Mbaise sub-culture as he writes: In most part of Igbo society, the early part of this period are usually the most rigorous. During the 28 days, the widow is not allowed to go to the stream, or market or enter the farmland. Certain rituals must be performed at the expiration of the 28 days before the widow can perform her normal duties (1-11). The major stipulation of the most Igbo culture in this period is that the widow moves from her husband's house/hut to another house or hut in another part of the compound. While here, she wears no clothes unless perhaps rags and she must sit on a block or wood and nowhere else. She must not sleep on a mat instead banana leaves will suffice. Within this period, the widow infrequently takes her bath and of course any personal hygiene (Basden, 28).

One of the beliefs connected with these phase of the funeral is that the deceased husband is still hovering around and still seeks to have contact with his wife/widow. So the widow in question, if for any reason she wants to go out of the hut of her seclusion or the compound must follow the back door and must never leave or enter through the same door or gate. However, the widow must arm herself with a ritual kitchen knife or stick as a protection against the intervening spirit of her deceased husband. Reporting on this practice from the Nsukka sub-culture, Okorie maintains that this period is so intense that the widow is not even expected to talk to or eat with anybody including her own children and relatives except those who are already widowed.

The widow is expected to grieve openly and demonstrate the intensity of her feeling in formalized way. Far more restrictions are placed on a widow than a widower. It is the widow not

the widower, who must endure the most humiliating rituals in relation to dressing codes, eating food, personal hygiene, and sexual activity (201-209). Widowhood is considered as life event with wide range of consequences. Hence, Goldman and Lord underscore that mourning and widowhood are opposite side of the same coin with range of implications for those involved" (122). The prominent feature is the intensity of wailing and hysteria which death generates or is expected to generate, the children will join in the wailing with friends and relatives of the family (79-84).

However, in some cultures like among the Mbaise group of Owerri sub-culture and this is often the practice in many Igbo cultures, a woman becomes a widow and begins to undergo different phases of widowhood rituals as soon as her husband's death is announced. Notably, the rituals of widowhood differ according to the level of civilization and the social status of the man, while he was alive. Goldman and Lord enunciate on this fact when they aver that while the wife or wives of an ordinary man is expected to go into traumatic wailing, beat her chest, fling around her arms and go into falling down immediately the husband takes in his last breath, with other women surrounding and restraining her from hurting herself and force her to sit down on the ground, where they sit around her.

After the interrogation and the panel/members of the family are not satisfied with the widow's account/explanations of the situations that led to the death of her husband that she would be subjected to drink the water used to bathe the corpse of the deceased husband. However, the widow may not be the only suspect in most severe cases-the death of a young man- thus others members of the family, relatives and friends could still be suspected and placed under different kinds of oath. Some of these suspects include but are not limited to the deceased brothers, friends and relatives in justification of this assumption, Moti and Wegh writes: *Ku orun* is a process by which Tiv people investigate into the cause of the death of their family members. This custom flows from the belief that death does not just occur. It is always caused by some diabolism. The process leading to the identification of the person or group responsible for the death starts with accusations and counter accusations among the dead persons patrilineal and matrilineal lineage, which often leads to customary post-mortem surgery (164) After this first stage –the inquiry/investigation stage, other stages in preparation for the burial follow in in tandem. It is from this point of preparation for burial that the widow begins to drink the dreg of her suffering and humiliation appropriate to her status as a widow. Here, the widow by the reason of her association with a deceased husband becomes both social and ritual taboo and as such becomes impure. In this state of impurity, she is not expected to have any dealing with anybody that has not experienced such state –being a widow.

CONSPIRACY AGAINST WIDOWS IN TIV TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

In the traditional Tiv society, the concepts of life and death found their definition within the general concept of African “*Holism*”. Holism as a socio-metaphysical concept defines human and natural existences within an integrated metaphor. Thus among the Tiv people, life is a continuum and as such death does not cause its cessation, accordingly, life transcends beyond the grave. Davis enunciates on this ideality when he avers that in some African cultures, death does not end a marriage (18). Among the TIV, a year period of mourning is imposed and the widow is expected to dress in white rather than black as is used to be until the 1980 s. in addition, she would have her hair cut low and would further refrain form of sexual relationship during the period of mourning.

It is upon this ontology that the widowhood practices in African [Tiv land] found their definitions. Against this backdrop Sossou describes death as an awful event that challenges the emotional and spiritual understanding of every individual (201-209). Death, though traumatic experience however, every society has made some philosophical and ritualistic attempts to make it acceptable, less fearful, absolute and with an air of resignation and to providing opportunities for expressing grief and also showing respect for the dead person. Therefore, the Tiv funeral and mourning rituals are designed to accommodate the irreconcilable conflicts inherent in death.

In the event of the death of a young person the family members will muster every energy, spiritual and material, to finding out the cause but this is done after the first reaction of general wailing. The explanation of such death is sought in the activities of witches and wizards, juju and or bad medicine which in Tivis called *kpeheishor*. The first person to be accused before any other is the wife, however this depends on the wife’s relationship with her in-laws, especially the sisters in law. The reason for being the prime suspect is that she was the closest person to the deceased.

Other forms of widowhood practices among the Tiv people and culture can be categorized and examined as follows:

- 1. Widow inheritance:** This system of marriage allowed a brother to inherit the widow of his dead brother. A son could also inherit the widow of his father (other than his mother). Such women were also called either *kwaseikyoson* or *kwaseichoghol*. In all cases where the widow had children for the deceased, all additional children arising from the new arrangement remained the children of the deceased since the widow’s relationship with the new “husband” was not recognized technically as marriage. The idea was to forestall the disintegration of the family, ensure continued protection of the widow and support for her to still champion the line of her deceased husband. To ensure maximum protection of the widow in the new relationship, she and her new “husband” were taken through the “*megh*” ritual. Essentially the ritual “*u aver megh*” was a process in which the widow and

her husband joined their legs under which a fowl was passed to ensure the ability of the widow to still bear children.

