



8 | THE POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF ALICE YAFEH-DEIGH

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the postcolonial feminist Biblical Hermeneutics of Alice Yafeh-Deigh. It is motivated by the writing project goals of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, which seeks to highlight the contribution of African Women theologians to scholarly discussions on African Liberation theologies. The paper thus seeks to interrogate the context underlying the works of Yafeh-Deigh, and her contribution to scholarship. Using a feminist analytical approach, this paper examines her methodology and engagements with other scholars in her area of specialty. The approaches she uses suggests that the Cameroonian-born feminist theologian applies a cultural study through liberation postcolonial approaches, to address the male-centred methods in biblical interpretations that marginalize women's experiences. Through these approaches, Yafeh-Deigh exposes epistemological foundations that seek to place women in a category that do not reflect their experiences. This paper submits that her scholarship needs to be celebrated for its great contribution to biblical interpretation and the critique of patriarchal domination of women. Hinging on the contextual realities of Bamessing women, she advocates for a method to interpret scriptures, that enables the intersection between culture and scriptures to be addressed. This paper discusses Yafeh-Deigh's feminist paradigm, which does not only criticize inculturation, but deviates from androcentric methodologies. It notes that her greatest contribution is the liberative aspect of her hermeneutics, seen where scriptures that seem to put women down become liberative and empowering.

Keywords: postcolonial, feminist, Biblical Hermeneutics, Cameroon, Bamessing, women's experiences, androcentrism, patriarchal domination,

Introduction

Alice Yafeh-Deigh is a Cameroonian born feminist biblical scholar currently based in the United States of America. In her several writings, she employs her personal experiences through migration across different cultural borders and worlds. By migrating from Cameroon to the USA, she finds herself caught up between her patriarchal birth culture and the diasporan culture into which she has been educated and is pursuing her career as a professor of biblical studies. Although several cultures are patriarchal and oppress women in diverse ways and different magnitudes, Yafeh-Deigh uses the Bamessing culture to expose misogyny and discrimination against women with the view of advocating for gender justice in society. Her research interests are founded on a feminist belief that the world can be better and women can be treated fairly, so, she uses several writings to express this conviction. Feminism is a broadly applied term for approaches to scholarship that seeks to liberate women from all forms of oppression. Set within biblical studies feminism consider to varying degrees the relationship of the biblical text to women's experiences. As a postcolonial liberation feminist biblical scholar, Yafeh-Deigh employs several theoretical, literary, exegetical and hermeneutical approaches ranging from cultural criticism, to socio-critical criticism, intertextuality, and others to address themes. This paper explores some of these interdisciplinary methods Yafeh-Deigh employs in interpreting some biblical texts. The interest of the paper is to expose and celebrate her contributions to postcolonial and liberationist readings of scriptures. It is therefore structured as follows: academic background; themes addressed in the writings; the Cultural Studies and Postcolonial approaches; Alice Yafeh-Deigh/African Women's Contexts; the methodology in conversation with Liberation and Inculturation hermeneutics; the methodology in conversation with African liberative feminist approaches that empower women; and Conclusion.

Academic Background

Alice Yafeh-Deigh is a holder of PhD from Princeton Theological Seminary, USA. She is an adjunct professor in the Department of Biblical and

