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Daughters of Zelophehad – Quest for gender justice in land acquisition and ownership

Author:
Kelebogile T. Resane[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Historical and Constructive Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Kelebogile Resane,
resanekt@ufs.ac.za

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This article studies the resilience of five daughters of Zelophehad in requesting to be allocated the land as their father never had a son. The Mosaic law discriminates women against land allotment or ownership. However, the same law teaches that only God owns the land and the occupants are the custodians. Deuteronomic tradition presents land custodianship as a right dispensed solely at the discretion of the owner, while Leviticus presents land as a resource to be properly managed by the recipients for sustainability. Exodus presents land occupation as a social concern. The patriarchal views of marginalising women from owning the land are challenged by the spirit of the daughters of Zelophehad who challenged the ancient traditional biblical laws with their patriarchal endorsements that restricted them to land ownership.

Contribution: Many African societies are still patriarchal, marginalising women from land ownership and occupation. Women in these traditional societies are encouraged to welcome and embrace the spirit of the daughters of Zelophehad by embracing justice education that promotes equality and social justice. They should boldly appear before the authorities to define their marginalisation regarding land possession and ownership. They can enhance their participation in economic growth by taking the risks and forming the strong networks that lead to viable economic partnerships and corporations.

Keywords: daughters of Zelophehad; women; land; law; traditions; justice; theology.

Introduction

The focus of this article is to demonstrate the biblical teaching of the rights of women to own the land. The textual content of Numbers 27:1–11 is used as both a premise and the object lesson for women's legitimate right to own the land. Certain African cultures, historical records and constitutional references, are alluded to, as a way of reinforcing the necessity of change needed to give women the rights to the land.

The Old Testament promotes the idea that rights of inheritance were assumed to pass through the male descendants. 'Women could not inherit land' (Manschreck 1974:107). In Numbers 26, it was only the sons who were numbered, and this seems to have applied to rights of inheritance as well as to military responsibility. The five daughters of Zelophehad (Nm 27:1–11) raised the question of their father who died without sons. They considered themselves as left destitute, having neither father nor brother to inherit any land. The five daughters of Zelophehad challenged the ancient traditional biblical laws with their patriarchal endorsements that restricted them to land ownership. They demonstrated an unwavering faith that does not easily accept the *status quo*, but one that dares in the midst of adverse conditions. This was a litmus test for Mosaic leadership of flexibility of former traditions by bringing their case before the Lord. Moses sought the Lord in the new situation. The law was not used to marginalise the screaming voices; instead, consultation for hermeneutical application invoked. 'The directive from God was that daughters should inherit their father's possessions, if there was no son, so that family claims might be maintained' (Wood 1970:165). Special consideration was given to women, who were able to inherit their father's properties (Merrill 1994:133). As a result, God gave a new application to the existing law. God never changes his law, but frequently requires a new application. One sees the rights of women furthered in this statute.

The dilemma in this narrative is that women do not inherit property (Dt 21:15–17). Patriarchy determined land ownership based on male hegemony. 'Patriarchy in its biblical sense (meaning the role of the older men over women and younger men) appears to have been prevalent'

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(Kinsman 1983:3). The family of daughters without sons restricted these daughters to marry only within the family or clan, so that there was no transference of land custodianship outside juridical clan. This is also observed in 1 Chronicles 23:22 that Eleazar died without having sons: he had only daughters. Their cousins, the sons of Kish, married them. According to Hamilton (1999:364), the Hebrew construction applied in the narrative seems to be supporting this dilemma. The Numbers text declares that the daughters of Zelophehad 'drew near' (*qārab*) and 'stood' (*lipnê*) before Moses and the priest (27:1–2). This gives an idea of feeling unworthy or unclean, therefore communicating by keeping the distance. The victims of social marginalisation created proximity to those in power by vocally communicating their case. What is important is that the daughters of Zelophehad overrode their social degradation and communicated their feelings and their thoughts. This narrative is an example of women taking initiative to fight for what they believed was their legal and human right. It is a narrative of women who understand God's justice towards their fight against discriminative patriarchal systems. These daughters of Zelophehad's initiative is a non-confrontational and collective approach that can serve as a model for African women in their struggles for equal rights, especially in relation to the ownership of the land.

