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“Other Ways of Reading” : Musa W. Dube and Postcolonial Feminist Reading of the Bible

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Mutale Mulenga Kaunda

“In this extremely gendered colonial language, the African continent was being penetrated by the West, its male subjugator, and inseminated with Western seed to give birth to the Westernized African.”
Musa W Dube (2013:2)¹

Abstract

This chapter reflects on some of the distinct key metaphors and concepts that Musa Dube espouses in her African postcolonial feminist thinking and how these contribute to African women’s liberation theologies. Intentionally focusing on two key concepts/metaphors in Dube’s postcolonial feminist theologies, this chapter affirms Dube’s African women’s postcolonial theologizing using a decolonial lens. The chapter draws on how Dube advances further, and employs these concepts/metaphors as tools of analyzing biblical texts. Dube recognizes the potential of the bible having death dealing forces in Africa if not interpreted critically, especially for women and she uses apt concepts/metaphors as alternative ways of reading the bible for fullness of life.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Feminist, Gender, Culture, Bible, Musa Dube, Talitha Cum

Introduction

Dube has greatly, intentionally and efficiently contributed to African feminist postcolonial theories. She nuances the effects of religion, culture

¹ Dube, Musa. “The Scramble for Africa as the Biblical Scramble for Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives”, in *Society of Biblical Literature Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, Vol. 13, ed. by Musa Dube, Andrew Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, 1-26. (Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta, 2012).

and biblical hermeneutics especially in the ways that the bible is read and how particular ways of reading the bible might contribute to impacting women negatively or positively. She is a Professor of New Testament at the Candler School of Theology and is renowned for her work in feminist postcolonial² biblical scholarship. Dube is an African woman who has focused on other ways of reading the bible for social transformation and gender justice. This chapter is a celebration of Dube's postcolonial Bible reading which is illustrated in some of her key concepts such as 'Talitha Cum' and 'Language', and how she has embodied mentorship of young scholars, which are the two concepts focused on in this chapter. Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse have written an article on Dube, celebrating her activism and biblical reflections on HIV and AIDS in Africa³. Lovemore Togorasei⁴ has also written an article on Dube titled "Musa W. Dube and the study of the Bible in Africa". It is worth mentioning that Dube has worked academically and in activism with various scholars, male and female in her works.

As the current continental coordinator of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians, Dube has focused part of her leadership on young African women theologians (as rising stars) on writing mentorship. Dube was a University of Botswana faculty member in Theology and Religious Studies from 1988. When the Circle was being inaugurated in Ghana in 1989 where 69 women from various African countries gathered, Dube was not among them, she only came to hear about this gathering after it had passed. In a conversation with Dube while we were planning for the first volume of Circle pioneering women, Dube lamented that she heard about the Circle inauguration a week after the meeting was over in Ghana. In her own words, Dube stated, "Looking at this list, it was only my country in Southern Africa that was skipped. And I was already in the department as a staff development fellow. The funny thing is, one week after the meeting, I was then told about it. Now I wonder if the invitation

² Dube, Musa. *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*. (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 1-221.

³ Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse, 2008. "Other Ways of Being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXIV, 29-54.

⁴ Musa Dube "Musa W Dube and the study of the Bible in Africa", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, XXXIV, 55-74.

letter was just kept silently from me."⁵ Dube later joined the Circle and has been one of the many Circle matriarchs who have given leadership to the growth of the Circle in collaboration with Circle women. As preparations are underway for the 2024 Circle Conference in Ghana, there are a number of Circle volumes that are being written under the mentorship of Dube to be published before the Sankofa Conference.

