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Chapter 9

THE ROLE OF BURIAL MARKERS IN THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE OF A PEOPLE – SHONA AND ISRAELITE SOCIETIES IN FOCUS.

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Introduction

One of the most vivid memories from my childhood experiences is the day I unknowingly sat on a mould of soil and played with a pillar of stone that had been placed at the edge of the mould. What had drawn my attention to the stone was that it looked simply unique from other stones that were around. On being told, however, that it was a tomb where my grandmother had been buried years back, I felt a shiver go up the spine for I knew from one of the family teachings that it was a taboo sitting and playing on a grave. The prohibition went further even to bar children from going near the resting place of the dead. Such oral tradition/teaching found its way into the pen of Bourdillon (1976) who writes that graves are avoided because of the fear of death as well as fear of the occult powers which are believed to linger around graves. He goes further to mention that a case of madness, for example, in a small boy could be attributed to his stumbling across a grave while herding cattle and other similar mishaps could also be a result of proximity of graves (Bourdillon, 1976). Echoing similar sentiments is Julie Rugg (2000) who argues that cemeteries are for the most part considered sacred in so far as the site is 'regarded with respect.' Much of this respect, as she further argues, rests largely on the fact that the site acts as a context for grief, and it is the bereaved that need to be protected from inappropriate activity (Rugg, 2000). It is such teachings among the Shona in particular that made me sweat upon realization that I had been playing with a grave. While my grandmother had since passed on, the burial markers on her grave stood as a testimony that she had been interred on that spot and they stood also as a point of contact between her dead spirit and her living family members. Grave markers too were a reminder for the living to keep off from disturbing those who were 'resting.' What was done to my deceased

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grandmother was not unique to her alone but this has since time immemorial been the practice across various cultures. It is due to the quest to understand more the meaning and significance of these burial markers that this chapter makes a comparative analysis between Shona and Israelite burial customs since they share a lot in common. Before embarking, however, on the main task of the work I shall briefly look at the issue of interment in both cultures since it often determines the kind of burial markers to be placed on graves.

Interment among Jews and Shona peoples

Jewish Burials

Concluding the mourning rites among the Jews was the procession to the family tomb where the corpse was laid to rest. Inside the tomb, as noted by B. McCane (2003), was a burial chamber/s at the center of whose was a depression 'central pit' carved into the floor possibly to enable free movement while working in the tomb. Above the 'central pit' were niches carved into the walls of the chamber where the corpse was placed. One form of these burial shelves was the *loculus niche* wherein a corpse would lie perpendicular to the wall of the tomb so that either the feet or the head only would be visible. The other form was called the *arcosolium niche* which was a broad arch-shaped recess carved along the wall of the tomb thus creating a wide and open shelf upon which the corpse could be laid parallel to the tomb wall (McCane, 2003). Both the *loculus niche* and the *arcosolium niche* are believed, however, to be a Hellenistic development that first began to appear in Jewish tombs during the late Hellenistic and Herodian periods.

After the corpse had been laid in the tomb, the mouth of the tomb was usually covered with a large circular stone and the stone could further be secured by sealing it. Sealing it helped relatives see whether the tomb had been tampered with or not. At Jesus' burial, for example, we find the chief priests and Pharisees who had been ordered to guard the tomb making the sepulcher secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard (Mt.27:66).

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Apart from burial in the niches there were also other locations where the corpse could be laid to rest. In some instances the 'central pit' could serve also as a place where corpses were laid. Serving also as places of repository were free-standing burial containers such as the sarcophagi and lead or wooden coffins (McCane, 2003). Depending on the socio-economic class and willingness of a given family, the sarcophagi or the wooden coffin could be artfully constructed and ornamented.