Daughters of Zelophehad internalised pragmatic consciousness organised around practical reality of life strategy. They pursued the strategy of resilience to break the traditional or patriarchal red tape. Their particular feminine identities did not bar them from accessing or owning the land – the commodity that enhances any human selfhood. They freed themselves from the constraints of paternalism and patriarchy, and pursued ideals of earning their own livelihood in order to continue to grow and maintain their households (Bozzoli & Nkotsoe 1991:236–237). The narrative is a lesson on achieving more than challenging and changing unjust law. It is a narrative about refusal of giving in and surrendering to the social obstacles accompanied by prejudices, oppressive and discriminative obstacles towards social emancipation (Tarlow 2018:1).

Land in Mosaic law

As stated above, land possession and ownership were interpreted as the nation's patrimony or inheritance. It was regarded as God's gift to his people, although the ultimate owner is God himself. Brueggemann (1984) pointed to the fact that:

> Land possession is closely linked to Yahweh, his governance and purpose … The land is not autonomous, nor are those who have it, but it relates to the Creator (Lv 25:23). (pp. 43–44)

Yahweh is the owner of the land. This made land a sacred trust that could not be sold (Kaoma 2015:88). There can therefore be no perpetual human ownership of the land (Wittenberg 2007:167). The same notion is highlighted by Wright (1997:3) that the divine ownership of the land was the indisputable notion in Israel as well as the neighbouring nations. Time and again the Pentateuch reiterate that it is God who gives Israel the land (Wenham in Harrison 1979:320). This was clearly spelled out in Deuteronomic tradition:

> When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. (Dt 8:10)
>
> Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. (Dt 9:6)

This giftedness of the land was very important that losing it was equated with the destruction of the essence of nationhood. To be 'dispossessed of one's family land or, worst of all, to be driven out of the country into exile was unmitigated calamity' (Wright 1997:4). People living on the land understood that they were just the custodians. 'They are only tenants, custodians of the land, responsible for the use of the land to God, its ultimate owner' (Wittenberg 2007:167). Land acquisition and ownership was a proof that God elected the nation (Israel) as his possession. The land served as a visible symbol of special relationship with God. God the giver of land was to be appreciated through worship as people had to display a proper gratitude to him. Longevity in the land was regarded as a reward for obedience and worship of the Lord. To be driven off, the land was regarded as a last straw that breaks the Camel's back of destroying the deepest ego or identity of the nation. According to Clements (1978:94), the land became for these people 'a sign of hope, and an object of promise'. It became the central object of hope and eschatological expectation. Deuteronomic wisdom points out that as per God's promise and human condition of obedience, the land inhabitants are expected to 'increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey' (Dt 6:3), 'a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills' (Dt 8:9):

> [*A*] land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven … a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. (Dt 11:11–12)

It is therefore theologically conclusive that the land is the platform on which humanity experiences God's blessings, and where God delights communing with his people. The land is where humanity experiences God and life and all its accompanying prosperity. Again, throughout Deuteronomic account, one sees the concept of land bound up with the concept of rest. The 'rest' concept 'is admittedly bound up with the concept of a pleasant life in the land, secure and blessed' (Dumbrell 1984:121). Land is the convergence point where God and humanity meet for humanity to enjoy the Edenic experience, which was the original intention of God for creation. No land no prosperity for wealth is linked to land and to land ownership (Wright 1997:3). No land no self-expression. No land, no God–human communality, 'for land is the specific experience of God's well-ordered creation over which humankind now has dominion' (Brueggemann 1984:43). This truth is further asserted by Gnanakan (2014:49)

that 'Land is crucial for human habitation as well as for the production of food and other essentials'. Humanity finds its full expression and identity on the land. Any negative experiences on the land, for example, famine, were because of inhabitants' disobedience to God's law. God had said it all over the canon that if they turn away from him, he would:

> [*S*]hut up the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you. (Dt 11:17)

Ellisen (1991:1172) highlighted the fact that 'Israel's return to the land was contingent on her "return to the Lord" … Deliverance from both locusts and hostile armies depended upon the people's genuine turning to the Lord'. It is therefore imperative to remember that 'true wisdom is to live in responsible awareness of the Creator and his intention' (Brueggemann 1984:44).