African women theologians have argued that women's experiences are a starting point of women's theological reflection (Phiri and Nadar 2006:8). Theological reflection and engagements are embedded within human experiences, particularly women's experiences because theology is not done in a vacuum, it has a focus on the real-life experiences of human beings and their communities. Dube has been instrumental in the construction of postcolonial research, frameworks and methodologies, she embodies this form of research. Her embodiment of research is explained below in the section titled Embodied Scholarship. Her postcolonial scholarship is focused on black feminism, and she is bold enough to explicitly state difficult issues, for instance, rereading Matthew 5 Dube⁶ was bold enough to state:

I can hear Jesus saying to us: I was sick with AIDS and you did not visit me. You did not wash my wounds, nor did you give me medicine to manage my opportunistic infections. I was stigmatized, isolated and rejected because of HIV/AIDS and you did not welcome me. I was hungry, thirsty and naked, completely dispossessed by HIV/AIDS and globalization in my house and family and you did not give me food, water or any clothing. I was a powerless woman exposed to the high risk of infection and carrying a huge burden of care, and you did not come to my rescue. I was a dispossessed widow and an orphan, and you did not meet my needs.

Her research is at the intersection of postcolonial theories, HIV and AIDS, culture, gender, sacred texts, and religion. Born and bred in Botswana to Zimbabwean parents, (both countries are in the Southern Africa), she has been at the cutting edge of research on postcolonial biblical scholarship and has been teaching for 36 years (since 1988). As a New Testament scholar, she grapples with the question, how to read the bible

⁵ Musa Dube, 2021. Personal Communication, 1 December.

⁶ Musa Dube, "Theological Challenges: Proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV/AIDS & Global Economic Era", *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 363 (2002), 535-549; 537-538.

as a black woman who was colonized through the bible. Dube is celebrated as she offers the postcolonial⁷ bible reading for social justice. The first section will engage Dube's Postcolonial Feminist Theologizing with a focus on HIV and AIDS, the next section will focus on two of Dube's key concepts in her postcolonial African feminist theory and their demonstration of her African postcolonial feminist theory which calls for other ways of reading the bible. The third section will interrogate her embodiment of these key metaphors in the way she mentors younger scholars within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians network.

Musa W Dube's Postcolonial Feminist Theologizing

Since publishing her first peer reviewed journal article in 1989, Dube has been a prolific and an astute biblical scholar with over 59 journal articles to her name. This number does not contain the book chapters, books and journals edited and is not exhaustive as Dube continues to inspire with her scholarship and publications. At the heart of Dube's theologizing is the call for transformation, emancipation and liberation of African women's lives, this is also the Circle's theology. African postcolonial feminist hermeneutics of transformation offers critical assessment in the models of social engagement between Biblical scholars and women in faith communities. For Dube, focusing on postcolonial feminist reading of the bible is a personal motivation drawing on how her parents were displaced in Zimbabwe by the white settlers who grabbed land from Zimbabweans at the time⁸. They were forced to move to Botswana where Dube was later born. The African dictum suffices here, "When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible, and we had the land. They said, 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had

⁷ Johanna Stiebert and Musa Dube, *The Bible Centers & Margins: Dialogues Between Postcolonial African and UK Biblical Scholars*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2018).

Dube, M.W. & R.W. Wafula (Eds.), *Postcoloniality, Translation and the Bible in Africa*. (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017).

Dube, M.W., Andrew Mbuvi & Dora Mbuwayesango (Eds.), *Postcolonial Perspectives on African Biblical Interpretations*. (Atlanta: SBL, 2012).

⁸ Ezra Chitando and Rosinah Gabaitse, 2008. "Other Ways of Being a Diviner-Healer: Musa W. Dube and the African Church's Response to HIV and AIDS", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXIV, 29-54; 30-31.

the Bible, and they had the land.”⁹ Land grabbing anywhere certainly would affect women more disproportionately. Just as any injustice to any nation impacts on women much more negatively and severely. While gender justice issues continue to be raised globally, women are still at the receiving end of many forms of injustices. Patriarchal constructed norms continue to favour men more than women and therefore, women are disproportionately impacted in various forms of injustices.