Religious Studies at Azuza Pacific Seminary. Her areas of expertise, research and teaching interest include New Testament exegesis, Greco-Roman sexual ethics, cultural hermeneutics, feminist hermeneutics, postcolonial hermeneutics, and literary and rhetorical methods of biblical interpretation. Her approach to the New Testament strongly emphasizes the historical and sociocultural influences that gave rise to individual texts. She has been engaged in teaching for several years and the courses she teaches include Paul the Pastor & Theologian, The Gospels and Christology, Luke/Acts; Life and Teachings of Jesus; Thessalonian and Corinthian Epistles, Women in Biblical Tradition, Global Biblical Interpretation, Senior Seminar, Biblical Theology and Ethics. Yafeh-Deigh has been engaged in several research ventures since 1998 and has also published several books and articles. In 2008, Alice Yafeh-Deigh reviewed *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*, written by Alice Ogden Bellis. *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 30(1) 91-92. In 2012, she published an article, *The Liberative Power of Silent Agency: Reading Mary (Luke 10:38-42) Through the Eyes of Cameroonian Rural Women*. In Musa Dube, Andrew Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango (eds) (2012:408-417) *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*. In 2015, Yafeh-Deigh wrote another article, *Paul's Sexual and Marital Ethics in 1 Corinthians 7. An African -Cameroonian Perspective*, In *Bible and Theology in Africa*, New York: Peter Lang, INC. (2018). *Rethinking Paul's Sexual Ethics within the Context of HIV and AIDS: A Postcolonial Afro-Feminist-Womanist-Perspective*. In Madipoane Masenya and Kenneth Numfor Ngwa (eds) (2015:20-39) *Navigating African Biblical Hermeneutics: Trends and Themes from Our Pots and Our Calabashes*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Also, in 2020, she published an article, *African Feminist Theology*, In Elias Kifon Bongmba (ed), *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology* (85-104). Still in 2020, Alice Yafeh-Deigh published another article, *A Re-evaluation of Jesus and His Family's Migration Story through the Framework of Inter-Dependent Hospitality*. In Musa W. Dube and Paul L. Leshota (eds) *Breaking the Master's S.H.I.T. Holes: Doing Theology in the Context of Global Migration Contact Zone/Explorations in Intercultural Theology* (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 25-37. In 2020, Alice also published *Children, Motherhood, and the Social Death of Childless Women: The Social and Theological Construction of*

Infertility in the Hebrew Bible and in Cameroon. *Biblical Interpretation* 28(5), 608-634 (DOI:10.1163/15685152-2805A005). In 2021, Yafeh-Deigh co-published *Vision and Re-Envision: Re-Tracing the Social Justice Relationship Between Hannah and Mary's Songs*. In Max J. Lee and B.J. Oropeza (eds), *Practicing Intertextuality: Ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman Exegetical Techniques in the New Testament* 91(8), Eugene/OR: Cascade Books, pp. 70-79.

Themes addressed in Alice Yafeh-Deigh's Writings

Yafeh-Deigh discusses several social and gender justice themes in her writings some of which are considered in this paper. The selected themes that are central to feminist concerns include the unjust social order in polygamous marriages with particular focus on the pre-conversion period of polygamists, inter-dependent hospitality in the context of migration, the social alienation of women with fertility disability, dismantling social and religious norms that sustain discriminatory practices, allowing everyone to feel the redistributive effects of God's social justice activities.

The Unjust Social Order in Polygamous Marriages

Alice Yafeh-Deigh (2015:187) identifies with the feminist agenda for social and gender justice for all in the church, home and society. She orients her advocacy towards the Afro-womanist-feminists who are deeply committed to women's emancipation. She acknowledges that she has an inescapable duty to maintain a critical but constructive voice within the system and to challenge the church to take a stand for the establishment of a just social order'. In this vein, she seeks to unveil the unjust social order in polygamous marriages with particular focus on the pre-conversion period of polygamists in the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC).

Yafeh-Deigh discusses the exegetical, translational and text critical issues in 1 Corinthians 7. The essence is to address the oppression of women in pre-conversion polygamous marriages among the Bamessing of Cameroon. She brings out Paul's sexual ethics and marital ethics in 1 Corinthians 7 using cultural criticism, a methodology that analyses the different ways in which the Bible has been received and interpreted in

the different cultures that encounter it. Yafeh-Deigh in her methodology recognizes dimensions of meaning or background of biblical texts that enable her to apply to her context, a process called contextualization. Yafeh-Deigh (2015:180) is concerned with pre-conversion marriages in the PCC within the broader institution of traditional marriage patterns in Cameroon. She uses the Bamessing context to point out the problems of patriarchal structured marriages in general and plural marriages in particular. Yafeh-Deigh shares her personal experiences where her mother got married at the age of 14 to a man who already had a first wife. She identifies that such marriages rooted in the unjust oppressive systems contribute to the violation of women's civil rights. She raises the critical issue of community blaming or ostracising childless women in such marriages, especially when their financial situation precludes them from using alternative means to have children. Consequently, childless women spend their whole lives suffering from both societal and family rejection.

