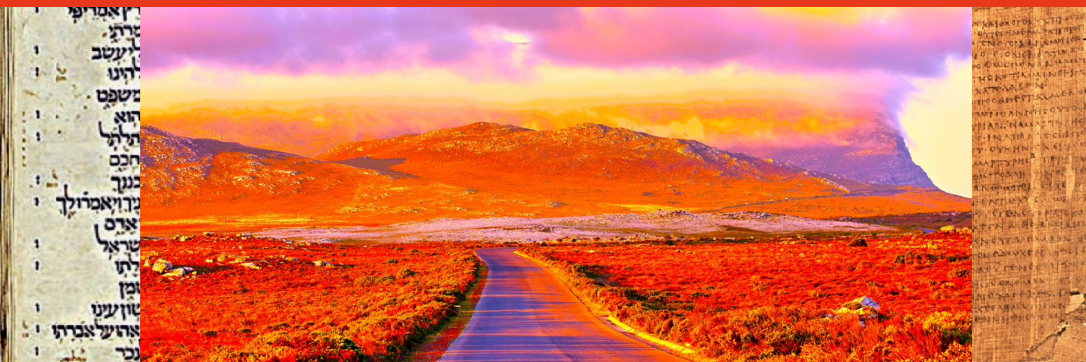


Masiwa R. Gunda, Kathrin Gies,
Ezra Chitando, Jana Hock and Lena Janneck (Eds.)

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Reflections on Biblical Studies in Africa
and the Contributions of Joachim Kügler



University
of Bamberg
Press

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Volume 42

edited by
Joachim Kügler,
Kudzai Biri, Ezra Chitando, Rosinah Gabaitse, Kathrin Gies,
Masiwa R. Gunda, Johanna Stiebert, Lovemore Togarasei



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*Dedicated
to*

Joachim Kügler



*A time for reflection, not the final page
For in the hearts of the dream merchants
The ignited flames will ignite more flames
To forever narrate the story*

Kitche Magak

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Joachim Kügler has definitely gone an extra mile. His dedication to Biblical Studies in Africa is outstanding, extending far beyond Germany. His interests across the various areas of religious studies transcend the traditional boundaries of New Testament scholarship. His commitment to alternative visions of society is obvious in the books and articles he has published over the last decades.

This volume, therefore, reflects on the importance of Biblical Studies in Africa and the contributions Joachim Kügler has made to them in bridging German and African biblical scholarship, predominately through interaction with scholars from Zimbabwe. The articles by various contributors are arranged in four sections.

Section 1 *Methodological Frameworks* deals with methodological questions, Africo Biblical hermeneutics and Postcolonial Biblical criticism. These articles collectively illustrate how Joachim Kügler's work is intrinsically linked to African Biblical Studies.

Section 2 *Contexts for Applied Bible Studies* explores the Bible's impact in different African countries, including Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya.

Section 3 *Contextual Readings of the Bible* presents biblical texts like the Exodus narrative, the Book of Esther, the healing stories of Mark or Paul's letter to the Galatians read from different perspectives.

Section 4 *Biblical Studies for Social Transformation* engages with disability studies, discrimination faced by the LGBTQ+ community and global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, human rights and their interconnectedness.

In more than one case, one and the same article could have been placed in more than one section as there is no African biblical scholarship that does not reflect on its contexts and that does not have a vision of social transformation. Thus, each article in its own way goes the extra mile.

We thank Joachim for his commitment and wish him all the best for his future!

Special thanks are due to Deborah Diethelm, Julia Gareis, Andreas Saffer, Margrit Seuling and Irene Loch, for their assistance in finalizing this Festschrift for Joachim Kügler and to Barbara Ziegler from University of Bamberg Press.

Bamberg/Geneva/Harare, July 2024

Kathrin Gies, Masiwa R. Gunda, Ezra Chitando, Jana Hock and Lena Janneck

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Masiwa R. Gunda

Introduction: The Birth and Growth of *Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS)* Series

Joachim Kügler and the Intentional
Subversion of Western Epistemological
Dominance

Abstract

In October 2004, Joachim Kügler, as Professor for Biblical Studies at Bayreuth University, received Honoured Serima Taruona as a PhD candidate. Prior to that he was already working with Eric Soga Onomo, who was at the Catholic Seminary in Bamberg. Soon after, the team grew with the arrival of Jacques Owono from Cameroon. By 2010, when Kügler presided over the graduation of his first PhD mentee, the brood under his care and mentorship had grown to seven. To date, Joachim has overseen at least six PhD graduates and hosted not less than six Alexander von Humboldt and Georg Forster Fellows over almost two decades since he started working with African biblical studies candidates. One of the most significant contributions, besides hosting and mentoring students and researchers, was the creation of the *Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS)* series in 2009. This introduction is a brief narrative of the journey of BiAS and its implications for Biblical Studies in Africa and by African scholars.

Keywords: *Bible, Africa, Subversion, Epistemology, Dominance, Bias*

1. Introduction

Having enrolled for a diploma in religious studies at the University of Zimbabwe in 1997, I was quickly attracted to the study of the Old Testament and to a lesser extent, the study of the New Testament. My two lecturers then, Rev. Dr. Philemon T. Chikafu (May His Soul Rest in Peace)

and Rev. Dr. Aynos M. Moyo, teaching Introduction to the Old Testament and Introduction to the New Testament respectively, challenged me and inspired me at the same time. The Bible was not what I thought it was! The Bible was not as straightforward as I always believed it to be! One need not be a Christian (or Jew) to study the Bible!

Looking at the course outlines for these two courses that I was taking, it was a collection of the who is who in biblical studies: Julius Wellhausen, Gerhard von Rad, Norman K. Gottwald, John H. Hayes, Lawrence Boadt, Hans Conzelmann, Rudolf Bultmann and many others. What was conspicuous by its absence, were biblical scholars from Africa. To be a biblical scholar, was to be a “European” biblical scholar. We were taught to approach the Bible like the disinterested and unbiased European and North American scholars, whose books became our daily epistemological diet. Our lecturers were merely directing us towards this ideal of imitating European scholars. Academic essays had nothing to do with our lived experiences, only what could be objectively extracted, “exegeted” from the text and context of the Bible was legitimate and valid!

A certain degree of dissatisfaction began to emerge when I could not reconcile how the objective, universal approach to the Bible could address the Bible like it was a dead text that had no bearing in contemporary communities when all around me, the Bible was either saving lives or destroying lives. It was shaping communal norms, values and practices. How could these lived experiences be excluded from the academic study of the Bible? For what use will be a study of the Bible that excludes this very lived experience of so many Christians around the world? Being accepted by Joachim Kügler to pursue my PhD studies under his mentorship at Bayreuth University became a turning point in my professional development, especially expressed in the creation of BiAS, as an alternative centre of power – a margin plugged to the centre for subversive purposes.

2. Power and Dominance: Control of Ways of Knowing

As I was working towards the completion of my PhD thesis, Prof (this has been Joachim’s name to me and my family – every other Prof must be

qualified by name, only him is my unqualified Prof!) and I started discussing where to publish my thesis, which is a requirement for graduation. There were many publishers that we could have approached but we started exploring other non-existent options, we started exploring the possibility of subverting existing structures by creating an alternative centre of power with an unapologetically biased preference for often disadvantaged biblical scholars from Africa.

We were very clear that the current publication industry, especially as it related to biblical studies, was dominantly western. The main publishers were based in Europe and North America, and it was them that successfully distributed their published books across the world, their books were found in small seminaries in Africa, Asia, Pacific, Caribbean, Latin America etc. Their published authors were the “reference scholars” for biblical studies globally and that meant their epistemologies were regarded as the “true” epistemologies that had to be studied and embraced by all aspiring biblical scholars from around the world. By possessing the truth about and of the Bible, western biblical scholars possessed power and dominance to judge all other scholars of the Bible.

We also were aware of some developments in some parts of the global south, where biblical scholars were studying the Bible differently from the approaches in the west. There were even some publishers who were willing to publish such materials, however, they did not have the infrastructure to compete against the established publishers in the west. That meant there were materials, good materials, written and published in Africa that never saw the academies across the continent, let alone the world. Many of them did not explore their own national contexts. Studies done at one Zimbabwean university remained unknown to students and staff at a university in a neighbouring town or city. These studies could not exercise influence nor inspire an alternative perspective because they were not accessible.

We also were aware of excellent studies done by African biblical scholars in some of the leading universities in Europe and North America, yet these were also not easily accessible to the students of the Bible in Africa. They were not as aggressively marketed in Africa as the books of the white scholars. So books by black South African scholars were unknown to Zimbabwean biblical studies students, across the Limpopo River, yet we knew

theories, hypotheses and models developed by North American and European scholars. There was a clear structural and systemic intentionality in the manner knowledge, ways of knowing, and sources of knowledge and knowing were being controlled in the world of biblical studies. Western biblical studies was accuser, prosecutor, judge and jury on what constitutes “good biblical studies”! Could we do something about this?

3. Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS): Our Response

When Joachim Kügler was preparing to leave Bayreuth University to join the University of Bamberg, there was a degree of uncertainty for me: what did this mean to me and my studies. However, for Prof, this move was beginning to interest him even more: Bamberg had a publishing house, the University of Bamberg Press (UBP). Could we use this to launch a series that would begin to address what we were observing in the publishing world? Conversations with the leadership at UBP quickly made it clear that this was a real possibility, but what would that series be called? UBP needed a name! This is how *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) came about. Prof had taken a deliberate and preferential option of working with budding and established scholars from Africa and he was not interested in shepherding them into standard European biblical studies but wanted to create a platform for co-learning, exploring the intersection of European and African approaches to the Bible, embracing the intersectionality existing between the “ancient text” and the “living text” of the Bible.

It dawned on us as we settled for the series name, *Bible in Africa Studies*, that its acronym would be “BiAS” and in our conversation we tried to see if this acronym would be good or bad for the series. I opined that while “bias” carries negative connotations associated with marginalizing others without due regard to their well-being, our intentions were intentionally biased to subvert an existing system that was biased at its core. We were going to embrace the BiAS that were pursuing, we were intentionally looking to provide a platform for African biblical scholars to put their approaches and studies of the Bible on the global map. Having the materials published both in print and online versions would make these materials accessible to a global audience, not only in Africa. This series would change the game and it has!

A collection of essays by Lovemore Togarasei became the first publication in the series in 2009 followed by the PhD thesis of David Bishau (2010) and Gunda's PhD thesis, the first supervised by Joachim Kügler (2010). What has happened since 2009, has been an exponential growth of BiAS, which even birthed a sub-series, *Exploring Religion in Africa* (ERA), for materials and books that were not explicitly, biblical studies, but rather religious and theological studies, yet still focusing on Africa. In all, to date, BiAS and ERA have forty volumes and counting! Without saying it, BiAS has been postcolonial and decolonial, it has been a subversive approach to biblical studies.

4. The Editorial Team – Inclusivity and Daring

From the conversations between Prof and myself, an editorial team started to take shape. The first to be invited to the team was Lovemore Togarasei, a New Testament Professor from Zimbabwe who was an experienced research fellow hosted by Joachim Kügler. Then followed two associate editors, Zimbabwean professors in the study of religion, Nisbert T. Taringa (May His Dear Soul Rest in Eternal Peace) and Ezra Chitando. Through their presence and work, BiAS birthed ERA. It was a male only editorial team and we all were uncomfortable because all of us were fully aware of the gender imbalance in the world.

To plug this anomaly, from volume 32, the editorial team is now as follows: Kudzai Biri (African Traditional Religions), Ezra Chitando (World Christianity), Rosinah Gabaitse (New Testament), Kathrin Gies (Old Testament / Hebrew Bible), Masiwa R. Gunda (Old Testament / Hebrew Bible), Joachim Kügler (New Testament / Responsible for the contact with UBP), Johanna Stiebert (Old Testament / Hebrew Bible), and Lovemore Togarasei (New Testament). This has allowed BiAS to achieve gender equality and more significantly, gender equity in its composition and function. With the retirement of Joachim Kügler, the balance will tilt in favour of females. There is room for continuously and creatively looking at the editorial needs of BiAS.

One of the unsung (s)heroes of this subversive intervention by Joachim has been Frau Irene Loch, whose tireless work in all the volumes of this series has been outstanding and greatly appreciated. Frequently, she has

worked beyond the remit of her job description to make these publications possible. The staff of UBP have also been outstanding allies.

5. BiAS: The End of the Beginning – a Continuing Journey

The retirement of Joachim Kügler has caused some uncertainty in our minds, was this going to be the end of BiAS? As we counted down the years, we at some point thought we were on journey to bury BiAS because we needed an active Professor at the University of Bamberg, who was willing to embrace the vision and aspirations of BiAS and therefore give BiAS a life beyond the active service of Joachim Kügler in the university. Our prayers have been answered in the most emphatic of ways, not only did we get one Professor, we got two Professors who have embraced BiAS and therefore have assured BiAS of an existence beyond its founding father. We welcome Professors Kathrin Gies and Uta Poplutz, specialists in Old and New Testament studies, at the University of Bamberg, who have accepted the baton from Joachim Kügler and will preside over the continued growth of BiAS. Long live BiAS!

6. This Volume

Joachim Kügler has interfaced with numerous African scholars, not only in biblical studies but across the various areas of religious studies. The contributors to this volume are not all the scholars he has worked with; they are just the few that responded to the call and came through with chapters. If all had responded, then this book would have been much bigger and richer! What you will encounter in this volume are chapters that explore the ways in which Joachim has impacted biblical studies in Africa through his openness to embrace alternative perspectives, challenging such perspectives and allowing himself to be challenged by them as well. Joachim Kügler, as Ezra Chitando articulates in the first chapter, has been an ally par excellence for biblical studies by African scholars. His impact suggests it is possible to build a community of scholars based on acceptance of diversity, embrace of constructive criticism, and a shared re-envisioning and re-imagination of a future that is shared and co-owned.

SECTION 1

Methodological Frameworks

Ezra Chitando

1 Joachim Kügler, The Bible and Africa

Eight Points of Attention in Allyship

Abstract

Joachim Kügler has emerged as a reliable, consistent, sensitive, and trusted ally to generations of African scholars, students and citizens, as well as other citizens of the Global South more generally. In his actions and proclamations, he has embodied the qualities of an effective ally. This chapter seeks to utilize Kügler's personality and commitment, as well as a selected passage from the Bible (and the author's considerable experience in activism), to distil some key principles that can inform effective allyship. These can serve as the Eight Points of Attention to those who seek to become effective allies in their chosen areas of activism. While the chapter acknowledges the contradictions and challenges associated with allyship, it contends that activists for diverse causes can partner with allies in order to achieve better outcomes. It also encourages those who seek to be effective allies to follow the examples set in the biblical passage and by Kügler, while recognising the complexities of allyship.

Keywords: *Joachim Kügler, Africa, African scholars, Allyship, Bible*

1. Introduction

Allies abound. Some people of goodwill are always keen to assist those they regard as struggling for full liberation. Indeed, the tipping point in revolutions is often reached when those who have been in the class of the oppressor break ranks and either actively stand and walk with or speak on behalf of the oppressed. They can also passively resist actions that deepen oppression. Declaring that every struggle needs as many contributors as possible seems to be a straightforward truism. Every addition to the ranks

of those struggling appears to suggest that victory is certain. A few examples would suffice. White people in Black peoples' struggles. Men in women's fight against patriarchal oppression.¹ Heterosexuals in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (LGBTQI) fight against stigma, discrimination and exclusion. Lecturers siding with students. Older people standing with the youth. Jewish people recognising the people of Gaza's battle for the right to live and own the land. The examples could be extended (Faith in Action Writing Collective, 2017), but I hope my basic point has been made. To paraphrase Gideon Byamugisha's (Igboin, 2015) formula in relation to the faith communities' response to HIV, victory is achieved when we multiply freedom fighters and decrease the number of oppressors.

Yet, who is an ally? What must an ally (or, at least, an effective one) be vigilant about or guard against? What must s/he/they do to contribute to the struggle they support in more strategic ways? What are pitfalls that all those of us who seek to be allies need to be acutely conscious of, if we are to be of any help to those who are in the struggle? How has Joachim Kügler sought to be an ally to African scholars (and other citizens of the Global South) and what are the lessons that we can derive from his engagement? What insights can we derive from the Bible, a text that Kügler has dedicated his professional life to analysing closely, to make allyship more effective? If Chairman Mao coined the Eight Points of Attention² for the Chinese Red Army in the Chinese Civil War (Uhalley Jr., 1988). The Eight Points of Attention are as follows:

- 1) Speak politely.
- 2) Pay fairly for what you buy.
- 3) Return everything you borrow.
- 4) Pay for anything you damage.

¹ I am indebted to my sisters, friends, and colleagues in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) and the global women's movement for guidance on male allyship. All the mistakes (including those relating to interpretation and practical engagement) remain mine.

² See for example, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_23.htm, 12.04.2024. While I identify with the idea of guiding principles, I am opposed to war, theologically and ideologically (except for oppressed groups fighting for freedom and dignity).

- 5) Don't hit or swear at people.
- 6) Don't damage crops.
- 7) Don't take liberties with women.
- 8) Don't ill-treat captives.

Can a similar list be generated for allies?

Informed by the foregoing questions, this chapter seeks to reflect on eight key principles, the Eight Points of Attention, that we can derive from the Bible and dedicated allies such as Kügler in order to promote more effective struggles for liberation that involve people from opposite sides of the struggle. In the first section of the chapter, I summarise the debate around the possibility of genuine allyship. In the second section, I present a popular biblical passage, highlighting some of the scholarship around it. In the third section, I read the popular biblical passage as providing key insights into effective allyship.

I reflect on the selected biblical passage as an “ordinary reader” (West, 2007, p. 2; Nadar, 2009; Gunda, 2015, p. 158; Chitando, 2020; Mbuvi, 2023, p. 152). I offer interpretations of the passage from the angle of radical solidarity and accompaniment – qualities I deem critical to the quest for allies who seek to go the extra mile. I insert Kügler in my interpretations of the text and highlight how he has sought to uphold the Eight Points of Attention in his engagement with African scholars, Africa and the Global South more generally.³

A word of caution. In this chapter, I do not seek to suggest that we must locate Kügler in the discourse and practice of white saviourism (Khan et al., 2023). This is a widely entrenched belief and system within particularly the non-governmental organisation (NGO), faith-based organisation (FBO), sectors and international relations where global North actors (individuals, organisations, governments and multilateral institutions) are presented as the saviours of hapless and clueless Africans. As I shall argue in this chapter, Kügler has stridently opposed such an identity. In word and in deed, he has sought to respect the endeavours of Africans and other

³ It is possible to read Kügler as a decolonial scholar. He challenges the hegemony of global North scholarship, respects the intellectual offerings by African scholars and has been particularly intentional about embracing publications (and the scholarship of) by African women scholars. He has been courageous to blacken his institute and faculty (Brown, 2004).

Global South individuals, institutions and countries to achieve full liberation through their own actions, often pointing out the skewed global systems that are designed to benefit the global North and exclude the Global South. Neither do I intend to hint that he must be put on a pedestal because of his commitment towards interacting justly with African scholars/Africa.⁴ No. All human interactions are replete with tensions, contradictions... yes, messiness even (Lapsley, 2012). Further, no single human person should be saddled with the responsibility of saving an entire continent/disadvantaged region of the world on their own.

2. Is Effective Allyship Possible? An Overview

Before we can locate Kügler among allies in the struggle by Africa/ns and other Global South actors, we must settle the initial question, namely, “is it possible for one who, by accident of birth, dint of history or earlier choice, is on the side of the oppressor to be on the side of the oppressed?” Space considerations preclude the possibility of bringing out the diverse perspectives in relation to this key question. However, in this section I shall seek to summarise two of the major positions that have emerged. It is also important to concede that in the different conflicts that are going on in the world today, identifying oppressors and the oppressed is not a straightforward issue. Further, these categories are not always absolute, thus, one can be partly an oppressor and partly the oppressed at the very same time! This is particularly so when one does not wield a lot of power while s/he is in the category of the oppressor. For example, while men generally have more power than women, some men are themselves oppressed by oppressive/more violent men (Ratele, 2013; Kügler, 2023, p. 49). For example, as a power-less man in a militarised state, I am vulnerable and oppressed, but at home, as a patriarchal figure within my family, or at work to the woman who is my assistant, I might be an oppressor.

As outlined in the first paragraph of this chapter, an ally is one who is not at the receiving end of oppression. S/He, however, is moved by a compelling sense of justice to relinquish/critique/challenge her/his position of

⁴ I acknowledge Blessing Nyahuma’s idea of multiple Küglers, namely, the academic, priest, German, etc. (discussions, April 2024). In this chapter, however, I adopt a more or less holistic perspective.

relative power and comfort to be on the side of the oppressed. S/He makes a conscious and deliberate effort to refuse to be an innocent bystander (Craig-Snell & Doucot, 2017), choosing justice over comfort (Soyemoto et al., 2021). As a member of a privileged social group, an ally supports and advocates for members of an oppressed group (Washington & Evans, 1991). However, critics have come up with the first definitive position, namely, that *it is not possible* for an ally to fully invest her/himself in the struggles of the oppressed. The struggle is the sole responsibility of the oppressed. It is neither possible, nor desirable, for those who sit on the other side to come across and act in solidarity with the oppressed. Paulo Freire placed a lot of emphasis on the oppressed acquiring the right level of consciousness and work for their full liberation (Freire, 2000).

Linked to the above critique is the notion that the oppressor has the option that the oppressed do not have: s/he can always withdraw from the struggle. On the other hand, the oppressed do not have this possibility, as they are always facing oppression. In this scheme, the ally has the exit/withdrawal option that the oppressed do/es not have. A related challenge is that the ally does not endure the pain that the oppressed experience. His or her solidarity is from at least some distance. If the oppressed are going hungry due to lack of food, the ally can still eat when s/he takes the momentary/long term retreat. If the oppressed are homeless, s/he can always have a roof over his or her head, while those s/he is in solidarity with remain vulnerable to the elements. Further, there is the danger of performative allyship where individuals are engaged in solidarity with oppressed groups for selfish reasons, often taking up the easiest and safest tasks (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023).

Despite the challenges associated with allyship outlined above, there is a different argument that is more positive. There are those who argue that *it is possible for one to be an ally* and act in solidarity with the marginalised. In fact, they maintain that the term “ally” is limited. For them, a better term would be “accomplice” and “co-conspirator” (Suyemoto et al., 2021). These alternative terms are meant to capture the willingness and commitment by the ally to take risks and identify completely with the oppressed. Research in the field shows that there are some stages that an ally can go through. These include apathy, dissonance, learning, stumbling and integrating (Martinez et al., 2024). Whereas Martinez et al. provide valuable

descriptions of these stages, in this chapter I maintain that their presentation of these stages as following each other in a logical sequence is problematic. Thus, as I shall argue in the Eight Points of Attention, it is critical for allies to adopt the stance of permanent vigilance. To be sure, even the most integrated of allies must guard against apathy and be aware of the possibility of stumbling. Thus: Being an ally is not a literal status you can achieve. It's more of a commitment to a certain way of living, something we always have to strive for. It is a lifelong process of learning, listening and self reflection. No one is going to be perfect at it as well. The underlying injustices and discrimination people face are ever evolving. We have to keep changing to face them in different ways (Amnesty International Australia, 2020, p. 3).

Having presented the two diametrically opposed positions regarding the possibility of allyship above, I would like to state clearly that I lean more towards the second position, while appreciating the insights from the first position. To be clear: I do believe that it is possible for the oppressed to have allies among the oppressors. I also believe that academics, often ridiculed as keeping a safe distance from various struggles, can be allies in such life and death processes as those relating to food security and food sovereignty (Levco, 2021; Maseno et al., 2024). At work, allies can be instrumental in reaching out to members of excluded groups, undo their biases and champion causes that matter (Ravishankar, 2023). However, and this is the focus of this current essay, those who are willing to take the risk to become allies (or, yes, accomplices and co-conspirators) must observe specific guidelines if they are to be welcome and successful in their advocacy efforts. In the ensuing section, I present a popular passage from the Bible to highlight the possibility of effective allyship.

3. The Good Samaritan: A Summary

The passage, Luke 10,25–37, has attracted the attention of, among others, scholars, preachers, artists and ordinary readers. It is known as the parable/story of the Good Samaritan (below I call him “The Daring Samaritan”). It is presented in the context of Jesus seeking to answer the question of who one’s neighbour is. It is striking for the power of its simplicity and effectiveness. Thus:

²⁵ An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” ²⁹ But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10,25–37).⁵

There have been many scholarly readings of the passage narrated above. I shall restrict my focus to more recent publications. For example, Moe maintains that readers must retain sight of both the Samaritan and victim in their interpretations of the liberating mission of Jesus (Moe, 2019). Muck approaches the passage from the perspective of inter-religious dialogue (Muck, 2016). On their part, Chamburuka and Gusha read the passage in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chamburuka & Gusha, 2020). Esler interacts with the passage in pursuit of reducing intergroup tension and conflict (Esler, 2020), particularly between ethnic groups (Gatumu, 2019), while Vijayaraj reflects on the passage in the context of the discourse on human rights (Vijayaraj, 2006). Matsoto’s Master’s dissertation included the passage in her African feminist analysis of parables in the Bible (Matsoto, 1992). Confirming the multiplicity of perspectives, Nyawung interprets the parable in terms of what he regards as the need for

⁵ NRSV Updated Edition.

Africa's risk-taking and striving for socio-economic development (Nyaiwung, 2018). Nick Spencer's *The Political Samaritan: How Power Hijacked a Parable* is an informative analysis of the deployment of the parable for political mileage in the politics of the United Kingdom (Spencer, 2017). The foregoing paragraph has highlighted the multiple interpretations of the Lukan parable that have been proffered by scholars from diverse geographical and theological traditions. When the interests of earlier scholars on the authorship of the gospel, the role of parables, the context of the narration and the history of the interpretation of the parable are added, the complexity becomes clearer. However, this chapter, concentrating on the need for effective allyship, will not delve into these intricate issues, important as they are.

In the following section, I provide my own "ordinary reader's" interpretation of the parable. I should reiterate, however, that I would replace my sister Elizabeth Mburu's concern with reading the Bible "correctly," with "reading the bible more effectively" to address a pressing issue relating to the full liberation of humanity and creation (Mburu, 2019). As Kamudzandu rightly observes, "[T]he Bible is not a neutral document." (Kamudzandu, 2010, p. 3). To underscore my standpoint: my reading of the specific passage below is informed by my own preferential option⁶ for effective allyship.

In a sense, I regard the exercise I am engaging in within the scope of this essay as a form of dialogue between an African reader of the Bible (myself) and a European reader of the Bible (Kügler) (De Wit & West, 2009).⁷ This is with special reference to effective allyship in the execution of diverse struggles. The overarching motivation of this chapter is to draw lessons from the Bible, from Kügler and practical experiences to sharpen allyship. This is because allies have caused much harm. Sometimes this happens when allies think they know more, or have better ideas than the

⁶ I am indebted to Masiwa R. Gunda (in this volume) for reminding me about this concept.

⁷ For the effective decolonisation of African biblical studies to be accomplished, there must be internal conversations among African scholars. For example, while (Sr. Dr.) Gesila Nneka Uzukwu's exegetical study of Gal 3,28c is highly informative, she does not engage with the deployment of the verse in African (womanist) theology and African biblical studies (Uzukwu, 2015).

people they mean to serve. Allies can dilute indigenous voices and perspectives. Allies often disappear when the going gets rough, or switch sides when the issue changes, or disappear when a single issue is resolved rather than working for the long term and for future generations. There are allies who participate primarily for their own recognition and glorification. Sometimes people who intend harm have called themselves allies (Woodworth et al., 2017, p. 5).

4. The Daring Samaritan: Eight Points of Attention in Effective Allyship

The multiplicity of angles from which the parable has been interpreted (as summarized above) confirms the reality that every reader approaches the (or, a) text from their specific location. In this section, I seek to read the parable of the Daring Samaritan (my own descriptor) in the context of searching for principles for effective allyship.⁸ I shall read the passage from the perspective of the Samaritan as an ally. I will endeavour to identify some Points of Attention for those of us who seek to be allies. I have not restricted myself to what is provided by/in the text, but have also allowed my imagination to roam and anticipate some variables that the Samaritan might have had to engage with in fulfilling his role as an effective ally. The Eight Points of Attention that I derive from reading the text are presented below:

1. Be genuine

The Daring Samaritan was deeply genuine. All his actions stemmed from conviction and commitment. Due to his pre-existing belief of the full humanity of the other, he felt compelled to have his business disturbed when he encountered the reality of the badly injured man. In fact, the badly injured man became his only business. He was still interested in the welfare of the man, post his trip! Effective allies are genuine, passionate and dedicated to the cause. They are not motivated by the temptation of a good

⁸ Lynn Gehl and Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe call them “Allies Bill of Responsibility” (Gehl & Anishinaabe-kwe, 2012).

press. Alone, the Daring Samaritan dared to risk his life. Possibly, the robbers might as well have been lurking close by, waiting for their next victim. Like the Daring Samaritan, allies such as Kügler are willing to interact with Africa and African/Global South scholars and other citizens on the basis of equality and justice because they are genuine. This is a non-negotiable quality, as Africans have experienced exploitation at the hands of many actors who pose as friends. They come to plunder Africa's resources and subject Africans to new forms of slavery (Murithi, 2014; Chipaike & Matarutse, 2018; De Heredia & Wai, 2018). This requirement for allies to be genuine applies to all other sectors. The Daring Samaritan was effective because he was genuine. All those who seek to stand with the oppressed in the different struggles can be most effective if they are genuine. Genuine white people can have genuine relationships with Black people (Selvanathan et al., 2023). Genuine German academic professionals/hosts can establish thriving relationships with their visiting African academic colleagues. Genuine heterosexual allies of LGBTQI people have a solid foundation for effective collaboration. Given the reality that ally experience and development is a lifetime process that requires continuous learning and growth (Suyemoto & Hochman, 2021), being genuine will go a long way in equipping allies to remain dedicated to the liberation agenda.