Apart from the Deuteronomic ordinances concerning the land, Leviticus spells out the practicalities of land custodianship. According to Leviticus 25, God is the owner of the land; and he entrusts humans the stewardship of keeping and tending it for present and future generations (Gnanakan 2014:50). The ordinance concerning the sabbatical year gives the tenants an opportunity to expand their faith in the owner as the provider; and for the land to renew itself for better production outputs – in order to regain fertility (Ex 23:10–11). Wittenberg (2007:167) highlighted the importance of sabbatical year that 'all activity of the tenants should stop, because the land itself should participate in the sabbath rest of God'.

Leviticus epitomises the management of the agricultural land, including vine fields. While Mosaic law highlights social concerns, Leviticus, in particular, highlights the land's proper management and its ultimate owner (Yahweh). The vineyards mentioned in Leviticus in this context demonstrate the significance of land productivity for the benefit of humanity. This calls for good stewardship from humans to maintain the productivity of the land:

> By including the land in what, according to priestly thinking, is one of the most fundamental human rights given in creation, namely to participate in the rest of God, the sabbath, it has eliminated all utilitarian thinking which degrades nature to a mere object, a resource for human exploitation. (Wittenberg 2007:168)

Great observation is that Deuteronomy presents land custodianship as a right dispensed solely at the discretion of the owner, while Leviticus presents land as a resource to be properly managed by the recipients for sustainability. Exodus (23) presents land occupation as a social concern:

> Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. (v. 11b)

Human survival through and on the land seems to be the central concern for the Exodus narrative.

The Mosaic Law in reality captures the importance of the land utilisation for human benefit, good and sustainability. These principles, as I summarise them from Wittenberg (2007:169), are still relevant today especially for womenfolk:

1. Observing God's laws regarding the land assures us *and you will live safely in the land* (Lv 25:18).
2. Economic security will be guaranteed by the special fertility of the land. (Lv 25:19).
3. God's blessing is on the land, if sabbatical year is observed, that is, proper management for land to rejuvenate itself (Lv 25:20–22).

These ordinances yield no space for exploitation of the land. The care for the land 'is part of a person's religious duty, as it is care for the world that God made' (Williams 2013:52). Human beings are to enter into dynamic community to live life under the giver of land, God himself. Humans should redefine their position in land acquisition and occupation:

> Although they are entrusted with the stewardship of nature, they are at the same time part of nature and accountable to God who alone is the owner of his creation. (Wittenberg 2007:168)

Land ownership and women in African cultures

Like in many parts of Africa, discourses on land reforms are a highly emotive issue here in South Africa, yet land issues historically played some key roles including some anticipated resolutions towards national stability, democracy and development (Resane 2015:176). Land-related issues confront South Africa and threaten her territorial integrity. Political sides that promote equality in all spheres of society, equitable distribution of resources and redressing the imbalances of the time see these ideals achievable through ownership of land. Despite these political noises, inefficient implementation of land policies and land inequality remains. Inequality or denial to land accessibility equals poverty and disempowerment. In agreement with Muzenda (2020):

> Land has always been the source of life in Africa. African history shows that the African life is based on land. It is the land that produces which is needed for human consumption. (p. 4)

Land constitutes a productive asset and is a major source of capital for the poor (Lipton 2009). In rural and urban centres, land is wealth (Akinola 2018:2). The truth remains that 'land is familial, communal, sacramental, life-giving, healing and eschatological' (Chimhanda 2014:37), and therefore a platform on which livelihood is derived and expressed.