Yafeh-Deigh (2015:172) addresses the issue of pre-conversion polygyny using Paul's pastoral and pedagogical principle in 1 Corinthians 7 as a model. She alludes to Paul's ultimate goal of single-minded devotion to the Lord suggesting that it can serve as a foundational principle as follows: there should be equal relationship in marriage grounded in mutual submission and service; those in mixed marriages should not separate or divorce after conversion because the unions were valid in God's sight (1 Corinthians 7:14), and did not hinder devotion to the Lord; also, analogically, both men and women in polygamous families who convert should be baptised and given full membership status in the church, and coached to live to serve the Lord with no recourse to separation or divorce; finally, as Paul disallowed post-conversion mixed marriages (1 Corinthians 7:39), PCC should emulate to prohibit post-conversion polygamous marriages.

Using her womanist liberation approach, Yafeh-Deigh (2015:175) vocalises that polygamy has strengths and weaknesses through empowerment and disempowerment of women. Empowerment offers women a place to be economically provided for and sheltered by a man, but asymmetrical relations that prioritise maleness over femaleness disempowered women. Yafeh-Deigh (2015:184) notes that polygamous marriage

enforces power inequities and sanctions women's perpetual subordination, oppression, and alienation. Notwithstanding, many women prefer polygamy to divorce due to the emotional trauma and economic distress that accompany a divorce. Yafeh-Deigh (2015:175) argues on the other hand that since institutionalized gender discrimination in Cameroon hinders the application of equal rights, mutual love, and partnership between spouses in a polygamous marriage, divorce could be an option after careful thought.

Inter-Dependent Hospitality in The Context of Migration

Alice Yafeh-Deigh is not only interested in social justice within multi-marriages, she shows interest in injustices perpetrated against migrants. Her main argument concerns the rhetoric of Donald Trump, the immediate past president of the USA, who exhibits social exclusion in his declarations and discourse of transnational border-crossing. Alice Yafeh-Deigh uses two texts, Matthew 2:3, and 15:21-28, to develop a hermeneutic of inter-dependent hospitality to address Christian moral obligations towards the 'Other', identified as the stranger and immigrant (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:16). Yafeh-Deigh interprets the first story of the migration of Jesus and his family to Egypt. She underscores the hostility and danger Jesus and his parents faced as they fled to Egypt to take refuge there and hide from the tyrannical Herod the Great. For her, the story exposes the vulnerability of millions of children born in conflict zones, fleeing with their parents across borders, searching for secure places. She submits that as immigrants in Egypt, Jesus and his family depended on the generosity of a foreign host country to survive. She hypothesises that the refugee status of Jesus and his family exposed them to a broad spectrum of vulnerabilities. However, Jesus' 'enduring memory and reminder of the event through the parents retelling' and his proximity to immigrants, suggest that migration has a positive contribution to make in discourse. Jesus' discourse on migration must have developed from his encounter with the Roman oppressors, foreign slaves, and dislocated non-Jews. Yafeh-Deigh notes that this interaction shapes Jesus interaction with strangers, particularly the gentiles.

Yafeh-Deigh (2020:15) also interprets Matthew's story recorded in 15:21-28. She uses this narrative of Jesus' encounter with a gentile

woman to emphasize the theme of inter-dependent hospitality or lack thereof, and the theme of movements across borders. She notes that the first story Matthew 2:3, is a foreshadow of this second story that projects Jesus' treatment of the Canaanite mother, and so it functions as a yard stick, the ultimate litmus test for how Jesus responds to and practices hospitality towards strangers. The analytical framework of Yafeh-Deigh is an interdisciplinary critical methodology that is informed by narrative-critical and postcolonial-feminist perspectives (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:15). She uses a narrative critical analysis explaining that the post-colonial-feminist perspective does not minimise the lived experiences of immigrants, women, and those who face oppressive marginalization and violence at the hands of cultures at large. She thus uses her own social location as an immigrant with diasporic identity factors woven into her theological interpretation to address the plight of migrants.