2. Acknowledge privilege

The Daring Samaritan recognised his privileged status. He might not have had the time to reflect and process the issue at hand. However, he had so much going for him, unlike the man who had been viciously attacked by the robbers. He had his good health. He had the means of transport. He had financial resources. He had oil and wine. The robbers had chosen another victim (the man in front of him) other than him. There was really nothing that the Daring Samaritan had done not to be attacked (in the same way that the man who had been attacked does not appear to have done anything to make him a target). All these were privileges that the injured man did not have. The Daring Samaritan acknowledged his privilege and went ahead to take concrete actions that promoted the health and well-being of the other person. To say that he was privileged is, however, not to suggest that he was rich: he could not pay the full cost of accommodation for the injured man.

Acknowledging privilege is a critical step for effective allyship. Kügler has accepted the privilege that he enjoys as a male German professor interacting with his peers (fellow researchers/professors) and students from Africa and the Global South. He recognises that the system in which he operates (institutional/national) provides him with many resources that his colleagues and students from the Global South do not have. Where some have used the opportunity to boast about the efficiency of their systems, Kügler has openly acknowledged his privilege (Kügler, 2012, p. 11 with reference to economics). This has enabled him to reach out and partner with colleagues and students from the Global South. His engagements with other citizens of the Global South (beyond the academic/professional) have been informed by his acute awareness of privilege. McIntosh underscores the need for whites and men to acknowledge their privilege if social justice is to be achieved. She writes as follows:

“I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code-books, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 2).

3. Dare to be a sell-out⁹

I have renamed the Samaritan “Daring”, not because I feel “Good” is not good enough, but because his actions demonstrate his daring approach to issues. The Daring Samaritan dared to break ranks with those who upheld laws of purity. He dared to cut off ties with those who engaged in systematic analyses of safety and security: indeed, the entire scene might have been stage-managed to snare him/anybody who would fall for the ruse.

⁹ I am indebted to Gerald West for this concept in relation to activism. When I first heard it, my whole being was shaken to the core. In Zimbabwe, “selling out” has dire consequences. The concept was concretised during the 1970s war of liberation against settler colonialism. Just the accusation (unproven) was often enough to lead one to meet a slow, cruel and painful death at the hands of the guerrillas. For them, a known enemy outside was better than one hidden within. One of the songs I heard as a boy proudly proclaimed, “*Vatengesi tinouraya*” (“sell-outs we kill”) (Marowa, 2009; Machingura, 2012; Dzimiriri et al., 2014, p. 235).

The Daring Samaritan takes up a radical position by siding with the injured man. One could argue that he gives up his citizenship among those not injured and joins the community of the injured. He sells out his membership among the pure and resplendent and takes his place among those who are bloodied and call the dungeons home. The Daring Samaritan provides a powerful model for effective allyship by moving across and entering others' places of struggle and pain.

By establishing genuine, non-exploitative relationships with Africans, Kügler follows the example of the Daring Samaritan. Kügler refuses to buy the narratives of African inefficiency and incompetence. He decamps from the dominant European tradition of regarding Africa only for its usability. Instead, he has sought to cultivate, nurture and sustain meaningful relationships with Africans and other Global South individuals and institutions. Effective allyship calls for such courage. White people who think and act Black. Men who reject myths of women's incompetence. Heterosexuals who refuse to entertain stories of homosexuals' impurity and decadence. Older people who do not support suggestions that young people should not be trusted with power. Effectively, effective allies end up with many outgroup friends (Levin et al., 2003).

It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that the "sell-out" does not become superior to those who remain in his/her in-group. A gender-sensitive activist self-identifying as a man remains a man. He is as vulnerable to being biased against women as all other men are – except that he is perhaps more conscious about his vulnerability than many other men. He can be an advocate for promoting women's rights among fellow men. However, he must also budget for legitimate critique by and merited suspicion from, some women activists, as well as support from many other women activists.

4. Form deep friendships

Contemporary diplomatic procedures create the false impression that friendships and commitments are signified and confirmed by exchanging signed copies. The Daring Samaritan formed a deep friendship with the injured man by deed, not through empty rhetoric. He went beyond the call of duty to ensure that his newly found friend received the best care possible. Whereas conventional wisdom maintains that deep friendships

are sustained by reciprocity, the Daring Samaritan dared to extend the hand of friendship to one whose positive reaction he could not guarantee. Indeed, it is very much possible that upon recovery, the man who had been previously injured could declare his autonomy and sovereignty. If ever the Daring Samaritan dared to mention his benign acts, the now healthy man could nonchalantly ask, “Did I ever ask for your help? Did you see these lips of mine asking you to use your cheap oil on my wounds? Did I request you to place me on your bony animal? Did you hear me ask you to put in that dilapidated inn?”

Effective allies must budget for rejection from those they seek to partner with in the struggle for full liberation. They must cultivate deep friendships to understand the other, but without expecting to be lionised. Indeed, the one dimension that those with power cannot take away from those with less power is the power by the latter to reject any overtures by the powerful! Kügler’s strong friendships with actors from the Global South, like every friendship, carry with them the threat of abuse and rejection. However, allies must always strive to reach out and form deep friendships with those they seek to accompany. Whereas in intelligence circles it is strategic to gather as many secrets about one’s allies and friends as possible, in activism allies are expected to be part of the solution to an enduring problem (Isika, 2023). The indigenous institution of *usah-wira* (ritual/deep friendship) provides guidelines for friendship: a true friend is available to journey with the other every step of the way (Chikafu, 2012). Deep friendships help in equipping the ally to understand the experiences of the other and to appreciate their challenges, fears and hopes.

5. Respect the activists

With fear and trembling, allies enter the world of those struggling against oppression. The Daring Samaritan had high respect for the injured man, hence he did all he could to contribute towards the restoration of his dignity and health. The biggest danger that those of us who seek to be allies face is when we feel so accustomed to, and knowledgeable about, the issues that we are advocating for, that we (unconsciously/unintentionally) replace the activists. The Daring Samaritan, for all his daring acts, was not the one attacked by the robbers. Perhaps, if he had arrived earlier, when the robbers were attacking the man, he might have had the opportunity of

joining in the action, on the side of the man who was being attacked. We can acknowledge him for bandaging wounds (which is important), but not for taking the blows (which is deeply painful).

Kügler has sought to observe and uphold this key Point of Attention. He has resisted the temptation of declaring that he now knows all the challenges that African scholars face and that he can represent them effectively in different settings. Allies that respect the activists, that is, those who are at the coal face of the struggle, get respected in turn. Effective allyship includes the ally recognising the primacy of the activists/those directly affected by a particular issue in the struggle. Male allies must accept the leadership of women in the struggle for women's rights. Allies in the struggle against stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV must stand aside and let people living with HIV lead this struggle. White people should not lead the Black struggle for rights and dignity. Those who are economically privileged should not lead the struggle against poverty (see Kügler, 2012 for valuable reflections on poverty and the need to challenge the structural sin of global inequality). Allies come in to support, not to supplant, the people fighting for a cause. The (disability) activist slogan, "Nothing About Us Without Us" (Charlton, 1988) is instructive in this regard.

6. Be Humble

The Daring Samaritan did what needed to be done. Thereafter, he did not stand on a mountain top to proclaim the critical nature of his intervention. He only interacted with those who were central to his intervention; only his animal and the inn keeper knew of his actions. Although there were no cameras then, he certainly did not yearn for, or need, one! His ministry/critical task was to intervene and salvage the situation. His agenda did not include gaining a following on social media or winning awards for the most daring act.

I will readily concede that in the contemporary world, advocacy does include generating financial resources to support the cause. However, contradictions emerge when allies seek publicity and accolades for their advocacy work. Once again, Kügler has provided an effective model of allyship. He has remained behind the scenes, allowing African scholars to set

both the agenda and the pace, including in the *Bible in Africa* (BiAS) Series. Male advocates in the struggle for gender justice must work hard, but not suggest that their commitment surpasses the first-hand experiences of women and queer people. People with disability are best placed to lead the struggle for the rights of people with disability. Those who live in houses with many rooms cannot be at the forefront of the struggles by the homeless. Humility enables the ally to be open to new issues, positionalities and strategies.

7. Accept Mistakes

The Daring Samaritan plunged right into action. He saw a need and immediately sought to avail his services. He was vulnerable and could have made a number of mistakes. To begin with, he does not appear to have undertaken a security scan. The robbers might still have been around. Presuming the injured man could still speak, he does not seem to have sought his consent before placing him on his animal. They might not have had a conversation on which facility he was taking him to. In some jurisdictions today, he was definitely susceptible to some potential legal action against him!

Like the Daring Samaritan, allies must accept their vulnerability to making mistakes. They might be sincere in their endeavours, but this does not shield them from making mistakes/having their motivations questioned (Van der Zande, 2012). However, they should still strive to be friendly, respectful and caring towards those they are in solidarity with (Ostrove & Brown, 2018, p. 201). Thus, in his interactions with scholars and others from Africa and the Global South, it is possible (and likely) that Kügler might/would have made some mistakes. Indeed, every ally is liable to making mistakes, since interpersonal encounters are always fraught with contradictions and tensions. However, allies must embrace mistakes as teachable moments and utilise the experience to become more effective.

8. Sustain Compassion

The Daring Samaritan was initially “moved with compassion”. He went out of his way to ensure that the injured man received the medical attention that he needed. One could say that at that point, he had already exceeded expectations. However, he expressed his ongoing compassion

when he undertook to defray the in-keeper's expenses upon his return. He would not allow compassion fatigue to set in. He retained interest in the health and well-being of his friend beyond the initial interaction.

Most of the causes that allies sign up to are long-term struggles. The challenge, therefore, is that both the activists and their allies can suffer from fatigue. As the South African Black theologian, Tinyiko S. Maluleke has often said in relation to the slowing down of Black Theology in South Africa after the fall of Apartheid, "war is tiresome". As an ally, Kügler has not allowed "compassion fatigue" to overwhelm him. He has continued to collaborate and interact with different generations of African scholars. Allies need to invest in compassion for long term engagement. As both Dube and Zylla have highlighted, a theology of compassion enables one to enter into others' places of pain (Dube, 2007; Zylla, 2017). Allies must sustain passion and compassion as there is no easy walk to freedom, as one of Africa's greatest children, Nelson Rohilla Mandela, advised (Mandela, 1965).

5. Conclusion

Kügler has been a consistent ally in the struggles by African scholars to ensure that the academy is decolonised and their contributions receive due recognition. He has also interacted positively with other Africans and citizens of the Global South in various settings. His principled stance provides valuable insights into fair and balanced relations between European and African scholars, as well as the global North and the Global South more generally. Utilising the example of a well-known biblical passage, in this chapter I have reflected on the Eight Points of Attention for effective allyship. By drawing key ideas from the passage, I have drawn attention to how the text can be mined to provide guidance to those who are allies for diverse causes. Kügler's sensitive, respectful and justice-upholding interactions with African scholars provide a valuable paradigm for rules of engagement between activists and allies across different parts of the world. As the Daring Samaritan dared to cross the boundaries and as Kügler has been courageous to overcome differences, so are all allies encouraged to observe the Eight Points of Attention for a better world by all and for all.

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Julius Gathogo

2 Afro-Biblical Hermeneutics and Joachim Kügler's Contribution

A Comparative-historical Engagement

Abstract

The chapter seeks to understand Joachim Kügler, a German Roman Catholic professor of theology, by drawing from history and compares him with some earlier European “friends” of Africa who contributed heavily to promoting Afro-biblical hermeneutics. Such include: Clement Doke, Robert Moffatt, Johann Ludwig Krapf and other contributors during and prior to the early 20th century. Hypothetically, the chapter understands Afro-biblical hermeneutics as a broad-based term that addresses biblical studies from an African lens. This includes: publishing on the interface between Bible and Africa’s contextual-cultural realities, translations, interpretations, reflections, and related activities. In view of this, Afro-biblical hermeneutics was birthed in the 17th century when the Bible was first translated into some Bantu languages of Africa, though the New Testament appeared only in 1840. Henceforth, a flurry of activities that ushered in biblical translations took place; and by the 1950s, many African nationalities had the new translated versions that strengthened the growth of Afro-biblical hermeneutics in concrete terms. This chapter is conscious of the fact that Kügler is not necessarily a replica or a reincarnation of the above “friends” of Africa who trace their origins in Euro-America. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to recall that African ancestrology insists that exemplary human beings return in disguised ways. In utilising a comparative-historical engagement as its research design, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how Bible translations birthed Afro-biblical hermeneutics and underscores Kügler’s contribution as following in the same continuum.

Key words: *African Christianity, Afro-biblical Hermeneutics, Ancestrology, Joachim Kügler, Robert Moffat, Translation*

1. Introduction

Afro-biblical hermeneutics is a wide-reaching term that incorporates biblical studies, biblical translations, moral-ethical comparisons of the Bible and Africa's cultural-contextual realities, Bible and science debates, Bible and information technology, Bible and gender, Bible and race relations, Bible and indigenous cultures, Bible and ecology, the activities of African instituted churches and other related activities. The contributions of European missionaries, such as Robert Moffatt of Southern Africa, Clement Doke of Southern Africa and the Tübingen-Derendingen, German-born Ludwig Krapf of Eastern Africa (Gathogo, 2010b) and others who made initial attempts at Bible translations in the local African languages, become a critical turning point.

Although Joachim Kügler is not viewed as a Bible translator, his hermeneutic contribution and interests in Bible in African studies is clearly evident since 2004. His contribution is critically important, as it is in continuum with earlier initiatives that birthed Afro-biblical hermeneutics right from the 17th century when the Bible was first translated into Bantu languages of Africa.

Nevertheless, the first complete Bible translation, covering both the Old and New Testament appeared in 1857 after Robert Moffat, a Scottish Congregationalist missionary to Africa, supervised its translation into Setswana, a language of Southern Africa. Despite appearing too limiting, Afro-biblical hermeneutics have also been defined as the scriptural interpretations that are typically African in originality,

“character and practice; done in Africa, especially among African instituted Churches. Consciously or unconsciously, they borrow heavily from African religious heritage, in their dialogue with the gospel of Christ.” (Gathogo & Kinyua, 2010c, p. 251).

This definition is clearly seen when considering the Afro-biblical hermeneutics of the African instituted churches. Nevertheless, this definition has been strengthened by Zablon Nthamburi and Douglas Waruta who say, thus

“unless an African is enabled to understand scripture in his/her own cultural [and contextual] patterns, the scripture will not only lose its validity but its authoritative relevance as well.” (Nthamburi & Waruta, 1997, p. 40).

Certainly, Kügler's model is not necessarily geared towards appealing to culture; rather it's a broad appeal to the African context. In engaging sociocultural realities of Africa, he co-partnered with renowned Zimbabwean scholars to establish the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series in 2009. In light of this, I was privileged to author one article on religion and civic-developmental responsibilities in the Kenyan context, which appeared in Kügler's co-initiated project.

2. Afro-biblical Hermeneutics and BiAS

2.1 NRM Concern

Besides the exuberance that goes with Afro-biblical hermeneutics, a red flag can be raised in regard to some "distorted" hermeneutics that are seen in patriarchally-driven interpretations of the Bible, especially among the New Religious Movements (NRMs) (Lewis, 1998). In turn, some cultic NRMs have had the characteristic of advocating for a distorted afro-biblical hermeneutics by encouraging their members to keep off non-believers, to isolate themselves from family and old friends, to treat their leaderships as deities, as others encourage withdrawal from the 'sinful' world. Some NRMs also use the Bible to promote terrorist cults, doomsday cult, political cult, polygamous cults, and racist cults among other digressions from the norm (Lewis, 1998). Or was the idea of arresting distorted hermeneutics the primary motive in founding the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series?

As Kügler and his team set out to establish the above initiative, one is driven to think that they were conscious of the earlier initiatives right from the 17th century, and were indeed progressing from there rather than constructing a new outfit altogether. In my own interpretation, I am persuaded that the pioneers of BiAS were seeking an authentic and/or orderly hermeneutic contribution that was modelled on St. Luke's version of telling Theophilus (that can also refer to the lovers of God in Africa), thus:

"With this in mind, since [we] have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, [we] too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Lk. 1:3–4).

The “orderly [Afro-biblical] account” is the most critical contribution among the BiAS; hence Kügler will always take credit for its establishment.

Certainly, Kügler and his team were striving to usher in a more accurate and well-researched account of Afro-biblical account. This has been confirmed by the various volumes bearing diverse themes with reference to cutting-edge issues facing the post-colonial Africa. The gender question, leadership, politics, pandemics, and development are some of the themes that are accurately captured in these BiAS series.

In a nutshell, distorted hermeneutics reminds us about the Apartheid South Africa where the Bible was used to favour one race, a phenomenon that calls for careful and intellectually-inspired interpretation of the Bible. With the Shakahola Massacre of April 2023 where the NRM “Pastor” Paul Mackenzie of *Good News International Ministries*, Kilifi, Kenya, led in foreseeing poor biblical interpretation and indoctrination that advocated fasting to death as a route to meeting the resurrected Christ (Theuri, 2023), the call for an intellectually-driven biblical hermeneutics that Joachim Kügler and team have been advocating for becomes an urgent task.

2.2 Methodology

Methodology in Afro-biblical hermeneutics includes: thematic interpretation of key concerns in Africa today, analysis and publishing researched areas of concern, conference resolutions, translations, gospel-cultural dialogue, and narrating our relevant experiences among others. As a methodology in Biblical hermeneutics, Bible translation becomes a critical starting point. Contextual reflection of biblical contents in light of some African realities becomes another significant approach. With Africa having over two thousand spoken languages, she accounts for nearly 27% of the globally spoken languages that go up to 7,010 (Mbiti, 1986). It is these translations that unlock the written knowledge and eventually aid oral theologies that are critically visible in Africa, as gospel artists release their diverse themes and messages. Further, daily conversations in the African context are guided by biblical verses and quotations that have become societal archetypes – a phenomenon that underlines the value of Bible translations and indeed the Afro-biblical hermeneutics that Kügler and team have been articulating via publications since 2009.

In Africa, translations have magical impacts on the respective audiences. For as John Mbiti has noted, “nothing is more decisive as a watershed than publication of the scripture in a local language.” (Mbiti, 1986, p. 24). In other words, Bible translation provides a direct contact where the African Christian finds herself or himself in his or her own mother tongue. In view of this, David Barrett validates the significance of these translations in aiding Afro-biblical hermeneutics when he explains that the translated scriptures get enshrined in the souls of the African peoples (Barrett, 1968).

Kügler and team's works, in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, progresses from these early translations albeit in different historical circumstances. A comparative-historical engagement, as a research design, helps us to draw broadly from various actors in biblical studies and early translations in order to understand Kügler's place in Afro-biblical hermeneutics. Was he conscious of this as he mooted the idea of the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series? Was BiAS conscious of distorted hermeneutics in Apartheid South Africa and other places, or even among some NRMs; and were there priority areas that needed to be addressed thematically?

2.3 Impetus Gained in 2004?

And although Joachim Kügler's, a Catholic Theology Professor of the University of Bayreuth/Germany, engagement with Afro-biblical hermeneutics can be said to have begun after he supervised an African student, Honoured Serima in 2004, it is equally true that he got into a deeper engagement in 2009 (Togarasei, 2009). This was clearly felt when he teamed up with noted Zimbabwean scholars, namely: Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Lovemore Togarasei, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, and Ezra Chitando and began to engage in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, without necessarily proclaiming it along these terms. After their Afro-German dialogue, they began the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series (Togarasei, 2009). The University of Bamberg Press, Germany, has been publishing these Afro-biblical series that addresses diverse topics.

Ripples are that a German-Zimbabwean 'conversation' ended up as a Euro-African dialogue in biblical scholarship that has brought on board scholars from Kenya (author's home), Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, and Ivory Coast among other areas. Like a

Mustard Seed which grew into a big tree where birds of the air refreshed themselves, the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series has widened its horizons within a period of about ten years, courtesy of Professor Kügler.

Just as in the biblical citation of the Mustard Seed that remains the “smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Mat. 13:32), the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series has stood out as a huge and all-inclusive enterprise for scholars of all shades.

2.4 Some Afro-biblical Hermeneutic Concerns

In one of the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series books, *Religion and Development in Africa* (2020, Eds. Ezra Chitando, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Lovemore Togarasei & Joachim Kügler), where the author produced a chapter on “Religion and Civic Participation” diverse contextual concerns have been addressed. Such includes: Rethinking development, role of religion in developmental matters, youth and religion in Africa, gender in religion and development, Faith Based Organizations and development, non-biblical religions and development, religion and justice, married women in public spheres, interplay between religion and development, church-state relations, political-economy of land, sustainable peace and development, Seventh Day Adventist and development, indigenous oral literature and sustainable development, Ubuntu values and environmental concern, Bible as a source of development in Africa, Bible and liberation in Africa, and resurrection as “corrective” creation. Other Afro-biblical concerns in this book are: ecology and biblical texts, Bible and sexuality challenges, and developmental agenda in Africa today. These concerns are critical in helping us understand the shape of Afro-biblical hermeneutics that is being propounded by Kügler and his team.

Other volumes by the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series, which have addressed diverse themes include: *Queen of Sheba: East and Central African Women's Theologies of Liberation*. It was edited by Loreen Maseno, Esther Mombo, Nagaju Muke & Veronica Kahindo, as a 2024 publication of the University of Bamberg Press (Circle Jubilee Volume 2). The volume is geared towards celebrating the pioneers of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle) such as Mercy Oduyoye, Isabel Phiri, Musa Dube, Musimbi Kanyoro, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Teresia

Hinga, Mary Getui and Brigalia Bam among others (Gathogo, 2008b). The movement that began informally in 1976 was formally launched in 1989, in Accra-Ghana, in 1989. Its main objective has always been to give African women theologians' hermeneutical voice; and was indeed "a culmination of a decade-long work and the realization that while women were the majority in faith-based organisations, they were visibly absent in religious leadership and academic study of religion" (Tsholofelo, 2019, p. 1).

Another volume by the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series that gives the shape of Afro-biblical hermeneutics is: *Sankofa. Liberation Theologies of West African Women* (Circle Jubilee Volume 1). It was edited by Seyram B. Amenyedzi, Yosi Apollos Maton and Merceline L. Yele, in 2023. This publication was set as a preparation for the July 2024 conference of The Circle, as they commemorated 35 years of existence (1989–2024). To "return" The Circle to Accra-Ghana, where it was founded after Mercy Oduyoye's famous speech, "Let the Bird fly [with two wings of men and women]" was another major reason for this preparatory book that was published under the auspices of Kügler's *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series. The book also celebrated Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah, who is the first Muslim woman to join The Circle. It was dedicated to her.

Another volume from Kügler's BiAS is: *Identity and Socio-Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel: The Sermon on the Plain (Lk 6:20–49) and Greco-Roman Panegyrics*. It was edited by Louis Ndekha in 2023. Its main argument is that a reading of the Sermon on the Plain can only make sense when we view it from the Greco-Roman panegyric. The book also appears to agree with Kügler's overall perspective of understanding salvation from a holistic perspective.

A more contemporary concern is the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (hereafter COVID-19). In view of this, Kügler and his team authored a book in 2023, namely: *The Bible, Quran, and COVID-19 Vaccines: Studies on Religion-based Vaccine Perceptions (Africa, Europe & Middle East)*. It was edited by Joachim Kügler and Kathrin Gies. By giving an Asian-African-European perspective, via a multi-religious design, this volume further brings out Kügler's holistic approach to biblical hermeneutics. Further, in addressing the question: "Why should God, Scripture, and Church be against vaccination?" (Kügler & Gies, 2023), the volume offers some practical solutions to the challenge of New Religious Movements (NRMs)

which tends to avoid biblical exegesis in their discourses, and approach the Bible from a lay-person's perspective. Such literal interpretations are common in the African context as well as in other parts of the world.

Molly Manyonganise's book, *Daring Patriarchy?: A Biblical Engagement with Gender Discourses on Political Participation in Post-colonial Zimbabwe* (2023), is another publication by the Kügler-led BiAS. It brings out critical themes such as patriarchy concern, Bible and gender, women and politics, religio-cultural disquiets, and post-colonial African realities, and the influence of the Bible in reshaping some troubling religio-cultural realities in Africa and globally.

Besides this, a Nigerian scholar, Kingsley Ikechukwu Uwaegbute, has authored the book: *Material Possessions in Luke 12 and in Nigerian Christians' Practise* (2022). The theme of materiality is critical in post-colonial Africa, as America's prosperity theologies enter Africa rhythmically. Manyonganise's (2023) book resonates with the hermeneutic concerns in Ishanesu Sextus Gusha's publication: *Paul's Ethics of Reconciliation with Ndebele and Shona Ethnic Cohesion* (2022). The latter goes beyond by ushering in the theme of reconciliation in a continent (Africa) that has over 2,000 ethnic nationalities (Mbiti, 1969). It argues that the tension among the two Zimbabwean ethnic groups (Shona and Ndebele) is pre-colonial though it graduated into a serious concern during the colonial era. With such ethnic tensions, African nations and/or the global society cannot progress, as even the political mobilization will be done along ethnic lines rather than through ideological convictions. The ZANU (ruling) and ZAPU political parties of Zimbabwe are cited as practical cases that speak for various corners of Africa. This drives the concern for a democratic culture, as the reader wonders whether it is feasible in Africa. A Pauline hermeneutics of reconciliation is given out as the panacea for such tension-prone cases of the tropical Africa, as St. Paul's writings to Corinthians inspire social cohesion among Jews and Gentiles. St. Paul's symbols such as New Creation, new baptism, Ambassadors, the Cross of Christ, Christ are cited as hermeneutic keys of reconciliation.

3. The Work of Joachim Kügler

Clearly, Kügler-led BiAS has several publications that are critical of our understanding of Afro-biblical hermeneutics; and indeed, his contribution is evidentially seen along these lines. Isn't he in continuum with the earlier Euro-American actors who loved Africa and its people and eventually contributed substantially (refer to Doke, Krapf, Moffat and others)? Here, Kügler's uniqueness comes out clearly when he offers transformative leadership in academia, a phenomenon where the team leader strives to empower everyone to do something and grow upfront.

This contrasts transactional leadership, a phenomenon where a leader strives to maintain the status quo (Gathogo, 2017). While a servant leader strives to serve the people, however dedicated to the job, a transformative leader helps everyone to grow and serve society as well, as she or he works hard to arrest dependency syndrome or over reliance on the leader. In utilizing transformative model of leadership, several themes or concerns have been brought to the fore for wider consideration and action.

3.1 Afro-centric Concern

As noted above, an Afro-centric concern is clearly evident in the *Bible in Africa Studies* Series (BiAS), as African realities that need our collective attention are well captured in light of biblical traditions. Kügler's contribution, like Robert Moffat before him, is thus afro-centric and broad-based in scope. It has far-reaching prospects in addressing a hotchpotch of issues facing Africa. It underlines the importance of the Bible in addressing cutting-edge issues facing tropical Africa. In both Moffat (who is associated with one of the early translations of the Bible), and Kügler, it resonates well with the position taken by African theologians since the mid-20th century. Jesse Mugambi underlines this critical importance of the Bible in addressing African woes when he says:

“The Bible is central to African Christianity. It is the most widely translated, and the most widely read book in tropical Africa. The Bible is the most widely available book in both rural and urban areas. It can be regarded as the most influential book in Africa. The Bible is read at primary and secondary schools, in colleges and universities, in seminaries, during

worship services, in fellowship meetings and in private devotion and meditation. Most Christians carry copies of the Bible, or parts of it, everywhere they go, and read it when they have a little time to spare. Even when they do not have the Bible in their hands, they will refer to it as they talk and pray.” (Mugambi, 1995, pp. 142–143).

It is after the biblical translations that its power and influence became manifest to African Christians. This is due to the fact that “soon as they acquire the skills of literacy [they] are able to discern [the] meaning from the Bible” (Mugambi, 1995, p. 143), as it now speaks directly to them. In translating the Bible into African languages, thus, the birth of Afro-biblical hermeneutics began in earnest.

Historically, and as noted earlier, it was in the 17th century when the first Bible translations into Bantu languages were produced (Doke, 1958, p. 82). Nevertheless, only in 1840 did the first New Testament appear. A complete Bible appeared afterwards in 1857 in Tswana language, courtesy of Robert Moffat (born 1795, died 1883). He translated the earliest biblical book of Luke into the Tlhaping dialect of Tswana in 1830. Moffat, the Scottish Congregationalist missionary to Africa, was the father to Mary Moffat Livingstone and the father-in-law of David Livingstone (born 1813, died 1873). In turn, Livingstone was a Scottish physician, pioneer Congregationalist missionary under the auspices of the London Missionary Society. The latter was an interdenominational evangelical society that began in England in 1795. It was instigated by a Welsh Congregationalist cleric, Edward Williams (Doke, 1958, p. 82). As Moffat settled among the Batswana, at Kuruman to the north of the Vaal River, from 1820 onwards, he would move as far north as the Matabele nation of Southern Africa in the present Towns and cities such as Hamanskraal, Mokopane, Polokwane, and Zebediela (Dodds, 1998).

3.2 Bible Translation & Robert Moffat

Robert Moffat (1795–1883), like Joachim Kügler, was greatly admired for his passion to improve the living standards of Africa and her people. Despite living in the dark days of African history where the post industrial revolution Europe was in a hurry to conquer Africa and utilise her raw materials for their emerging industries at home, Moffat, as this chapter

seeks to demonstrate, remained true to his missionary calling. Put differently, Moffat had a clear agenda of avoiding proselytization (false or immature conversion), and strived to ensure conversions to Christianity; a phenomenon where dialogue between the Gospel and the cultural-contextual realities were emphasized for authenticity. This noble agenda came out strongly when he led in biblical translation after learning the local languages of Southern Africa keenly. As noted above, he was also the father-in-law of the missionary-explorer, David Livingstone (1813–73), who played a critical role in exposing the evils of slave trade; and also famous for his famous prayer:

“God, send me anywhere! Only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. And sever any tie in my heart except the tie that binds my heart to Yours. If you have men [and women] who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them.” (Horne & Coshham, 2013, p. 13).