There have been various issues that have held African women’s lives down and excluded them from diverse decision-making spaces, even when decisions are about them as women. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, HIV and AIDS, according to the UN 2000 report, was spreading rapidly and Africa had the highest infections, young African women¹⁰ were highest impacted. Dube has continued to engage in the research around HIV and AIDS because HIV and AIDS has continued to impact African women and girls disproportionately.

According to the 2000 UNAIDS report¹¹, there was fear, stigma and denial during this period for HIV and AIDS, and this led into a vicious cycle of these three making it difficult for those infected to seek medical care. Many were uninformed, making them vulnerable to contracting AIDS. Some women were infected with HIV and AIDS within their marriages. Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar¹² have argued that marriage is a dangerous institution for African women because of certain cultural devotions that deny women life. Due to little or no sexual reproductive health awareness, information and services, young girls and women continue to be in vulnerable situations for various reasons such as gender-based violence within homes, schools, communities, religious spaces etc. The clergy in churches were almost quiet or maybe needed more skills to engage and reflect on the HIV and AIDS situation in Africa. Theologians in seminaries, bible schools and universities began to speak out about these issues

⁹ This dictum is usually alluded to archbishop Desmond Tutu and Jomo Kenyatta.

¹⁰ Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic 2000. https://data.unaids.org/pub/report/2000/2000_gr_en.pdf [Accessed on January 23rd, 2023].

¹¹ Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic 2000. https://data.unaids.org/pub/report/2000/2000_gr_en.pdf [Accessed on January 23rd, 2023].

¹² Isabel Phiri & Sarojini Nadar, 2009. “Going through the Fire with Eyes Wide Open’: African Women’s Perspective on Indigenous Knowledge, Patriarchy and Sexuality”, *Journal for the Study of Religion* 22/2, 2-22; 6.

through activism, research and publications thereby creating tools, approaches and methods of engaging the HIV and AIDS epidemic more humanely in religious spaces. Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS in the curriculum was and still is of great importance for holistic education. Dube is one of the biblical scholars who took the HIV and AIDS issue seriously and rose to the challenge of creating awareness of the overwhelming impact the epidemic had on women. This led to numerous research works that Dube has published¹³.

The way the bible is read is key to the liberation of African women. Dube draws on her biblical scholarship and women's experiences of the bible, culture, religious spaces and the history of African women being left behind. Dube does theology or theologizes "not only with the entire community in mind, but also with the entire community present in voice."¹⁴ As a biblical scholar, Dube argues that "combining Bible and culture is a recognition that authoritative texts for African women are more than just the written religious texts. Rather African cultures remain vibrant and authoritative texts in the lives of women, and they need to be studied, analyzed, and reinterpreted for a creation of a just world and the empowerment of women."¹⁵ Further, Dube argues that "The Bible has been read within precolonial, colonial, struggle-for-independence, post-independence, neo-colonial and globalization contexts."¹⁶ The bible has to be read through postcolonial gendered lens to be relevant and to be inclusive in the approach to social justice. For Dube, postcolonial theologizing does not do justice if it fails to emphasise on the issues that disproportionately

¹³ Musa Dube, *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological programmes*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2003); Musa Dube, *Talitha Cum! Calling the Girl-Child and Women to Life in the HIV/AIDS & Globalization Era*. <http://koed.hu/talitha/musa.pdf> [Accessed on 1 January 2023]; Musa Dube, *The HIV & AIDS Bible: Selected Essays*. (Pennsylvania: University of Scranton Press, 2008) to mention just a few.

¹⁴ Oluwatomisin Oredein. "Word and Witness: A Theological Account of the Life and Voice of Mercy Amba Oduyoye", unpublished doctoral dissertation. (Divinity School of Duke University, 2017) 21.

¹⁵ Musa W. Dube. *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*. Society of Biblical Literature: Georgia and World Council of Churches: Geneva. (2001).