Yafeh-Deigh (2020:24) employs the term 'Other' drawn from a post-colonial perspective. This interpretation is in line with the Postcolonial theory, a cultural critical theory associated with Edward Said. In his book *Orientalism*, he exposes the Western creation of the orient as an imperialist tool to control the nature and shape of the knowledge of the colonised (Said, 1979:7-9). Dube (2000:1, 47) and Sujirtharajah (1999:15) acknowledge that Said's work marked the beginning of discussions on postcolonial theory. Scholars have variously applied a postcolonial critique to biblical interpretation. Sujirtharajah (1999:15) notes that post-colonial Biblical interpretation seeks to interrogate Biblical narratives, texts and interpretations that legitimize and re-inscribe colonial tendencies. The interest of the interpretation lies not on the historical truths but to find out colonial ideologies in the text. Dube (2000:1, 23) shows that postcolonial Biblical interpretation is an approach of reading the Bible in a way that the postcolonial subjects confront, expose and arrest imperialist strategies. Yafeh-Deigh applies the theory to examine the effects of imperialist views on postcolonial immigrants from non-western societies. She concludes that radical hospitality is expected towards the most vulnerable in society, the stranger and manifold forms of the 'Other', symbolised in the texts as immigrants or stranger (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:27).

The social death alienation of women with fertility disability

Another theme that Alice Yafeh-Deigh explores and which is central to feminist concerns is the poor condition of childless Christian women. In a published paper, she uses several Old Testament scriptures to review the tension between the biblical mandate to have children versus the claim that God holds the exclusive power to open wombs (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:6). Yafeh-Deigh (2020:5) examines the social and cultural implications of the theological assertion for procreative disadvantaged women in the Hebrew Bible like Sarah (Genesis 16), Rebecca (Genesis 25), Rachel (Genesis 29-30), Samson's mother (Judges 13) and Hannah (1 Samuel 1). She holds that the pervasive literary and theological motif that procreation is always contingent on God opening the womb is of central importance to her understanding of barrenness and childlessness. She uses several examples Eve (Gen. 4:1, 25); Sarah (Gen. 21:6); Leah (Gen. 29:32-35; 30:18-20); Rachel (Gen. 30:6, 23-24); Hannah (1 Sam. 20, 27); and Elizabeth (Luke 1:25) to substantiate that each of these women gave birth after a struggle, and attested to God's agency. Yafeh-Deigh and Roth (2021) make the following thrusts:

First, the interpretation of Psalm 139:13 and Job 10:8–12 is that children as the 'most prized grace-gift of God', thus God values children and is involved in the procreative and gestational process of those unborn. **Second**, procreation according to Genesis 1:28 is a divine blessing and command, thus all humanity is mandated to have children. **Third**, the mandate reinforces the religious idea that encourages reproduction in which humans need to partner with God in an intricate partnership; **Fourth**, God has given humans the potential to procreate but that role is contingent on the degree of human relationship with God in an interdependent divine-human arrangement. **Finally**, children are the result of such 'double agency'. Similarly, this procreative blessing-mandate correlates with the patriarchal pro-natal cultural norms of ancient Israel thus fostering the notion that motherhood implies giving birth to biological children. Yafeh-Deigh laments that this genetic-motherhood expectation is problematic, it ostracises women with 'infertility impairment' due to their inability to fulfil their biological gender functions. They are subjected to stigma and prejudice since having children is considered as a social obligation, not a choice.

Following the above submissions Yafeh-Deigh (2020:6) employs a feminist cultural hermeneutics approach with its assumption that all readers read and interpret the Bible from their social locations, and with specific interests in mind. She concludes that in patriarchal society, womanhood was associated with motherhood with the assumption that motherhood is the highest state of womanhood. Also, women's social statuses within their homes and larger community depended on being biological mothers. In addition, barren women in the Bible had diverse perspectives about their situation: For Sarah (Gen. 16:2), it was the Lord that inhibited her from procreating (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:9); Rachel (Gen. 30:22-24) considered her barrenness as a reproach (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:14). She comments that the matriarchs with 'infertility impairment' were determined to become mothers and assume their social and religious responsibilities. Yafeh-Deigh (2020:14) contends that the yearnings project the increasing tension between divine-human partnership in the procreative process. The narratives indicate the vulnerability of childless women stigmatised and stereotyped in pronatal societies, and also facing social, cultural, economic and religious disadvantages.