By striving to improve the ‘standard of living’ among the indigenous people, it means that Moffat had the wherewithal to approach Christianity from a holistic perspective, as advocated by modern African scholars (refer to Mugambi 1995, Mbiti 1986, Nthamburi 1991, Muzorewa 1985 and others). It implies that he viewed the ‘good news’ as going above mere spirituality; thus, he sought to address the broad-spectrum of life. Hence, the quest for improving the standard of living refers, but not limited to, raising the measure of consumption of goods and services, private and corporate growth, increase of the well-being of the greater number, environmental care and/or management, addressing people’s concern with a view to making it better, arresting the dysfunctions of rich ones getting richer as the poor get poorer, value addition of material and human resources, improvement of quality living in terms of nutrition, monetary measures, monetary indicators, foreign exchange, local and foreign trade, and provision of necessities such as food, shelter, clean water supply, life expectancy, and clothing among other areas (Tikkanen, 2023). In light of this, Moffat compares with the Rev. Dr. John William Arthur (1881–1952) who was largely seen as the “friend of the Africans” in the colonial Kenya due to his support for the African education. He had concerns with some African cultural issues, in light of his biblical understanding and his measured biases, though he also represented African interests in the so-

called Legislative Council of Kenya, from 1924 to 1926, and served the Executive Council of the colonial Kenya from 1928 to 1929 (Hutcheson 1923, Gathogo 2010a). Following the death of the Rev. Dr. Henry E. Scott, as the head of the Scottish mission in the colonial Kenya, in 1911, Dr. Arthur, who was primarily a medical missionary who performed the first surgery on the first African president in Kenya (Jomo Kenyatta) while a pupil in their schools, took over from him after his ordination in 1915. Afterwards, Dr. Arthur concentrated on evangelical work as opposed to his medical work. He however, served dedicatedly in the then British East Africa, from 1907 to 1937 (Gathogo, 2008a). Arthur's zeal and capacity for work led to his being honoured by the Kikuyu with the tribal name *Rigitari* (meaning, the Doctor, our Doctor) (Hutcheson, 1923). Unlike Moffat, the latter's promotion of Afro-biblical hermeneutics was seen through offering leadership and promotion of school education and/or general education among the Africans in the colonial Kenya. Kügler's contribution to post-colonial Africa is in promoting biblical reflection on contemporary concerns; which compares well with the former duo.

Although the first Bible translations into Bantu languages of Africa, in the 17th century, were rather informal and premature, as language remained a barrier to any serious translation work, Moffat's role was more solid, hence pragmatic and realistic. Indeed, the formal Bible translations in Africa, and Southern Africa in particular, were done by the missionaries in the latter part of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

“Early Bible translation was undertaken by an individual or a group of missionaries, usually from the same society. In some cases, the translations were published by the mission itself, either on a mission press, or a commercial press in South Africa, or on a press in the mission's home country. In other cases one of the Bible Societies, such as the [British and Foreign Bible Society] BFBS, the American Bible Society (ABS) and the French Bible Society made grants of paper and/or financial aid for printing and binding. As an indication of the dedication of missionaries in Africa to Bible translation, Doke pointed out that up to 1938 nearly one quarter of the world's New Testaments, one seventh of the world's complete Bibles (Doke 1958, p. 82), and nearly one sixth of Scripture portions, were translations into languages classified as Bantu Languages.” (Hermanson, 2004, p. 7).

Hermanson goes on to say that:

“During this period, formal-equivalent translations of the Bible were made in Tswana (London Missionary Society) Moffat, 1857; Wookey 1908; Central Tswana (Berlin, Hermannsburg and Dutch Reformed) 1970; Xhosa 1859 (Wesleyan Missionary Society) Appleyard 1864; Revised 1899; 1942; 1975; Southern Sotho 1881 (printed)/1883 (distributed) (Paris Evangelical Mission 1883), Revised 1899, 1909; 1961; 1976; Zulu (American Zulu Mission [ABS]) 1883; Revised 1893 (still in print); new translation 1924 (discontinued); (Hermannsburg Mission) 1924; (Natal Missionary Conference [BFBS]) 1959; Tsonga (Swiss Mission) 1906, Revised 1929; Northern Sotho (Berlin Mission) 1904, 1951; Venda (Berlin Mission) 1936; Afrikaans (Plenary Committee Dutch Reformed Church [BFBS]) 1933, Revised 1953.” (Hermanson, 2004, p. 8).

Robert Moffat’s works in biblical translation, as the starting point in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, helps us to understand Joachim Kügler’s contribution as a contemporary theologian with a bias towards the African concerns. Certainly, Kügler’s selflessness is a progression of earlier initiatives, though from a different dimension. His uniqueness is greatly favored by historical circumstances and his innovative approach that invites the wearers of the shoe (African scholars) to speak more and stop the African shoe from pinching further. His uniqueness is also seen in the ongoing conversation, in the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series, where a Euro-African dialogue is given prominence.

3.3 A Reincarnation of Clement Doke?

Further, in rethinking the contribution and dedication of Joachim Kügler in Afro-biblical hermeneutics, that is evident through his co-founded *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series, one is left wondering: Could he be the proto-reincarnation of Clement Martyn Doke (1893–1980)? In a continent where ancestors are believed to return in disguised ways, as in the “form of visitors from other places” (Gathogo, 2017, p. 175), one is easily driven to think that “God has done it again” by bringing back Clement Doke through Joachim Kügler’s works. In my local Kenyan language, we say that the “Cutting of one Mugumo Tree brings yet another stronger one” (Gathogo, 2001, p. 21). In other words, the demise of C. M. Doke in the last half of the twentieth century (on 24th February 1980), brought back

another well-engaging friend of Africa (Kügler), whose impact is continental and global. In turn, Doke is one of the most dedicated scholars in South Africa who initiated an intellectual revolution in the study of African languages; and who eventually created the so-called Bantu literature. After completing his Bachelor of Arts degree at the age of 19, in 1914, he began the missionary career at Lambaland in the then Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). This went hand-in-hand with his desire to lay a strong ground for biblical translation in the languages of the indigenous peoples. To do this, he first studied the Lamba language. This also gave him ample time to prepare for Lamba-English dictionary. By studying Lamba language first, he wanted to avoid Dutch's biblical translations of the 17th century which were done without first studying the Xhosa, Zulu and other African languages hence, the first attempt at biblical translation failed due to language barriers. Nevertheless, Doke managed to transform the "study of Bantu linguistics, folklore and literature not only in Zambia, but also in Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] and in South Africa" (Masilela, 2023, p. 1).

Doke's preparation for the study of African languages and biblical translations to the indigenous tongues was well-prepared right from childhood days, albeit unconsciously. Born in Bristol, England, on 16 May 1893, his parents began to prepare him for future tasks when they took him to the New Zealand, together with his siblings, before he was one year old. They were to remain there from 1894 to 1902. This relocation from the United Kingdom to the New Zealand and the final settling in Southern Africa served him well on four accounts. First, it gave him intercultural exposure that helped him later as he navigated through the vicissitudes of life in Southern Africa. It also helped him to avoid ethnocentrism in mission, to embrace cultural relativism in mission, to learn new norms, to appreciate cultural diffusion, to overcome culture shock in mission, and enabled him to appreciate cultural universals as he later settled in Africa (Gathogo, 2017, p. 166–169). He was about ten years old when his family relocated to Southern Africa in 1903. Second, the relocation to Africa saw his father, Joseph John Doke (1861–1913), becoming interested in scholarship, and in particular the contribution of the Indian lawyer-turned-activist (Mahatma Gandhi) as he practiced law in South Africa. After about five years, Doke Senior (his father), managed to make history by publishing the first

known biography of Mahatma Gandhi, who lived from 1869 to 1948. His father's contribution was an inspiring gesture and indeed, it gave him a strong foundation that later served him well as he likewise sought to research and document the Bantu peoples of southern Africa and the rest of the tropics (Doke, 1940; Doke, 1958; Masilela, 2023).

Third, Doke Junior (Clement) followed the footsteps of his father, a Baptist Cleric, and got ordained by the Baptist Union of South Africa. As a missionary, in following his father's trend, he spent 8 years with the South African Baptist Union of South Africa, from 1914 to 1921, in the then Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Fourth, upon his return to South Africa in 1923, he was appointed a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Bantu Studies at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. He also earned his PhD at the same University in 1924, and was subsequently crowned as the specialist in African languages. This was followed by dozens of publications on Bantu languages. It included the Lamba-English dictionary and the Zulu-English dictionary. Following his deep commitments in African languages that led to his biblical translations, he earned Honorary Doctoral degrees (Honoris Causa) from various universities who felt that his outstanding role in languages and translations were huge contributions warranting special honors. It is no wonder that Rhodes University conferred him in 1971 as Witwatersrand honored him in 1972, as he was viewed as one who was in a class of his own, hence a great role model (Kemp, 2023).

Critically important is the fact that Clement Martyn Doke sought to establish the study of African languages on a scientific basis and/or via scholarly means through editing of the African Studies journal. This came after he changed the journal from the old title which was Bantu Studies, a year after he assumed its editorship in 1942. Further, as noted by Ntongela Masilela:

“There are basically four recognizable ways in which Doke made his mark: (1) His early collections of what he referred to as wisdom-lore; (2) His encouraging reviews of newly published works in journals such as *Bantu Studies* (later *African Studies*) of which he was editor from 1931 to 1953, and *South African Outlook*; (3) His consistent review of developments in the field of literature qua literature; (4) His consistency in encouraging translations of classical works from other languages [...]. Between 1935 and

1953, Doke was [the] editor of the Bantu Treasury Series of poetry and drama, published by the University of Witwatersrand Press in Johannesburg. In that capacity, his most direct contribution to the growth of Bantu literature came in the form of eleven publications [...]. Plaatje's translations, no doubt inspired by Doke (notwithstanding their difference of opinion as to which works were most suitable for translation), were followed by many other translations of English classics into various Bantu languages." (Masilela, 2023, p. 1).

Further, as Doke has noted:

"The period commencing about 1830, down to the present day, became a period of intensive monograph study of the Bantu languages, a period in which almost all the research and recording work was done by missionaries, to whom Bantu literature owes an unrepayable debt." (Doke, 1958, p. 9).

Equally, the twentieth

"Century was well known before Native [African] writers began to take a hand in the development of Bantu literature, although Tiyo Soga had made his great translational contribution to Xhosa as early as 1867." (Doke, 1940, p. 2).

On the whole, Doke, like Kügler who came afterwards, remains a very realistic hermeneutically-tuned scholar in African studies, as he viewed "advanced literacy" as a critical step and/or authentic way towards effective Christianity. Nevertheless, he only completed the translation of the Bible into Lamba (Zambia) after his retirement. It was published as *Amasiwi Awa Lesa* (The Words of God) in 1959 (Masilela, 2023). In view of this, Kügler's co-partnership with African scholars in Afro-biblical hermeneutics that addresses gender, development, environment and other contemporary concerns, is on a continuum with Clement Doke's approach to the African studies.

3.4 Joachim Kügler & the Poverty Theme

In view of this, Joachim Kügler compares with Robert Moffat in the way he takes the Bible as a "power" that can be utilised to create a better world, especially with reference to Africa. He also compares with Doke in the way he takes African studies with gusto. Despite not being concerned with

translation, as in the case of Moffat, their common denominator is seen in the fact that they all make the Bible a point of reference, a gateway to literacy, modernity, and as a forum through which myriad of problems can be addressed and thereby create a progressive society. Certainly, African challenges in the twentieth century were characterised by themes of racism, colonialism, slavery, disease, poverty and ignorance among others, which were well paid attention to by Moffat and Doke. Equally, the African challenges in the twenty-first century include, but are not limited to: poverty, gender relations, exclusivism, North-South gaps, neo-colonialism, patriarchy, environmental justice, quality and relevant education, poor distribution of resources, and hermeneutics of suspicion among others, which are well taken care of by Kügler-led BiAS.

In particular, Kügler has elaborately addressed the theme of poverty, among other contemporary themes, which is a major subject in post-colonial Africa. He bemoans the gap between the rich and the poor in the global matrix. In this case, the poor include those who are threatened by HIV and AIDS. It may also mean people whose environment is polluted by car's exhaust pipes, burning of coal, sewages that pollute water and land, spew pollutants via pesticides and/or chemical poisons as we strive to kill insects and weeds and eventually harm wildlife and waterways, hence more poverty and suffering. With African governments failing to manage floods and droughts from a long term basis, poverty may remain a perennial concern.

In light of this, Kügler says, thus:

“The gap between those who are well off and those who suffer is getting wider and wider, and additional threats like HIV/AIDS contribute to the ‘shadow of death’ which many people are living in. This process can be seen in the Western countries, but is much more dramatic in the global South, i.e in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Zimbabwean Christians, as well as those in other countries, cannot ignore this severe problem, but have to understand it as a challenge of peace and justice. All of us should understand that the struggle against poverty is part of our Christian mission.” (Kügler, 2013, p. 323).

He goes on to say:

“As a Catholic scholar, I may point to the texts of the Second Vatican Council, which defines the Christian Church as a kind of sacrament [which] was

formed by God to preach and realize God's love to [humanity]. Being Church in itself means to serve those in need. And [failure to serve] those who suffer is equivalent to not being [a] Church. Our faith in God's love and justice urges us to ask what we can do to share in solving the problem of poverty. As a biblical scholar, I have to ask, what the tradition of the Bible can contribute to this struggle and how it might help in overcoming need and suffering. It is well known that the Old Testament has a lot to say on poverty and on the God's relation [with] the poor and [the] oppressed." (Kügler, 2013, p. 323).

Apart from his North-South approach to the poverty debate, Kügler addresses the challenges of prosperity theologies which are pitching tents in continental Africa. He cautions the danger inherent in their prosperity gospel. He contends that such theologies may end up turning away the poor, especially if their needy status is blamed for lack of faith. While cautioning on the inadequacy of charity, he argues that it must be accompanied by "the struggle for justice in economic and political structures" (Kügler, 2013, p. 337). In view of this, practitioners of the faith, evangelicals in particular, have to open up

"for the political dimension of eradication of poverty" as "poverty is not only an individual fate; it is also a product of economic structure which must be changed." (Kügler, 2013, p. 337).

In a sense, Kügler (2013) takes us to the difficulty in defining poverty, as it may be understood as applying not just to those who are victims of a

"maldistribution of resources but, more exactly, to those whose resources do not allow them to fulfil the elaborate social demands and customs which are placed upon citizens of the society in the first place." (Outhwaite & Bottomore, 1993, p. 503).

Iliffe hardens the debate when he says that the poor are diverse, as poverty has many facets. He goes on to say that African people, in their indigenous society, had their own varied and changing notion of it. This therefore means that a precise and consistent definition is not feasible. He further argues that poverty, nevertheless, "has an inescapable connotation of physical want, especially in the poor countries" (Iliffe, 1988, p. 2). Pedro maintains that the life of the poor has no privacy and violence is frequent, including wife and child beating; the marriage is often at the risk of disintegration; child and wife abandonment is also frequent; many families

are mother centred; and authoritarianism in the family is marked. These views seem to be speaking about the actual situation of Mathare slums in Nairobi, Kenya (Lewis, 1959, p. 16). The only problem is that they give a wrong impression that divorce is only found in the non-industrialised world, while the truth of the matter is that divorce is more common in the industrialised world than in the non-industrialised world.

As in Kügler's broad dimension of understanding poverty, Oscar Lewis' two books: *Five Families* (1959) and *The children of Sanchez* (1961) are still relevant today with regard to poverty. Many authors acknowledge his many years of research in Mexico. In these books, Lewis pointed out that poverty creates its own culture. He says:

“One can speak of the culture of the poor, for it has its own modalities and distinctive social and psychological consequences for its members.”
(Lewis, 1959, p. 16).

And through his research, he discovered that the culture of poverty includes people with relatively high death rates and low life expectancy; low level of education; and low participation in organization. For instance, unions or political parties; no participation in medical care or other health programmes; little utilization of city facilities, such as stores, museums or libraries; low wages and little employment security; low skill levels; lack of savings or access to credit; and no food reserves in their homes (Lewis, 1959, p. 43).

Nevertheless, Kügler's hermeneutical axis has paid attention to such life threatening challenges that are prevalent in tropical Africa, just as with the Afro-biblical hermeneutics seen in the works of Masiwa Ragies Guda, Lovemore Togarasei, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, Ezra Chitando, Sophia Chirongoma, Chammah J. Kaunda, Sokfa France John, Tarisayi Andrea Chimuka, Loreen Maseno, Susan Mbula Kilonzo, Hassan J. Ndzovu, Muhammed Haron, Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, Elizabeth Pulane Motswapong, Lilian C. Siwila, and Nelly Mwale. Further, the works of Chita Joseph Chita, Mutale Mulenga Kaunda, Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye, Andrew David Omona, Julius Gathogo, Uziah Maate Kiriaghe, Sonene Nyawo, Petronella Munhenzva, Lindiwe Princess Maseko, Beatrice Taringa, Musa W. Dube, Sidney K. Berman, Francis Machingura, Ishanesu Gusha, Canisius Mwandayi and all other African scholars who have contributed in the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series. These scholars have teamed up with Kügler

so as to address the African agenda, and have all demonstrated Ubuntu (humane) spirit effectively. That is, Kügler's hermeneutics resonates well with other scholars in Africa, and beyond the continent, who appreciate the beauty of biblical hermeneutics as deserving an all-inclusive treatise. This is largely seen as the better way of addressing the myriad of issues facing our contemporary society. In their diverse approaches and orientations, they express mutuality in building a better society in light of Afro-biblical hermeneutics. Kügler's contribution is certainly a curtain raiser in African scholarship that has substantively borne fruits.

4. Conclusion

The chapter sought to explore Afro-biblical Hermeneutics with special reference to Joachim Kügler's contribution. In teaming up with Zimbabwean scholars who have focused on biblical hermeneutics consistently (refer to Masiwa Ragies Guda, Lovemore Togarasei, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa, and Ezra Chitando) to establish the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series since 2009, and in having supervised an African student in 2004 – where he engaged deeply with African socio-cultural realities at close range, Kügler's initiation into Afro-biblical hermeneutics began in earnest. As a fully initiated afro-Biblicist, Kügler found himself addressing one of the critical themes in African studies, namely poverty. Here, he resonates well with African scholars who have a holistic understanding of poverty; and who identify the various types of poverty: inherited, instant, temporary, new, relative, absolute, hidden, endemic, overcrowding, and terminal poverty, among other dimensions (Gathogo, 2020).

Coming from continental Europe, and having an African agenda in mind, he fits into the shoes of his missionary predecessors such as Johann Ludwig Krapf, who was a fellow German to East Africa of 1844 (Gathogo, 2010b), Robert Moffat the Scottish missionary and Bible translator who worked hard to improve the living standards of southern Africa in the early 1800s, David Livingstone, the Scottish physician and pioneer Congregationalist missionary under the auspices of the London Missionary Society in mid 1800s, and John Arthur, a Scottish missionary, who was largely seen as a "friend of the Africans" due to his support for African education in the colonial Kenya. He has been viewed as a reincarnation of

Clement Martyn Doke (1893–1980), devoted scholar who formed the so-called Bantu literature. Is the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series another form of Bantu literature? Has the proverbial African Mugumo tree brought forth another one in disguised ways?

In this treatise, Joachim Kügler has also featured more as an ancestral return of Robert Moffat despite the latter being a Congregationalist, and the former being a Roman Catholic theologian. In particular, Moffat strove hard to ensure real conversion of Southern Africans to Christianity, as opposed to false conversion (proselytising) where dialogue with local realities is avoided altogether. In writing about the holistic dimensions of poverty and in the formation of the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series so as to address cutting-edge issues facing Africa, Kügler found himself a replica of Moffat in God's mysterious ways. In a sense, he becomes a returning African ancestor, as the former comes in disguised ways. Of great concern Kügler's works in the *Bible in Africa Studies* (BiAS) Series is whether he had distorted hermeneutics in mind as they began this initiative. Although he blames prosperity theologies for distorting biblical hermeneutics, his position on Apartheid South Africa's hermeneutics, especially among the Dutch Reformed Church, is not clear. BiAS does not appear to give it attention. Or could it be viewed as a non-contemporary concern in a democratic world? Equally, BiAS has not given xenophobia the much needed attention, yet it's a major concern in our contemporary Africa. Nevertheless, the initiative is a welcome trajectory that puts Africa on an academic pedestal that strives to address African challenges in light of the Scripture.

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3 Four-Legged Stool or Three-Stone Cooking Stove?

Reconsidering Methodology for *African Biblical Hermeneutics*

Abstract

The search for an *African Biblical Hermeneutic* (ABH) has come a long way and has grown into an established discipline. In the enterprise, several methodologies and African resources have been employed and deployed to develop an ABH that is adequately African. While acknowledging the contributions of other scholars to ABH, e.g. E. Mburu's *African Hermeneutics* using the imagery of a four-legged stool, this paper, however, approaches ABH significantly differently. Using a "new" imagery of a three-stone cooking stove to describe the form and function as well as the tasks involved in ABH, the present study proposes an alternative methodology that involves three broad tasks and eight specific tasks of ABH. In this analogy, stone 1 is the analytical tasks of ABH; stone 2 is the performative tasks; and stone 3 is the transformative tasks. In this way, this paper contributes, methodologically, in the conversation towards finding an ABH that is truly African and truly biblical.

Keywords: *Africa, Hermeneutics, Bible, Context, Transformation*

1. An Overview of *African Biblical Hermeneutics* (ABH)

Different scholars use different nomenclature to describe the enterprise of interpreting and appropriating the Bible in African contexts. For example, while Adamo calls it *African Biblical Hermeneutics* (Adamo, 2015), Mbuvi calls it *African Biblical Studies* (Mbuvi, 2023), and others call it Af

rican Biblical Interpretation. Ukpong describes the specific task of interpreting the Bible in African contexts as “inculturation hermeneutics” (Ukpong, 1995) while Dube describes it as “decolonization” (Dube, 2000; Abogunrin, 2005). West sums up the entire enterprise of engaging with (including interpreting and applying) the Bible in African contexts as a hyphenated “post-colonial” project because “the presence of the hyphen is a reminder of Africa’s entangled time, allowing for a pause between terms and historical moments” (West, 2018, p. 247). While each of these nomenclatures can express certain nuances that the others may not, it seems they are used differently but mean the same thing or have the same goal, namely, to carve out a way of reading biblical texts in African contexts that is, to a considerable extent, African in terms of method, content, and topics addressed. However, in this chapter, *African Biblical Hermeneutics* (ABH) will be used to represent the various nomenclatures, except for direct quotations where each author’s nomenclature will be retained.

Noting that ABH is both innovative and reactionary, Mbuvi argues that “a genuine ABS is therefore an amalgamation of multiple interpretive methods, approaches and foci that reflect a creative engagement of the African cosmological reality and the Bible” (Mbuvi, 2017, p. 149; Mbuvi, 2023, pp. 105–107). West advocates for a distinctive ABH that is significantly different from the Western approaches that have been mainly shaped by grammatical-historical approaches. However, he further notes that even if ABH engages historical-critical approaches, they are to do so creatively rather than prescriptively (West, 1997, p. 10; Mbuvi, 2017, p. 152). West proposes that in ABS, unlike in the West, the expert reader or scholar reads “with the ordinary reader” and not “on behalf of the ordinary reader” (West, 2004; Loba-Mkole & Wendland, pp. 12–13; Mbuvi, 2017, p. 154), being accountable more to the African context than to the guild of biblical studies (West, 2018, p. 259).

Adamo attempts to tackle the issue of defining a distinctive ABH headlong with his 2015 paper entitled “What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?” (Adamo, 2015, pp. 59–72), which is an updated version of his numerous presentations and publications on the subject matter (Adamo, 2001). Adamo defines ABH as:

“a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African world-views, cultures and life experiences, with the purpose of correcting

the effect of the cultural, ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the business of biblical interpretation. It is the rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Africentric perspective. African biblical hermeneutics is contextual since interpretation is always done in a particular context. Specifically, it means that the analysis of the biblical text is done from the perspective of an African world-view and culture.” (Adamo, 2015, p. 59).

An important word that Adamo does not include in the definition above but which plays a vital role in his construal of ABH is “transformation.” He sees ABH as primarily a principle of interpreting the Bible for transformation in or of Africa (Adamo, 2015, p. 62). Adamo describes the enterprise of distinctively interpreting the Bible in Africa as African biblical hermeneutics, African biblical transformational hermeneutics, or African biblical studies (Adamo, 2015, p. 62).¹ According to Adamo, ABH has three main characteristics: it is “liberational, transformational and culturally sensitive” (Adamo, 2015, p. 64). Similarly, West describes ABH as not only post-colonial and a site of struggle, but also as tri-polar in the sense that it involves the African context as one pole, the biblical context as another pole, and the appropriation pole, referring to the dialogical or intermediating processes between the first two poles (West, 2018).

While the majority of scholars adhere to the common features of the ABS that fronts or foregrounds African realities, others are critical. Byang Kato, for example, criticizes ABS of over-exulting African culture, religion and philosophy beyond proportion (Kato, 1975, pp. 53–54, see also Tienou, 1984, pp. 151–165). Even though Adamo takes a relatively “safe” posture of humility when he acknowledges that ABH, like any other hermeneutic, is not 100 percent objective (Adamo, 2015, p. 64), Kato’s critique applies to what Adamo sees as the purpose of ABH, namely, “to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholars have long enjoyed” (Adamo, 2015, p. 63). Such a “reactionary” and sometimes “militant” approach (as Adamo’s and similar ones) to ABH is, in my opinion, counter-productive for three reasons: first, it comes from a competitive rather than collaborative approach to biblical

¹ Adamo notes further that ABH is related to, though not the same as, the following terms: inculturation hermeneutics, liberation hermeneutics, contextual hermeneutics, Africentric hermeneutics and vernacular hermeneutics.

interpretation that meaningfully engages and benefits from different contexts. Secondly, its tendency to blame any misinterpretation and/or misapplication of biblical texts in Africa to Eurocentric methodologies provides a fertile ground for romanticizing the African culture, religion, philosophy, and ABH itself, therefore not critiquing its own inherent weaknesses that could hinder human flourishing within its own corridors. Thirdly, it lends itself more to a retrogressive rather than a progressive methodology in the sense that it focuses more on what “has been done to Africans” and misses out on the most important question of how the Bible can genuinely transform Africans and Africa in view of our history and the inherent weaknesses of our own culture and traditions. A transformative methodology needs to be more forward than backward looking. Elizabeth Mburu’s hermeneutics (Mburu, 2019), from a distinctively evangelical orientation, is an example of a more forward-looking African biblical hermeneutics. In what follows, I summarize Mburu’s Four-Legged Stool hermeneutical steps, then present my own Three-Stone Cooking Stove hermeneutical model as an alternative methodology for ABH. By engaging more with Mburu’s distinctively evangelical hermeneutics instead of other recent proposals for ABH such as Mbuvi’s (Mbuvi, 2023), the present study acknowledges its evangelical presupposition, therefore situating the discourse within evangelical biblical hermeneutics in African contexts.² Four evangelical presuppositions with which the approach of Mburu and the present study come to the biblical text are: a hermeneutic of trust; a commitment to being accountable to both the biblical text and African context; a commitment to the author’s intended meaning of the text but different applications; and commitment to the transformative power of the Bible in the African context, despite its entangled history with colonialism and patriarchy.

² It may seem problematic to isolate a distinctively evangelical hermeneutics within the broader ABH, but it is necessary because it clarifies the specific presupposition with which the biblical text is approached. For the sake of clarity, the evangelical presupposition is namely that of a hermeneutic of trust rather than a hermeneutics of suspicion. This, nevertheless, does not in any way imply that the African context is taken lightly or at secondary importance. Instead, the African reality or context is awarded the same importance and analytical rigor as the biblical context.

2. Engaging Elizabeth Mburu's African Hermeneutics

Elizabeth Mburu's Four-Legged Stool methodology for ABH is currently one of the most elaborate discourses on ABH. Mburu notes that the source and nature of the problem of a shallow Christianity in Africa is a dichotomy of faith and everyday life, indicating that our Christian faith has not been internalized due to the Western tradition of interpretation that we have imbibed without contextualizing our interpretation (Mburu, 2019, p. 5). According to Mburu, the solution to the dichotomy problem is a contextualized hermeneutic, hence her proposal for an African hermeneutic (Mburu, 2019, p. 4).³

Noting that hermeneutic must be linked to a particular geographical place, Mburu argues that "we need an African hermeneutic, one that raises questions that a hermeneutic from a different environment would not" (Mburu, 2019, pp. 5–6). An African hermeneutic is one which draws on aspects of "African culture that facilitates our understanding of the practical implications of the Bible" (Mburu, 2019, p. 6). Mburu's aim is to develop "a hermeneutical model that works for us as African readers of Scripture" (Mburu, 2019, p. 65). She uses the metaphor of a four-legged stool, which she describes as a "model," to describe a method that works well in interpreting Scripture in Africa.

Mburu's four legs of African hermeneutics include: Leg 1: parallel to the African context. Leg 2: the theological context. Leg 3: the literary context. Leg 4: the historical context. The fifth model is the seat, supported by the legs, which is the application to an African context (Mburu, 2019, pp. 65–66).

Similar to what Grant Osborne (Osborn, 2010) describes as the hermeneutical spiral, Mburu notes how her method is not entirely linear but circular, noting that

³ Wessel has rightly observed that Mburu fails to recognise that when she proposes that a Western tradition of interpretation is responsible for dichotomised lives in Africa, it equally implies that Christians in the West who already have a Western contextualized interpretation do not live dichotomised lives (Wessels, 2020, p. 361). This, however, is not the case because living a dichotomized Christian life is as much a problem in the West as it is in Africa, if not even more.

“the legs are not independent of each other and we will find that we will be moving back and forth between them as we try to find the right balance. Each leg affects the other, and we will be making constant adjustments as we gain greater understanding of the passage we are considering.” (Mburu, 2019, p. 66).