¹⁶ Musa W. Dube. "Talitha Cum! Some African Women's Ways of Reading the Bible". In Botha (eds.). *Semeia Studies: Twenty-Five Years of Liberation Theology*. Atlanta: SBL (2009), 133-146; 134.

affect African women. And the bible has to be read *vis-a-vis* the realities of women’s experiences of exclusion and marginalization among other things. Understanding that women are constantly marginalised and excluded, Dube unapologetically asks important questions: “How do I read the Bible as a black person who was oppressed through the Bible? How do I read the Bible as a woman, who is often marginalized in church and in the society through biblical texts, which explicitly says, “I do not allow women to speak in church?”¹⁷. These questions inevitably and subliminally casts light on how women are excluded in various spheres of life.

Chitando and Gabaitse¹⁸ explain that “Dube has written extensively on HIV and the stigma of AIDS, gender inequality and postcolonial feminist interpretations, interrogating Western institutions and traditions that dominate African economies, scholarship, cultures and health sectors.” HIV and AIDS is not an individual’s disease according to Dube “HIV/AIDS works through social injustice. It is an epidemic within other social epidemics of injustice. Thus, where there is poverty, gender inequality, human-rights violation, child abuse, racism, ageism, HIV/AIDS stigma, classism, international injustice, violence, ethnic and sex-based discrimination, HIV/AIDS thrives. While it is undoubtedly true that anyone can get HIV/AIDS, the most marginalized groups – who are subject to the above social conditions – are more vulnerable and likely to lack quality care when infected or sick.”¹⁹ Dube has worked closely with various male theologians on the HIV and AIDS epidemic, notable among them is Ezra Chitando who is also vested in HIV and AIDS conversations and they have both worked closely with Nyambura Njoroge in the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa-EHAIA. Their collaboration has been around the curriculum, conferences research and publication on the HIV and AIDS. She also continues to engage in curriculum development and transformation projects such

¹⁷ Musa W. Dube, “Africa Praying: Singing the Song of Healing in the Eye of the Storm”, Keynote Address: BOCAIP, NACA & Gaborone DMSAC in celebration of the month of Prayer: University of Botswana Conference Centre (26 September 2018).

¹⁸ Chitando and Gabaitse 2008. “Other Ways of Being a Diviner-Healer:” 31.

¹⁹ Musa Dube. “Introduction: Toward Multi-Sectoral Teaching in a Time of HIV/AIDS” in “HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum” Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes, ed. by Musa W. Dube. (WCC Publications: Geneva, 2003), vi.

as in 2009, Engendering Theological Education with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and the previous year 2008 she was engaged in a similar project with the World Council of Churches.

Taking an appreciative inquest, Dube's immense contribution to post-colonial feminist theologies of liberation and HIV and AIDS is a call to gender justice and social transformation. Focusing on Dube's work on postcolonial feminist theology which is deeply entrenched in African women's ability to transcend the normative biblical readings that undermine their humanity, Dube argues that African women subvert the domination of Western understandings and claims over the bible in subtle ways. Dube has argued for alternative ways of reading the bibles that are life-giving for women in Africa. Dube espouses a postcolonial feminist lens to highlight women's experiences with the bible, religion, and culture. African women read the bible to glean hope and use their indigenous cultural understanding as a heuristic tool to engage and convey new meanings. One of the concepts that Dube has used in postcolonial feminist readings is *Talitha Cum*.

Talitha Cum!

Mark 5:41 where the concept of *Talitha cum* is drawn from, refers to a little girl that had died and her father went to seek her resurrection from Jesus. Jesus called her out and she arose! The Circle has used this metaphor to bring to life the dead situations in African women's lives. When religion, culture, economy, politics and so on have killed women's ingenuity, resourcefulness, and innovation *Talitha Cum* calls women back to life in all its fullness. Calling back to life is one of the ways that the Circle theologizes; Mercy Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro²⁰ who are also influential, impactful, leading writers and founding matriarchs of the Circle, edited a volume with the title- *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*. The first part of the title is the same metaphor for Talitha Cum, this volume brought together essays from Circle members on rituals in Africa and how these rituals impact women. African rituals are religious and cultural in nature as Mercy Oduyoye²¹ has argued, African women "write about controversial elements of life in Africa, such as

²⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro. *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2006).

²¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro. *The Will to Arise*, 1.

culture, sexuality, *rituals* and rites of passage. These elements of life are part of their *religion*". The will to arise/Talitha Cum underscores the implication of ritual in African societies and its heavy weight on the shoulders of women. One of the metaphors that Dube uses in her scholarship is Talitha Cum as she calls women to life, to engage in life affirming theologizing. Dube challenges all the dynamics that negate African women's dignity and human rights. Talitha Cum suggests significant analyses of long held beliefs and theologizing approaches, demonstrating the colonial and patriarchal positions within such beliefs. To achieve the transformation necessary to empower women, the Talitha Cum framework is vital as it calls women back to the circle of life. Dube has written articles and given keynote speeches and public lectures with the title Talitha Cum over ten times as her curriculum Vitae shows. This is a demonstration of the importance and commitment that she has toward African women arising!

History demonstrates how African women have often been written about by the West and also by African men, this is why her-story²² is an important concept in Circle theologizing. Her-story is history written from a feminist view by women about women's involvement in historical progressions that may have been written by men previously. Talitha cum invites African women to find the will and then to arise and take their position in scholarship, leadership, in religious spaces, economic, political spaces and within their communities. Metaphorically conceived as dead, *Talitha cum* is a call for African women's resurrection from all forms of oppression and death dealing forces that have often excluded, marginalized and continue to kill women metaphorically, psychologically, economically, emotionally, culturally, religiously and also physically. To inspire women to be able to find the will within themselves to arise, the Circle and Dube to be precise, have continued to demonstrate that inequality in society affects women more than men. Dube recognizes that often it is the responsibility of women to help other women arise and shape her-story to change the future. Dube points out how it is often in

²² Isabel Apawo Phiri, Sarojini Nadar, and Betty Govinden. *Her Stories: Hidden Histories of African Women of Faith in Africa*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002).

the poverty-stricken regions of the world that this marginalisation, exclusion of women is worse,²³ Africa continues to suffer the legacies of injustice and always seem to be at the receiving end of resources that requires a humane living. In that regard, Dube explains that Talitha Cum is a hermeneutic that calls for:

living in the resurrection space: the art of continually rising against the powers of death, the powers of patriarchy, the powers of colonial oppression and exploitation the powers that produce and perpetuate poverty disease and all forms of exclusion and dehumanization. Walking in the ways of Kimpa Vita, African women' Talitha Cum hermeneutics are ways of staying alive even when one confronts oppressive powers that crushes, one dares to rise.²⁴

Talitha Cum is a metaphor for seeking justice, liberation, emancipation and equal rights for women to be able to competently engage the injustices that have rendered them excluded. Other ways of reading the bible for the resurrection of women and their experiences draws again on post-colonial feminist reading. In her contribution to contextual theologies and African women experiences, Dube has argued that Christian baptism which symbolizes dying with Christ meant for Africans that they had to die to their African culture as well and adopt a Christian name because their African names were deemed 'pagan'.²⁵

Talitha Cum invites African women to arise in their full humanity, in their African-ness and their identity to create a space that recognizes them as African and as women. African women who resisted their identity being given up in the name of conversion to Christianity like Kimpa Vita are acknowledged and affirmed to inspire African women in faith communities. Dube writes about Kimpa Vita, a Congolese woman who accepted Christianity and was given a Christian name as was customary

²³ Dube. "Talitha Cum! Calling the Girl-Child and Women to Life in the HIV/AIDS & Globalization Era", presented to the Women's Commission Meeting of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), Johannesburg, Feb. 12-13, 2002, 71-93; 77.

<http://koed.hu/talitha/musa.pdf> [Accessed 30 January 2023].