Yafeh-Deigh (2020:14) uses intersectionality to outline the complexity of prejudices biblical women face as a result of systematic and structural arrangements that allow for status differences, oppression in patriarchal representation of motherhood to serve the interests of the patriarch, and the vulnerability faced due to 'fertility disability'. Yafeh-Deigh (2020:17-20) proceeds to contextualise these findings listing the challenges a barren Bamessing woman goes through which include; duress to reproduce otherwise they are socially isolated and stigmatized, constraints from traditional norms and social values regarding family, desire to produce legitimate children who can continue the family lineage, tragedy and trauma due to economic disadvantages (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:19-20). The critical issue in these challenges is that a woman with 'fertility disability' is often blamed for her situation, with no proper gynaecological diagnosis. She calls for a redefinition of motherhood and change in attitudes concerning childlessness, and suggests that this can be done through re-socialization. Yafeh-Deigh (2020:24) also calls for a reconceptualization of motherhood in the manner of Ruth-Naomi's inter-

dependent hospitality’ (a theme Yafeh-Deigh revisits in her paper on migration). She exemplifies that such a relationship of motherhood and mothering modalities brought about quality of life and experience of empowerment and emancipation’.

Dismantling social and religious norms that sustain discriminatory practices

This theme runs in a paper Yafeh-Deigh co-authored with Roth (2021:122-140). The authors employ intertextuality to discuss the issue of social justice and reversal of social norms in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and Luke 1:46-55. They trace the social justice dimension in Hannah’s song (1 Samuel 2:1-10) from the structure, identifying four parts; First, the physical features of the body as metonymies for human and divine characteristics that follow a certain pattern, second, acknowledging God’s sovereign actions over human history and the cosmos, third, a description of the social realities experienced (or to be experienced by God’s people) and fourth, a reiteration of God’s sovereignty over the affairs of individuals, nations and all creation.

They opine that the song reimages the status quo in ways that reaffirm the value of all human beings-the disenfranchised and the powerful alike. In this light, the song’s purpose is to persuade, encourage, and perhaps entice its reader to hope for a way out of the degradation of the Judges period which forms the immediate literary and historical context. The song anticipates that the dealings of God with Hannah, could be extended to Israel. By this Israel could experience a new type of coming to life. Yafeh-Deigh and Roth (2021:131) submit that Hannah’s poem brings out Yahweh’s commitment to Israel. It involves the ‘recasting of expected social norms, the elevation of those on history’s underside and the humanisation of the affluent’. Since these would be accomplished by the coming king whose identity is not known, Hannah’s song leaves a gap which Mary’s song seeks to fill.

Yafeh-Deigh and Roth (2021) highlight two themes in Mary’s song: God’s graciousness and restorative justice on behalf of Mary (Luke 1:46-50); and God’s restorative actions for all marginalized as promise fulfilment (Luke 1:51-55). They observe that in the former, Mary’s con-

victions are rooted in 'God's subversive, countercultural and transformative' actions. In recollecting God's deeds Mary envisions a future that is driven by God's mercy and faithfulness, a theme they note, runs through the Gospel of Luke (1:79; 2:10, 14; 2:29-32; 3:6; 3:38; 4:16-30; 7:2-9; 10:30-37; 17:11-16; 24:47). God unilaterally initiates the envisaged future inaugurated in Mary's case and foreseen in the reversal of fortunes. Yafeh-Deigh and Roth (2012:134) explain that 'God who is subverting conventional expectations is not just interested in Mary or Israel but in all people, particularly the ones that fear God. In the latter, Yafeh-Deigh and Roth identify that the focus of Mary's song is on dismantling social and religious norms that sustain discriminatory practices, allowing everyone to feel the redistributive effects of God's social justice activities (2021:137). Their central hypothesis is that God's faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham intertextually ties Mary's song to that of Hannah. They find the unrealized promise that creates social justice expectations in Hannah's song being fulfilled in Mary's song. They conclude that both songs are masterpieces sung by female characters, where the dominant theme of social justice stands as the focal point and unifying theme. (Yafeh-Deigh and Roth, 2021:135).

The Cultural Studies and Postcolonial approaches of Alice Yafe-Deigh

Alice Yafeh-Deigh's publications fall under African feminist approaches to biblical scholarship. The most prominent include womanism, black feminism, *mujerista* theology, Asian Feminist theology, Dalit women's theology, *minjung* feminist theology, African Feminism, concerned African women's theology, *Africana* womanism, Ubuntu feminism, and Bosadi feminism. Yafeh-Deigh (2020:2) elucidates that these various articulations are grounded in the 'actual experiences, emancipation struggles, and the complex historical and cultural realities of the particular communities of women'. She notes further that each perspective, nevertheless, is unified in the goal of making women's lived experiences their central concern. Alice Yafeh-Deigh's work follows this unified goal combining text-oriented and reader-oriented hermeneutics to address various issues in scholarship. These feminists literary and liberative analytical

frameworks expose the interest of the author and her desire to critique male-oriented liberation methods that do not factor women's experiences. Graybill and Huber (2021:3) also opine that an important idea that comes from feminist theory is 'intersectionality'. Intersectionality describes the ways that gender and sexuality intersect with other forms of identity, such as race and class.