2.1 In Search for Metaphors: Four-Legged Stool and Three-Stone Cooking Stove

Before engaging Mburu’s African hermeneutic further, a brief engagement with her Four-Legged Stool metaphor is helpful. One good reason for Mburu’s use of the Four-Legged Stool metaphor is that it is a familiar object both in the past and present Africa (Mburu, 2019, p. 65). While familiarity in the past and present Africa is a good argument for using the four-legged stool, it needs to be noted that it does not adequately serve her goal of presenting a uniquely African hermeneutic. If the goal is to produce an African Hermeneutic that “raises questions that a hermeneutic from a different environment would not” (Mburu, 2019, pp. 5–6), then a more uniquely African metaphor than a four-legged stool would be more suitable, seeing that a four-legged stool is a universal object that is familiar in both the Global South and the Global North. Nevertheless, as a heuristic tool, Mburu’s Four-Legged Stool metaphor successfully and helpfully represents her five hermeneutical models.

The present study presents an alternative hermeneutic that focuses on reading and discovering the meaning of specific biblical texts, using an alternative metaphor of a Three-Stone Cooking Stove. While it can be argued that a Three-Stone Cooking Stove is also not peculiar to Africa as it is still in use in other parts of the Global South (after all, a lot of African culture is similar to other parts of the Global South), it at least serves the purpose of uniqueness, which is important for ABH (Mbuvi, 2023, pp. 105–106), compared to a universally familiar four-legged stool, since it is extremely rare to find a Three-Stone Cooking Stove used in today’s Western world.

Moreover, the metaphor of a Three-Stone Cooking Stove conveys the nuance of something being prepared to be consumed or eaten, with the extended nuance of it satisfying one’s hunger (for freedom, for transfor-

mation, for truth, for the word of God, and so on). This metaphor, therefore, creates a vivid expectation on the reader of some concrete “spiritual” meal at the end of the interpretation of the Bible, which would therefore satisfy the spiritual hunger of Christians in Africa. Furthermore, the Three-Stone Cooking Stove metaphor helpfully conveys the nuance of ‘communal’ participation in the interpretive process, since cooking in Africa is primarily a communal activity as much as eating is.

For a Three-Stone Cooking Stove to perform its function, it requires the collaboration of all members of the household, just as biblical interpretation in African contexts involves every member of the church, what West calls “ordinary readers” or non-scholarly readers (West, 1995, pp. 60–69) and Mbuvi calls grassroots readers (Mbuvi, 2023, 107). At least in the culture of the Zaar people in Nigeria, cooking is a collaborative activity as it pertains to providing what is cooked (such as meat from hunting or grains from farming, mostly by the men of the family), bringing (and breaking) the firewood (done by men and women of the family), picking up fire from the neighbors (mostly done by a child), adjusting the burning firewood to be sure the fire does not die down (mostly done by male and female children in the family), applying the ingredients and supervising the entire cooking process (mostly done by the mothers or women of the house), and the communal eating of the prepared meal that involves every member of the family, guests, or neighbors. The fact that the firewood has to be carefully observed and adjusted to keep burning and cooking the meal represents the importance of biblical interpreters always observing the appropriateness and impact of their interpretation and making the necessary adjustments to ensure an accountable interpretation.

At a more specific level, just as the pieces of firewood from the three angles of the Three-Stone Cooking Stove meet in the middle and together burn and cook the meal, so also the eight specific interpretative tasks in the present hermeneutic overlap and together deliver a comprehensive interpretation of a biblical text. However, whether one uses the Four-Legged Stool or Three-Stone Cooking Stove imagery, Kügler’s caution needs to be taken to avoid using African metaphors that regard the Bible as a magical tool rather than literature (Kügler, 2013, pp. 184–217). The present methodology, therefore, approaches the Bible as literature to be read,

analyzed, and applied to/in African contexts. We shall, however, first summarize and engage with Mburu's four legs of African (biblical) hermeneutics before presenting the exegetics hermeneutics or methodology of the present study.

Before turning to engaging with Mburu's four legs of ABH, it is worth noting that the major point of difference between the ABH of the present study and that of Mburu is in the sequence of the tasks involved in ABH rather than in the content or substance of her approach. Hence, this study seeks to advance the discourse on ABH from an evangelical standpoint from where Mburu stops. In so doing, the weaknesses and strengths of Mburu's methodology will be highlighted.

2.2 Problematizing the Argument for Drawing Parallels with the African Contexts

While agreeing with Mburu on starting with an African context, the major disagreement between the Three-Stone Cooking Stove methodology of the present research and Mburu's Four-Legged Stool methodology is in her proposal to start by drawing parallels between the African context and biblical context. It is worth presenting her two reasons for starting with the African context in her own words before responding to it:

“One, it enables us to begin to understand the biblical text from a familiar position. This is important because hermeneutics involves moving from the known to the unknown. Two, examining our own worldview and context puts us in a position to recognize where our assumptions do not fit with the text. If we do not know what we are assuming, how will we even recognize when our assumptions are wrong?” (Mburu, 2019, p. 67)

Conceding that it is not always easy to fully analyze the African context and worldview at this early stage in the hermeneutical process, Mburu still argues that these parallels help us to acknowledge our worldviews as valid resources for meaning, as well as make the parallels begin to be familiar to the reader (Mburu, 2019, p. 69).

A number of problems, however, arise from Mburu's arguments for starting with drawing parallels between the African context and biblical context. First, her statement that starting with the African context “enables us to begin to understand the biblical text from a familiar position” (Mburu, 2019, p. 67) is based on an assumption or speculation of what the biblical

text says without first analyzing it. Mburu's argument for starting with analyzing the African context or worldview is acceptable, but her argument for drawing parallels between the African context and the biblical context at this early stage in the hermeneutical process before analyzing the biblical text is premature. How can parallels be established to the extent of stating whether the African context fits or agrees with the biblical context or not without first analyzing the biblical text to come to an accountable conclusion as to what it says or means? The exegetics methodology below separates the analysis of African context and the analysis of a biblical text as different tasks, while an analysis of the similarities and differences (parallels) of these two contexts is also a separate model in the hermeneutical process.

Even though Mburu says at this stage we "begin to understand" the parallels between the African context and biblical context, thereby deferring the full understanding to a later stage (after other legs are completed), another problem arises. What we are "beginning to understand" already lays the foundation and possibly shapes our view of the text such that even subsequent legs (e.g. historical, literary, and theological contexts) would be understood in light of the initial premature understanding of the text that we thought we had. The fact that at this point the text has not been analyzed to come to an accountable conclusion as to its meaning makes establishing any parallel between the African context and biblical text premature, unaccountable, and standing on a faulty ground. It is like building a house on a weak and sandy foundation that one is not sure can hold the entire four-story building, with the expectation that when the building is completed and it is seen that the foundation cannot hold the entire building, the foundation can be strengthened afterwards to be able to hold the entire building. In other words, while starting with the African context is appropriate, Mburu's proposal for establishing a parallel between the African context and biblical text at this stage is significantly problematic to biblical the interpretive fidelity that Mburu seeks to promote (Mburu, 2019).

The second problem with Mburu's proposal of starting with the African context is that of ambiguity of the subject matter on the part of the biblical text. In the second reason, Mburu says "examining our own worldview and context puts us in a position to recognize where our assumptions do

not fit with the text”. The question, however, is, at this stage, which specific biblical text, worldview or context do those African worldviews need to fit with?

Hence, starting with an African context in the present study means starting with identifying or naming an existential (theological or ethical) question, concern, or a worldview in Africa to which the interpreter seeks to relate with the Bible, then undertaking cultural analysis of the identified question, concern or worldview. For example, an existential problem of a widow’s in-laws dispossessing her of every possession and subjecting her to some humiliating rituals (such as shaving her hair) on the accusation that she killed her husband is a starting point for African biblical hermeneutics. The interpreter(s), whether an individual or community, therefore, analyses this cultural practice by way of describing its features, rationale, and impact. After this step comes the selection and analysis of a relevant biblical text that can speak to the specific African culture under consideration. In the case of the cultural treatment of widows, texts such as 1 Timothy 5:3–15 or James 1:27 could be relevant biblical texts.

Why an interpreter or group of interpreters go to a particular biblical text could be based on their present or previous reading (mostly through translated Bibles in English, French, Portuguese, or some African languages), sermon, or teaching that they had heard on the text that seems to resonate, rightly or wrongly, with the existential problem with which they are confronted. This knowledge or idea that they have of the text is, whether correct or incorrect, however, subjected to analysis of the text to ascertain what it meant within its ancient socio-historical context. Only thereafter can any attempt be made to draw parallels with the African context in the next steps of the hermeneutics. The exegetics methodology below will clarify the processes involved therein.

A brief example using Matthew 18:15–17 as a pericope will suffice. I was drawn to this text when a dispute arose in our church denomination regarding the number of times a pastor is to be placed on church discipline before he is dismissed from the pastoral ministry of the church. One group that advocated for three times before a pastor is expelled made explicit references to Jesus’ statement to “treat them [the offenders] as you would a pagan and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:17). The topic or subject

matter of Matthew 18:15–17 is disputed between those who see the subject matter as “church discipline” (disciplinary view) and those who see it as “reconciliation in interpersonal relationship” (interpersonal reconciliatory view) (Manomi, 2023, 93). Going by Mburu’s proposal to draw parallels as the first step in the hermeneutical process, one can ask, are the parallels to be drawn between church discipline or interpersonal reconciliation and similar practices in African contexts? Unless one does a full study of this passage to decide on which subject matter it addresses, one does not know the specific theme with which to draw parallels with the African context. As will be seen below, a careful exegetical analysis of the text situates the text within the theme of reconciliation in interpersonal relationship rather than church discipline (Manomi, 2023). Hence, interpersonal reconciliation is the theme analyzed and on which parallels are drawn between the biblical and African contexts.

2.3 Problematizing the Theological Context

Mburu’s theological context focuses more on general theological contexts rather than specific contexts of passages or pericopes that are under study. However, in most cases, the majority of people who read the Bible in Africa read specific passages rather than the whole passage, and they focus more on the theology of those specific passages rather than the theology of the whole book. Mburu’s reference to the theology of the Gospel of Mark as primarily focused on Jesus as the Son of God rather than focusing on Jesus Christ as the Messiah is good. However, Mark’s gospel is a narrative, therefore, it is relatively easy to locate its broad theological emphasis or theme(s). Other books of the New Testament, however, may contain multiple rather than a single theological emphasis. In this case, the theological context should be more passage-specific (in agreement with the way many Africans read biblical texts) than whole book-specific as is the case in Mburu’s hermeneutics.

Another problem of sequence in Mburu’s methodology regards the sequence between analyzing the theological context on the one hand and the historical-cultural context on the other hand. Mburu states that her reason for starting with the theological context rather than the historical and cultural context of the biblical text is that, in both historical and con-

temporary Africa, most readers of the Bible first pay attention to the theological emphasis of the text before anything else, and their understanding of the theological emphasis normally determines their interpretation of the text (Mburu, 2019, p. 70). By focusing on theological emphasis, Mburu means that Africans are prone to look for issues that relate to God, faith, and how that affects their everyday life when they read a biblical text. Caution (as Mburu herself acknowledges), however, needs to be taken when considering the theological context of a text, referring to both the theological context of production of the text and the theology that can be discerned within the text. In Mburu's words, "At this level, therefore, some tentative points of application will already begin to present themselves. But we must allow ourselves to go through the entire process, examining all four legs of the hermeneutical stool, so that our application is informed by thorough analysis" of the text (Mburu, 2019, p. 70).

Mburu seems to be aware of the potential interpretive error in starting with the theological context before the historical or cultural context of the text, when she notes that "this approach is harmful to interpretation because we are ignoring the context of the Bible and prioritizing our own context" (Mburu, 2019, p. 71). Similarly, she cautions thus: "It is important to be very careful when examining this second leg of the hermeneutical stool. We must not allow premature conclusions about the theological emphases of the text to dictate how we understand the other legs" (Mburu, 2019, p. 72). Despite noting these pitfalls, Mburu still proposes that we start with the theological context before the literary and historical contexts because that is how Africans read the Bible. One would then ask, if this is a premature conclusion that is "harmful to interpretation," as Mburu said, is this approach still to be adopted or corrected? Should we build an entire hermeneutical step (leg 2) on premature assumptions regarding the theological context of a text or defer the theological context to a later stage, after the literary, historical and cultural contexts of the biblical text have been analyzed? If any, a valid argument for starting with the theological context would have been that the theological context helps, contributes to, or lays a foundation for understanding the literary, historical and cultural contexts of the text. However, Mburu does not make this argument, neither does she show how starting with the theological context

helps in correctly understanding the literary, historical and cultural contexts.

Moreover, is the way Africans read by focusing on the theological context fixed or correctable? Is such a reading to be encouraged or discouraged and corrected? Again, the same critique of leg one applies to leg 2 (theological context), namely, the sequence which leads to tentative findings and premature conclusions pending the subsequent legs. It is generally true that the hermeneutical process is not linear but circular or a spiral, but it is not helpful to intentionally reach premature conclusions based on speculations and expect the subsequent steps to correct the previous assumptions. Such assumptions have a potential to determine instead of correct the remaining hermeneutical processes. The exegethics methodology incorporates the theological emphasis of the text in the textual analysis, grounding the theological emphasis on the grammatico-historical analysis of the text.

2.4 Problematising Mburu's Literary Context

Mburu's leg 3 is the literary context, which involves studying the genre of the specific passage under consideration, the literary techniques used therein, grammatical and syntactical analysis of the passage, and the literary context of the passage as it relates to what comes before and after it. Mburu expects that this step will modify and clarify the tentative interpretive assumptions reached in the first two legs (African context and theological context, respectively) (Mburu, 2019, p. 73). However, as argued above, the issue here is the ordering of the legs rather than the content thereof, even though the ordering has implications for the content. Mburu's leg 3 (literary analysis) ought to have come before one aspect of her leg 1 (parallels to the African context) and leg 2 (theological context), because the conclusions in those legs are premature and tentative, awaiting the literary analysis, and because there is no satisfactory justification for starting with drawing parallels between African context and biblical context and analyzing the theological context before the literary context of the text.

Generally, one important hermeneutical feature that is crucially missing in Mburu's hermeneutical steps is the fact that she does not show how the first two legs help in getting the third leg correctly. In other words, while

Mburu shows how understanding the literary context of the text helps in correcting the premature conclusions reached in leg 1 and 2 (parallels to the African context and the theological context) respectively, she does not show how starting with parallels to the African context and theological context help in understanding the literary context of the text. If the literary context of the text is so important in correcting the premature conclusions reached regarding the parallels to the African and the theological contexts, and analyzing the parallels to the African context and theological contexts do not play a role in understanding the literary context, then starting with the literary context before analyzing parallels to the African context and theological contexts provides a more logical and interpretive flow, therefore more helpful.

2.5 Problematizing Mburu's Historical Context

In the historical and cultural context (leg 4), Mburu rightly notes how studying the socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances in which the text emerged helps in understanding the text. The problem here, in line with my critique above, is that of order or sequence. To defer historical and cultural analysis of biblical texts to the last step in the hermeneutical process is to create room for the entire hermeneutic to be based on premature assumptions as to the meaning of selected biblical texts rather than accountable exegetical analysis.

Again, while Mburu notes how the fourth leg (historical and cultural context) helps in refining the tentative application points noted in the previous legs (parallels to the African context, theological context, and literary context), she does not show how the initial first two steps starting with the parallels to the African context and theological contexts (leg 1 and 2 respectively) contribute to an accountable understanding of the literary, historical and cultural contexts (leg 3 and 4 respectively). Moreover, Mburu notes how the last two legs help to correct the premature conclusions reached in the first two legs. This, therefore, suggests the importance of starting with the literary, historical and cultural contexts of the biblical text to avoid arriving at premature conclusions when studying the theological context and drawing parallels with the African context.

Mburu's hermeneutical approach is rightly informed by her idea of moving from the known to the unknown, as noted above. Mburu, however,

does not demonstrate how the so-called “known” (African context) helps in arriving at the “unknown” (biblical context), thereby weakening her argument. As far as the hermeneutical processes are concerned, it seems, therefore, that after the African cultural analysis, starting with the third and fourth legs (literary and historical contexts) is more meaningful because it provides the basis for discovering the theological context of the text and for drawing parallels with the African context.

Hence, if I were to re-order Mburu’s Four-Legged Stool, it would be in this order: Leg 1 is the African cultural context. Leg 2 is the literary and theological context of the biblical text; leg 3 is the historical and cultural context of the text; and leg 4 is the parallels between the African context and the biblical context. Application to the African context, being the seat, stays where Mburu placed it, after the four legs.

2.6 The Seat of the Four-Legged Stool: Application

The application to the contemporary situation is the fifth stage in Mburu’s hermeneutical process, and one that binds all the four legs together and refines the tentative applications in the previous steps. She rightly notes that throughout the hermeneutics processes, application is taking place subconsciously. However, it is at this stage that the right way to apply the text in our current context is confirmed (Mburu, 2019, p. 84). Mburu, unlike many postmodern approaches, rightly affirms that each text can only have one meaning – the one intended by its author. “Meaning is therefore understood to be single and determined by the author of the text.” (Mburu, 2019, p. 85).

There is a difference between meaning and application. Mburu rightly notes that a text has one meaning but multiple applications, when we understand application as referring to the “significance of the text for a modern audience” (Mburu, 2019, p. 85). Moreover, Mburu notes the difference between culture-bound truths that do not allow for direct application today (e.g. wearing clothes made of wool and linen woven together in Deuteronomy 22:11) and trans-contextual truth, meaning absolute truth that applies to any culture at any time, such as in Exodus 20:1–17. In culture-bound or relative truth, we seek for the principle behind it, e.g. holiness (Mburu, 2019, p. 87). Noteworthy, however, is that, while trans-contextual

truth applies to all cultures, the specific way it applies may vary. For example, the command to honor one's parents in Exodus 20:12 applies to all cultures, but the specific ways such honor is shown will vary from culture to culture, thus, needing an application in each context (Mburu, 2019, p. 87).

Mburu provides a helpful practical way to apply trans-contextual or non-cultural biblical truths in African contexts, following three steps. Firstly, identify trans-contextual content of Christianity and the way it has been formed and expressed in Africa. Secondly, dis-engage the trans-contextual from the culture-bound aspects of the text or subject matter. Thirdly, re-frame the transcultural truths in ways that are consonant with African cultural expressions. Using the example of the command to honor one's parents, Mburu notes that, unlike the way that honor was expressed in the Jewish culture by a girl accepting her parent's choice of a husband for her, such honor can be expressed in modern Africa where girls of marriageable age choose their husbands but follow the prescribed cultural procedures like paying a bride-price before getting married (Mburu, 2019, pp. 87–88).

3. Three-Stone Cooking Stove: A Methodology for African Biblical Hermeneutics

Here I present my own African Biblical Hermeneutic, using the imagery of a Three-Stone Cooking Stove. As argued above, the imagery of a Three-Stone Cooking Stove is appropriate to African biblical hermeneutics. A cooking stove represents a bubbling, lively, and aromatic scene that holds hope and promise of a delicious meal, in this case, a biblical message of “good news” to the hungry, marginalized, terrorized, and colonized African people. The contributions of ABH to liberating Africa spiritually, socially, economically, politically, and so on cannot afford to assume a sitting and restful posture. Such an enterprise requires a lively and bubbling posture that a Three-Stone Cooking Stove represents. The imagery of a cooking pot resonates with Masenya and Ngwa's description of ABH using the imagery of “cooking pots and calabashes” (Masenya & Ngwa, 2018). Nevertheless, it is helpful to clarify that the real issue here is not that of which metaphor is better – that would be too light a topic to address. What is at

stake is that of the viability of the hermeneutical model, as it relates to its potency to provide an ABH that diligently and accountably interprets Scripture and appropriates it in ways that result in positive transformation of African persons, institutions, churches, and society at large. To this noble task we turn.

I refer to my ABH as exegethics (Manomi, 2020; Manomi, 2021) – comprising the words exegesis and ethics, due to my specific focus on “ethics” (human behavior and the evaluation thereof) rather than “theology” of biblical texts. Nevertheless, the exegethics methodology applies to all aspects of the text. A caveat needs to be stated here, however, that this distinction is only heuristic, as ethics is inherently embedded in theology, and theology is inherently ethical.

This methodology involves three broad tasks that represent the Three-Stone Cooking Stove and eight overlapping specific tasks that represent the fire-woods that burn and cook the food in the pot between the three stones. Stone 1 is the Analytical Tasks; Stone 2 is the Performative Tasks; and Stone 3 is the Transformative Tasks. Under each of these broad tasks are specific tasks that form the fire-woods. Analytical Tasks include: Task 1 – Cultural Analysis; Task 2 – Textual Analysis; Task 3 – Synthetic Analysis; and Task 4 – Appropriative Analysis. Performative Tasks include: Tasks 5 – Scriptural Performance; and Task 6 – Performance Evaluation. Transformative Tasks include: Task 7 – Identification and Description of Transformation; and Task 8 – Description of Interpretive Risks.

A brief description of the eight tasks in the Exegethics methodology will be presented here.⁴

3.1 Analytical Tasks

Task 1 – Cultural Analysis: This task identifies and analyzes a specific existential or theological topic, question, concern, or worldview in any given

⁴ The Exegethics methodology is in the process of development, with a book length presentation and application of the methodology in the process. The Exegethics methodology has undergone and is still undergoing modifications, as evident in several of my previous publications. I hope that presenting it in this publication generates conversations that will further enrich the methodology before the book is out.

African context (e.g. cultural practice, politics, church, marriage). Undertaking cultural analysis of an African ethical reality is based on the recognition that African ethics is or should no longer be regarded as “the cradle” and “experimental space” (Ngwa, 2017, p. 1) of ethics but a developed ethical space with its complete resources, which can be subjected to critical analysis, thereby offering valid ethical reasoning to global ethical discourse.

Cultural analysis is vital to hermeneutics because cultures are the “*loci theologici* that provide the specific languages it needs to be able to formulate the Gospel in its inescapable culturality” (Gruber, 2017, p. 42). Similar to Mburu’s proposal for considering traditional and modern African reality in African hermeneutics (Mburu, 2019, pp. 45–64), cultural analysis here includes the analysis of both the historical and current (popular) aspects of African culture as it relates to the specific theme under consideration. Considering both historical and contemporary African culture is important because some contemporary cultural practices, even if modified, can be traced to historical or traditional African realities. Understanding the historical and traditional background, therefore, gives a clearer understanding of the form and function of the cultural phenomenon under consideration. Cultural analysis is necessary at the initial stage because appropriating or constructing an African biblical ethics or theology requires understanding African Traditional Religion (ATR), culture and ethics in their pre-colonial, pre-Christian or pre-Islamic conceptions and how those historical conceptions continue to influence contemporary African culture.

Due to the multiplicity of African contexts, the specific African context needs to be defined. The present study argues that the nature of the specific audience an interpreter has in mind determines what aspects of African culture is to be analyzed – whether the historical, traditional, or contemporary African culture. For example, within the context of a rural and homogenous local church congregation where most of the members are from the same ethnic group and language, cultural analysis will take the form of analyzing the traditional culture as it relates to the issue or theme under consideration. For a cosmopolitan urban audience, however, cultural analysis will take the form of analyzing contemporary (popular) culture. For a youthful urban audience, cultural analysis will take the form of

analyzing African popular or even hip-hop culture as it relates to the theme or issue under consideration. Whether the audience are women, men, leaders, students, etc., cultural analysis is audience-focused.

3.2 FARI Methodology: A Methodology for African Cultural Analysis

The logical question that follows the proposal to undertake cultural analysis is that of methodology. What specific methodology will guide the cultural analysis? To this, the present study proposes four steps in doing cultural analysis, which includes analyzing the Features, Agents, Rationale, and Impact (FARI). Whatever cultural practice or worldview one picks and whichever aspect the focus is on (whether the historical, traditional, or contemporary form and function of such a cultural import), when the features, agents (actors), rationale (justification), and impact of such a cultural practice are identified and described, we can say that the specific cultural practice or worldview has been analyzed. In this context, features of the culture refer to the nature, symbols, and activities involved in a specific cultural phenomenon. Agents here refers to the people, actors, or recipients (active or passive, including victims) involved in such a cultural phenomenon. Rationale refers to the cultural justification or planation for such a cultural practice. Impact refers to the specific impact of the specific cultural practice or worldview on individuals, institutions, church, and society.

An illustration of cultural analyse of interpersonal reconciliation within the context of an ethnic homogenous rural audience will help. From my emic observation of the contemporary Zaar culture (with the influence of Christianity, Islam and Westernization), which is primarily an oral culture still, three features of interpersonal relationships can be identified: (1) the burden for reconciliation and the efforts thereof lie primarily with the offender, who is expected to go to the offended person, show remorse, apologize, and seek for forgiveness and reconciliation, usually with a commitment to not repeat it again; (2) however, if the offended person decides to initiate reconciliation, even though not required, it is appreciated as an act of magnanimity and generosity of spirit; (3) depending on the gravity of the offence, in the traditional Zaar culture, the offender may be expected to retribute or offer an object to indicate repentance. The agents involved

in interpersonal reconciliation are (1) the offender, (2) the offended, and (3) any third party such as older family members, parents, or the local chief, especially if the two persons are not able to resolve the problem. The rationale for encouraging interpersonal reconciliation is its importance for harmonious communal life in Zaar family or community, seeing that peaceful communal living attracts blessings from God and ancestors. The impact of interpersonal reconciliation is that it strengthens relationships and gives good reputation to the individuals involved and promotes harmonious living in the family and community at large, and attracts blessings from God and ancestors.

Task 2 – Textual Analysis: As the second step in the hermeneutical process, textual analysis involves, primarily, historical-critical, linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and theological analyses of a selected biblical text or passage that is considered relevant to the African context, to understand the text, co-texts, and contexts in which it was written, the message it sought to convey, and the effect or impact it sought to have. This task is what Verhey describes as interpreting Scripture as “scripted”, meaning as an object and a written text that can be located in specific time, history and context (Verhey, 2007, pp. 20–25).

Bearing in mind the fact that in Africa, the biblical scholar, theologian, and ‘ordinary’ readers are all stakeholders in biblical interpretation, consulting a reliable but accessible commentary or summary of the meaning of a selected passage may suffice for textual analysis, especially for non-scholarly interpreters.

For example, the exegetical analysis of Matthew 18:15–17 (Manomi, 2023, pp. 95–99; France, 2008, pp. 10–14), as briefly presented above, leads us to the conclusion that the theme of the passage is reconciliation in interpersonal relationships. Under this theme, we discover the meaning or message of the text, which can be summarized in four points: (1) reconciliation among followers of Christ is needful; (2) the burden for reconciliation and the efforts thereof lie primarily with the offended; (3) third party involvement in reconciliation is encouraged if the two parties are not able to resolve the problem and reconcile between them alone; (4) to treat the offender who refuses to reconcile as an unbeliever and tax collector means the offended person should lower his expectation on the offender and start afresh with the basic strategy of “winning him over” with love and the

message of the gospel, as exemplified by Jesus Christ in his relationship with tax collectors and unbelievers. With this textual analysis, we can proceed to the next task of synthetic analysis of the biblical context and the cultural context in tasks 1 and 2 respectively.

Task 3 – Synthetic Analysis: At this level, the task is synthetic in the sense that it synthesizes the results of the first and second tasks above by drawing parallels, identifying points of correlation and disparity, or tandems and tensions between the biblical perspective and African perspective on the theme or text under consideration. The guiding question for this task is, what aspects of the two “perspectives/views” (the biblical view and African views) are in tandem or tension with each other? Identifying and describing the tensions and/or tandems enables the interpreter of the Bible to appropriate the message of the text accountably. Using the theme of interpersonal reconciliation, this task draws out the similarities and differences between interpersonal reconciliation in contemporary Zair culture and in Matthew 18:15–17 as an example. While the similarities are synthesized at this stage of the hermeneutics, the differences will be appropriated in the next stage. The similarities between the Zair cultural perspective to interpersonal reconciliation and interpersonal reconciliation in Matthew 18:15–17 can be summarized as follows: (1) both perspectives agree on the need for interpersonal reconciliation for harmonious living in a community; (2) third party involvement in the reconciliation process is regarded as important if the two parties are not able to reconcile themselves; (3) both perspectives do not give a limit to the number of attempts at reconciliation. The differences between the two perspectives are: (1) while the biblical perspective places the burden and efforts for reconciliation primarily on the offended, the Zair culture places it primarily on the offender; (2) while the biblical perspective does not require offering any material object as a symbol of repentance or reconciliation, the Zair culture does, especially if the offence is grievous. With this, we can move to the next task to see how these differences can be negotiated and appropriated.

Task 4 – Appropriative Analysis: This task bridges the gaps between the analytical tasks and the performative tasks below. It seeks to reconcile or harmonize the tensions or differences identified from Task 3, namely, the points of departure between African perspectives or practices and biblical

worldviews and practices. With specific reference to ethics as an example, the task here involves identifying what negotiations, concessions or appropriations need to be made in order to arrive at an ethic that is biblically accountable and relevantly African. Being accountable to the biblical text here means being able to explain how we arrive at the conclusion regarding the intended meaning of the text in view of its historical and literary context. In other words, being accountable to the biblical text here means extracting the meaning of the text from the text, with a clear methodology of how we do that, instead of inserting our own meaning that cannot be accounted for from the historical and literary context of the text. Being relevant to African context, on the other hand, involves appropriating the message of the biblical text in a way that it speaks to an African reality, leading to positive transformation.