In Africa, 'the customary land tenure system is driven by linage or clan control' (Akinola 2018:5). Women's struggle for land dates back to the colonial era. Out of confusion or ignorance, the colonialists perpetuated and sometimes 'imposed patriarchal structures of land use and ownership … and reinforced a gender division of labour, which empowered

men and disempowered women' (Mbilinyi & Shechambo 2009:96). The sad scenario is 'most women remain dependent on the existence and goodwill of male relatives for access to land' (Allendorf 2007).

In the middle of the 19th century, South Africa experienced a socio-economic boom because of the discoveries of diamonds and gold. Population migration to the mining centres changed the traditional cultures (Gouws & Kadalie in Liebenberg et al. 1994):

> This disruption caused marital instability, the emergence of female-headed households and the break-up of the household as the traditional economic unit in which children were jointly cared for by both men and women. (p. 217)

Despite this socio-cultural turbulence, 'land acquisition … provided the cornerstone for economic security' (Manson & Mbenga 2014:11). Indeed, land is an economic resource for human livelihood. Urban dwellers acquired and accumulated wealth by owning 'stands' for personal occupation and for outbuildings for rental purposes. South Africa continues to slump into poverty, and those suffering the most are women. Acquiring women's property rights, especially land ownership, is crucial to the socio-economic development of the postapartheid South Africa. It is another means of poverty alleviation.

African cultures had for centuries impeded women prosperity by marginalising them from land ownership. Colonial and apartheid legislations restricted women mobility – one of the cornerstones in keeping especially African women in a position of subordination. Women were and still are not allowed in diverse ways, to own the land. 'Even after the deaths of their spouses, the inheritance rights favoured their sons if they had any, or their deceased husbands' relatives' (Masenya & Ramantswana 2015:103). This is particularly observed in rural or tribal land. This does not apply to women only, as land tenure was intertwined with people's social–communal systems whereby the territory inhabited by an ethnic group was owned by the tribe in the name of their king or tribal chief. Individual land tenure was only a European custom and phenomenon (Changuion & Steenkamp 2012:13). Land became a commodity for enhancement of political involution – ownership centred around the *kgosi* [chief]. Men, especially of the royal descent, occupied or owned the land for themselves or the benefit of their families. African royals used this system to dislocate women from land ownership. This is demonstrated by Michael Moiloa of Bahurutshe- bo-Moiloa, who once stated that (Manson & Mbenga 2014):

> [*W*]omen should not be given a chance (to cultivate demonstration plots) as they are always occupied by domestic affairs at their home, but … the young men should be given the opportunity. (p. 119)

This was said in the 1950s when the tribe, because of Lutheran missionary influence, was embracing modern agriculture as their economic livelihood. The women were increasingly displaced or marginalised as cultivators – a phenomenon that gained the momentum among the Bahurutshe since the 1940s. The same trend happened to the indentured Indians in the province of Natal where men furrowed the land with hoes to plant seed cane, fertilised and weeded the fields; and 'Indian women helped the men in the fields' (Munsamy 2004:59).

Traditionalism oppresses women in matters of acquisition of the land. Women are still expected to attend to household tasks, and therefore, are not always encouraged to take up leadership roles. Aspects such as prejudice, sexism and discrimination from men generate the idea that farming is a man's job. Some people had reached the cul-de-sac of hope, because this *status quo* seems to be deeply entrenched in psychological bedrock of African societies. Nürnberger (2007) was of the same opinion that:

> To look for equal status of women in traditionalist cultures is a futile exercise. Even in the few cases where the female lineage is fundamental, for instance among the Owambo, it is the men who are in charge. (p. 201)

In post-political liberation struggles of Southern Africa, which involved both men and women, struggles for justice regarding women's rights to the land, continue to be a new struggle. 'The civic society also joined the cries of women for land imbalances. The civic society challenged the authorities to consider gender justice in land ownership' (Muzenda 2020:7).