Feminist and Liberationist movements share a common commitment to the liberation of the disenfranchised on the world. Yafeh-Deigh's methods are interdisciplinary approaches cutting across feminism, liberation and postcolonialism sharing the same quest for social and gender justice. The categories of persons addressed include the disenfranchised, stigmatised and the marginalised in their search for full equality in marriage, the stigmatised women with 'fertility disability', and immigrants with different documentation status. This suggests that Yafeh-Deigh's writings are characterised by activism against inhumanity, oppression, sexism, and the racist domination of others. The critical approaches range from feminist to liberative hermeneutics that empower women to challenge the gender-orientation of patriarchy and its attendant male-bias and oppression of women.

Yafeh-Deigh thus uses the cultural hermeneutical approach to interpret scriptures in a bid to address oppressive patriarchal readings of scripture. This approach recognizes that every interpretation of the Bible must emerge from the encounter between the biblical text on the one hand, and the cultural context (what Yafeh-Deigh terms, social location) of Africans on the Other. Using this approach in interpreting 1 Corinthians 7 she sets out to correct the uncritical valorisation of African cultural values like polygyny that sanctions inequities between spouses and disempowers women who are more disadvantaged. She also uses postcolonial intersectional approaches to address the poor treatment of women with fertility disability, inviting scholarship to sustain the redefinition of motherhood and womanhood, and reconceptualise genetic birth with the Ruth-Naomi model of inter-dependent hospitality. Through cultural hermeneutics, Yafeh-Deigh makes the experiences of African women the interpretive framework, and facilitate readings which point out the liberative and oppressive aspects of scriptures for the welfare of women.

Alice Yafeh's African Women's Contexts

Alice Yafeh-Deigh places her work within the broader framework of African Women hermeneutic which seeks to address patriarchy and its attendant consequences for women's oppression and domination. As noted with several Circle publications, the patriarchal background of Yafeh-Deigh resonates in her writings. Yafeh-Deigh's work is consistent with the current goals of the circle: to continue interrogating patriarchal influences and women's social, systematic, and institutionalised oppression in more complex ways; to engage more openly with male theologians; to offer more mentoring opportunities for untrained writers and theologians; and to increase dialogue with ecumenical organizations (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:12). In her publications Yafeh-Deigh undoubtedly confirms Mojola's assertion that patriarchy is one 'elephant in the house' that sanctions all limitations placed on the African women (Mojola, 2018:2). The impact of patriarchy on African women's lives resonates in the articles in one of the most recent publications in honour of the Circle's founder and mother, Mercy Amba E. Oduyoye.

The editors suggested that scholarship that has a liberative focus must apply 'academic rigor and theological resistance against imperial powers, such as religion, patriarchy and colonialism' (Cowan, 2021:vi). O'Brien, (2013:6) conceptualises patriarchy from the 'generational continuity' principle which seeks to restore the primacy of paternity in an attempt to address male appropriation of female reproductive labour. However, there exists other institutions like kinship, economy and politics which are interwoven. The experiences of women differ from one patriarchal context to another depending on the intersection within the institutions. On a conceptual level, Lorber identifies three groups of feminists' definition of patriarchy. On the one hand, Radical feminists consider patriarchy as the structure and process of men's misogynist domination of women through violent control of their sexuality and progeny function. On the other side, Marxist feminists understand patriarchy from a political point as domination of women in the home by husbands, and also male domination of women in the capitalist marketplace where they work.

For the Psychoanalytic, patriarchy is a symbolic rule of the father through 'gendered sexuality and the unconscious domination of women'

(Lorber, 1994:6). In Africa no one contends that patriarchy is an institution where gender manifests in sexual division of labour, and men's oppression and domination of women. Lazar accords that patriarchy is a gendered ideology, structured, enacted and renewed in institutions, social practices that mediate between the individual and the social order (Lazar, 2007:8).