²⁴ Dube, Musa (2009). "Talitha Cum! Some African Women's Ways of Reading the Bible," In Botha, eds. *Semeia Studies: Twenty-Five Years of Liberation Theology*. Atlanta: SBL, 133.

²⁵ Dube. "Talitha Cum! Some African Women's Ways of Reading the Bible", 134.

when Africans converted to Christianity. She argues that Kimpa Vita was crisscrossing between the colonial Christianity and her African roots.

"Kimpa Vita/Dona Beatrice, with her lifetime round-trip ticket, her crisscrossing foot marks, had brought black paint into the white colonial church, painting Jesus, his disciples, and his mother black and asserting that this black Jesus would restore the kingdom of Congo. Clearly, Kimpa Vita had not died to her Congolese world when she accepted colonial Christian conversion, 'civilization' and a new name, Dona Beatrice."²⁶

Dube argues that while the Christian mission enterprise and colonialism worked hand in hand to erase the African identities, African people were negotiating covertly and in subtle ways how they could hold both Christianity and Africanness in tension. Kimpa Vita is one such woman who held both Christianity and her African-ness in tension- arising with both Christianity and African-ness yet sturdier than both.

In many ways, what Dube has argued with regard to Talitha Cum is that African women can arise from suppression, exclusion, marginalization, and oppression by intentionally presenting themselves not as "dead and buried colonized African Christian woman with a new name" rather as women of African soil and with the power to resurrect themselves as whole African women. Dube further charges that "Resurrection is the power to come back against powers of annihilation and the powers of colonial domination. It is the art of insisting on the right to be alive and to live freely."²⁷ When African women rise and resurrect themselves with intentional awareness of their African-ness, they call for decolonization of their identities, race, minds and all life's aspects that have been colonized, dehumanized, excluded and denied life. By refusing to believe and accept what the colonial project and Christian mission enterprises wanted the African people to be (inferior race, inferior gender, inferior culture, inferior religion and so on), Kimpa Vita used a form of resistance that allows one to cross borders of identities and interrogates how such a belief can be flipped over to addresses patriarchal, colonial, capitalist, racist, tribalist, sexual and all forms of discrimination among other life-denying social factors.

²⁶ Dube. "Talitha Cum! Some African Women's Ways of Reading the Bible", 135.

²⁷ Dube. "Talitha Cum! Some African Women's Ways of Reading the Bible", 136.

Language

One of the tools that colonialism and Christianity used to disempower the African continent was language. Language can be a tool of oppression in various ways, Bell Hooks²⁸ asserted “I know that it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize.” The way in which language is used to dominate and oppress has been experienced in Africa and many other places where people were colonized and enslaved. The language of oppression that marginalises, inferiorizes and excludes many. Dube argues, about how colonialism and colonial language capitalized on language to disempower, “the narrative of darkness was weaved in modern colonial times as a rhetorical device of legitimizing the domination of Africa and its people. The rhetoric of darkness and heathenism sought to invite a certain illumination with the medicine of gospel and western civilization... darkness is an ideology of alienating all that does not correspond with the west and to domination by creating western imitators.”²⁹ Various indigenous African ideas, values were demonized as a way to disempower Africans. Missionaries often worked with colonial officials and in the process claimed that African names were to be replaced with Western or usually coated as biblical/Christian names, a name like Thembeke for instance would be replaced with Edith as a Christian name. This was an approach that engraved mental hatred of being African in a subtle way for many Africans. Language can be used to empower, and inspire, and it can also be used to disempower and dehumanize. Dube recognizes how language has been used to scorn African women and men and uses language as a tool to resist and explicitly make awareness of colonial legacies in her postcolonial feminist scholarship. The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter is a case in point, Dube writes, “In this extremely gendered colonial language, the African continent was being penetrated by the West, its male subjugator, and inseminated with

²⁸ Bell Hooks. “Language of Power”, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 167-175.
<https://newlearningonline.com/literacies/chapter-7/hooks-on-the-language-of-power> [Accessed on 28 February 2023].