In Jewish tradition, burial in a family tomb functioned as a physical marker of the family claim to the land. When, for example, Joshua died, he was buried in his own inheritance at Timnathserah (Josh.24:30). H.C Brichto and J. Milgrom (Cited in Block-Smith, 1992) suggest that the commandment to honour one's father and mother (Ex.20:12; Dt.5:16) may actually refer to the filial obligation to maintain ownership of family property with the ancestral tomb so as to provide 'honour' in life as well as after death.

While some ancestral tombs functioned as physical markers of the family claim to the land, some burials served as territorial boundary markers. In the book of Samuel, we find Rachel's tomb, for example, situated in the territory of Benjamin (1 Sam.10:2). Though family tombs generally appear to have been the place of interment for most individuals in Jewish society, some biblical texts show that certain religious and civic functionaries, prophetic figures and kings were buried separately and in most cases, in their capital cities. When Samuel died, for example, he was laid to rest in Ramah, his own city (1 Sam.28:3). Though there are archaeological debates on the exact location of David's tomb, the book of Kings informs us that when he slept with his fathers, he was laid to rest in the City of David (1 Kings 2:10).

Moving down to the ranks of the ordinary people or the commoners as it was known in Jewish society, one finds that they too had their own places of burial. Since they could not afford to have hewn tombs most were buried in pit graves in the common burial field. One such place is the common burial field outside Jerusalem's city gates, in the Kidron Valley attested also in 2 Kings 23:6. Being buried in the common burial field was almost tantamount to a curse since it precluded

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joining the ancestors and this meant a subsequent lack of family veneration and care. If being buried away from the family tomb happened to be compounded by being unmourned by one's family members, the curse was too shameful. Such a shameful or dishonourable burial, in other words, was precisely the total opposite of what was accorded by honourable burial, for instead of enabling one merit the care and veneration of the living family members it displaced an individual from his place in the family.

Shona Burials

Looking at Shona culture one would realize that while the Jewish structure of the family tomb hardly has any parallels in this culture, the concept as such is not that foreign. Most clans among the Shona have burial places peculiar to the clan and each family within the clan is allotted its section. Even at common burial places families usually have their deceased family members laid to rest in rows corresponding to each family name. With the older generation of the Shona, it was quite common to have burials performed in rock caves as was with the Jews. The only difference, however, was that it was hewn tombs for the Jews whereas with the Shona, natural caves were sought and then sealed off when a burial would have taken place. When the cave was big, the Shona could also partition it into various burial chambers.

Yet another aspect in common between Jews and the Shona is the practice of reserving certain burial places for key figures of their respective societies, especially the royal house. Given the belief in the posthumous powers of the dead in both cultures, those figures who are recognized as principal players in the history of their nations are thought to possess special powers and to maintain intimate contact with the Creator as they had during their lifetimes. As a result of this belief, their bodies are buried in special places away from the rest of fellow dead humans. This finds echo in Bourdillon (1976) who writes that the graves of chiefs are often put together in a remote spot far away from human habitation and it is a known taboo that all are barred from visiting such graves except for ritual purposes. With the Shona, a special rock cave is identified and partitioned into various chambers so that the remains of each chief occupy their own chamber. Unlike the Jews, however, who had their kings buried in artfully constructed and ornamented

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sarcophagi; the Shona would first dry the corpse then position it as if in real life on a well constructed stone seat inside the cave. As a mark of the cave's sacredness a dense bush is allowed to grow around the cave. Only specially appointed people may be allowed inside the cave in the event that there is another burial to take place or when they want to offer sacrifices.

While pit graves in Jewish tradition were generally meant for the commoners or the less fortunate, the same cannot be said in Shona culture. Due to difficulties in locating free caves and sometimes the distance to such caves, most of the Shona now have their dead buried in pit graves. If someone, however, identifies his/her own cave and requests to be buried there when he/she is dead, people usually would try to honour that request made.