In the case of interpersonal relationships in Matthew 18:15–17, the appropriate task involves appropriating the biblical perspective on interpersonal reconciliation into an African perspective. For example, in some African contexts such as the Zaar culture, depending on the gravity of the offence, the condition for reconciliation is that the offender seeks for pardon from the offended person, and sometimes has to bring an object in form of a cola or chicken to seal the interpersonal reconciliation. However, such a condition would need to be compromised to the biblical perspective of interpersonal reconciliation that does not require an apology from the offender as a condition for forgiveness and reconciliation. Instead, the offended (innocent) is the one who takes the initiative and follows through with the reconciliation processes, agreeing with a broader biblical theology of reconciliation where it places the burden of reconciliation on the innocent rather than the guilty. This was the basis on which God, the innocent, initiated the process of reconciliation with the guilty humans, leading even to the incarnation of the sinless Jesus Christ to save sinful humanity. Indeed, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for the us” (Romans 5:8). Such an appropriation of interpersonal reconciliation transforms the African cultural conditions and practice of reconciliation, leading to more peaceful interpersonal relationships and co-existence.

In summary, with reference to the Zaar culture, we can appropriate an African biblical ethics of interpersonal reconciliation with four points as follows: (1) interpersonal reconciliation is essential for harmony in the

community; (2) the burden and efforts for reconciliation hang on both the offended and the offender because it takes the two parties to reconcile. Whoever between the two initiates reconciliation, the other party is obliged to cooperate towards reconciliation; (3) if reconciliatory efforts fail between the two, any or both the parties are encouraged to involve a third party, be it an individual or an institution; (4) any offering of an object such as cola, chicken, or ram in the reconciliatory process should only be symbolic and voluntary rather than a necessity or condition for reconciliation. Even if symbolic, the item should not be so expensive that it becomes a burden to the person seeking reconciliation, so as not to set a new norm that makes reconciliation materially expensive. It is noteworthy that, even though the context of Matthew 18:15–17 is that of interpersonal reconciliation, it can be appropriated in the context of group reconciliation, such as between ethnic groups, religious groups, or communities that are not living in peace with one another.

3.3 Performative Tasks

We now turn to the performative tasks, which build on the analytical tasks described above.

Task 5 – Performance of Scripture: This fifth task is descriptive in the way that it says that the text has been performed by scholarly and non-scholarly users of the Bible in the African context. There are myriad media printed with Scripture and thus performing Scriptural interpretation by means of their movement and interaction in embedded African contexts. Here, the African biblical interpreter identifies and describes specific ways in which a given biblical text or theme has been performed in a given or defined context, such as in communal worship, liturgy, songs, and prayer, but also films, podcasts, devotional books, hashtags, captions, or slogans on clothes, hand bands, emblems, cards, inscriptions on cars, buildings, cups and plates, jewelries, and the like.

Using Matthew 18:15–17 as an example, I have seen at least three ways that this text has been performed in Nigeria (Manomi, 2023, pp. 95–99): first, I have heard someone preach about it, saying that if after three attempts to reconcile one party refuses, such a person should be “treated as a pagan and tax collector”, implying that he should be rejected or excommunicated. Similarly, it is a common saying among Christians, at least in

Nigeria, to hear someone say ‘treat him as an unbeliever and tax collector’ when they are talking about the need to cut off ties with a person who seems to be offending them often. Second, our church denomination set up a committee to advise on the number of times a pastor may be placed under church discipline for an offence before he is expelled completely from the pastoral ministry. In our committee meeting, some of the members referred to this text as a model to propose 3 times of church discipline before expulsion. Third, I was asked to examine a thesis that a Master of Theology student had written on this text. He had interpreted it in the context of church discipline rather than interpersonal reconciliation, and had drawn parallels between this text and the practice of church discipline in his denomination. Based on his analysis following interpretations as that of Osborne (Osborne, 2010, pp. 683–687), the theme of the passage is church discipline rather than reconciliation in interpersonal relationships. Clearly noting and describing how a given biblical passage has been performed provides the interpreter a good basis to evaluate the performance in the next hermeneutical task.

Task 6 – Performance Evaluation: This task is both evaluative and prescriptive as it pertains to performance of Scripture as described in Task 5 above. Like any art, theology in general, and biblical exegesis in particular, has to be deliberately open to self-criticism, self-evaluation, and criticism from the church and society. It must always be ready to return to the drawing board, review, reformulate, re-strategize, and present its content to the performing community (church and society) in a way that addresses current concerns.

Regarding the evaluative aspect of this task, my evaluation of the three performances of Matthew 18:5–19 in African contexts is that the text was wrongly performed in the way that (1) it encouraged excommunication of a fellow after three attempts at reconciliation; and (2) the text was situated in the context of church discipline rather than interpersonal reconciliation. Moreover, my observation is that the message of that text has not been adequately performed in both print and non-print media in Africa.

Regarding the prescriptive aspect of this task, the message of Matthew 18:15–17 can be performed in an African church community by preaching or teaching it in the church, writing songs or stories emphasizing that the

biblical pattern of reconciliation places the burden of reconciliation primarily on the offended person (presumably the innocent) and the need for both the offender and the offended to cooperate towards reconciliation. The prescriptive task involves proposing specific examples of how a given text can or should be performed in view of a specific audience within the African context. Hence, the ethics of interpersonal reconciliation in Matthew 18:5–19 can be performed among the youths by writing short social media captions like: The Offended is the Reconciler; The Guilt of the Innocent is to Refuse Reconciliation; Reconciliation is Worth Every Effort, and so on, with Matthew 18:15–17 in brackets. Such captions can be printed in shirts, caps, hand bands, stickers on cars, cards, emblems, mugs, jewelries, and the like. Moreover, with an urban youthful audience in mind, such a message can be creatively performed or disseminated in print and non-print media such as songs, drama, podcasts, devotional books, hashtags, and the like. In these ways, the message will spread and stick in the target African community or group.

3.4 Transformative Tasks

While the performative tasks described and prescribed specific ways a text has been and can be performed by non-scholarly and scholarly users of the Bible in Africa, the transformative tasks seek to identify and describe the specific impact of interpreted and applied texts and the potential future impact they have on individuals, institutions and the society.

Task 7 – Identification and Description of Transformation: In this task, the African biblical interpreter identifies, names, and describes specific negative and positive evidences of transformation that result from the interpretation and performance of the Bible in African contexts. In other words, this task particularly looks for evidence demonstrating the concrete impact of exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics.

Moreover, it looks out for the vivid impact of the performance of Scripture in worship, liturgy, prayer, and so on. In this task, both positive and negative impact of the interpretation and performance of the Bible in African contexts is described. On the positive side, such concrete impact could be qualitatively assessed, depending on the topic and text, in the form of spiritual growth, more commitment to Christian faith and praxis, more knowledge of Scripture, more peaceful co-existence in homes and society,

and the like. It could also be quantitatively measured in the form of numerical growth of the church, creativity and initiation of new life-transforming church programs, mission strategy, and so on. On the negative side, such concrete impact could be qualitatively assessed in the form of lack of spiritual growth, poor commitment to the Christian faith and praxis, ignorance of the message of the Scripture, disharmony in interpersonal relationships within the community, gender discrimination, tribalism, sectionalism, child-abuse, sexual exploitation, and the like. It could also be quantitatively assessed in the form of numerical decline in church attendance, fewer initiatives for community engagement, and the like. The transforming effect of biblical exegesis and application is to be observed and evaluated at three levels: personal, institutional, and societal levels.

In Tasks 5 and 6 above, we described and evaluated how Matthew 18:15–17 has been performed and proposed how it can be more meaningfully performed to foster interpersonal reconciliation in African contexts. Here, we will describe the specific negative and/or positive impact of such performances at personal (including the interpreter), institutional (marriage, family, church) and societal levels. Sharing my personal experience, from the day I studied and understood this text clearly, I repented of waiting for my offenders to ask me for forgiveness, made efforts to reach out to a few people that I know our relationship had suffered some problems even though I felt they offended me, and I made efforts to reconcile. Hence, the interpretation and application of this text has had a positive transformative effect on my relationship with the few people with whom I have now reconciled and restored our interpersonal relationships. At the institutional level, it can be observed that interpreting this text in the context of church discipline instead of its contextually-accountable interpersonal reconciliation has perpetuated the cultural practice of placing the burden of reconciliation on the offender only, therefore missing out on the transformative power that lies in the offended person(s) initiating and pursuing reconciliation. The negative impact of such an interpretation and performance of the text can be seen in the wider society as well, where interpersonal reconciliation is seen as the burden of the offender rather than

both the offended and the offender. Such a view hinders or delays interpersonal reconciliation, thereby promoting disharmony that upsets African communal living.

Task 8 – Identifying Interpretive Risks: This final task is about the “unknown” future task of today’s interpretive endeavors. African biblical interpretation recognizes that our scholarly endeavors today have future impact beyond our generation. While we can identify, describe, correct, and even control the impact of our biblical interpretation on individuals, institutions, cultures, and societies, we have little to no control on what the future generations may do with the work we produce or how they will use our scholarly work in interpreting Scripture. Therefore, this task involves identifying potentials for extremist or “wrong” interpretations of a given text and consciously noting not only what the text means, but what it does not mean.

The scholar at this point is at liberty to even describe the interpretive risks of the text being interpreted, to guide and prevent future readers from fundamentalist or extremist readings of biblical texts that could hinder human flourishing, as seen in the way some Christians in Africa justify and participate in killing suspected witches and wizards in Africa, justifying their actions on the interpretation of texts like Exodus 22:18 and Leviticus 20:27. Such texts, whose meaning seem to be oppressive to individuals in the African society, are to be re-read carefully and from the theological lens of God’s redemptive plan for human flourishing of every member of the society. Hence, it needs to be clearly stated that, even though these texts have interpretive risks in African contexts because they mention the word “witch” and witchcraft is a delicate and ongoing problem in many African communities, the contextual interpretation of the text (Bretherton, 2005) does not instruct anyone to kill people suspected of witchcraft.

In regard to Matthew 18:15–17, the interpretive risk is that if Jesus’s command to “treat as a pagan and tax collector”, is taken literally outside its context, it could easily be connected to the way Jesus chased out money changers in the temple (Matthew 12:12–13) and, therefore, suggest a “violent” rejection or disconnection of any ties with a person who refuses to reconcile after three attempts. The mention of tax collectors in Matthew 18:15–17 and money-changers in Matthew 12:12–13 could be regarded as

a connection or an explication of what Jesus meant by “treat as a pagan and tax collector”. So, this interpretive risk needs to be clearly identified and prevented by saying that Jesus’s statement is in a different context from his action of chasing out temple marketers. While Matthew 12:12–13 is about people turning the Temple into a market place, Matthew 18:15–17 is about the ethics of interpersonal reconciliation among Jesus’s followers. To understand what Jesus meant by “treat as a tax collector and sinner”, we should ask how he himself treated such people like Levi, Zacchaeus, and the woman caught in adultery. He treated them with love, went to them, ate with them at the risk of being declared a sinner, and in doing so, won their hearts and made them his disciples. This is what our text expects of the offended person to do to the offender.

4. Conclusion

Engaging primarily with Elizabeth Mburu’s African biblical hermeneutical models which she represents with the imagery of a Four-Legged Stool, this chapter has challenged mainly the sequencing or ordering of her hermeneutical procedure, arguing that it is counter-productive. Instead, the chapter presents an alternative African biblical hermeneutical model using the imagery of a Three-Stone Cooking Stove that involves three broad tasks and eight specific tasks, resulting in a more accountable, contextual and transformative biblical interpretation and appropriation in African contexts.

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4 Postcolonial Biblical Criticism und Afrika

Zugänge zu biblischen Texten in den Arbeiten von Musa W. Dube und Mmapula D. Kebaneilwe

Abstract

Both Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and African readings of the Bible are still largely unknown in German speaking biblical scholarship. There are hardly any publications in German to introduce them to students of theology. This paper aims to inform about Postcolonial Studies, their key texts and how they were applied to biblical studies starting in the 1970s. It will then focus on the work of two biblical scholars from Botswana whose research at Bamberg University/Germany was sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Exegetical readings of four biblical texts (Mk 5,21–43; Gen 34; Prov 31; Esth 1) by Musa W. Dube and Mmapula D. Kebaneilwe will be presented in order to demonstrate strategies of postcolonial feminist interpretation and contextual African reading.

Keywords: *Postcolonial, Feminist, Contextual Reading, Africa, Musa W. Dube, Mmapula D. Kebaneilwe*

1. Einleitung

Stephanie Feder hält in einem Artikel von 2012 zu Exegesen afrikanischer Bibelwissenschaftlerinnen fest, dass in Europa afrikanische Auslegungen kaum rezipiert würden, da sie in der Exegese als oberflächlich, esoterisch oder zu wenig wissenschaftlich gälten (Feder, 2012, p. 158). Mittlerweile gibt es eine empfehlenswerte Einführung *Postkoloniale Theologien* von Stefan Silber, die immer wieder auf Bibelauslegungen verschiedenster postkolonialer Exeget:innen, u. a. auch aus Afrika, zurückgreift (Silber, 2021).

Gleichwohl konstatiert auch er, dass Veröffentlichungen in deutscher Sprache zu postkolonialen Theologien immer noch überschaubar seien. Das gilt auch und gerade für exegetische Arbeiten (Nausner, 2020, pp. 196–197). Erfreulicherweise ist jüngst ein Band der *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* zu *Postkolonialismus/Postcolonial Studies* mit einem Überblicksartikel zu *Postkolonialer Bibelhermeneutik und Exegese* erschienen (Kahl, 2023, pp. 5–27). 2024 wird ferner der von Werner Kahl herausgegebene Band *Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutics in International Perspectives* erscheinen.

Im Folgenden möchte ich Grundlagen des Postcolonial Biblical Criticism skizzieren und Arbeiten zweier afrikanischer Exegetinnen in diesem Rahmen verorten. Beide, Musa W. Dube und Mmapula D. Kebaneilwe, verbrachten in den Jahren 2011 bzw. 2022–2024 Forschungsaufenthalte als Gastwissenschaftlerin bzw. Stipendiatin der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung am Lehrstuhl für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaften der Universität Bamberg. Als alttestamentliche Exegetin bin ich besonders an ihren konkreten Textauslegungen, ihrer Bibelhermeneutik und ihrem methodischen Vorgehen interessiert. Ich werde daher ihre Auslegungen von einem neutestamentlichen (Mk 5,21–43) und drei alttestamentlichen Texten (Gen 34; Spr 31; Est 1) vorstellen. Ich schreibe auf Deutsch, um deutschsprachigen Studierenden erste Einblicke in afrikanische Bibelauslegung zu geben, die postkolonial und feministisch bzw. womanistisch konturiert ist.

2. Grundlagen des Postcolonial Biblical Criticism

Postkoloniale Bibelauslegung ist inspiriert von postkolonialer Theorie und postkolonialen Studien (Silber, 2021, pp. 16–23). Diese stehen in Kontinuität mit unterschiedlichsten Formen des Widerstands gegen die koloniale Herrschaft während der Kolonialzeit. Im engeren Sinn entstehen postkoloniale Studien mit der staatlichen Unabhängigkeit asiatischer und afrikanischer Kolonien in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts in der englischsprachigen Geschichts- und Literaturwissenschaft. Sie decken auf, wie der Blick auf historische Ereignisse und literarische Darstellungen kolonialen Machtinteressen und einer kulturellen Hegemonie folgt und auch die Gegenwart noch von kolonialen Denkmustern bestimmt ist.

Der Begriff postkolonial lässt sich also zum einen in einem zeitlichen Sinn als „nach“ dem Ende der kolonialen Herrschaft verstehen. Inhaltlich bezieht er sich zum anderen darauf, dass koloniale Herrschaft in wirtschaftlicher, politischer, kultureller und epistemologischer Hinsicht sowohl in den Ländern der ehemaligen Kolonisatoren als auch der Kolonisierten andauert. Zentrale Texte dreier breit rezipierter Denker:innen sollen hier vorgestellt und die Entstehung des Postcolonial Biblical Criticism skizziert werden.

2.1 Grundlegende Texte postkolonialer Theorien

Als grundlegend für die Entwicklung postkolonialer Theorien gilt die Studie *Orientalism* des palästinensischen Literaturwissenschaftlers Edward W. Said (1935–2003) aus dem Jahr 1978 (dt. Said, 1981). Er zeigt, wie in literarischen Werken, wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten und Gebrauchstexten wie Reisebeschreibungen der Kolonialzeit Wissen über als Orient bezeichnete Gebiete mit der Intention konstruiert wurde, die dort lebenden Menschen zu beherrschen und ihre Ausbeutung zu legitimieren. Konstruiert wird die Identität des Westens in dialektischer Antithese zu seinem Anderen, dem Orient, als Othering. Nach Said ermöglicht dieser Diskurs, der Orientalismus, die Ausübung von westlicher Autorität und Macht über den Orient, territoriale und intellektuelle Aneignung und die Legitimierung von Gewalt (McCarthy, 2017, pp. 10–11; Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2020, pp. 99–159).

In Südostasien entwickelt die *Subaltern Studies Group* etwa zur selben Zeit eine Kritik der europäischen Geschichtsschreibung über Indien und benachbarter Staaten (Silber, 2021, pp. 17.139–140; Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2020, pp. 161–228). Mit dem Begriff subaltern wird ein Konzept von Antonio Gramsci aufgegriffen, das in den postkolonialen Theorien Menschen bezeichnet, die in mehrfacher Hinsicht unterworfen und ausgebeutet sind. Von dieser Gruppe ist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (*1942) inspiriert, die Feminismus und kritisch-marxistisches Denken in den Postkolonialismus einbringt. Sie richtet ihren Blick auf die subalterne Frau, die sowohl als Folge des Imperialismus ökonomisch ausgebeutet als auch innerhalb patriarchaler Strukturen untergeordnet ist und sich und ihre Interessen nicht selbst vertreten, also nicht sprechen kann. In ihrem Essay *Can the Subaltern speak?* von 1988 (Spivak, 1988) problematisiert sie –

als Kritik an Michel Foucault und Gilles Deleuze – die Repräsentation der Subalternen durch westliche Intellektuelle, die für und über andere sprechen.

Ebenso wegweisend sind die Arbeiten des indischen Literaturwissenschaftlers Homi K. Bhabha (*1949), darunter sein Hauptwerk *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha, 1994). Sein Anliegen ist es, Kulturkontakte jenseits von binären Machtverhältnissen in ihren Ambivalenzen zu beschreiben. Sein Konzept der kulturellen Differenz zeigt auf, dass Kulturen nie starr sind, sondern immer wechselseitiger Beeinflussung unterliegen. Es ermöglicht, die dichotomischen Zuschreibungen von Kolonisator/Kolonisierter, Orient/Okzident und damit einhergehend von Macht/Ohnmacht zu überwinden und andere Formen von Agency in kulturellen Aushandlungsprozessen sichtbar zu machen. So macht er deutlich, dass die Macht der Kolonisatoren nie so abgesichert ist, wie sie erscheint. Im Begriff der Mimikry verdichtet sich die Handlungsmacht der Kolonisierten gerade dort, wo die Kultur der Kolonisatoren angenommen, sich ihr angepasst und damit Inferiorität überwunden wird. Hybridität als Neukonstruktion von Identitäten mit inhärenten Differenzen und Ambivalenzen, die eindeutige Zuordnungen sowohl auf Seiten der Kolonisatoren als auch der Kolonisierten verunmöglichen, gilt Bhabha als Form des Widerstandes. Sie ist ein Schwellenraum zwischen eindeutigen Identitätskonstruktionen, der Dritte Raum, in dem Bedeutungszuschreibungen ausgehandelt werden (Struven, 2017, pp. 16–20; Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2020, pp. 229–295).

Die Schriften dieser drei Autor:innen sind zentrale Referenztexte der auf sie folgenden postkolonialen Denker:innen. Von ihnen geprägte Begriffe wie Othering, subaltern, Mimikry oder Dritter Raum prägen den Diskurs. Postkoloniale Studien und postkoloniale Theorie haben sich mittlerweile in den einzelnen Disziplinen zu einem kaum mehr überschaubaren Feld ausdifferenziert. Gemeinsam ist ihnen, dass sie immer auch ein politisches Anliegen verfolgen und Widerstand gegen Kolonialität und Kolonialismus leisten. Diese Ziele zeichnen auch postkoloniale Bibelauslegungen aus.

2.2 Die Entstehung des Postcolonial Biblical Criticism

Postkoloniale Theorie wird in der Exegese der Bibel seit den 1990ern in der englischsprachigen Bibelwissenschaft, vor allem in Indien, Afrika und den USA, rezipiert (Oldenhage, 2022). Während einige Exeget:innen sich explizit in der Tradition von Said, Spivak und Bhabha bzw. der postkolonialen Studien verorten, verstehen sich andere als postcolonial, weil sie kontextuelle Exegese betreiben. Wieder andere tun dies, verstehen sich aber explizit als nicht postkolonial, weil sie sich Theorien, die im Wesentlichen westlicher Wissenschaftstradition und eurozentrischen, damit hegemonialen Logiken folgen, nicht zuordnen wollen. Gleichwohl leisten sie Widerstand gegen postkoloniale Unterdrückungsmechanismen.

Als eine Art Gründungsdokument gilt in der Bibelwissenschaft die 75. Ausgabe von *Semeia*, einer Zeitschrift der *Society of Biblical Literature* (SBL). Sie erschien im Jahr 1996 mit dem Titel *Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading*, wurde von Laura E. Donaldson herausgegeben und versammelte erstmals Aufsätze unterschiedlicher Autor:innen, die grundsätzliche hermeneutische Fragen erörtern oder konkrete postkoloniale Bibelauslegungen bieten. Drei Jahre später wurde an der Jahreskonferenz der SBL die Sektion *Postcolonial Studies and Biblical Criticism* gegründet (Oldenhage, 2022).

Als eine einflussreiche Figur gilt der aus Sri Lanka stammende Bibelwissenschaftler Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, der bis zu seiner Emeritierung in Birmingham lehrte. Er differenziert drei Ebenen des Postcolonial Biblical Criticism, die man als historische Kontextualisierung, als kritische Analyse der Auslegungsgeschichte und als Relektüre biblischer Texte vor dem Hintergrund postkolonialer Anliegen beschreiben kann (Sugirtharajah, 2006, p. 67). Auf einer ersten Ebene wird die Bibel als Produkt verschiedenster kolonialer Kontexte von ägyptischer bis römischer Zeit gelesen. Aufgedeckt werden dabei koloniale Vorannahmen und imperiale Absichten ebenso wie die Positionierung gegenüber Subalternen. So übernimmt z. B. das Buch Esther die koloniale Perspektive des Perserreiches und hinterfragt das Tributsystem nicht. Es hat vor allem die Elite im Blick und fördert Assimilation und Konformität (Sugirtharajah, 2001, pp. 251–252). Auf einer zweiten Ebene wird angesichts des Anspruchs von Neutralität bzw. Objektivität durch die westliche Exegese der ideologische Gehalt von

Interpretationen und die Bedeutung der Bibel im Kontext von Kolonialismus und Imperialismus offengelegt. So zeigen Untersuchungen von fast 20 exegetischen Kommentaren, die zwischen 1857 und 1978 veröffentlicht wurden, dass Jesu Antwort auf die Frage nach den an den Kaiser zu zahlenden Steuern (Mt 22,15–22; Mk 12,13–17; Lk 20,20–26) während der Zeit der Kolonialherrschaft politisch und prorömisch ausgelegt, mit dem Ende der Kolonialzeit privatisiert und auf die Ebene der persönlichen Treue gegenüber staatlichen Autoritäten bezogen wurde (Sugirtharajah, 2001, pp. 255–256). Auf einer dritten Ebene werden biblische Texte aus einer postkolonialen Perspektive neu gelesen, so dass Pluralität, Hybridität oder Multikulturalität Analysekatégorien sind und historischer und gegenwärtiger Widerstand gegen hegemoniale Konzepte sichtbar wird. Aus dieser Perspektive wird die binäre Gegenüberstellung von JHWH und Baal in der Erzählung vom Gottesordal auf dem Karmel (1 Kön 18) und die damit einhergehende Abwertung der indigenen Religion hinterfragt und gezeigt, wie vielmehr in religionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive Konzepte, die Baal zugeordnet werden können, in JHWH-Vorstellungen integriert wurden (Sugirtharajah, 2001, pp. 253–255). Dabei wird nicht vorausgesetzt, dass die Bibel Antworten oder Lösungsstrategien angesichts postkolonialer Konflikte bieten könnte, sondern im Gegenteil muss sie sich daran bewähren: “Rather, it is to see whether it can lend itself and evolve as an appropriate Word of God in response to issues which were not the primary concern of these narratives.” (Sugirtharajah, 2006, p. 67). Als einer der ersten fragte auch der auf Kuba geborene Bibelwissenschaftler Fernando S. Segovia (*1948), der in Nashville/Tennessee lehrte, nach der Verbindung von postkolonialen Studien und Bibelkritik. Von ihrer Genese her und als akademische Disziplin ist Exegese genuin historisch-kritisch ausgerichtet. Die Vorherrschaft der historischen Kritik sieht Segovia mit dem Aufkommen von literary criticism seit den 1970ern und unter dem Einfluss der cultural studies in den späten 1980ern und frühen 1990ern beendet (Segovia, 2000, p. 121). Damit wird auch die Vorstellung, es könne eine universale, objektive und unideologische Auslegung biblischer Texte geben, abgelöst: Die Möglichkeit kontextueller Lektüren und reale Leser:innen kommen in den Blick. Segovia versteht seine Hinwendung zu den Postcolonial Studies als Folge seiner eigenen Biographie und seiner Erfahrungen mit Imperialismus und Kolonialismus. Ähnlich wie

Sugirtharajah unterscheidet er drei verschiedene Dimensionen einer “postcolonial optic in biblical criticism” (Segovia, 2000, p. 125). In Bezug auf die biblischen Texte als antike Texte nimmt er den soziokulturellen Kontext der Texte und damit deren Einbettung in imperiale Herrschaftsformen in den Blick, die von Oppositionen wie Zentrum/Ränder, zivilisiert/unzivilisiert und kultiviert/barbarisch geprägt sind. Er fragt nach der wechselseitigen Wahrnehmung von Zentrum und Rändern sowie der Repräsentation des jeweils Anderen in den Texten. Als zweite Dimension seiner postkolonialen Lektüre biblischer Texte benennt Segovia die Analyse der Lektüren und Interpretationen der biblischen Texte im westlichen Kontext, die von Kolonialismus und Imperialismus geprägt sind, also in der Zeit von 1492 bis zur Gegenwart. Dabei wird besonders die Bedeutung von Religion für die Etablierung der kolonialen Reiche sichtbar. Die Entstehung der Exegese als Wissenschaft gehört genau in diesen Zusammenhang. Gefragt wird also, wie die Interpretation biblischer Texte und deren Verständnis von Zentrum/Ränder, Unterdrückung/Gerechtigkeit vom Kolonialismus geprägt ist. Als dritte Dimension seines postkolonialen Zugangs versteht Segovia die Berücksichtigung der soziokulturellen Kontexte der gegenwärtigen Leser:innen der antiken Texte. Dabei ist für ihn von Bedeutung, dass es trotz der binär strukturierten Konstruktion von Welt, wie sie den Kolonialismus auszeichnet, Möglichkeiten des Widerstandes der Unterworfenen an den Rändern gebe. Als eine Form dieses Widerstands sieht er die Abkehr vom rein historisch-kritischen Verständnis der Exegese an. Segovia bezeichnet sein Modell postkolonialer Exegese als “profoundly ideological, for it looks upon the political experience of imperialism and colonialism as central to the task of criticism” (Segovia, 2000, p. 131).

Postkoloniale Theorie und postkoloniale Studien sind in dieser Hinsicht also nicht eine kulturwissenschaftliche Referenztheorie unter anderen, sondern sie verweisen auf die Verstrickungen der historisch-kritischen Exegese als akademische Disziplin in koloniale Strukturen und stellen damit ihr wissenschaftliches Selbstverständnis in Frage. Der Anspruch einer objektiven Lektüre biblischer Texte allein vor ihrem historischen Entstehungskontext – wie er immer noch an vielen europäischen und US-amerikanischen Universitäten erhoben wird – wird somit als ideologisch

entlarvt, so dass der Weg frei wird für explizit kontextuelle und gegenwartsbezogene Auslegungen biblischer Texte.

Sugirtharajah und Segovia veröffentlichten 2007 *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings*. 2018 folgte der von Hemchand Gossai herausgegebene *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*. Erschienen ist ferner 2018 *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*. Innerhalb der Bibelwissenschaften hat sich ein vielfältiger Diskurs entwickelt, der postkoloniale Zugänge mit anderen aktuellen Fragestellungen und Disziplinen wie den Gender und Queer Studies oder der Ökotheologie verbindet.

Als Beispiele für diesen vielfältigen Diskurs, der sich in Folge postkolonialer Theorie etabliert, und angeregt speziell durch die *Bible in Africa Studies* der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg seien die Zugänge und exemplarische Textauslegungen von zwei Exegetinnen aus Botswana vorgestellt, die postkoloniale, feministische und womanistische Diskurse aufgreifen. Während Musa W. Dube sich explizit postkolonial versteht, zeichnen sich die Arbeiten von Mmapula D. Kebaneilwe vor allem durch ihre kontextuelle Verortung aus. Beiden gemeinsam ist, dass sie mit ihren Auslegungen biblischer Texte Widerstand gegen postkoloniale und patriarchale Strukturen mit ihren intersektionalen Verschränkungen leisten und sich an der Überwindung gegenwärtiger Problemkonstellationen beteiligen wollen.

3. Postcolonial Biblical Criticism und afrikanische Perspektiven auf die Bibel

3.1 Musa W. Dube

Musa W. Dube wurde 1964 als Kind einer Ndebele Familie geboren, die nach der Enteignung ihres Landes aus Zimbabwe nach Botswana immigrierte. Sie studierte dort Humanities, Environmental Science und Religious Studies. An der University of Durham/UK machte sie einen Master in New Testament Studies. Sie promovierte mit der 2000 erschienenen Arbeit *Postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible* an der Vanderbilt University in Tennessee/US bei Segovia, ebenfalls in New Testament Studies. Sie lehrte in Botswana und ist seit 2021 Professorin an der Emory

University in Georgia/US. Ihr wurde von der Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung der Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award zuerkannt, so dass sie von Januar bis August 2011 einen Forschungsaufenthalt am Lehrstuhl für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaften von Prof. Dr. Joachim Kügler an der Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg verbrachte. Musa W. Dube verbindet bei ihren Textauslegungen postkoloniale mit feministischen Zugängen. Zudem liest sie die Bibel im Kontext von HIV und Aids sowie ökotheologischen Fragestellungen. Im Folgenden werden Grundlagen und Methoden ihrer auf Befreiung zielenden Lektüren und zwei exemplarische Textanalysen vorgestellt.