²⁹ Musa Dube. “Decolonizing the Darkness: Bible Readers and the Colonial Cultural Archive.” In *Soundings in Cultural Criticism*, 31-44. (1517 Media; Fortress Press, 2013).

Western seed to give birth to the Westernized African.”³⁰ The African continent was being penetrated by the West continuously and at the same time depleting its resources that Africans could not access in their own countries on their own continent. “Subjugated and penetrated” can easily be seen as symbolic rape because the West did not seek permission to penetrate Africa. Recognizing how high the stakes are for African women and Africans at large, what is said and written about African women, who writes their history, how they write that history in the way that they do is critical. And therefore, where the colonial and missionary enterprise is romanticized, Dube is emboldened to tell her-story unequivocally.

Writing about the theology of the University of Western Cape, Sarojini Nadar and Tinyiko Maluleke argue that “narrative stakes are indeed high—who gets to tell the history of theology at UWC, how they tell it, and why they choose to tell it in the ways that they do are enormously important because such a history not only shapes the future but also speaks powerfully to the present.”³¹ Language has many times been used to violate those who seemingly have no power, in this case African women. Dube refuses to bow to the colonial language that so easily dehumanizes African women and has chosen to use the same tool, language, to give an indigenous understanding of the violence that colonialism exerted on the continent. Her African postcolonial feminist reflections “demonstrate how decoloniality and Black liberation talk are appropriated for colonial ends.”³² For instance, beads that are an important tool of communication in some African nations were demonized in the name of Christianizing the African continent, indigenous names were seen as of less value, upon converting to Christianity, one had to adopt a ‘Christian name’ (Western) and lose their African name. Rites of passage that are crucial to the African understanding of their reality were deemed outdated if not pagan. Using the terms ‘pagan and demonic’ is language that is aimed at causing the people to see the rites as evil, therefore should not be engaged further. and it was effective in rendering Africans to hate themselves,

³⁰ Musa Dube. 2012. “The Scramble for Africa as the Biblical Scramble for Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives,” 2.

³¹ Sarojini Nadar and Tinyiko Maluleke. “Of Theological Burglaries and Epistemic Violence: Black Theology, Decoloniality, and Higher Education”, in *Ecumenical Review* 74/4 (2022), 548.

³² Sarojini Nadar and Tinyiko Maluleke “Of Theological Burglaries and Epistemic Violence: Black Theology, Decoloniality, and Higher Education”, 549.

their culture their beliefs and identity. The Colonization of Africa was a well thought out plan that has lingered decades after the physical colonization ended. As Marcus Garvey stated in his speech in 1937 his words popularized by Bob Marley in a song titled Redemption Song, “emancipate yourselves from mental slavery non but ourselves can free our minds”.³³ These words reveal that the impact of colonization and slavery was not only physical but impacted other spheres of life such as psychological, economic, political and emotional. Hugo Hinfelaar establishes that there was intense planning for the colonization of Africa:

A Conference held in Berlin had precipitated what became known as the scramble for Africa. The continent was being carved up to become the colonial possessions of the Great Powers of Europe. Livingstone, and a number of Protestant missionaries, had travelled extensively through un-charted territory and had enthused Scotland with the idea of a Christian conquest of Africa summarized in the motto of the three C’s: Civilization, Christianity and legal Commerce.³⁴

Time was spent planning, engaging ideas and the language of the colonial project and how to have it effectively. Dube³⁵ bemoans that “African communities and their lands were, of course, neither consulted nor invited to the Berlin Conference. The participants were Western European powers, traders, and their missionaries. Africa, surrounded by numerous suitors, did not have the choice to choose a suitor nor to refuse one.” She speaks and writes boldly when she exposes the evils of injustice and oppression, she explicitly says it in ways that will speak the stamp and the impact that colonialism and all forms of oppression has left on the African continent.