The subservience of women because of religio-cultural ideologies disempowers women from owning the land. Sadly, the very same women robbed of the opportunity to own the land are the ones expected by societal norms to produce food from the very same land, for the family or society at large. It is sad to say that although many women work hard towards the produce of the fields, they have little or no say towards the produce (Masenya & Ramantswana 2015:103). They are the active contributors towards food economy from the land that they do not own. When Bozzoli and Nkotsoe (1991) interviewed some Bafokeng women of the dawn of the 20th century, one of the interviewees expressed:

> Our main occupation during those years was farming and it was profitable … Farming was number one … farming was the woman's sphere in more than just name: No woman ever thought of going to work for a white man … women got rich only through farming. Several women talk of 'my mother's fields', 'my mother's crops', and 'my mother's income from the sale of crops'. (pp. 41–42)

While men were allowed to emigrate to join industrial economy in the cities, women were not allowed to follow suit, but to remain home in anticipation of getting married. Patriarchy reinforced the chief mode of agricultural production through young women (Bozzoli & Nkotsoe 1991:89). Girls were ploughing and gardening, while men went to the mines and cities for the emerging industrial economy of the last century. This cultural tendency bred

patriarchal violence imposed on black women. In agreement with Kobo (2019:83), this patriarchal violence is anti-communal, anti-dialogue, violent and mono-logical. Patriarchal powers consorted with the imperial powers to manipulate the women situations 'in order to throw *others* on the underside of the imperial/colonial matrix of power into enslavement' (Ramantswana 2017:81). Women tilled the land that they could not own. They produced livelihoods on and out of the ground that they could not proudly be title deeded. In the midst of economic marginalisation, political imperceptibility and land repudiation for women, 'they make it their responsibility to provide for the family and to preserve the resources that have been endowed to humanity by mother earth' (Chirongoma 2012:123). This means that women are the primary producers of food for the communities, despite socio-political marginalisation they face on socio-economic platforms.

Women in South Africa are still invisible – unseen and unheard when coming to socio-political landscape in South Africa. They are in the majority in both the country and the church yet have no voice (Mudimeli & Van der Westhuizen 2019:27). Regardless of this socio-economic marginalisation, they continue with the spirit of resilience that characterises the women missionaries of the earlier centuries by having a strong belief in God and possessing some strong opinions on issues of their day. Their beliefs occasionally placed them at odds with their male counterparts in socio-political strata (Benson 2005:183). This is injustice that calls for ontological narrative of the land. Verhoef and Rathbone (2015) proposed the ontology of land that is broad and that resists the collusive power of colonialism and modernism, while at the same time incorporating the link between identity, integrity and dignity with the land (p. 158). This appeals for the engagement of theology 'of creation that emphasise the centrality of land in human history as a gift from God shared by all people as human habitat' (Verhoef & Rathbone 2015:157).

The return of the spirit of the daughters of Zelophehad

There is a popular saying in Africa: 'If you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation' (Stearns 2010:157). This notion is expanded by De Vries (1998:78) that 'education of women has what economists call a high return in investment, both for the individual and for society at large'. Education for women should be geared to justice education accompanied by skills development. African women should be encouraged to fight for their rights to education that focusses on farming skills. We who come from the notorious Verwoerdian Bantu Education remember that from the higher primary level, there was always a division where girls did domestic sciences, while boys did agricultural sciences. This definitely robbed girl learners an opportunity to imbibe passion for agriculture or farming.

The spirit and the resilience of the daughters of Zelophehad can only be possible in the language of justice. Justice is to be applied in order to address the injustices of the past. Mahlatsi (2020) correctly pointed out that:

> Because of our history of dispossession and dehumanisation through such processes as colonialism and apartheid, where draconian laws were implemented to disenfranchise and de-civilise Black people, our language of justice revolves greatly around expropriation … Taking back the land and economy that were violently dispossessed is one of the important ways of seeking justice. (p. 8)

Justice education for women aspiring to own the land automatically addresses imbalances in socio-economic landscape, dehumanisation and de-civilisation; and, of course, the 'brutally effective strategy of *invisibilisation* – a common mechanism of alienation and exclusion' (Mahlatsi 2020:96). The curriculum for this justice education should consist of identity and dignity of women, the rights and emancipation of women from patriarchal bigotry and, of course, the probabilities of women power in socio-economic mechanisms. It should be the education that will change women's perception that farming is a men's job and reverse the culture or patriarchal and traditional values that still divide the gender roles. The curriculum content should *visibilise* women and deal away with all efforts that render women unworthy of their humanity.