When it comes to the structure of pit graves among some groups of the Shona, it is possible to identify some similarity of it with the *arcosolium niche*. When digging the pit grave, these Shona groups carve out a recess along the wall of the tomb creating thus an open shelf in which the corpse is laid parallel to the tomb wall. Before, however, the tomb is filled with soil; the shelf is sealed off usually with stones or blocks of wood and dagga. Some lay the corpse in the depression they create on the floor of the grave but also have blocks of wood or stone laid on top so that the corpse does not come into direct contact with the soil that would be used to fill the pit grave. It is viewed a taboo if soil is just thrown directly on the corpse, whether it is in a coffin or not.

After filling the grave with soil, the Shona, more like the Jews, have their own way of sealing the tomb so that it can easily be seen or known later if the tomb was tampered with or not. After the last shovel of soil has been thrown onto the tomb, either a close male relative or the *varoora* (daughters-in-law) depending with a particular group of the Shona, sweep around the grave and great care is taken that the marks of their footsteps are not left imprinted on the ground that would have been swept. Affirming the existence of such a customary practice, Bourdillon (1976), mentions that the area around the grave is swept carefully with a certain branch of a tree which afterwards is left on the grave. The sweeping is meant to clear the ground such that any footprints indicating violation of the grave will be clearly visible on inspection the following morning. To

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achieve the effective result a person would have to sweep whilst going backwards so as to erase any trace of his/her footsteps. On coming the following morning for *rumuko* (awakening visit after burial) relatives would be keen to see if there are any marks either of persons or animals that could be visible on the swept ground. Some groups among the Shona may actually have some male members guard the grave during the night after the burial but such a custom appears to be generally dying off. What remains in place, however, is the guarding of an already dug grave in the event that a burial failed to take place. Such a custom usually stems from the fear that witches can easily tamper with the grave once it is left unguarded. While witchcraft appears to be the most feared phenomenon, there is also fear of the spirit of the interred dead person. To guard against wrath of the deceased, some groups among the Shona, as observed by Bourdillon (1976), leave a thorny branch on the path away from the grave to discourage the spirit from returning home to worry the family.

Just as burial in a family tomb among the Jews functioned as a physical marker of the family claim to the land, the same applies with some burials among the Shona. Most clans among the Shona have their homes situated on the piece of land they would have inherited from their ancestors. Claim to the ancestral land among the Shona becomes more pronounced if there is talk on the possibility of being evacuated to some other piece of land to pave way for any governmental project. Some actually would resist the evacuation on the grounds that their ancestors are buried there, arguing thus that the ancestors would be left with no one to care for them. When Osborne Dame, for example, was about to be built around the late 1980s, there was some tension between the government and the Manyika peoples living in the Mt Jenya area. The local inhabitants were resisting evacuation citing the existence and possible desacralization of their ancestral graves (Manyanhaire, I.O, et al, 2007, 217). Even if there is no talk about evacuation, encroaching into the patrimony of any family without prior agreement may actually result in a blood-bath between the families involved.

Burial markers in Israelite culture

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Sealing off the rite of interment among the Jews was at times the erection of a memorial marker on the tomb. When Rachel was laid to rest, for example, Jacob is said to have erected a pillar upon her tomb (Gen.35:20). During the reforms under King Josiah we also find another illustration pointing to this practice of erecting monuments. He, King Josiah, is said to have come across a monument of an unnamed prophet buried near the altar at Bethel and who is said to have long predicted the fall of this altar (2 Kings 23:1518;1 Kings 13:20). In yet another incident, though it may not have been directly linked with burial, Jacob is seen in the book of Genesis erecting a stone pillar on the ancestral ground and then pouring oil upon the pillar (Gen.28:17-18).

Fearing that no one would remember him in life since he had no son, Absalom is said to have set up for himself a pillar after his own name in the King's Valley (2 Sam.18:18). From her research, Bloch-Smith brings to light that another memorial monument called *yad* 'hand' and 'phallus' was erected inside the tomb. This instrument enabled one's memory to be perpetuated through progeny (Block-Smith, 1992:113). What can be said of these memorial markers is that they probably functioned also as the points of cultic activities such as consulting the dead and feeding the dead.