- 2. Property inheritance among the Tiv also known as *Dyako I Karen*:** widows in Tiv traditional society are not allowed to inherit the properties of their deceased husbands. This implies that the properties of the deceased husband is inherited by the brother of the husband and in the situation where the deceased husband has grown up children, the sharing formula is done on the basis of first born among the male children. the only way the widow could enjoy the properties of the deceased husband is when she has a grown up son for the husband (deceased) in so doing what has been inherited by the son can also be enjoyed by the virtue of been a mother of an heir in the family. This also reveals the significance of the male child in the family in a traditional Tiv setting, therefore the rate of conspiracy against the widows have to do with the gender of the children born in the family.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CONSPIRACY AGAINST WIDOWS IN THE TIV SOCIETY

One of the psychological effects of the conspiracy against widows among the Tiv is the fact that it brings about the feeling of inferiority complex. In this situation, the widow in whom the deceased husband's properties are taking away from the feel inferior as they are completely disregarded and ostracized from the family.

Another area is that the widow adoption by the deceased brother is done irrespective of the health status or record of the adopter which poses a risk to the widow and put her life in harm's way. Also the economic status and condition of the adopter brother is also disregarded not putting into consideration whether or not the person in question can be able to cater for the widow or not. In this respect Sossou posits that...For the women, death of a husband or a partner has an extra significance because it represents not simply the departure of a partner, a friend and breadwinner but also results in radical change in the woman's social status and life style" (201-209). More so, this practice is done without considering the psychological state of mind of the inheriting brother of the deceased husband. The widows are poor and uncared for by people who are supposed to give them succour and help. Thus, many widows face extreme poverty, discrimination and dehumanizing treatments. They were miserably deprived of their social security and family support. Their children too are isolated, often in unhealthy condition, physically abused and at times without inheriting any property.

Above all, this practice ignores the feeling of the widow towards the inheriting brother. This not considering whether the widow is fine with the decision or whether the widow has any feeling of

love towards the brother of the deceased, of which in absence of this consideration she could be forced to live with a man she does like for the rest of her life.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST WIDOWS

In terms of Christianity, the widows, in addition to other poor people, became an important source of attention for the early Christians. The church's stress on charity and care for the poor resulted in many widows joining the early churches. The response of the Christian religion to widowhood practices focused more on condemnation of the various indigenous religions and beliefs and on the preaching of the Christian doctrine that God created all persons and all things. The churches therefore condemned as pagan and anti-Christian traditional and indigenous customary institutions and practices (Amaduime, 87). As a result, women who became converted found themselves divided in their families and cultural beliefs.

Challenges facing widows such as fears and worries make it difficult for some widows to resist giving in to other practices such as wife-inheritance. Potash argues, "Many of them who have no source of income find it difficult to resist being inherited for fear of excommunication from their matrimonial homes without any entitlement to the estates of their deceased husbands" (34). The situation of the widows therefore should steer-up the present day churches from its comfort zone and a rise to fulfill its mandate by caring for the widows in relation to the Biblical principles. If the challenges facing the church are not adequately dealt with, the widows are likely to suffer.

However, the church needs to ask itself whether the same challenges were experienced by the Early Church. Carter observes, "The apostolic church like the church of every subsequent generation had its problems" (4). It is the responsibility of the church also not overlook the positive cultural norm that governed the community as Ojwang asserts, "Widow Care was done to enhance continuity of the deceased especially if the child was not left behind by the deceased for the failing to perpetuate oneself by having children is a great misfortune" (5). The church today, has the responsibility to adapt this practice because the Bible recommends that young widows to remarry if they cannot control their emotions (1Cor.7:9). This will reduce sexual-immorality both in the church and in the community. These widows are souls and in the presence of God they are all equal and the scriptures treats everyone equally.

CONCLUSION

Widowhood practices in Africa and Tiv land in particular, are dehumanizing and frustrating. This study therefore is undertaken to examine the conspiracy against widows in the traditional Tiv society. From the previous reviews it has been shown that widows were subjected to a lot of dehumanizing practices due mainly to the patrilineal nature of the Nigerian society that is male dominated, while the customary laws of the society are also skewed favourably towards men and

women have been disadvantaged from time immemorial. This explains why in the Tiv society always pity men and seek to offer succour for them when they lose their spouse, while the same society suspected women for the death of their husband. However, in contemporary time, factors like Christianity and high level of exposure of the women have gone a long way in 'watering down' most of these harmful widowhood practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The paper recommended the following points. That the real men and women of God should stand up for the family especially in a situation whereby the Jehovah sharp- sharp pastors who go collecting huge sums of money for tithe meanwhile go for extra power to produce over nights married men as husbands for their clients. Punishment should be meted out to those people who go into this dubious act, especially, during and after weddings. This could be even stopping or closing down such churches. There is also need for Christian leaders to constantly recognize the dignity of every one and everyone should be treated as such. Christian has to show their virtue of humility and openness by dialoguing and collaborating so that it disagreements on inheritance can be resolved amicably without hitches. In terms of manmade widows, dialogue is also important as clergy, religious leaders are enlightened. A creation of better understanding and joint collaboration can help so that erring member be sanctioned, which will serve as deterrent to other members who may be intending to commit such offences.

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