African Women theologians identify with these definitions of patriarchy where men dominate women and rule over them politically, socially, economically and wise. Dube (2009:133-134) describes the hermeneutical method as 'Talitha Cum', christened after the Congolese Kumba Vita who lived in the early 20th Century. Walking in the legacy of Kimpa Vita, African Women's Talitha Cum hermeneutics means living and insisting on staying alive even when confronted with oppressive powers that crush.

The gender factor has been central to African Women theologians in a bid to address misogyny and androcentric interpretation of texts that support the oppression of women. Oduyoye (1995:36) concurs that androcentric structures in which women operate are based on oppressive cultural notions that define women and seek to make them conform to 'male centred definitions, on the pain of marginalization and stigmatization'. Adasi (2016:3) agrees that gender-based segregation is largely evident in socio-economic and religious activities, patterns and roles set for women and men in traditional African societies. Dube (2002:112) avers that patriarchal oppression of women is as real as imperial oppression. African women theologians like Oduyoye (2004:36), Kanyoro (1992:99), and Dube (2009:133-134) and Fanusie (1989), have demonstrated that most discussions on women in religion and culture have been flawed by male chauvinistic perspectives. For instance, Oduyoye (1995:2) states that African men have prided themselves on having women who do not need to seek liberation as women. Oduyoye (2002:36) laments that socially, men are most often installed as 'lords over women', for the mere fact that they belong to another sex/gender. As a result, a few African male theologians like Kwesi Dickson (1968) and Obeng (1998:45) felt the need to address the how culture, tradition and religion oppress women. Obeng (1998:45) for instance notes that 'women are recognized under the shadows of men'). Such few voices are a whisper because as Oduyoye

(1995:80) observes, they are limited in addressing the fact that ‘the dynamic nature of cultures does not exclude the traditional foundations which have remained unchanged over time, and have continued to covertly and overtly shape women’s lives. Fanusie (1989:95) advocates that dehumanizing and demoralizing cultural practices should be challenged where and when it is necessary to do so. For instance, the plight of childless women, and women in multi marriages addressed in Alice Yafeh-Deigh’s writings, suggests that the stereotyping of sexes enforces women to accept their subordinate status. It is so hegemonic that no one sees it as oppression or domination (Pauwels, 2003:554).

Conversation with Feminist Biblical Interpretation for liberation and Transformation

Alice Yafeh-Deigh writes from the context of the patriarchy and oppressive culture, thus situating her work within feminist theory that examines the relation between gender within biblical studies and cultural studies by locating it within this larger canvas of cultural identity issues. These are feminist concerns that have pre-occupied biblical interpreters. Wolcott (2016) gives four assumptions have guided all their methods: First, women’s experiences form the hermeneutical starting point for their work; second, women’s experiences become a critical principle; third, the biblical text speaks liberation, not just reflecting on liberation and; fourth, the text is liberated to carry eschatological hope from God. Alice Yafeh-Deigh’s writings follow this paradigm *in toto*. The writings can thus be placed in conversation with feminist biblical interpreters especially African women theologians. The agenda is to ‘uncover the often-implicit sexism’ that impacts ‘cultural norms and philosophical assumptions’, to bring greater equality for women which in turn benefits all society (Magnum, 2014).

The feminist cultural hermeneutics approach makes the experiences of African women the interpretive framework. The approach critiques the idea that generalizes male experiences as ‘African experiences’, and makes male ‘identity’ and ‘sense of pride’ conterminous to ‘African identity’ and ‘sense of pride’ (Yele, 2022:79). The liberation perspective of

Yafeh-Deigh follows the African Women interpreters agenda to transform patriarchy, religion and culture where the majority of the adherents of Scriptures are transformed into subordinate human beings (West, 2008:6). This transformation is important to check Church practices that validate the oppression of women and bring societal change. Bartel (2001:11) points out that women are the 'growth points' of the Church today, constituting the majority of the membership. Maura (2005:411) concurs that whether in mainline Churches or African Instituted Churches, Charismatic movements or Pentecostal movements, women dominate the pews.