When it came to those who were perceived as enemies of the Jews, special markers were placed on their tombs as a sign of them being chastised in perpetuity. The tombs of such people were marked by a great heap of stones. When Ai was captured, for example, its king Achan had a great heap of stones raised over him (Josh.7:24-26). A similar thing happened to the five kings of the Southern coalition; the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish and the king of Eglon. After they had been put to death they are said to have been thrown into a cave where they had earlier hidden themselves and great stones were set against the mouth of the cave (Josh.10:22-27). Equally meted the same kind of burial was Absalom, he was thrown into a great pit in the forest and a very great heap of stones were raised over him (2 Sam.18:17).

Burial Markers in Shona Culture

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More like in Jewish culture, concluding the rite of interment in Shona culture is also the setting up of memorial markers. Whilst a pillar of stone is usually erected on almost every grave by the Shona to mark the position of the head when one is buried, such a pillar functions also as a locus of cultic activities when sacrifices to the deceased person are made, for example, during the *kurova guva* or re-instating ceremony. *Kurova guva* ceremony is a ritual meant to bring back the spirit of the dead person to look after the family. Apart from erecting a pillar of stone, some may insert a metal tag written or unwritten on the tomb as a future reminder of where their beloved one would be buried.

Other groups among the Shona plant a shrub either on the four corners or the two front corners of the grave. According Mugwidi (interview, 21/01/14), the Karanga people in the Silobela area of Zimbabwe plant a *mhuruweri* '(mulberry tree)' on the four corners of the grave and the trees are allowed to grow and even bear fruit. When the grave is within the courtyard children may actually feed on the mulberry fruits but are generally discouraged from doing so, especially if the grave is unknown to them. The custom of planting a tree around the grave is found also among some Ndau groups of Chipinge. As testified by Sipeyiye (interview, 21/01/14), some plant a *murungu* (Lucky-bean tree) on the four corners of the grave and the trees are also allowed to grow and it would be a taboo to cut any branch from such trees. With such trees in place it means while the physical marks of the original grave may disappear, successive generations will always be able to tell the exact location where their dear one was buried. Sipeyiye went further to say that some groups among the Ndau cut branches from a *muunga* ('acacia karroo tree') which they then place on the sides as well as the top part of the grave. This top covering of the grave with branches is also practiced among some groups of the Karanga people. In Masvingo South/Murinye area of Zimbabwe, the tradition is to use branches from the *muzeze* tree '(African wattle') (Chirongoma, interview, 22/01/14) to cover grave. The use of branches as burial markers is simply a temporal measure since with the passage of time they either get carried away by wind or eventually turn into humus after having dried off. This is unlike when a tree has been planted which can be a marker spanning across generations of a people.

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Graves of the founding fathers and mothers of most Shona groups are usually marked off by dense trees some kilometers away from human habitation. Such burial places popularly known by the Shona as *Dzimbahwe* (houses of stone) have close ties with places where chiefs are buried. No one is ordinarily allowed near the *Dzimbahwe* and only specially appointed persons may enter the *Dzimbahwe* at certain periods of the year for sacrifices such as, for example, *maganzvo/mukwerera* (rain sacrifice). Those who accompany the appointed elders in bringing the sacrifices sit themselves outside the dense treed *Dzimbahwe* until the sacrifices are over.

The attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe (1980) saw the rise of a new system of governance which is centered on the person of the presidency. The traditional system of chiefs was, however, not phased out but it now falls under the new political set up. To accord honour and respect to those who are recognized as principal players in the liberation history of the country from colonial rule, the new system of governance deemed it fit to reserve a special burial place for them known as the National Heroes Acre. Unlike the *Dzimbahwe* places which are marked off by dense forests and entered only by appointed elders of the society, the National Heroes Acre is an open space and accessible to almost every member of the society whenever a burial is taking place. Though the Heroes Acre is open to almost everyone, the site as a burial ground remains sacred and cannot be accessed anyhow. It remains too a guarded place, barred from the ordinary public outside burial days. In honour of the fallen heroes, state of art granite and marble stones are used to mark the graves of these men and women. A key distinguishing mark of the National Heroes Acre is the great monument erected in honour of the '*Unknown Soldier,*' that is, all those heroic sons and daughters of the soil who died trying to liberate the county but whose remains are not known where they perished.

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The statue of the Unknown Soldier (http://en.wikipedia.org, 2014)

Opening such a space was not meant to undermine sacrality of *Dzimbahwe* burial places but to accord high honour to those who otherwise could not be buried in the *Dzimbahwe* since they were not chiefs but had sacrificed a lot for the liberation of the country. Since the honour and respect given to chiefs is not usually measured in terms of their heroic contribution to the country but is based on a long drawn traditional system and is often hereditary, their burial and place of burial is culture bound, hence usually remains different from that of those who are accorded national hero status.

Situating burial markers within the socio-religious life

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Burial markers in both Israelite and Shona cultures play a key role in the socio-religious life of these peoples. One major function of burial markers is that of warning the public on the existence of graves. Among the Jews, for example, "Tannaitic rabbis taught that during pilgrimage seasons, Jewish graves and tombs should be marked with whitewash so that travelers might not unwittingly contact corpse impurity" (McCane, 2003:51). In passing such an injunction the rabbis were greatly influenced by their interpretation of Numbers 19:11-22 where a person is said to be unclean for seven days after contact with a corpse and that whatever he/she touches during that period would be unclean also since corpse impurity was capable of transmitting itself indirectly. To lay out more clearly this issue on corpse impurity, the rabbis devoted the whole Mishnah Treatise Ohaloth on it. Part of the treatise reads: "The stone that seals a grave and its buttressing stone convey uncleanness by contact and by overshadowing" (Mishnah Ohaloth 2.4 cited in McCane, 2003).What this warning simply meant was that corpse impurity could radiate outward through any tiny gaps and across shadows so that even if a person walked near a grave and his/her shadow happened to fall upon the grave then automatically the impurity would move through that shadow onto the person.

Though the Shona would not paint their tombs they share the same belief that a corpse defiles and this would explain the purification some undergo after the burial. The graveyard too in the eyes of the Shona is not a place to be ordinarily visited for evil forces are believed to be lurking around such places. Sitting on a tomb or playing with anything that is taken from a tomb is regarded as a taboo, hence, the Shona would from time to time teach their children to check out for the grave markings and keep away from them when heading cattle, goats, sheep or walk in the veldt in search of wild fruits, firewood or wood for carving. If they find edible wild fruits or firewood in proximity to a grave they are forbidden from eating such fruits or taking home the firewood and even if it is a tree that looks good for carving purposes, they are forbidden from cutting it in case they hear a mysterious human voice saying 'why are you cutting me?' or 'thanks for taking me, now I can rest' when it comes to firewood. *Shavi* (alien spirits), as believed by the Shona, may reside in anything in proximity to the grave hence when one takes any of these, chances of taking along the restless spirits become quite high.

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Attached to warning the public on the existence of graves, burial markers in both cultures help remind the public on the need to give respect to those resting in peace and not to disturb them unnecessarily. That a prohibition against disturbing those who are resting in peace should have long existed among the Jews can be inferred from Samuel's words to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" (1 Sam.28:15). In the eyes of the Shona also, the dead deserve their rest. This explains why elders would forbid people from visiting graves anyhow but only at particular times of the day if, for example, a relative has to be shown where his/her deceased relative was laid to rest. The same need to leave the dead enjoying their rest explains also the injunction against mourning the dead for too long among the Shona.