³³ Mendy Toney F. “A Call for Liberation in Redemption Song: “Emancipate Yourself from Mental Slavery””. <https://zambianobserver.com/a-call-for-liberation-in-redemption-song-emancipate-yourself-from-mental-slavery/> [Accessed on 14 November 2022].

³⁴ Hugo Hinfelaar, 2007. *Footsteps on the Sand of Time: A life of Bishop Jan van Sambeek*. Rome: Society of Missionaries of Africa, 7.

³⁵ Musa W. Dube, 2012. “The Scramble for Africa as the Biblical Scramble for Africa: Postcolonial Perspectives”, in *Society of Biblical Literature Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, Vol. 13, ed. by Musa Dube, Andrew Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango, 1-26. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 3.

Embodied Scholarship

One evening, I was with my family when I received a call from Dube. I had her number saved on my phone because there was something I had been meaning to seek her advice on but had not done so yet. I had never spoken to her before in any way, I had used her work in my theological studies, and I am yet to meet her in person. I was elated to receive her call yet at the same time wondered why she would call me. When I answered the phone call, and she spoke, I was made to feel at home, she introduced herself, then asked if I would consider working on a volume for the Circle pioneering matriarchs' biographies. The sense of being recognized as having the potential to carry out this work was overwhelmingly delightful. And over the next few weeks we spoke and began to select who could be a part of the editorial team on the volume and spoke frequently. I have been looking forward to meeting her in person and contributing this chapter is an honour and a humongous privilege for me. Having several conversations with her, I began to note how mentorship for her is not a theory rather a praxis and something that needs embodying. Feminist scholarship is often an embodied scholarship. Dube embodies her feminist scholarship through mentorship, she takes this role of mentoring rising stars of the Circle very seriously and seeks to impart as much as she can on all who will learn. Often, older women in African communities would mentor younger women to take up various leadership positions in their communities. Among the Bemba people of Zambia *bana cimbusa*³⁶ mentored younger women for agency, after the younger women went through *imbusa* teachings (pre-marital teaching for the bride rite of passage). As the current continental Circle coordinator, Dube has been calling young scholars to rise and the buzz name has been 'rising stars.' She has been calling rising stars to rise, Talitha Cum and make their mark. There is a wave of excitement as rising stars get calls for papers to contribute book chapters, journal articles and poems! She is indeed a mentor who does not stop at research but also shares opportunity for career advancements and scholarships for further studies. Having written over 225 scholarly works and counting, Dube is inspirational because she recognizes that the way to continue with African scholarship by African women, is to mentor one another and 'pull one another up'. This transposes me back to a Bemba adage that says *ukwenda babili*

³⁶ Older women that are sought by the bride's mother to give a young bride marital gems and agency.

temwenso which can be interpreted as; having company or being accompanied by someone emboldens us. Dube signifies the concepts above in her mentorship by bringing the hermeneutic of life, community engagement, other ways that affirm women's lives. Her mentorship is exemplary as she offers women space to exercise their agency using the multiplicity of African women theologies of life.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on Dube's African postcolonial feminist reading of the bible and two key concepts of her theologizing and how these distinct markers have contributed to Circle theology. Dube embodies her theologizing through her mentorship of rising stars in the Circle. Dube is one of the most creative, innovative, noteworthy and instrumental African women theologians, a significant global figure in postcolonial feminist scholarship. Dube is not only convinced of her scholarship, but she also embodies it to inspire young African women to rise and write their own herstories. She continues to call rising stars in African scholarship to rise, to fly and to never be left behind. the dark beauty of African theological imaginations. She uses language as a tool to speak truth to power and to explicitly point out the wrongs and evils of colonialism, sexism, racism and reflecting on how language can be utilized for African women's flourishing. Her feminist postcolonial passion intersects with her intentional critical social engagement and contributes to women's flourishing, rising and shaping their own her-story.in the search to contribute to making a difference in the world.

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