The daughters of Zelophehad had resilience to break the socio-religious rules by boldly appearing before the authorities to define their marginalisation regarding land possession and ownership. They articulated their plight in such a way that divine consultation had to be mediated. They cried for justice, and justice was offered them at the end. They acknowledged, and rightly so, that as women, they could not continue to be pariahs in their ancestral land. They knew that their sustainability was dependent on the land. So, denying them that right would birth poverty and dignity. Justice is to be pursued to right the wrongs meted out on women over many years of traditional oppression, 'colonialism, apartheid and a neoliberal regime that has facilitated the continued dehumanisation of Black people' (Mahlatsi 2020:197), especially women. Like in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad, men should play a crucial role as agents of change and see the importance and acknowledge that women were discriminated against in land ownership. This continuing historical anomaly should be addressed, not avoided.

If women, who make up the majority of smallholder farmers, were given same resources as men, their food output would be significantly increased. Gender inequality in agricultural sector effectively deprives the industry for maximum benefits in food security, job creation and, of course, income generation. Injustice and inequality are the two heads of monstrous discrimination. In the developing countries such as most in Africa, women are deprived of farming skills development, like De Vries (1998:74) said that 'where women are employed in raising cash crops, they do the backbreaking

work of planting, weeding, and harvesting, while men operate the mechanical equipment'. Although women are unique and significantly different from men physically, they are a *spirit-person with a female body*. Women are unique because God specifically placed them in the Garden of Eden along with male species, Adam. They were co-labourers in farming and the creation story does not differentiate their job descriptions. In fact, the Old Testament is rich with examples of women participating in economic life, 'mixing freely with their menfolk and frequently showing greater initiative and resourcefulness' (Wright 1997:190).

Like the daughters of Zelophehad, women need support to take risks. They should start with what they have in their hands, even if it means starting with one goat or a small patch of land in their backyards. Building from small always has the potential of growth. They should take the risks with their farming business in order to succeed. They need to 'strive to cultivate new spaces for representing themselves more forcefully and more intently… by creating new spaces of articulating liberation against patriarchal and imperial oppression' (Dube 2000:116). Instead of navel gazing and dying inside, women are to adopt Zelophehad's daughters' spirit of putting their heads on the block by breaking the disempowering barriers created by patriarchism, colonialism and apartheid. However, they should be empowered with the skills and abilities of calculating risk-benefit analysis 'which involves estimating the short- and long-term societal benefits' (Miller 1992:551). Risk-taking is inherent in economic survival, and it is the driver towards successful entrepreneurship. The resilience in Zelophehad's daughter can be a motivation for women who suffer marginalisation when coming to land acquisition and ownership.

One lesson to be learned from the daughters of Zelophehad is the united effort. They did not go to the authorities as individuals, but as a team. This is where corporate, networking and entrepreneurship come into play. Partnership, collaboration and unity accomplish much. Balenga (2017) captured the importance of partnership:

> In the 21st century, partnering with others is a must if we truly want to go further. It is in partnering and collaborating with others that we complement each other. Partnership puts the team aspect into action. What we may not know our partners may know, and we can use each other's knowledge to the mutual benefit of the partnership. (p. 276)

Women are encouraged to build a strong support network. From the immediate family to the community, women can develop partnerships and networks to foster the Setswana and Sesotho *letsema* concept leading into corporate utilisation of the farming land. *Letsema*, according to Resane (2017):

> [*I*]s a traditional practice of working together to reach common purpose. The community comes together to build community project such as the school, clinic, or another person's house or cattle's kraal. They cooperate also when cultivating or harvesting the fields of other members of the community. (p. 99)