Yet another key function of burial markers in both cultures is that they stand as a point of contact between the spirit of the dead person and its living members. As noted earlier on, Jacob is seen in the book of Genesis erecting a stone pillar on the ancestral ground and then pouring oil upon the pillar (Gen.28:17-18). The action by Jacob here of pouring oil can be associated with the common practice among the Jews of bringing food to their dead. The dead, in the eyes of the Jews, were empowered upon death or assumed post-mortem powers which made them 'divine beings'. Whilst bringing them food for their nourishment was a way of thanking them for their services, it was also in other instances a way of appeasing them for they were believed also to have malevolent powers. The reciprocity shown between the living and the dead in Israelite culture is what fuels Shona culture also. The dead in Shona culture are acknowledged for the role they played whist still alive and for that which they continue to play beyond death. Since they are viewed as better placed to obtain favours for the living family members, ritual sacrifices in their honour are viewed as of paramount significance. Such honours may range from untimely self-initiated sacrifices to gazette annual sacrifices generally known as *doro raana sekuru* (beer of the ancestors). While sacrifices and libations in Shona culture are usually offered *pachikuva/huva* (raised platform in the kitchen) there are some which are poured on the graves of the ancestors and the normal point where these libations are poured is the head pillar of the grave.

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Among the Jews, another function of grave markers was to distinguish the respected dead from those who were condemned in perpetuity, hence deserving no respect at all. As mentioned earlier on, the Jews would mark the graves of their enemies with a great heap of stones. Such a practice, however, is hardly found in Shona culture. Due to lack of sources it may not be easy to establish exactly what the Shona ancestors would do with the corpses of those they perceived as their enemies. Inferring, however, from the Shona belief that no human bone should be left unburied, it is possible to conclude that they buried those corpses but most possibly without the honour they would give to their members who were not social deviates. Enemies to the Shona could thus possibly have been classified in the ranks of social deviates hence buried separately from common graves. Since those persons were viewed as deserving no ritual sacrifices in honour of them one would hardly imagine a pillar being raised on the position of their heads. To warn the public, however, on the existence of a grave, visible stones marking the boundary of the tomb as on any tomb of any ordinary person were set up.

Burial markers as platforms for re-writing history

When the practice of setting up burial markers in both cultures is analysed from a socio-historical perspective it is easy to note that they (burial markers) provide a 'curriculum vitae' or 'resume' upon which people can re-write history. As symbols communicating the story of the dead in relation to the living, burial markers can provide an opportunity for the living to connect with their past and re-define meaning for the present and future. When the living are confronted with challenges they feel are beyond their strength to overcome they often resort to the spiritual world to seek guidance. In most instances it is upon the graves of their ancestors that they offer libations in order to placate the evil that would have befallen them as well as to restore the social order. When burial markers are in the form of big trees or firmly fixed head stones, for example, it means second or third generations can always find it easy to link up with their ancestral roots. It may not necessarily be to offer libations alone but to enable the younger generation to know their past since it would have a bearing on the present as well as the future. Katherine Verdery shares similar sentiments when she avers that dead people lend themselves to analogy with other people's

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resumes, that is, they encourage identification with their life story in a myriad of ways for while remains are concrete, they are also protean. They, in other words, do not provide a single meaning but are open to several interpretations. She goes further to argue that words can be put into their mouths or their own actual words can be ambiguated by quoting them out of context. She thus concludes by saying that it is easier to re-write history with dead people than with any other symbols which are speechless (Verdery, 1999, 28-29).

Related to offering a platform upon which people can re-write history, burial markers are important symbolic conduits for casting legitimacy upon the past. They give the past a tangibility and familiarity - making the history of the dead people they commemorate appear to be part of the socio-religious order of things. Their narration of the past, however, needs to be seen as two dimensional; they reveal as well as hide certain things. They, in other words, silence certain accounts of the past while giving voice to others. The dark side of the dead during their lifetime is usually not reflected in the message of burial markers as people tend to cherish only memories of dead person's heroic acts or his/her contribution to the family or society. In this way burial markers perpetuate *wafa wanaka* 'a dead person is good' kind of philosophy among the Shona. Since they tend to perpetuate more legends of hero worship, they, in other words, seldom invite and enhance reflections about the apparent difficulties to reconstruct the past in a truthful way.