3.1.1 Das Programm einer postkolonialen feministischen Lektüre der Bibel

In einem 1997 in *Semeia* erschienenen Artikel entfaltet Dube ihr Programm einer postkolonialen feministischen Lektüre der Bibel (Dube, 1997). Dabei grenzt sie sich dezidiert von den akademischen Zugängen westlicher Tradition ab, die sich allein auf den Entstehungskontext der Texte beziehen. Im Gegenteil sei die historisch-kritische Exegese “a powerful tool that divorces my experience and my questions from the field” (Dube, 1997, p. 13); sie produziere also Ausschließungsmechanismen, die ihre Belange als kolonisierte Frau ausblenden.

Erklärtes Anliegen von Dube ist eine postkoloniale Lektüre biblischer Texte. Ihrem Verständnis nach umfasst der Begriff *postcolonial* drei Ebenen: 1. Die historische Etablierung imperialer Kontexte und deren Überwindung; 2. Das Ziel, das sie mit Bhabha als “a committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed” (Dube, 1997, p. 14) bestimmt; 3. Die Texte, die Imperialismus rechtfertigen. Die Bibel sei in dieser Hinsicht beides: Sie habe gedient und diene als imperialer, als kolonisierender Text. Gleichzeitig gründe sie in imperialistischen Strukturen, d. h. sie sei ein postkolonialer Text. Gefragt werden müsse, wie die Texte Imperialismus rechtfertigen und wie sie diesem gegensteuern. Dabei dürfen die intersections von Kolonialismus und patriarchalen Strukturen nicht vernachlässigt werden. Während der westliche Feminismus Imperialismuskritik ausschließe und damit imperialen Strukturen verhaftet bleibe, wehrten sich afrikanische Frauen vor allem gegen imperiale Unterdrückung (Dube, 2013, p. 96).

Daher entwickelt Dube – u. a. mit Bezug auf Said – ein Instrumentarium zur Analyse biblischer Texte, die kritisch auf ihren imperialistischen Gehalt geprüft und deren Genderzuschreibungen sowie eine damit verbundene Benachteiligung von Frauen gleichzeitig sichtbar gemacht werden. Gefragt wird z. B. nach der Charakterisierung der agierenden Figuren, dem geographischen Setting, dem Reisen und den damit verbundenen Genderbildern. Typisch sei beispielsweise, dass Kolonisierte als hilflos, böse, ungebildet und als weiblich dargestellt werden, während Kolonisierende überlegen, kultiviert und männlich sind. Auch der Blick auf das kolonisierte Land sei gegendert: Es wird genommen, und in es wird eingedrungen. Während aus feministischer Perspektive eine Figur wie die Prostituierte Rahab (Jos 2; 6) als aktive und selbstständige Frau gefeiert wurde, wird aus postkolonialer Perspektive deutlich, dass mit ihrer Figur die Einnahme des Landes legitimiert wird: Sie wird als unmoralische Kollaborateurin gezeigt, die ihre eigenen Landsleute im Stich lässt und den Eroberern das Land öffnet. Übergeordnetes Ziel der Analyse ist “to counter imperialist violence and to seek liberating ways of interdependence” (Dube, 1997, p. 20).

3.1.2 Mk 5,21–43 als Erzählung von Widerstand und Aufstehen aus dem Tod

Gut deutlich werden methodisches Vorgehen und hermeneutische Grundannahmen Dubes in ihrem auf Deutsch erschienen Aufsatz *Markus 5,21–43 in vier Lektüren. Narrative Analyse – postcolonial criticism – feministische Exegese – HIV/AIDS* (Dube, 2014). Auf der Basis einer narrativen Analyse zeigt Dube die Verstrickungen von Patriarchat, Kolonialismus und Epidemie auf.

Dubes erste Lektüre wendet sich der narrativen Analyse von *setting*, das Ort und Zeit der Handlung bestimmt, und *plot*, der Handlungs- und Ereignisstruktur der Charaktere, zu. Sowohl *setting* als auch *plot* zielen auf eine bestimmte Wirkung bei den Leser:innen. So ist das *setting* dieser Erzählung, die von der Heilung der blutflüssigen Frau und der Auferweckung der Tochter des Jairus handelt, von der Opposition von dem öffentlichen Raum am See und dem privaten im Haus des Jairus geprägt. Gleich zu Beginn wird es von der Dringlichkeit zu handeln bestimmt, wenn Jairus Jesus anfleht: „Meine Tochter liegt im Sterben!“ (Mk 5,23).

Das Auftreten der blutflüssigen Frau unterbricht den linearen plot; sie wird geheilt, doch das Mädchen ist tot, als Jesus beim Haus des Jairus eintrifft. Angesichts des Glaubens des Jairus wird die Zeit jedoch sekundär: „Damit schreitet die Charakterisierung Jesu fort vom Machtvollen zum Erstaunlichen, vom Menschlichen zum Göttlichen“ (Dube, 2014, p. 15).

Der an das Mädchen adressierte Ruf ist für Dube der Ruf ins Leben und damit Grund ihrer Lektüren in postkolonialer und feministischer Perspektive sowie angesichts von HIV/AIDS, denn jedes dieser drei Paradigmen stelle sich „gegen Formen des Todes von Beziehungen“ (Dube, 2014, p. 15).

Im historischen Entstehungskontext des Imperium Romanum sei die Erzählung eine Erzählung des Widerstandes gegen die todbringende Macht der Unterdrücker. Dube versteht die 12 Jahre der Krankheit als Hinweis, dass die blutflüssige Frau das Land Israel und seine 12 Stämme repräsentiere: Israel leidet und sucht Heilung. Unterdrückung und Widerstand werden anhand des weiblichen Körpers artikuliert; in der Gleichsetzung von kolonisiertem Land und weiblichem Körper wird die Frau dem Mann untergeordnet. Hier überschneiden sich also postkoloniale und feministische Perspektiven.

So bleibt auch die feministische Analyse Dubes nicht dabei stehen, die Entschlossenheit der blutflüssigen Frau hervorzuheben und sie zu einem Beispiel von gender empowerment zu machen. Sie zeigt auf, wie auch die blutflüssige Frau als untergeordnet präsentiert wird, da sie sich Jesus von hinten nähert, während Jairus Jesus offen adressiert.

HIV/AIDS sieht Dube „im Kontext anderer sozialer Epidemien wie Armut, Ungleichheit der Geschlechter, Gewalt, globaler Ungerechtigkeit und mannigfaltiger Diskriminierung“ (Dube, 2014, p. 20). Einen biblischen Text im Kontext von HIV/AIDS zu lesen, müsse also zwangsläufig postkoloniale und feministische Lektüren integrieren. So werde am Beispiel der blutflüssigen Frau deutlich, wie Krankheit, Patriarchat und Kolonialismus zusammenspielen, um der Frau den Tod zu bringen. Jesus hingegen bringe Befreiung: „Befreiung, die die Ketten patriarchaler und kolonialer internationaler Beziehungen zerreit und Heilung für Indivi-

duen und Gemeinschaften bringt.“ (Dube, 2014, p. 21). Eine solche Lektüre fordere ihre Leser:innen dazu auf, Verantwortung für Heilung und Leben zu übernehmen.

Diese Auslegung biblischer Texte verwehrt sich also gerade dem Anspruch wissenschaftlicher Objektivität oder Neutralität, sondern will einen Beitrag in gesellschaftlichen und politischen Diskursen leisten. Dafür macht sie zwangsläufig den sozialen Ort der Ausleger:innen und Leser:innen biblischer Texte zum Referenzpunkt, an denen sich das der Bibel zugeschriebene befreiende Potential bewähren muss.

3.1.3 Gen 34 als Erzählung “at the Contact Zone”

Dube zeigt in ihrem Aufsatz *Dinah (Genesis 34) at the Contact Zone: “Shall our Sister Become a Whore?”* (Dube, 2017), wie ein postkoloniales feministisches framing das Verständnis der Erzählung verändert. Sie beginnt ihre Auslegung mit einem Beispiel sexualisierter Gewalt im kolonialen Kontext Cape Towns im Jahr 1850 und greift dabei auf den von Mary Louise Pratt geprägten Begriff der contact zone zurück (Pratt, 1992), der im Kontext postkolonialer Studien einflussreich geworden ist.

Die Kontaktzone ist der Raum, in dem asymmetrische Beziehungen von Kolonisatoren und Kolonisierten aufeinandertreffen, seien sie wirtschaftlicher, sozialer, politischer oder sexueller Art. Entgegen der kolonialen Ideologie, die von der Überlegenheit der Kolonisatoren ausgeht und auf Trennung und Reinheit zielt, gebe es immer Interaktion zwischen den verschiedenen Akteuren, die einerseits Kohäsion stiftend ist, andererseits Ungleichheiten stabilisiert und zu Konflikten führt.

Das von Dube angeführte Beispiel für die Bedeutung und Funktion von Sexualität in der Kontaktzone ist das einer Vergewaltigung einer weißen verheirateten Frau durch einen schwarzen jungen Mann in der Nähe von Cape Town. Er wird zunächst zum Tode verurteilt; als jedoch publik wird, dass die Frau nicht weiß, sondern farbig ist, wird das Urteil zu Gefängnisstrafe geändert. Während Vergewaltigungen weißer Frauen als Angriff auf die Kolonialmacht verstanden werden, können der kolonialen Logik folgend Vergewaltigungen von farbigen Frauen nicht gleich bewertet werden (Dube, 2017, p. 40). Dabei kommen rassistische Zuschreibungen zum Tragen: Werden schwarze Frauen vergewaltigt, werde ihr größeres sexuelles Begehren gestillt. An dieser Stelle wird der Zusammenhang von

Rassismus, Gender, Klasse und sexualisierter Gewalt im Kontext von Kolonialismus ganz deutlich.

Mit diesem framing liest Dube nun die Erzählung von der Vergewaltigung der Dina. Dazu ordnet sie den Text in den Kontext der Erzählungen der Genesis ein, die von der göttlich legitimierte Inbesitznahme des Landes der Anderen erzählen. Historisch führen sie in exilisch-nachexilische Zeit. Das nationale Trauma führe aber nicht zu Widerstand gegen die eigenen Unterdrücker, sondern zu Ermächtigungsphantasien, denen zufolge die Beziehungen an den Kontaktstellen so gestaltet sind, dass die eigene Dominanz sichtbar wird (Dube, 2017, p. 48). Die Vergewaltigung Dinas, der Tochter Jakobs, gehöre in den Zusammenhang der Landverheißung. Dina sucht den Kontakt zu den Frauen der indigenen Bevölkerung und wird von Sichem, dem Hewiter, vergewaltigt. Sein Vater Hamor bietet Jakob an: „Gebt uns eure Töchter, und nehmt euch unsere Töchter; und bleibt bei uns wohnen, und das Land soll vor euch liegen!“ (Gen 34,9–10). Genau dies führe jedoch zur Ermordung der hewitischen Männer: “they were killed for proposing longterm relations of mutual interdependence that threatened to put the colonized and the colonizer in a relationship of equality” (Dube, 2017, p. 54).

Dubes Anliegen ist also, aufzuzeigen, wie Texte unterdrückende Ideologien transportieren, sei es in Form von patriarchaler oder kolonialer Dominanz. Sie fragt nach göttlich legitimierte Reisen und Inbesitznahme von Land, nach der Konstruktion der Anderen, der indigenen Bevölkerung, und der als diesen überlegen gezeichneten Kolonisatoren sowie danach, wie Konstruktionen von Geschlecht ideologische Ansprüche stützen.

Reisen und Wanderungen der Erzelter werden mit der Landverheißung an Abraham (Gen 12) göttlich legitimiert. Die Frauen kommen dabei primär als Mütter in den Blick, die die Volkswendung ermöglichen. Die indigene Bevölkerung des Landes wird negativ gezeichnet, so z. B. mit Bezug auf Sodom und Gomorra (Gen 18–19). Gleichzeitig werden die Kolonisierten als Bewunderer der Kolonisatoren gezeigt, so ja auch Sichem, der Dina liebt (Gen 34,8–10), womit die Kolonisierung gerechtfertigt wird. Sichem entspricht zudem der ideologischen Konstruktion des triebgesteuerten Kolonisierten, der als moralisch unterlegen konzipiert wird. An Frauenkörper zeigt sich der Anspruch auf Macht: Dina hat die kulturellen

Grenzen überschritten. Die Inbesitznahme ihres Körpers, damit der Anspruch auf Macht über die Kolonisatoren, muss aufs Schärfste sanktioniert werden, nämlich mit dem Tod derer, die nach Macht greifen. Die Frauen jedoch erhalten – und hier bezieht sich Dube auf Spivak – als Subalterne keine Stimme.

Zwar nennt Dube auch in diesem Aufsatz als Anliegen, nicht nur koloniale Ideologien aufzudecken und Othering anzuzeigen, aber anders als bei der Lektüre von Mk 5,21–43 bleibt ihre Lektüre widerständig. Der Text selbst zeigt keinen Weg aus den Strukturen von Unterdrückung, Gewalt und Patriarchat hinaus. Die Tatsache, dass die Stimmen sowohl der kolonisierten als auch der kolonisierenden Frauen ungehört bleiben, führt jedoch zu Dubes Schlusswort:

“It is in this broken landscape that the postcolonial feminist framework invites dialogue, storytelling, and the birthing of relationships of liberating interdependence from and among women, who are wounded by both patriarchal and colonial structures of oppression and domination.” (Dube, 2017, p. 54).

3.2 Mmapula D. Kebaneilwe

Mmapula D. Kebaneilwe wurde 1972 in Botswana geboren, wo sie an der dortigen Universität Humanities studierte und mit dem Bachelor abschloss. Den Master of Theology erwarb sie an der Universität von Stellenbosch/Südafrika, den Doctor of Theology in Old Testament Studies an der Universität von Murdoch/Australien, wo sie mit der Arbeit *This Courageous Woman. A socio-rhetorical Womanist Reading of Proverbs 31,10–31* promoviert wurde. Gegenwärtig ist sie Senior Lecturer am Department of Theology and Religious Studies der Universität von Botswana. Von 2022–2024 ist sie Alexander von Humboldt-Forschungsstipendiatin am Lehrstuhl für neutestamentliche Wissenschaften, Prof. Dr. Joachim Kügler, an der Universität Bamberg. Zu ihren Forschungsschwerpunkten gehören feministische und ökotheologische Fragestellungen, sexuelle Gewalt bzw. HIV/Aids und die hebräische Bibel.

3.2.1 Afrikanische Lektüren “away from the margins”

Wenn Kebaneilwe sich selbst als *womanist* bezeichnet, dann ist das programmatisch: Ihr Ziel ist,

“to penetrate the barriers erected not only by Eurocentric male modes of thought but also by privileged black American male liberation theologians and by white feminists” (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 27; Kebaneilwe, 2012, pp. 28–35).

Gleichzeitig nimmt sie mit ihrem Aufsatz *Paddling the Bellowing Waters Away from the Margins* von 2018 ganz grundsätzlich Bezug auf postkoloniale Kritik an kolonialen Konzeptionen von Zentrum und Peripherie sowie speziell auf die beiden bibelwissenschaftlichen Publikationen von Sugirtharajah *Voices from the Margin. Interpretating the Bible in the Third World* und *Still at the Margins. Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years After the Voices from the Margin* (Sugirtharajah, 1991/2006; 2008). Sie verweisen für Kebaneilwe darauf, dass “the supremacy of the Western academy, of North American and European voices, persists” (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 28).

Als übergeordnetes Ziel ihrer Lektüren gibt sie an, Zugänge zu biblischen Texten zu finden, die nicht rein akademisch ausgerichtet sind, sondern die breite Masse ansprechen, die den biblischen Texten Bedeutung für ihre existentiellen Fragen zuschreibt. So bezeichnet sie ihre eigene Arbeit mit biblischen Texten als widerständig dem bibelwissenschaftlichen Mainstream gegenüber. *African Biblical Studies* seien somit zugleich innovativ und reaktionär. Sie seien insofern innovativ, weil sie sich nicht von westlicher Methodologie bevormunden lassen, und sie seien reaktionär, weil ihr Ziel Interpretationen sind, die die Bibel relevant für gegenwärtige Realitäten machen. Bei allen Unterschieden im vielfältigen afrikanischen Kontinent und in Bezug auf individuelle Lebensrealitäten könne man insofern von *African biblical scholarship* sprechen, als diese Lektüren immer kontextbezogen seien, also geprägt sind von soziopolitischen und kulturellen Realitäten, zu denen auch Armut, Hunger, ökonomische Benachteiligung, Gewalt, Gender-Ungleichheiten und ständige Bedrohungen der Gesundheit durch z. B. HIV/AIDS gehörten.

Kebaneilwe greift hier den Begriff der Inkulturation auf: “Inculturation involves an encounter between biblical text and a particular cultural context. It seeks to inform, transform and remake the culture through this encounter in order to bring about a new creation.” (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 29). Dabei ermöglichen die Leser:innen die Interaktion von biblischem Text und situativen Kontext. Hermeneutisch müsse reflektiert werden,

dass die Bibel auch gegen Arme und Benachteiligte sowie zur Stabilisierung der patriarchalen Kultur eingesetzt werde. Gleichwohl berge sie auch die Möglichkeit befreiender Lektüren:

“And the Bible is one source for seeking this justice. All of us acknowledge that the Bible can collude with patriarchy and even contribute to injustice [...]. But all of us also find great hope and a source of strength in the biblical text.” (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 37).

Als Charakteristikum der afrikanischen Bibelinterpretation kann also ihre Hermeneutik der Inkulturation bezeichnet werden:

“Texts are read to address and confront real-life issues faced by real-life people. Something is learned both from the ancient text and from the contemporary context of the interpreter and reader, with the two deliberately brought together in a dynamic dialogical process.” (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 37).

3.2.2 Spr 31,10–31 als ermutigendes Porträt der kompetenten Frau

Wie aus dem Lektüreprozess sowohl Text als auch Leser:innen verändert hervorgehen, zeigt Kebaneilwe in ihrem Artikel *Paddling the Bellowing Waters Away from the Margins. African Perspectives on Proverbs 31* (Kebaneilwe, 2018) am Beispiel von Spr 31,10–31, dem Porträt der kompetenten Frau. Ihr Ausgangspunkt ist dabei die wirtschaftliche Situation der Frauen in Botswana, deren durchschnittliches Einkommen geringer als das der Männer ist und die im Vergleich zu Männern eine weniger gute Bildung und Ausbildung genießen. Typischerweise werden Frauen auch in den informellen und damit weniger ertragreichen sozioökonomischen Sektor wie den Straßenhandel oder Verkauf von Second-hand-Kleidung gedrängt. Zum Phänomen der Gender-Ungleichheit gehört in Botswana auch, dass Frauen weniger Zugang zu Handel, Kapital und Krediten haben als Männer. Staatliche Maßnahmen wie die Gründung eines Women’s Affairs Department, das über Mittel verfügt, Frauen im Wirtschaftssektor zu fördern, sind wenig erfolgreich (Kebaneilwe, 2016, pp. 253–255; Kebaneilwe, 2018, pp. 34–35).

Einen Grund, warum diese staatliche Förderung nicht funktioniert, erkennt Kebaneilwe in Auseinandersetzung mit dem biblischen Text: Sowohl im Alten Israel als auch in Botswana werde die Rolle der Frau vor allem als Ehefrau und Mutter bestimmt (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 35). Es sind

also die Gender-Attribuierungen, die den Frauen in Botswana den Zugang zum Wirtschaftssektor verwehren. Die kompetente Frau aus Spr 31 könne zeigen, dass auch in einer patriarchalen Kultur Frauen im wirtschaftlichen Bereich erfolgreich sein und gleichzeitig ihre Rolle in der Familie ausfüllen können: “The woman in the text, therefore, could offer Batswana women in business good counsel and courage to persist in their business and like her transcend stereotypical and solely family-focused roles and expectations.” (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 35). Solange das Patriarchat die Kultur Botswanas dominiere, biete Spr 31 den Frauen einen Weg, “to be proactive and work within and against a culture that otherwise tries to curtail their options and opportunities” (Kebaneilwe, 2018, p. 35).

Bei ihrer Lektüre von Spr 31 nimmt Kebaneilwe also einen ganz spezifischen Standpunkt in einem bestimmten soziokulturellen Kontext ein. Ihre Interpretation erhebt dabei nicht den Anspruch, neutral oder unparteiisch zu sein, sondern ist insofern ideologisch, als es ihr darum geht, die wirtschaftliche Stellung der Frauen in Botswana zu verbessern.

3.2.3 Est 1: Waschtis Widerstand und der Kampf gegen HIV/AIDS

In einem anderen Artikel *The Vashti Paradigm. Resistance as a Strategy for Combating HIV* (Kebaneilwe, 2011) versteht Kebaneilwe die Figur der Washti (Est 1) als Model, besonders für verheiratete Frauen in einer patriarchalen Gesellschaft wie Botswana, das Einsichten für den Kampf gegen HIV/AIDS bietet. Sie verwendet hier die Resonanzmetapher, um das Verhältnis von antikem Text und gegenwärtigen Verhältnissen zu beschreiben: “Vashti’s resilience and courage in the face of marital sexual injustice and violence resonates powerfully with this contemporary tragedy.” (Kebaneilwe, 2011, p. 378).

Das Estherbuch wird mit der Erzählung von Waschtis Widerstand eröffnet: König Artaxerxes hat ihr befohlen, bei einem Festmahl vor ihm und seinen männlichen Gästen zu erscheinen, damit sie ihre Schönheit sehen. Dies werde von ihr als Angriff auf ihre Integrität als Frau gewertet, so dass sie sich weigert. Damit gefährde sie – in männlicher Perspektive – das Patriarchat und die soziale Ordnung: Ihre Weigerung erscheine für Artaxerxes als Kränkung seiner Männlichkeit, und ihr Verhalten könnte von anderen Frauen nachgeahmt werden (Kebaneilwe, 2012, p. 196). Als einzigen Ausweg sähen die Männer, Washti zu verbannen, um so die

öffentliche Ordnung aufrecht zu erhalten. Zwar verschwinde die Figur damit aus der Welt des Textes, gleichwohl hinterlasse sie “a true legacy of female power, courage and resilience, which is particularly relevant in the era of HIV and AIDS” (Kebaneilwe, 2011, p. 379).

Um zu illustrieren, wie dies gelingen könne, erläutert Kebaneilwe die Situation von Frauen in Botswana im Kontext von HIV/AIDS. Botswana gehört zu den Ländern, die am härtesten von der Pandemie betroffen seien, was vor allem auch kulturelle Gründe habe. Patriarchale Strukturen, damit zusammenhängende Genderkonzepte und daraus resultierende fehlende sexuelle Selbstbestimmtheit führten vor allem zu einer Gefährdung von Frauen. Während sexuelle Treue dem Ehemann gegenüber für Frauen vorausgesetzt werde, gelte dies für den Ehemann nicht; im Gegenteil gelte ungeschützter Geschlechtsverkehr als mutig und verwegen. Als Folge ist die Gruppe der verheirateten Frauen, die an AIDS sterben, größer als jede andere soziale Gruppe (Kebaneilwe, 2011, pp. 380–381). Die ABC-Strategie (Abstain, Be faithful or Condomise) habe nicht funktioniert, da sie die kulturellen Gründe, warum bestimmte soziale Gruppen wie verheiratete Frauen ohne eigenes Einkommen besonders vulnerabel sind, nicht in den Blick nehme (Dube, 2003, p. 109): Diese Frauen können innerhalb der patriarchalen Gesellschaft nicht frei über ihre Sexualität entscheiden.

Hier setzt nun Kebaneilwe an: Die Erzählung von Washti fordere die patriarchale Vorstellung der gehorsamen Ehefrau heraus, die diese als Objekt ihres Ehemannes begreift. Während die in Botswana vorherrschende Rollenerwartung sei, dass Frauen die Untreue ihres Mannes nicht nur ertragen, sondern auch decken, ist “Vashti’s model of resisting injustice [...] a model that can help women to overcome their perception of victimhood” (Kebaneilwe, 2011, p. 382). Mit der Erzählung von Waschtis Widerstand werden Frauen ermächtigt, sich gegen ihre Benachteiligung zu wehren: “She has demonstrated to us that in the face of marginalization and the silencing culture, we can still choose to say ‘no’ to the HIV infection that comes straight to us through the infidelity of our powerful husbands.” (Kebaneilwe, 2011, p. 383).

Auch bei dieser Lektüre von Est 1 im Kontext von HIV/AIDS wird deutlich, dass Kebaneilwe den biblischen Text ganz bewusst von ihrem sozia-

len und kulturellen Standpunkt aus liest und dabei ein bestimmtes Anliegen verfolgt. Die Frauen, die aufgrund kultureller Rollenzuschreibungen besonders gefährdet sind, mit HIV/AIDS infiziert zu werden, sollen befähigt werden, diese Fremdzuschreibung zu überwinden und selbstbestimmt für ihre Sexualität und damit für Leben einzutreten.

4. Fazit

Während meines Studiums in den 2000ern wurde ich in den bibelwissenschaftlichen Fächern vor allem in Methoden der historisch-kritischen Exegese eingeführt. Auch sprachwissenschaftliche und narratologische Ansätze wurden praktiziert, gleichwohl wurde vornehmlich nach der Bedeutung der Texte in ihrem Entstehungskontext gefragt. Angesichts der Tatsache, dass sich postkoloniale Ansätze, kontextuelle Lektüren und leser:innenorientierte Zugänge bereits seit den 1980ern und 1990ern etabliert hatten, frage ich mich im Rückblick, warum diese kaum Erwähnung fanden. Ein Grund sind sicher überdauernde koloniale Strukturen im Hinblick auf das akademische Selbstverständnis und Wissenschaftstraditionen. Gleichwohl wäre es naiv zu glauben, man könne im europäischen Raum, der im öffentlichen Diskurs kaum religiös und schon gar nicht biblisch geprägt ist, mit postkolonialen bzw. kontextuellen Lektüren biblischer Texte Widerstand gegen gesellschaftliche Ungerechtigkeiten leisten, wie dies z. B. im afrikanischen Raum anvisiert wird. Dennoch stellt sich mir die Frage, ob die größere Präsenz postkolonialer und kontextueller Bibelauslegungen an den Universitäten gerade im Hinblick auf die Lehrer:innenausbildung nicht einen breiten Diskurs um die Frage nach der Relevanz biblischer Texte für das Individuum und auch angesichts sozialer Herausforderungen nach sich ziehen könnte. Insofern erlebe ich die *Bible in Africa Studies* und das reale Aufeinandertreffen mit Bibelwissenschaftler:innen aus Afrika an der Universität Bamberg als große Bereicherung meiner wissenschaftlichen Praxis.

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SECTION 2

Contexts for Applied Bible Studies

5 The New Testament and Politics in Ghana (2017–2023)

Analysis of the “biblification” of Ghanaian Political Discourse by Ken Ofori-Atta (Ghana’s Finance Minister)

Abstract

This chapter investigates a political reception of the New Testament in Ghana from 2017–2023 which is tentatively labelled as Ofori-Atta phenomenon. In the stated years, Ken Ofori-Atta, then Finance Minister of Ghana, made consistent recourse to biblical texts during his presentations of annual government budget statements to the Ghanaian Parliament. From a postcolonial biblical reception hermeneutical analytic framework, research for the chapter examined the budget statements he presented over the period. Subsequently, it argues that the Ofori-Atta phenomenon is, on the one hand, a biblification of Ghanaian political-economic discourse through economic planning instruments such as national budgets and, on the other hand, a sermonisation of national budget presentation speeches. It projects the Bible, the sacred scripture of Christianity, as a national Holy Scripture which speaks to the entire nation of Ghana through such economic management instruments. Furthermore, Matt 14:13–21 is invoked programmatically and re-interpreted in a secular, political context. The study thus concludes that the Ofori-Atta phenomenon presents a potential political leveraging on an existing high Ghanaian religiosity as it presents the minister as a God-fearing public figure to be admired by all. Consequently, it has negative implications for public accountability in the management of the Ghanaian economy.

Keywords: *Ghanaian politics, Ken Ofori-Atta, Matt 14:13–21, Bible and Politics, Postcolonial Biblical Reception Hermeneutics, New Testament*

1. Introduction

“Mr. Speaker, this is a marked change from when I first stood before this House on 2nd March, 2017. [...] our economic prospects had dimmed considerably. I referred then to the biblical story of five loaves and two fishes [Matt 14:13–21] to illustrate the approach in turning the economy around. Mr. Speaker, I stood here in March 2017 and asked that the country’s paltry 2 fishes and 5 loaves be multiplied.”¹ This is Ken Ofori-Atta, a former Minister for Finance, delivering to the Parliament of Ghana the 2024 Budget Statement and Economic Policy of the Government of Ghana in November 2023. Appointed as Finance Minister in 2017,² Ofori-Atta has consistently made recourse to the Bible in his budget statements including Mid-Year Fiscal Reviews and Expenditure in Advance of Appropriation, which are all (secular) national economic management instruments. Indeed, our preliminary survey of all the budgets he has presented to the Ghanaian parliament since 2017 indicates that they are replete with several references, allusions, and paraphrases of biblical texts. Consequently, in this chapter, we present preliminary³ results of our study of this prime case of the Bible and politics in West Africa which we tentatively label as the Ofori-Atta phenomenon. The Ofori-Atta phenomenon is, on the one hand, a biblification (borrowing from Gunda, 2012) of Ghanaian political-economic discourse through economic planning instruments such as national budgets and, on the other hand, a sermonisation of national budget presentation speeches. It draws a link between politics, economic management, and national governance on the one hand and the Bible as a holy scripture of a specific religious community in a religiously plural and secular country on the other hand.