The Yoruba of Nigeria calls it *òwè*, defined by Gbadegesin (in Coetzee & Roux 2000), as:

> A cooperative endeavour in which people help one another on a specific task; for instance, building a new house or clearing a forest for farmland requires help from others. Such is freely given on the basis of reciprocity. (p. 295)

Women as humans are therefore social. They cannot exist as individuals, but corporately. 'All people are by nature social and tend to live in communities … Laws then, make it possible for people to live in community as one body serving community' (Nkadimeng 2020:109). Women as humans need others for physical, economic and developmental survival. Like Matolino (2014:53) asserted: 'She needs a community of people to enable her to exploit all other functions that she is endowed with'. In this community, women receive empowerment through networks and partnerships, because individuality is enhanced and assisted by communality. Communities serve or are expected to serve women as a pool to draw out resources for claiming what is rightfully theirs. This is when they should lean on pro-active boldness and reactive boldness. According to Speckman (2007):

> Pro-active boldness is about the challenge of structures by believers, regardless of the consequences, with the view of transforming them …, while reactive boldness is about the resistance and defiance of oppressive structures by believers … (p. 228)

Partnership will help female farmers to become bold and influential as agricultural industry players. Entrepreneurial boldness is a must for empowering women to move from subsistent farming to commercial farming. This can easily result into women playing a central role in the agriculture value chain for the domestic and international markets. Entrepreneurship is one of the options for reform, which is to identify and empower them (Changuion & Steenkamp 2012:305). The more entrepreneurs in the communities, the higher positive impact on the economy in terms of job creation. Women's active participation in the agricultural economy has potentials of benefits beyond their own livelihoods whereby the lives of their families and communities can improve beyond imaginations.

Conclusion

The return of the spirit of the daughters of Zelophehad should emanate from the biblical and theological narratives. It should be understood that women's emancipation of granting them the equal rights of owning and utilising the land is a biblical construct that should never be compromised. The church, like the missionary churches of the colonial era that taught people farming skills, should take the lead in charting the way forward, because it is the church that can handle the Bible to give theological insights into this matter. The separation of Church and State should not be a barrier that denies women opportunities of empowerment. The church in the community should become a learning centre for community development. We can all agree that 'the basis for any public and social engagement of the churches is theological reflection and analysis' (Bataringaya in Sinn &

Harasta 2019:80). From the biblical narrative, the church should engage dialogue on women to be allowed some space to exercise their freedom of utilising allotted land for economic growth through agricultural activities.

The narrative of the daughters of Zelophehad teaches us the quest for gender justice in land acquisition and ownership; and that theology needs to be revised in order to allay maleness but enhance femaleness. This theology's task is to:

> [*P*]resent a relational systematic theology of *differance*: 'I am because we are'. And *who* we are is inextricably linked with the epistemology of variegated group-ness, as in 'there is no me without we' – the antithesis of the Western theo-philosophical orthodoxy. (Thomas in Sinn & Harasta 2019:15)

Time has come for women to reclaim their place in economic activities through farming that comes through land ownership. The imbalances of the past are to be addressed, especially by men, to allay all the feminine prejudices and fears for women to arise and reclaim their rightful and potential agri-economic contributions. The spirit and the attitude of the daughters of Zelophehad are to be revoked and revisited for female emancipation when coming to land ownership and utilisation. Nürnberger (2016) was correct that:

> Female emancipation is particularly important for the healthy development of a society. We cannot afford to marginalise half of the population, least of all the half that has proved to be more hard working and responsible than its male counterpart in recent times. Apart from the demands of equity, women tend to have internalised the typical family values of cooperation and mutual concern, as opposed to the individualistic masculine values of competition and domination. With women in leadership positions, these values can be fed more readily into the social system at all levels of competence. (p. 241)

The joint efforts by men and women in all spheres of life should be encouraged for women empowerment. This empowerment equips women through education, risk-taking and networking.

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