Another critical aspect to note with burial markers is that they do not reflect or are they bound to the past only; they mirror also contemporary events, issues and even tensions. Since they do not have a static or fixed meaning they are in a constant process of being re-written as present social needs and ideological interests change. Burial markers can thus be read by members of the public in different and sometimes conflicting ways depending on their own histories and identities. As a result, while they may evoke feelings of security and belonging for some social groups, they can be a source of alienation for other groups (Alderman and Dwyer, 2014). A given case, for example, could be the burial markers distinguishing the National Heroes Acre in Zimbabwe. The monument

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was erected to redefine the sense of togetherness and of belonging in honour of those who had given their lives in battle and naturally it should be seen to evoke a sense of awe and respect to the people of Zimbabwe. These burial markers, however, are seen as exclusionary by members of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) whose heroic members are not being given chance to be buried there as well. Only members loyal to the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) are accorded burial space at this National Heroes Acre. Commenting on what they perceive to be the exclusionary nature of National Heroes Acre, the MDC –T Secretary General, Tendai Biti said:

> The little acre in Warren Park has been reduced to a privatized burial ground for ZANU opportunists and other villainous characters who by hook and crook have worked themselves up on the ladder of patronage and ass licking (Biti, 2014).

Aware of such criticism, Mugabe and his group have repeatedly maintained that stooges of the West (Opposition Party members) will never one day be accorded burial at the National shrine. Sarcastically Mugabe urges members of the Opposition Party to open their own Heroes Acre. Addressing mourners at the burial of Kumbirai Kangai at the National Heroes Acre, Mugabe said: "There are many anthills. Choose your own, we paid for this place, it's for own our heroes. You and your grasshoppers won't come here, no!" (Mugabe cited in Mabeza, 2013).

Conclusion

The fore-going analysis has brought it to light that the tradition of erecting a grave marker or monument to remember and honor a lost loved one is as old as humanity itself. The tradition stems from the natural human desire to show love and respect for those who have touched one's life; a powerful way indeed to express one's feelings in a traditional and enduring way. Focusing on Jewish and Shona cultures, this research has managed to identify at least some areas of commonality between the two cultures in regard to the erection of burial markers. The first thing noted was that in both cultures, grave markers provide a point of contact between the living and the dead. Secondly, they serve to warn the public on the existence of graves. Thirdly, they help

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remind the public on the need to give respect to those resting in peace and not to disturb them unnecessarily. As symbols communicating the story of the dead in relation to the living, burial markers do provide an opportunity for the living to connect with their past and find meaning for the present and future. They, in other words, provide a 'curriculum vitae' or 'resume' upon which people can re-write history.

This research claims not to have exhausted everything in matters to do with the erection of burial markers in the given cultures. The work leaves open the prospect of further enquiry. The aspect of change in the material culture, for example, and its bearing on the practice of erecting burial markers can be an interesting area to look at since both cultures have not been static but have been evolving with the passage of time. The use of un-designed and unpolished stones, for example, was common to both cultures but this has since changed as both cultures witness the use of expensive well carved and decorated stones. In terms of design and size, much depends on how a particular family would want to lavish something on a dead relative. Apart from changes in the material culture there have been changes also in the sphere of religion. Some groups in both cultures have embraced Christianity and this has seen also a shift in the forms and meaning of burial markers. A track to all these changes would surely add some new insights into the whole issue that was under discussion in this research study. What could equally be interesting to look at are the government policies of both cultures on burial places, burial markers as well as the issue of environmental degradation. Such issues lie beyond the immediate scope of this research.

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