While Ofori-Atta appropriates texts from different books of the Bible, our focus is on his use of the New Testament (NT), specifically the Gospel of

¹ Paragraphs 938–9 of the 2024 Budget Statement and Economic Policy of the Government of Ghana delivered on 15th November 2023.

² He has since February 2024 been removed from this position and re-assigned a new role.

³ The case presents a large data set that requires an extended time of study to exhaust the various aspects and factors involved. Our present study is, therefore, preliminary and only the first step into it.

Matthew from which he draws the synoptic miracle story of Jesus's feeding of the five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt 14:13–21). He makes consistent recourse to this text throughout his tenure to explain his approach in managing the Ghanaian economy. We approached the phenomenon using an integrated analytic framework of postcolonial biblical reception hermeneutics, i.e. an integration of postcolonial theory into biblical reception history which we think allows for a critical analysis and interrogation of the phenomenon.

Therefore, the first section will briefly discuss this integrated approach, before situating the Ofori-Atta phenomenon in the broader context of the Bible and politics in sub-Saharan Africa in order then to finally discuss the phenomenon itself. It is our observation and argument that the Ofori-Atta phenomenon sees Matt 14:13–21 as illustrating the approach to managing Ghana's economy, namely drawing in the God-factor into the technically secular business of national economic management. We posit that this in principle shifts responsibility to God which within the given religiosity of Ghanaians could be attractive but holds the potential of shielding the minister from public accountability.

2. Postcolonial Biblical Reception Hermeneutics

Explaining this perspective requires brief discussions of the two constituting perspectives: postcolonial theory and biblical reception history. Postcolonial theory has, since its emergence in the late twentieth century, not lent itself to a single definition. For Musa Dube, for instance, it is “an umbrella term” which “is best understood as a complex myriad of methods and theories which study a wide range of texts and their participation in the making or subversion of imperialism” (Dube, 1997, p. 14). Similarly, R. S. Sugirtharajah admits that “Postcolonialism is [...] a notoriously difficult concept to define” (Sugirtharajah, 2023, p. 2). Yet he adds that “The central function of postcolonial criticism is to be a contestatory force, more of a moral stance than a theory or a dogma” being “intercessory and intervening allowing silenced and written-out passages and personalities to have a visibility and a voice” (Sugirtharajah, 2023, p. 2). Thus, postcolonial criticism, following from Dube and Sugirtharajah, is critical about power dynamics in every setting be it textual or non-textual, especially how

that power dynamics function to the domination of many by a few. Consequently, like the Lucan Jesus, it would take the side (intercessory/intervening) of the subjugated, vulnerable without excusing their complicities. In applying it to biblical criticism, postcolonial critics draw attention to the imperial contexts within which the biblical texts, both New and Old Testaments, emerged such as the Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, Hellenistic, and Roman empires (Sugirtharajah, 2010, p. 251) and the paradoxical history of the Bible as providing resources for both imperial and liberative actions. In this wise, Dube describes the Bible itself as a “colonizing text” because “it has repeatedly authorised the subjugation of nations and lands” (Dube, 1997, p. 15; cf. Sugirtharajah, 2010, p. 251; Sugirtharajah, 2023, p. 7). This potential of the Bible to be used by both the powerful and weak against each other gives postcolonial biblical criticism its instrumentality: paying attention to the power dynamics at work in biblical texts and the use of biblical texts with the aim of unmasking the nature of the dynamics and giving voice to the voiceless, vulnerable, and marginalised who are pushed to the margins of the power constellations in biblical texts and during the reception of biblical texts. Precisely this feature of postcolonial criticism allows its application in this study, because politics by itself is a power-charged phenomenon just as the Bible also wields its own enormous power especially in Ghana where it is revered as the Word of God. Thus, to make recourse to the Bible in a political setting is to magnify the existing power situation.

For this reason, there is need for an approach that deals squarely with this magnitude. Consequently, we integrate the critical focus of postcolonial criticism into reception criticism which equally requires brief explanation. Reception hermeneutics as an approach in biblical reception history studies tends to be descriptive in analysing how subsequent readers have made use of biblical texts. As a research approach, it investigates the use and impact of the Bible on the lives of people in diverse historical and contemporary religio-cultural, political, economic, and social contexts (Beal, 2011).

Integrating postcolonial criticism into reception hermeneutics, however, implies that we seek not only to present, describe, and analyse the Ofori-Atta phenomenon, but also to critically interrogate such appropriations

and where necessary, expose and confront any parochial, self-serving political interest that might be advanced to the detriment of the many who find themselves at the fringes of the political set-up in Ghana. The need for a postcolonial biblical reception hermeneutics is also underlined by the fact that the recognised intrinsic religiosity and high regard for the Bible by many Ghanaians can easily be exploited by politicians to shift public opinion from corruption and mismanagement in national governance to their feigned religiosity by invoking biblical authority in their public political discourse. To ignore this will be tantamount to complicity with some of the vicious factors that keep many African populations impoverished and underdeveloped (Gunda, 2012). Before engaging the Ofori-Atta phenomenon, we will situate it in discussions on the interaction between the Bible and politics in Africa in general and Ghana specifically.

3. Bible and Politics in Africa

African politicians have not hesitated invoking the Bible during political/public discourses to advance political points. Political reception of the Bible is, however, not unique to Africa: whether in the UK (Crossley, 2016), the USA (Siker, 2012), or other parts of the world like New Zealand (Myles, 2016), at one time or the other, the Bible and politics interface. Nonetheless, a remarkable aspect of the African situation is that there, the Bible still comfortably enjoys the revered status as “the Word of God” which is deemed capable of providing solutions to the daily problems of people (Boateng, 2020) and which thereby becomes a meaning-making framework in the lived realities of many African Christians. Consequently, there is no shortage of biblical and para-biblical quotations printed on people’s properties (houses, vehicles, etc) and businesses as one can easily observe in urban centres in Ghana such as Accra and Kumasi. Certainly, such popularity and widespread reception of the Bible in sub-Saharan Africa is due to the pervasive presence of Christianity in the continent. However, the fact that several African countries such as Ghana are religiously plural and constitutionally secular on the one hand, and bedevilled with daily-life-threatening socio-economic problems stemming largely from

suffocating levels of corruption in public service and unpardonable economic mismanagement on the other hand makes the phenomenon worthy of scholarly investigation.

A cursory look at recent studies on the subject demonstrates that the phenomenon of biblification of African politics is not confined to a single African country, but cuts across sub-Saharan Africa. That is clear in Masiwa Ragies Gunda and Joachim Kügler's edited volume on the Bible and politics in Africa which deals with the interface between the Bible and politics in different southern African countries (Gunda & Kügler, 2012). Gunda and Kügler's editorial introduction to the volume observes that "The challenges facing Africa and the continued meteoric growth of Christianity in Africa coupled with the entrenchment of the Bible as the primary African book in most sub-Saharan African countries mean that Africa provides an important background to broach the subject of the Bible and politics" (Gunda & Kügler, 2012, p. 8). Examples from Zimbabwe and South Africa indicate that this phenomenon is a persistent character of African politics.

For instance, Gunda's contribution in the volume (Gunda, 2012, p. 25) observes with concern the widespread use of the Bible in public spheres in Zimbabwe amidst socio-economic crisis, a phenomenon that he characterises as "biblification of the public sphere" and questions whether this phenomenon is good for Africa. His proposal is to "de-biblify" the public sphere and engage in "critical biblification" by which he means, "becoming more engaged and involved in the issues that affect our society by monitoring how [...] [the] Bible is used and abused in the public sphere and clearly making our observations public in order to equip ordinary readers to resist being hoodwinked" (Gunda, 2012, p. 40). Similarly, Gerald West's attention on the African National Congress's (ANC) deployment of religion to shape nation building efforts in South Africa makes it clear that whether it is Thabo Mbeki or Jacob Zuma, the Bible has received demonstrable appropriation in South African politics (West, 2012).

When attention is turned to West Africa, the picture is not any different. Whether in Ghana or Nigeria, the Bible (and broadly speaking religion) has registered its presence in the public space through the frequency with which political actors draw on the Bible and different biblical imagery in their political rhetoric and the many times one president or minister of

state or the other has visited one Christian gathering (especially Pentecostal charismatic ones) or the other (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2016). The whole discourse, however, operates in the larger context of religion and politics where “from colonial to postcolonial times and from indigenous to missionary faiths, religion has continued to play an integral part of daily life [...] and it is impossible to engage in political activity without its influence” (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2016, p. 352).

In Ghana, even though constitutionally a secular state, religion and issues related to religious practices play a key role in national discourse (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2014). One expression of the Bible makes its political reception self-evident. The Bible in “word and text” i.e. as memorised and as written is presented, particularly from the Pentecostal-charismatic spheres, as sacred and potent, emanating with power and presence. The Ghanaian politician is certainly a product and benefactor of the society in which he/she seeks to rule. As a product, the politician, if a Christian, would have been formed with a certain notion of the Bible. In the search for political power, the Ghanaian (Christian) politician, then, explores the affinities of the people to the Bible to his or her advantage. He/she will quote the Bible in speeches, ascribe Biblical passages to political campaigns, and affirm biblical principles to win the masses.

This biblicisation of Ghanaian politics can be seen in a number of contexts. The prominent one is the arena of party politics and national elections. Here, two biblical passages have endeared themselves to politicians of Ghana’s two leading political parties – the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) – in recent years. The first is John 3:16. In the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections of Ghana, the NDC with incumbency used “John 3:16” as a campaign slogan. John 3:16 is, by the way, a popular Bible verse in Ghana; even among non-Christians (a factor that can be explained by the role of Christian mission schools). The NDC appropriated the text as follows. The late former presidents and leaders of the party, *John* Jerry Rawlings and *John* Evans Atta Mills, had “John” as their first name. The incumbent candidate who succeeded John Evans Atta Mills (who died in office) was *John* Dramani Mahama. Thus, he was the third John to lead the NDC in the year 2016 – third John, (twenty-) sixteen. Therefore, the popularity of John 3:16 was exploited to market his election campaigns. For Mahama and the NDC,

then, John 3:16 had less to do with the Johannine theology of the soteriological implication of God's self-giving love through his Son Jesus, and more with its popularity among Ghanaians, making it an easy tool for effective political communication.

The second text is 1 Sam 17:47. The NPP, the main opposition party at the time, similarly made use of the Bible in their campaign trails. Their catch phrase was "The battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam 17:47). Indeed, they have used this verse since 2012 national elections in Ghana which they lost. The party contested the election results in Ghana's Supreme Court and lost and remarkably, its leader, now current president, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo Addo, concluded his speech of accepting the court's verdict with "the battle is the Lord's" and subsequent press conferences and other media engagements ended with the same biblical text as well. It would not be only the president who used this biblical text, but also his party communicators and his ministers including Ken Ofori-Atta who adds this text to the myriads of biblical texts that he populates his budget delivery speeches with. Closely looked at, such appropriation was intended to give a veneer of a God-fearing, God-dependant political party and leader (Gifford, 2003) which is certainly appealing to the deep-seated religious sensibilities of Ghanaians. The NPP eventually won the 2016 elections and has subsequently initiated what will go down in the political and religious annals of Ghana as one of the most demonstrably observable instance of the marriage between religion (Christianity specifically) and politics in the country – the National Cathedral saga; that is the attempt by the current President and his government to build a non-denominational national cathedral for the country as a fulfilment, so the President, of his private vow to God (Haynes, 2023; Lauterbach & Bob-Milliar, 2023): to build "the Lord a house when he wins the elections".

Undoubtedly, the biblical story that is in the background here is that of the deuteronomistic story of David's intention to build a temple for ancient Israel's Yahwe (2 Sam 7:1–17). But what initially started as a privately funded project with grandiose fundraising events within Ghana and abroad, became a national project with alleged huge sums of Ghanaian tax-payers money allocated for the project. Consequently, it sparked public outcry (from political opponents and civil society organisations) in several ways and has been hit by one alleged scandal after another, leading to the

resignation of such prominent members of the Board of Trustees as Archbishop Nicolas Duncan-Williams, Rev. Eastwood Anaba, Bishop Dag Heward-Mills (all famous Ghanaian charismatic church leaders). It is worth noting that the President's political opponents, particularly the NDC, have not relented in citing other biblical passages to challenge the resolve of the government to build the national cathedral. Equally remarkable is that Ken Ofori-Atta has argued for the economic significance that the cathedral would bring to Ghana. His recent argument for the construction of the national cathedral employed the Johannine apocalyptic image of the "New Jerusalem" (Rev 21) to the effect that the cathedral would make Ghana the "New Jerusalem" in terms of tourist attractions (see Citi Newsroom, 2023).

Thus, the public space in Ghana, particularly the political one, is so profoundly biblified that any academic investigation will find countless instances for analysis. The Bible is used as a tool to propagate political intentions and to capitalise on its impact in the Ghanaian society to advance political interest. Against this background stands the Ofori-Atta phenomenon under study. All that, however, raises the question of other underlying explanatory factor(s) for this phenomenon apart from the political interest.

J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu rightly argues that the interaction between religion – in our specific case the Bible – and politics in "West Africa is rooted in the inseparability between sacred and secular realities in traditional African life and thought" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2016, p. 352). This traditional understanding of reality, being itself an expression of the cosmology provided by African traditional religions, finds explicit expression in the person of chiefs among many Ghanaian ethnic groups including the Akan. In the chief is vested not only political, administrative, and judicial powers, but such powers are also seen to be held in trust and exercised on behalf of the departed ancestors who are "believed to be real custodians of political and moral power" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2016, p. 353). Indeed, the traditional worldview – according to which reality is not dichotomised into seen and unseen with the twain never meeting, but the seen and unseen spheres interpenetrating each other – gives a religious dimension to almost every aspect of African existence. Accordingly, for politicians to make frequent recourse to religion in general and the Bible in particular

is reflective of the traditional belief system underlying the understanding of political power.

This primal cosmology still persists among many Ghanaians, educated and non-educated, Christians and non-Christians alike. Hence it is important that it is drawn into the discussion when analysing and interpreting the phenomenon of biblification of politics in Ghana. Then it helps to understand why politicians would find it easy and strategic to draw on religious resources such as sacred texts in secular contexts. For just as the success of the new religious movements in African Christianity in the twentieth century (i.e. the African independent churches and Pentecostal-Charismatic churches) was to a greater extent attributable to their success in harnessing the traditional religious belief system, so also political appropriation of the Bible could be an attempt by politicians to leverage on an existing religious orientation that favours the religiosity of political leaders. Unlike the traditional political leaders, who understood the religious consequences of the abuse of political power, however, the African politician does not seem to defer to any superior source of power except the electorate and even that only when they are seeking re-election.

Hence, the likelihood of their utilisation of the Bible to shield themselves from political and public accountability is a constant possibility (Gunda 2012, p. 39). This makes Gunda's challenge to African biblical scholars to engage in a "critical biblification exercise" by observing political appropriation of the Bible and making such observations public extremely important. We submit that a critical analytical perspective to undertake such observations is a postcolonial biblical reception perspective. As discussed above, postcolonialism's demand to take a moral stand in the interpretative act and speak truth to power and speak to the powerless about the powerful (Sugirtharajah, 1999) makes it a necessary critical ingredient in pursuing political reception of the Bible in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, in our analysis of the Ofori-Atta phenomenon below, we interrogate his reception of the Bible and draw attention to any abuse, potential or real.

4. The Ofori-Atta Phenomenon – Biblification of National Budget Statements and Government Economic Policies

Apart from being the former Minister for Finance of the Republic of Ghana, Ofori-Atta is a co-founder and former chairman of the Databank Group in Ghana. He is said to be a relative of the current President of Ghana. Additionally, he is a Christian and has on several occasions declared his faith in Jesus Christ. He worships with the Asbury Dunwell Church in Accra with his family and is very regular at Christian events. Many young people in the church look to him and his wife as a model Christian couple. In presenting the annual budget statements, Ofori-Atta usually appears in a white outfit with a briefcase. This is his consistent appearance on the floor of Ghana's Parliament from 2017–2023. This Christian profile should be borne in mind as we present and discuss his reception of the Bible.

From 2017–2023 he presented seven budget statements and economic policies of the government of Ghana to the Ghanaian Parliament with their corresponding mid-year fiscal policy reviews⁴ and in some cases expenditure in advance of appropriation.⁵ Therefore, three key political-economic documents are sources of the Ofori-Atta phenomenon namely, budget statement and economic policy, mid-year fiscal reviews of presented budgets, and where necessary expenditure in advance of appropriation. We have surveyed all these sources spanning 2017 to 2024 and the following observations are remarkable before the focus is set on the NT texts.

We observe that all the three sources in all the years under study have been highly biblified – meaning the existence of several biblical texts in the documents – with the frequency of the biblification varying from one year to another; 2019 being the highly biblified year, exhibiting not less than fifteen (15) biblical passages; followed by 2021 with about ten (10) cases, and

⁴ Usually termed as mid-year budget reviews.

⁵ Like the Case of 2021 Expenditure in Advance of Appropriation for January to March 2021 submitted on 28th October 2020.

the least is 2022. The modes of appropriation can also be observed: 1) direct quotation with references, 2) allusions to biblical passages, themes, and images, and 3) paraphrases of biblical texts. The biblical texts are used, at each instance, to communicate or illustrate a certain message without recourse to their biblical, literary contexts.

Moreover, some of the references are wrong and some of the paraphrases lead to re-writing of the biblical texts to make them suitable for the purpose for which he is making recourse to them. Examples for each will illustrate the point. In paragraph 1144 of the 2021 budget statement, Ofori-Atta calls for national unity by arguing, “we should always be united on the broad goal of advancing the welfare and progress of our people [...]. There is more to us than we have so far realised. As the Lord said in Genesis 11:5, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.’” Certainly, the text, from the Tower of Babel story in Gen 11:1–9 is in verse 6 and not 5⁶ and what is quoted here is a paraphrased condensation of the entire verse. The same thing applies to the 2018 budget paragraph 876 where the miraculous feeding of the five thousand people is erroneously said to be found in Matt 13 instead of 14. The paraphrased condensation is also found in the *Expenditure in Advance of Appropriation for January to March 2021* paragraph 46: “Let me, Mr. Speaker, [...] leave us with Psalm 133; ‘How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in Unity for then the hand bestows His blessings’.” Definitely, the song of ascent has its middle section here mutilated and the rest rephrased. It is difficult to ascertain why the minister appropriates the texts in this manner. We posit, however, that he might be quoting from memory – which will not be surprising as there are many Ghanaian Christians who have whole chapters of biblical books and whole Psalms in memory. Granted that, it is still surprising that the pains are not taken to cross-check the references, given the political and technical level at which he is located and presenting the budget. This then leads us to the conclusion that the interest in this bibli-fication lies more in drawing on the revered authority of the Bible in the Ghanaian context to advance the political views expressed than being

⁶ Surely, one might not want to stretch that beyond limits as the original texts were initially transmitted without chapters and verses.

faithful to the Bible. Relatedly, we observe that his use of the Bible suggests that he finds it an effective rhetorical material for the communication of his political ideas. That doubtlessly creates a fertile ground for potential abuse of the Bible.

Moreover, the manner of appropriation covers biblical texts from both the OT and the NT, which points to the scope of the minister's knowledge of the Bible. The following books of the Bible feature in the three sources: Genesis, Exodus, 1&2 Samuel, Nehemiah, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel; Matthew, John, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Timothy, and 1 Peter. It thus seems that the Ofori-Atta phenomenon favours the OT texts more than that of the NT. Nonetheless, as it will be demonstrated shortly below, an NT text – Matt 14:13–21 – becomes the controlling and agenda-setting biblical text for this phenomenon.

Additionally, a close look at the phenomenon indicates that Ofori-Atta de-contextualises the biblical texts, repurposes them, in order then to re-contextualise them for his own use. In other words, the texts are freed from their literary and canonical contexts in order for them to be useful for the political context. Here again lurks the danger of abuse and call for careful scrutiny. Furthermore, in Ofori-Atta's hands, the Bible speaks and applies to the whole nation – Christian and non-Christian alike. Consequently, the Bible becomes a sacred text for all Ghanaians and not only Christians in Ghana. Put differently, the Bible ceases to be the Holy Scripture of one of three major religious communities in Ghana, but that of the entire country. This has interreligious implications which lie beyond the scope of this study.

A quintessential instance that illustrates the foregoing three observations is paragraph 293 of the 2019 budget: "I believe, that with faith as our shield and God-loving Ghanaians as partners, the promise of God in Genesis 12:2–3 will also be ours: 'I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name [Ghana] great [...]. And in you all the families of the [earth] [Ghana] shall be blessed'." To be seen here is not only the de- and re-contextualisation of the Abrahamic blessings,⁷ but also the text is applied to the entire nation and thus becomes the Holy Scripture for the

⁷ Square brackets part of the original quotes.

entire country. We should not forget that apart from using collective expressions like “will also be ours”, he is standing before the elected representatives of the people of Ghana, the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, making this presentation, hence the national status assumed by the Bible by implication.

Ultimately, the Ofori-Atta phenomenon is not only the biblicization of Ghanaian political-economic discourse, but also a “*sermonisation*” of the budget presentation speeches and their associated economic-political documents. Sermonisation here means using biblical texts in a homiletic fashion to exhort the nation. For instance, in paragraph 6 of his 2019 mid-year fiscal review speech, he exhorts the Parliament and the people of Ghana, “Mr. Speaker, as we cross the Mid-Year mark, let us thank God and bless His holy name for his love which endures forever. I am confident that as in Isaiah 61:7–8, instead of shame and dishonour, Ghana will enjoy a double share of honour, we will possess a double portion of prosperity.” Furthermore, it sees the Bible as a source of “the approach” to economic recovery and growth and hence attributing such recovery and growth to God which then potentially shifts responsibility from the minister to God and thus provides a potential escape route from public accountability. For if it is God whose grace is responsible for the economic growth, then he is to take blame if such does not happen. This is the observation we make with particular reference to the appropriation of the NT specifically Matt 14:13–21.

5. Ofori-Atta and the New Testament: Matthew 14:13–21 as “the approach” to Economic Recovery and Growth in Ghana

Specific NT texts that are quoted and alluded to include Matt 14:13–21; 25:14–30; John 6:9; Eph 3:20; Phil 1:6; 4:19; 2 Tim 1:7; James 1:4; and 1 Pet 1:10; 2:9. Definitely, a better appreciation of the appropriation of these texts requires case by case contextual analysis for which space would not

permit here. Therefore, attention will be given to Matthew 14:13–21,⁸ Jesus’s miraculous feeding of five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two fish. As already mentioned, the Ofori-Atta phenomenon has used this text in a programmatic manner and sees it as illustrative of his approach to managing the Ghanaian economy. This is explicitly expressed in our opening quotation, i.e. paragraph 938 of the 2024 budget: “Mr. Speaker, this is a marked change from when I first stood before this House on 2nd March 2017. [...] our economic prospects had dimmed considerably. I referred then to the biblical story of five loaves and two fishes to illustrate the approach in turning the economy around.” “2017” and “Matt 14:13–21”, then, build a reference point to which he frequently refers to in his budget statements. It is helpful to illustrate this observation by presenting the evidence for all the years starting from the 2018⁹ budget, paragraph 876: “Mr. Speaker, in my debut appearance in this august House, my backbencher friends across the aisle traded Bible quotations with me. As I invoked the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and three fish (Mathew 13 [sic]), they responded with Philippines [sic] 4:19 ‘And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.’” This is repeated in 2019 paragraph 8, “Mr. Speaker, I stood here in March 2017 and asked that the country’s paltry 2 fishes and 5 loaves be multiplied [...].” Similarly, in 2020 paragraph 9: “In the 2017 Budget, we illustrated the NPP Government’s expectations, aspirations and hope for Ghana’s future, using the miracle of Jesus when he fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and two fish.” Equally in 2021 paragraph 4 of the Expenditure in Advance of Appropriation: “Mr. Speaker, in 2017, [...] I invoked ‘*The miracle of the five (5) loaves and two (2) fishes*’ [sic] to illustrate the predicament we found ourselves in [...], I was declaring our faith and hope in a God who can do much with little [...].” He is silent on it in 2022 and 2023, but repeats it in his 2024 budget, paragraph 939, “Mr. Speaker, I stood here in March 2017 and asked that the country’s paltry 2 fishes and 5 loaves be multiplied. Indeed, as the young boy gave all he had to the multitude, so have we and the Lord, in response, has blessed our nation, and this we should not forget.”

⁸ That it is Matthew’s version of the text that he has in mind is clear from the 2018 budget.

⁹ He first used the text in 2017. Hence our starting from 2018.

This calls for further analysis. To begin with, the Ofori-Atta phenomenon has been consistent with the appropriation of Matthew and to the extent that it continues to be referred to confirms our deduction that it functions as a programmatic text for the minister's approach to managing the Ghanaian economy. Noteworthy is that from the 2017 to 2024 budgets, he has progressively explained the function of the text in his hands. An important function that he gives to the text is *illustration* in two senses. The first sense is that with the text he describes the meagre economic resources available, and the second sense indicates how he and his government will multiply these resources, i.e. economic recovery and growth. This is obvious in paragraph 877 of the 2018 budget which comments on the paragraph 876 already quoted above: "Mr. Speaker, with the little inherited from the Mahama Government [i.e. the previous government], our performance these ten months are indeed nothing less than a miracle as evidenced by the blessings and achievements I have just enumerated. I can only add, Mr. Speaker, that the combination of Philippians 4:19 and Mathew 13, hard work and obedience have greatly benefited our dear country." In other words, "the little inherited" corresponds to the five loaves of bread and two fish while the claimed economic performance represents the multiplication. Not to be overlooked here is the divine dimension of the entire phenomenon. It is not just for illustrative reasons that Ofori-Atta clings to this biblical text, but there is reason to think that he actually believes it can apply to the economic fortunes of the country. He intimates this in the above quotation; "the combination of Philippians 4:19 and Mathew 13, hard work and obedience have greatly benefited our dear country" is to be understood in this light. The evidence gains more weight in the 2019 quote above where he argues, "And, indeed, as the young boy gave all he had to the multitude,¹⁰ so have we and the Lord, in response, has, indeed, blessed our nation." The emphasis is on the "and the Lord [...] has [...] blessed our nation." We should understand this to mean not only the much-needed economic management expertise and competence to guarantee the expected results of economic growth, but more importantly, it will appear, the divine role therein. Simply put, excellent economic management competence is not enough to lift the many Ghanaians out of the chocking dungeons of poverty through economic

¹⁰ Referencing the Johannine version of the story, John 6:1–13.

growth, but we need God to come in! Undoubtedly, that is consistent with his boss's (the President's) mantra in using 1 Sam 17:47; the battle is the Lord's.

Besides illustrating the meagre economic resources and the ability to multiply it albeit with God's help, the text also expresses the minister's party's hope for the future of the Ghanaian economy: "We illustrated the NPP Government's expectations, aspirations and hope for Ghana's future, using the miracle of Jesus when he fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves of bread and two fish." Obviously, the "expectations, aspirations and hope" is economic abundance. Here too we should not forget that the God factor is in mind as the next paragraph commenting on this quote indicates, paragraph 10 of the 2020 budget: "Mr Speaker exactly 2 years, 8 months and 12 days later, I stand before you to declare that indeed God has been gracious."

Ofori-Atta attributes more functions to the text in the subsequent years. Indeed, it still plays the illustrative role, but with increased nuances. In 2021, the text still illustrates the paucity of economic resources, but the minister adds another dimension by stating in paragraph 4 that "in 2017 [...] I invoked '*The miracle of the five (5) loaves and two (2) fishes*' to illustrate the predicament we found ourselves in [...], I was declaring our faith and hope in a God who can do much with little and in fact do exceedingly above all we can ask or think." In addition to the illustrative role is the declaration of faith in the God-factor.¹¹

Finally, the development in his understanding of the political use of the text reaches its zenith in the 2024 budget when he notes, after describing the dire nature of the economy he inherited from the previous government, that "I referred then to the biblical story of five loaves and two fishes to illustrate *the approach* in turning the economy around."¹² Matthew 14:13–21 thus provides the minister with "the approach in turning the [Ghanaian] economy around." Holding the preceding analysis together with this, it can be deciphered that the approach in turning the economy around is "trust in God to send a miracle even if you are working hard and pursuing sound economic policies". That is certainly a caricatured view of

¹¹ The reference to Eph 3:20 is indicative.

¹² Emphasis added.

the Ofori-Atta phenomenon at this point, but it captures the essentials of coupling the secular, technical task of national economic management with divine influence, so that as Jesus “looked up to heaven” and gave thanks holding the five loaves of bread and two fish and this subsequently fed the multitude, so also with the Ghanaian economy in his hands, Ofori-Atta looks up to God with the hope that he will help bring about economic growth.

It is important to interrogate this phenomenon from an exegetical point of view. Without the space to go into detailed exegetical analysis of the pericope Matt 14:13–21, some exegetical highlights will serve our purpose here. Source critically, the pericope as it stands is Matthew’s redaction of his primary source, Mark 6:32–44. Following his *Vorlage*, he sets the story right after the pericope on Herod’s execution of John the Baptist (Matt 14:1–12). After hearing about John’s execution, Jesus withdraws himself to a deserted place by means of a boat, but crowds followed him on foot (v. 13). Upon seeing the crowd, he is moved by compassion because of them (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς) and heals the sick (v. 14). In the evening, his disciples request that he dismisses the crowds to go and find food for themselves since they could not feed them, having only five loaves of bread and two fishes (vv. 15, 17). Jesus rejects the disciples’ request and asked that they be fed (v. 16). He asks for the five loaves and two fish, orders the crowds to sit down, looks up to heaven, blesses, then breaks the bread, and gives them to the disciples who in turn distribute them to the seated crowds (vv. 18–19). Eventually, the over five thousand people¹³ are fed to the full with the comparatively little food, leaving surplus (vv. 20–21). Clearly, the story exhibits significant OT parallels such as 2 Kings 4:42–44.¹⁴ That aside, it is significant to emphasise that v. 14 is essential for reading the story which is very relevant in interrogating its political reception in the Ofori-Atta phenomenon. For in this verse, Jesus’s compassion for the crowds is the propelling force of his initial action of healing the sick among the crowd: “When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.”¹⁵ Furthermore, the temporal reference in v. 15 “evening” and the repetition of the

¹³ Factoring the women and children into the account.