Conversation with Liberation and Cultural Hermeneutics

Yafeh-Deigh's hermeneutics can be compared with Liberation and Cultural hermeneutics. Sujirtharajah (2002:105) identifies three types of liberation theologies, the classic liberation hermeneutics, people's reading and identity specific reading. He explains further that liberation theology is not a single genre but a series of genres, many of them interconnecting and speaking on behalf of many voices). Liberation theology introduced two hermeneutical categories that have entered the lexicon of biblical scholarship. These are the 'hermeneutical circle' and 'hermeneutics of suspicion' developed by Segundo (1976:7-38). Liberation theology therefore engages socio-economic analyses and also addresses other kinds of inequality based on race and caste. Yafeh-Deigh's work aptly utilises these two hermeneutical categories to address issues of social injustices within culture and religion.

Yafeh-Deigh's Cultural hermeneutics is an advocacy methodology that seeks to use biblical texts to support social justice. Yee (2013:54) gives the advantage of culture criticism that it 'offers one way to evaluate the many different and exciting ways the various cultures we inhabit encounter, appropriate, and venerate the sacred text'. Similar to liberation theology, scholars employ cultural criticism at the exegetical and application stage of their hermeneutics. Yafeh-Deigh draws biblical themes generated from exegesis to address issues in her culture and contexts, a process called contextualization. Spanje (1998:197-217) defines contextualization as an approach scholar use to draw lessons from biblical texts and apply

them cross-culturally to their contemporary contexts. The essence is to liberate the marginalized, fight for full equality, human rights, and a full life for all regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality and so on.

Some themes cut across liberation and feminist critiques; first, they critique frameworks of interpretation, second, they offer alternative re-interpretations, and third, they unmask the ways in which interpretations are used to serve the interests of those in power (Wolcott, 2016). Yafeh-Deigh's themes and point of departure can thus be compared with the themes and points of departure of both liberation and cultural criticism, from the perspective of advocacy, selective use of scriptures and application of themes that emerge to the cultural context, and the quest for equality, human rights, and justice. In her biblical hermeneutics, she also adopts the three-step approach of beginning with the experience of the people (textual or contextual), analysing or assessing the reasons for their condition and the tension involved, and suggesting concrete practical steps to ameliorate the social injustices against women in her cultural context. In her several writings she also employs inter-cultural application of the fruits of her exegesis. Yafeh-Deigh's work is therefore an advocacy against complex workings of power and ideology in discourses that sustains gendered social arrangements in patriarchal contexts. The description is fitting since it draws attention to the biblical author's and the interpreter's context in which socio-economic, political, religious and cultural activities of men and women are hierarchically ordered in a way that engenders asymmetry.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that writing from a patriarchal context, Alice Yafeh-Deigh seeks to show a practical application of her methods in liberating women from all forms of bondage. The paper notes that the Cameroonian born feminist theologian demonstrates through various writings, the significance of a cultural studies approach in interpreting biblical texts and applying them to contextual realities. The celebration of the achievements of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians warrants that this contribution to scholarship be highlighted.

Through her works, Yafeh-Deigh makes a contribution to scholarship on the cultural studies approach, liberation and postcolonial methods in interpreting biblical texts. Her use of the feminist paradigm critiques not only inculturation, but also deviates from male-centred liberation methodologies. The methodology as a critique of liberation and male-centred hermeneutics seeks to expose epistemological foundations that place women in a category that do not reflect their experiences. Comparing biblical women from the perspectives of privileged, superior status vs. unprivileged inferior statuses, she challenges cultural presuppositions that do not factor the experiences of those at the margins. Applying the methodology to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, to intertextuality between OT and NT texts, and the several OT texts that address the marginalisation and stigmatisation of women with fertility disability, she notes that the experiences of women differ from context to context, but women all over the world share some common challenges. Her innovative inter-dependent hospitality theory that cuts across several works exposes the advantages of interdisciplinarity in Biblical hermeneutics. The liberative aspect of her hermeneutics is seen in the advocacy for all types of justice including social, gender, economic, migration, and others. Touching on the contextual realities of Cameroonian women, she advocates for a method to interpret scriptures, that enables the intersection between culture and scriptures to be addressed. Yafeh-Deigh employs a feminist cultural hermeneutics to critique the definition that restricts motherhood to genetic-biological connections, and disparage motherhood. Thus, every biblical interpreter is invited to heed to her call for a re-conceptualization re-definition of male-centred cultural and contextual values and epistemologies that impinge on women's lives.

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