¹⁴ See also 1 Kings 17:8–16; 2 Kings 4:1–7.

¹⁵ NRSV.

“crowd” in vv. 15, 19 make it reasonable to see the compassion that drove Jesus to heal the crowd to be the same emotion propelling the feeding of the crowd (Ukeachusim et al., 2021). This is grounded in the fact that the tradition that traded the story (Mark) has compassion as part of it and importantly the second feeding pericope, Matt 15:32–38, links compassion directly with the feeding miracle.

In relation to the Ofori-Atta phenomenon, therefore, it should be emphasized that it is not the multiplication per se but the motivation, the divine compassion expressed for those who are held hostage by the lack of basic necessities of life like food. This is where the text challenges the Ofori-Atta phenomenon and other political appropriation of the NT – does Ofori-Atta and by extension Ghanaian/African politicians really feel for the glaring needs of the many people who are living from hand-to-mouth daily or even those who barely can afford a single meal a day in Ghana? Juxtaposing the manifest socio-economic problems in Ghana and many parts of Africa with the staggering levels of corruption in public service as well as countless cases of economic mismanagement and wastes makes it clear that compassion is a scarce ingredient in Ghanaian politics. Moreover, an exegetical observation makes it worth highlighting that the story stresses the fact that all were fed to the full (καὶ ἔφαγον πάντες καὶ ἐχορτάσθησαν v. 20) which equally presents another challenge to the political reception – to what extent does economic growth lead to equitable distribution of resources? Is “the approach” to turning the economic fortunes of Ghana comprehensive enough to reach every Ghanaian, or is it narrowly designed to enrich a few people with politicians being the immediate beneficiaries?

Beyond these exegetical implications, it is important to state that the Ofori-Atta phenomenon has the potential of leveraging on the religiosity of Ghanaians and thus courting popular support amidst an ailing economy that is currently being “redeemed” by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Moreover, the phenomenon, by its suggestion on the reliance on God who is capable of multiplying national resources, has the tendency to shift responsibility of economic growth and success to God instead of the minister. A concomitant implication of this shift is that the minister and by extension the government could be shielded from public accountability. Finally, the Ofori-Atta phenomenon does not seem to take seriously

the interreligious implication when it set forth the NT and the Bible as a national sacred text. Peaceful and religiously tolerant though Ghanaians may be, but that must not be taken for granted.

6. Conclusion

The Ofori-Atta phenomenon is a biblification of Ghanaian political-economic discourse with accompanying documents such as national budget statements and economic policies as well as the sermonisation of national budget presentation speeches on the floor of Ghana's Parliament. It projects the Bible, the sacred scripture of Christianity, as a national Holy Scripture which speaks to the entire nation of Ghana through such economic management tools as national budget statements and government economic policies. It invokes Matt 14:13–21 in a programmatic manner and gives the text its own interpretations within a secular, political context. Ken Ofori-Atta, as a Christian politician, might simply be attempting to give expression to his Christian faith in public service. Yet in our judgement, the appropriation of the New Testament and other biblical texts in the manner presented above shifts the responsibility for economic recovery and growth in Ghana to God, which could eventually shield the minister and by extension the government from public accountability. Moreover, it can potentially create a mind-set that relents in exhausting all empirically grounded economic growth strategies, since God can intervene with a miracle. Furthermore, the frequent recourse to the Bible by the finance minister in a highly religious country like Ghana could be interpreted as an attempt to leverage on this high religiosity for political ends, because it presents the minister as a God-fearing public figure to be admired by all. Such admiration could also interfere with public accountability in the management of the Ghanaian economy. Indeed, it should be stated that it is hard to observe empirically the extent to which the use of Matt 14:13–21 (and the Bible as whole) in national economic management has yielded the expected economic boom since 2017, for the Ghanaian economy has suffered several setbacks and is currently under a three-year IMF bail-out program since 2023. Ultimately, it must, therefore, be argued that the recourse to the Bible in politics in Ghana and other parts of Africa

is not an expression of a belief in the divine power thereof, but a leveraging on an existing religiosity for political ends; ends that actually benefit the political elites more than the masses.

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6 The Bible in Politics in Zimbabwe

Abstract

The Bible was used in politics during both the colonial and post-colonial eras in Africa. This chapter shows that the Bible was and is still being used to promote the political agenda of the elite. This is the predisposition by regimes to employ popular religions in their interaction with constituencies to promote their political objectives. Yet the application of the biblical message on national issues, including politics must be within the parameters of sound exegesis and hermeneutics. The chapter shows examples of debatable and controversial use of the Bible in Zimbabwe and South Africa by politicians such as Robert Mugabe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, Nelson Chamisa, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. Furthermore, the controversy includes the clergy making the matter even weightier and worthy of academic interest. We demonstrate in this chapter that if the church spoke with one united voice and become apolitical in its engagement with the state and spoke with authority on matters of national development and national interest it would be the true salt and light of the world. While that would not eliminate the controversies and abuse of the Bible in society, it would serve as a good standard to the society.

Keywords: *Bible, Politics, Hermeneutics, Zimbabwe, South Africa*

1. Introduction

The Bible in Politics is a topic that suggests and alleges the abuse of the Bible to achieve a given political agenda. With relevant examples from Zimbabwe and South Africa, the discussion explores the factors leading to the abuse of the Bible to achieve a given political agenda, that is, the relationship between the Bible and politics, the extent to which the Bible is deliberately and controversially used in politics and the Church's role in the public use of the Bible. This paper's discussion targets scholars,

clergy, Christian leaders, Christian politicians, or Christians and non-Christians who feel they have a calling to national politics. The Bible has become a public book that is not easy to regulate. Both believers and non-believers use the Bible as a reference point for moral conduct, though in a number of cases, respective audiences may not understand its contents. Believers take the Bible as a connection to God. The abuse of the Bible is not only in relationship to national politics but other spheres of life, even though this paper focuses on the Bible in politics. This paper categorically condemns the inappropriate use of the Bible for ulterior motives.

2. The Bible and Politics

The New Zealand Bible Society (2022) describes the Bible as “a remarkable collection of ancient writings which Christians believe to be God’s revelation to people. It is a library of books and letters bound up in one.” The New Zealand Bible (2022) further claims that “the Bible tells the story of God’s relationship with the masterpiece of his creation (people)”. The description rightly describes the Bible as a collection of many books in one and the holy book used by Christians for guidance. The description highlights the historical aspect of the Bible in relation to God, the creator. This paper restricts the use of the term Bible to imply the Christian holy book. However, in the case of Zimbabwe, even non-believers use the Bible for guidance and edification. The celebrated book has also been evoked in politics and any discussion on governance issues. Boswell defines politics as a battle of ideas to bring about cultural identity, recognition, and a system through which material resources are allocated within a community or society (Boswell, 2020). Politics applies to different levels and contexts of human interaction, which involves the battle of ideas, cultural identity, recognition, and allocation of material resources. Cultural identity refers to contestation about values and lifestyle. African politics have been characterized by different phases of socialization, that is, the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial phases. This paper focuses on the colonial and post-colonial phases. The African colonial era ranges from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries or from 1800 to the 1960s in most countries (Parker & Rathbone, 2007; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012, p. 46). The last colony to be liberated was South Africa in 1994. The post-colonial era in Africa

began for most of the countries in the 1960s when several African nations gained independence. Interestingly, the Bible has continued to influence African politics, as shown in some selected African nations such as South Africa and Zimbabwe.

2.1 The Use or Abuse of the Bible in the Public Sphere

We concur with Gunda, who postulates that the Bible

“has been extensively used in the public sphere by politicians, judges, industrialists, and religious functionaries. Its public use has raised critical questions about the nature of development we aspire for as Zimbabweans.” (Gunda, 2012, p. 22).

Such public use of the Bible, whether correctly or wrongly, is attributable to the spread and entrenchment of Christianity within Africa. As a result, the Bible has arguably become part of people’s lives, irrespective of whether they are regular Church attendants or not, believers or unbelievers alike. The abuse of the Bible in politics entails either the quotation of biblical scriptures during a political address or invoking the name of God to support a given political position. Examples of abuse of the Bible are discussed below.

2.1.1 Example 1: Emmerson Mnangagwa and Religion

Both Robert Mugabe, the former president, and Emmerson Mnangagwa, the incumbent president of the post-colonial Zimbabwe, claimed to have been ordained by God to lead Zimbabwe. To that effect, Emmerson Mnangagwa declared that “the voice of the people is the voice of God” in response to the mass demonstration of Zimbabweans in November 2017 against the rule of Robert Mugabe (Mudzanire & Banda, 2021, p. 2). What Mnangagwa meant with the statement, “the voice of people is the voice of God” is not clear, but Mudzanire & Banda give two possible meanings of the statement (Mudzanire & Bnada, 2021, p. 3). Mnangagwa took the mandate to rule the country as given to him by the people seriously. Firstly, it may have meant that God worked through people to elect Mnangagwa to rule Zimbabwe, and anyone resisting or rejecting Mnangagwa was resisting or rejecting God. The second possible meaning also implied that if Mnangagwa refused to take up the president’s position in Zimbabwe,

he would be disobeying God. Anyone who then goes against his leadership as president would be labelled as serving the devil and going against God.

Most likely the second meaning was consistent with Mnangagwa's perception of his ascendancy to power. The perception seemed to have been an opportunistic one in which one rode on the popularity of religion, particularly Christianity in Zimbabwe, and chose to appeal to the citizenry through religious Christian rhetoric, "the voice of people is the voice of God." Zimbabweans in general and Christians in particular had been praying for God's intervention in the Zimbabwean crisis which was getting out of hand towards the end of Mugabe's reign. Most Zimbabweans were looking forward to another messiah after Morgan Tsvangirai failed to dislodge Mugabe (Machingura, 2012). Several people were looking forward to the positive response to the Zimbabwean crisis. Critics take Mnangagwa's rhetorical statement as some form of religious manipulation for citizens to accept him without question as the ordained leader of Zimbabwe. The statement removes any talk about political contestation through elections or the existence of opposition political parties.

Chiminge describes the God in Mnangagwa's speeches as ambiguous and different from the God of the Bible (Chiminge, 2019, p. 47). Chiminge's assertion above is justifiable because of the lack of consistency between Mnangagwa's claims of being God ordained and the alleged government's human rights violations. Human Rights Watch (2020) describes Zimbabwe under the leadership of Mnangagwa as "highly intolerant of basic rights, peaceful dissent and free expression." Zimbabwe's second republic has been allegedly characterized by the detention of citizens without trial, the banning of opposition parties' political rallies, and instances of political violence whose investigations by police were done in an opaque way to mention just a few examples. Interestingly, Mudzanire & Banda observe some syncretism in Mnangagwa's perception of God, particularly between Christianity and African Traditional Religion (Mudzanire & Banda, 2021, p. 4). For example, Mnangagwa equated Mbuya Nehanda, Zimbabwe's first Chimurenga war heroine, and Jesus Christ in his speech to commission the former's statue by bringing at parity the death of the latter on the cross with the former's contribution to Zimbabwe's liberation struggle (Machivenyika & Ziwira, 2020; n.d.).

Mudzanire & Banda, however, think that there were some shades of belief in the Christian God in Mnangagwa's utterances as exemplified by his reference to "God's sovereignty and humanity's powerlessness in controlling the events of the world" (Mudzanire & Banda, 2021, p. 3) when he reacted to the impact of the cyclone Idai. Mudzanire and Banda's analysis of Mnangagwa's faith as syncretistic resonates with the observation that syncretism is characteristic of the expression of the Christian faith in Zimbabwe and Africa where it is common to mix Christian beliefs with African traditional ones. It is common for people to identify with one Church or the other and at the same time involved in African Traditional Religious practices and beliefs.

For critics, the above scenario of President Mnangagwa is a clear example of the abuse of not only the bible but the Christian faith in a bid to present oneself as a democrat. The statement, "the voice of God is the voice of people" would only be applicable where clear democratic processes were followed, and a leader was inaugurated as a choice of the majority of the people of any given nation. It is not perfectly applicable in the case of Zimbabwe's second republic where the removal of the then president, Robert Mugabe from office was through military action.

2.1.2 Biblification of the Public Sphere in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Eras

Gunda calls "the widespread use of the Bible in the public sphere," "the biblification of the public sphere." (Gunda, 2012, p. 25). He is convinced that the phenomenon is common in Africa and that there is continuity in its prevalence between the colonial and post-colonial eras. Gunda observes that this was prevalent in the colonial era as exemplified by Dutch sailors who identified South Africa as "the promised land, given to them by God" (Gunda, 2012, p. 25). They packaged colonialism as a blessing from God for Africa and as part of the trinity of colonialism, civilization and Christianity; and the use of the Hamitic myth to rationalize and sanitise "the mass victimization of the indigenous Africans" (Gunda, 2012, p. 25). The trinity of colonialism, civilization, and Christianity was used by the colonizers to demonize every aspect of African cultures while the European cultures and traditions are presented as Christian.

The above development played a major role in the biblicization of the public sphere in Africa where the Bible ended up being part of peoples' gatherings. The use of the Bible in the public sphere became popular to the extent that the Bible became a public book. While the development is applaudable for promoting the growth of Christian faith in Africa, it is regrettable that the same phenomenon was used to pacify the African indigenous people so that the oppressive system of colonialism would be perceived as holy. Gunda concludes that while the African liberation struggle

“was packaged as a new ‘Exodus from the oppression of Pharaoh’ to the ‘promised land flowing milk and honey’, it turned out to be an exodus to bewilderment in which ‘honey and milk have turned out to be agony’.”
(Gunda, 2012, p. 25).

While the colonizers used the Bible to justify their oppression of the African indigenous people, the African liberation movements used it to package both their liberation strategies and post-colonial political messages. The postcolonial era saw several African leaders mentioning God or even making claims of having been ordained by God as leaders of their respective countries.

The abuse of the Bible in Africa has its origins in the colonial era. In the case of Zimbabwe and South Africa, the colonizers abused the Bible and the Christian faith by bringing the European cultures to parity with Christianity while they demonized the African cultures and traditions. On the other hand, the indigenous African people packaged their struggle for freedom as a new exodus, in application of the biblical history of the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt. However, the Zimbabwean postcolonial context, just like most African states, is still far away from the promises made by the African liberators during the struggle. The African status quo raises questions on whether the liberation struggle was a new exodus or not because those perceived or alleged to be against those in power get persecuted. The Bible is then evoked to support such actions.

2.1.3 Example 2: Robert Mugabe and Religion

For example, in Zimbabwe, either Mugabe or his supporters were quoted several times referring to the Bible or replacing the name of Jesus with Mugabe on some of the Christian songs. Mugabe who at the burial of his

late former chief secretary of state, Charles Utete and in reference to Evan Mawarire's online campaign for a national shutdown said;

"I don't know if he is a man of religion. A man of religion, we would hope, would preach biblical peace. First Corinthians, what does it say? Love one another. Not destroy one another, fight one another. So, beware these men of cloth [...] not all of them are true preachers of the Bible. I don't know whether they are serving God. Well, we spell God, G.O.D., they spell God in reverse." (Mugabe, 2016).

Mugabe used the Bible to castigate a minister of religion who led an online campaign for a national shutdown. The national shutdown was to express the citizens' disgruntlement over their continued suffering due to Zimbabwe's economic meltdown. Surprisingly, Mugabe did not say a word about the negative economic, social and political circumstances affecting Zimbabwe's citizens as claimed by Evan Mawarire and yet used the Bible to attack the one who claimed to fight for the cause of the poor.

The above-quoted speech ties in very well with speeches by Mugabe's supporters and allies. Hungwe reported that the then Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) youth leader, Kudzai Chipanga declared that "Mr. Mugabe will die in office. It was written in the Bible that he would not just rule the country but would die in office." (Hungwe, 2016). One wonders which Bible or biblical texts Chipanga referred to. It is another example of abuse of the Bible to promote political agenda and interests. The political agenda then was to keep the then 92-year-old Zimbabwe's president, Robert Mugabe in office even though, he was struggling to discharge his duties effectively due to old age.

News24 reported that Grace Mugabe, the then Zimbabwe's first lady, declared Robert Mugabe irreplaceable as Zimbabwe's leader and that he would continue with his leadership even from the grave in the event of death. Grace Mugabe's speech had no direct reference to the Bible but presented Mugabe as a supernatural being who would defy health challenges and even death to continue to rule the country (News24, 2016). The speech goes a long way in demonstrating the extremes that political leaders go just to promote their political agenda. Mawawa (2016) quoted Nehemiah Mutendi, the bishop of the Zion Christian Church, saying Mugabe was greater than the biblical Moses because while he (Moses) did not manage to take the Israelites to Canaan (Exodus 3:10–11; Deuteronomy

34:5), Mugabe had managed to deliver Zimbabwe from the colonial regime and had continued to lead the country in the post-colonial era. In this case, the Bible was manipulatively abused to shower praises on a political leader. The political expediency that warranted bootlicking by a clergyman turned out to be a hermeneutical exercise in which the biblical narrative about Moses was exploited. Conclusively according to Mutendi, Moses was inferior to Mugabe notwithstanding his (Moses') aptitude to speak with God face to face as one who spoke with a friend (Exodus 33:11). On the other hand, Constantino Chiwenga, the vice-president of Zimbabwe, in yet another example of abuse of the Bible, likened Mugabe to "the biblical Moses, who successfully rescued his kinsmen from oppression, but failed to deliver them to the land of milk and honey because of delinquency" (Bulawayo24 News, 2018). The same Mugabe who was described by Mutendi as greater than Moses was now being likened to one who was described delinquent biblical Moses by Chiwenga. Chiwenga was now showering praises on Mnangagwa whom he described as the Joshua of Zimbabwe, called by God to take the nation into the Promised Land (Bulawayo24, News 2018; Deuteronomy 31:1–32:47; Joshua 1:1–18).

In this example of the abuse of the Bible, both political and religious leaders are found wanting. It portrays a great appetite for appeasing the political leader at the helm of Zimbabwe by both type of leaders. They summoned all their biblical knowledge just to shower praises on the national leader. While it is a common trend among Zimbabwean politicians, it goes without saying that it is the least expected of the clergy who should actually be speaking truth to power and where it is necessary to apply the Bible. The use of the Bible in both private and public spaces has not spared members of the opposition.

2.1.4 Example 3: Nelson Chamisa and Religion

Tarusarira claims that Nelson Chamisa, opposition leader and former president of the Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), an opposition party was the first politician to claim that his politics were guided by his Christian faith (Tarusarira, 2020, p. 31). Apart from his "God is in it" slogan and other religious inclinations in his political activities, Chamisa employed a pastoral approach which saw him declare a seven-day fasting and prayer programme from the 29th of July to the 4th of August 2019 guided by such

scriptures as Psalm 68:31; Psalm 11:3 and 2 Chronicles 7:14. Nelson Chamisa's bid for the presidency in the August 2023 election put God at the centre. Chamisa's CCC manifesto mentioned God 19 times. While faith is a critical aspect of life, critics argue that Zimbabwe's politicians' use of the Bible for political mileage is often a well-calculated practice. We concur with Tarusarira's conclusion that "religious politics remain strong and influential within Zimbabwe" and that it has the risk of dividing the nation and the electorate.

Nelson Chamisa, being a product of a theological seminary and a Christian perhaps follows the footsteps of other Zimbabwean politicians in the mould of Ndabaningi Sithole, Canaan Banana and Abel Muzorewa who were clergy men. Without casting a shadow of doubt on his faith, he must avoid falling into the same trap as Zimbabwe's liberators who promised Zimbabweans a Canaan that was never experienced over forty years after independence. While politicians must be free to express their faith, they must refrain from abusing the Bible and Christian faith, particularly by putting their own words into God's mouth or speaking on behalf of citizens.

2.2 Churches' Support of the Political Establishment and Status Quo

While the above approach by politicians could be tolerated because to a certain extent, it was expected of them to behave in that way, ZANU-PF found allies in the broader Church and some faith leaders. Nkala (2022) quoted Andrew Wutawunashe, Family of God founder and leader, speaking at a war veterans conference, comparing Mnangagwa to the biblical Joshua and declaring that he was God-sent. Critics argue that, Wutawunashe's sentiments raise a lot of questions, particularly when Church leaders close their eyes to political leaders' violation of human rights and perpetration of injustice. It also raises a lot of questions when the Bible is used to sanitize a political agenda despite the suffering of the poor and marginalized. Chidakwa (2023) reports that Wutawunashe, who is also the chairman of the *Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches* (ZIIC), led church leaders (from Roman Catholic, Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe, Pastors4ED, *Vapostori* and Zion4ED, Lutheran and African Apostolic Church Mwazha in the post 23 August 2023 disputed

election period to congratulate president Mnangagwa on his victory. *Vapostori*, and Zion4ED refer to a group of *African Independent Churches* (AICs) which openly supported ZANU-PF and Mnangagwa in the run-up to Zimbabwe's August 2023 elections. While the gesture to congratulate the one elected president would have been noble in a normal situation, in this case, it was questionable because diplomatic and political engagements to resolve the electoral dispute were still underway.

The defense of the clergy who support those in political power in Zimbabwe often cited Romans 13:1–7 (Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022, p. 3). This is a New Testament biblical text which acknowledges those in authority as God's servants, exhorts everyone to submit to those in authority, acknowledges those in authority as ordained by God to bring wrath to those who do wrong, and justifies the payment of tax to those in authority. However, Gusha dismisses the defense as a misinterpretation of scripture (Magezi & Tagwirei, 2022, p. 3). Stott identifies four models of state and church relations and these are

“Erastianism (the state controls the church), theocracy (the church controls the state), constantianism (the compromise in which the state favours the church and the church accommodates the state to retain its favour) and partnership (church and state recognize and encourage each other's distinct God-given responsibilities in a spirit of constructive collaboration).” (Stott, 1994, p. 339).

Stott finds partnership as resonating with Paul's teaching in Romans 13:1–7 (Stott, 1994, p. 339). Clearly, both the state and the church have different roles. Also, Christians have obligations to both God and the state as implied by Jesus Christ in his statement, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's” (Matt 22,21). However, Stott's comment on the applicability of the passage is plausible, that is,

“We need to be cautious, however, in our interpretation of Paul's statements. He cannot be taken to mean that all the Caligulas, Herods, Neros, and Domitians of New Testament times, and all the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins, and Saddams of our times, were personally appointed by God, that God is responsible for their behavior, or that their authority is in no circumstance to be resisted. Paul means rather that all human authority is derived from God's authority so that we can say to rulers what Jesus said

to Pilate, ‘You would have no power [*exousia*, authority] over me if it were not given to you from above.’” (Stott, 1994, p. 340).

The Church leaders in question in cahoots with Zimbabwe’s incumbent president maintained the colonial and post-colonial trajectory of manipulatively abusing the Bible to promote the political agenda of the ruling class.

Mnangagwa’s response to the gesture by the clergymen as reported by Chidakwa is worth noting when he said

“as Government, if you are leading a nation that is Christian, what else do you want? All that is left for you is to create a philosophy which makes everybody feel they have a responsibility to build their own country.” (Chidakwa, 2023).

It is not surprising that several clergy, Christian organisations, and politicians endorsed Mnangagwa’s presidency despite controversies around the elections and the declared results. Biblical verses were cited to legitimize his chosenness by God (Mushanawani, (2023), *The Manica Post*, 21 July 2023; Parker-Kwinika (2017), *The Herald*, 14 November 2017; Share (2018), *The Herald*, 06 March 2018; Zinyemba (2018). *The Sunday Mail*, 22 July 2018). On the other hand, clergymen, Christian organisations, and politicians disputed that and cited the Bible to delegitimise Mnangagwa as chosen by God and declared Nelson Chamisa as anointed by God to be the president of Zimbabwe (<https://www.theafricareport.com>). In some cases, some of the clergy have condemned President Mnangagwa’s election considering the human rights abuses (Amnesty (2023); Reporter, S. (2023). The description of Zimbabwe as a Christian nation might be a politically motivated one and is a gesture of appeasement to the clergy while at the same time, aimed at largely Christian population to identify with a head of state who acknowledges the common faith. Otherwise, one of Zimbabwe’s founding values and principles is the nation’s diverse cultural, religious and traditional values. This is a value that is contrary to the nation claimed to be Christian (Zimbabwe 2013). In other words, Zimbabwe has freedom of worship in line with its constitutional provision of “freedom of assembly and association” (Zimbabwe 2013). In that regard, Zimbabwe constitutionally was not yet a Christian state but a secular one despite the various political leaders across the political divide citing the

Bible in the day-to-day socialization. It is not only about Zimbabwe but other African nations such as South Africa, hence the example that comes later in this paper.

The response of some of the Zimbabwean churches to their nation's situation as described above is testimony to the lack of coherence and awareness of their role in nation building. Partnership is the most ideal model of church and state relations. The church must be radically apolitical and play a prophetic role in a manner that earns it respect from both the ruling and opposition political players. The church must speak on behalf of God and demonstrate justice and impartiality in its prophetic role. This is difficult when the church speaks with many conflicting voices. Above all the church must demonstrate the correct way to apply the biblical message on national issues in such a way that it becomes the authority in matters of theology, morality and society. The Zimbabwean church has a lot of work to do to attain the above. Interestingly, the abuse of the Bible in the public domain has a long history in South Africa, the neighbouring nation of Zimbabwe.

2.3 Abuse of the Bible during the Colonial Era in South Africa

Struby found out that Christian rhetoric, which includes using the Bible in the public sphere, was used as a political tool by both proponents and opponents of Apartheid during the colonial era in South Africa (Struby, 2018, p. 16). Richard argues that Apartheid was a product of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) because their theological underpinning was that the Afrikaners were sent by God to South Africa (Struby, 2018, p. 16). Apartheid was a phenomenon replicated in different forms and ways in the different African countries during the colonial era. The common denominator in the different forms of Apartheid in different African countries was, in the words of Martin "keeping the blacks in their place" (Struby, 2018, p. 16). What place was that? It was a place of subjugation, poverty, disease, and hunger which in the perception of the proponents of apartheid was ordained for the African Indigenous people by God while the colonizers were the favoured ones. The Bible and Christianity were used during the colonial era to promote the selfish interests of the ruling class, that is, the colonizers.

Interestingly the same Bible and Christianity were also used by the opponents of apartheid to promote the liberation struggle, making liberation theology more popular. This is probably why Farisani is convinced that the Bible is prone to abuse by the powerful, to “legitimize economic and environmental exploitation, racism, sexism, and other forms of abuse” (Farisani, 2014, p. 208). Richard, a study participant, intimates that “people who led the struggle were driven not only by their political commitment but also by their religious faith” and therefore “they found themselves in the scripture” (Struby, 2018, p. 16). Jeffery-Schwikkard narrates how ANC in the 1980s “increased its formal engagement with religious institutions” (Jeffery-Schwikkard, 2022, p. 1087), leading to the establishment of a special department of religion, public acknowledgment of liberation theology and public pronouncement of shared objectives with Church organizations. Apart from the fact that Christian organizations like ecumenical Church bodies and individual Churches rightly used the Bible to correct the theological errors of the proponents of apartheid, the move gave “moral legitimacy to the liberation struggle” (Struby, 2018, p. 17). Sadly, after the liberation movements in Africa, like ANC and ZANU-PF, got into power they to a certain extent borrowed the colonial template and expected, a “subservient and non-threatening Church” (Struby, 2018, p. 18) as opposed to one that demands accountability from government for its actions. It therefore turned out that the selfish political agenda of the post-colonial governments in Africa took precedence over the need to serve the people in the same manner as colonial governments behaved. Such is the trajectory that determined the use of the Bible in both colonial and post-colonial eras in Africa, that is, the Bible as a political tool rather than a genuine standard or measurement for faith, development and life. Ultimately what we can conclude is that humanity, irrespective of race, skin colour or creed, is depraved in its default settings such as injustice, prejudice, selfishness and unlimited crave for power. The centrality of the biblical message in both the colonial and postcolonial African societies is highly questionable because of the extent to which the Bible was abused by both political and religious leaders despite the deteriorating situations where people cry for help. While abuse of the Bible by political leaders

might be excusable though not commendable based on pressures associated with their vocation, abuse of the Bible by the clergy is inexcusable as they should set the correct image for society.

2.4 The Bible, Christianity and Postcolonial South Africa

West (2012) provides an assessment of the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's ruling party's use of the Bible in nation building. He observes a shift from Nelson Mandela, the first independent South Africa president's total refusal to use the Bible or religion in politics. His successor, Thabo Mbeki's prolific use of the Bible was amazing as he would justify its use in the public sphere. In one instance Mbeki quoted Matthew 4:18; 19 which narrates a story in which Jesus encountered Simon Peter and his brother Andrew fishing at the sea of Galilee. Mbeki's interpretation of the text was as follows:

“Perhaps taking a cue from this, some in our country have appointed themselves as ‘fishers of corrupt men’. Our governance system is the sea in which they have chosen to exercise their craft. From everything they say, they know it as matter of fact that they are bound to return from their fishing expeditions with huge catches of corrupt men (and women).” (Mbeki in West, 2012, p. 116).

According to West, Mbeki used the image of fishing for men in the Matthean text to refer to stereotyping of Africans by former colonizers as corrupt, liars, thieves and people with a tendency to enrich themselves through immoral means (West, 2012, p. 116). The appropriateness of the text is highly questionable, and it sticks out as one of the examples of using the Bible in the public sphere to promote a political agenda without due care. The application was not sensitive to the context of the passage. Jesus called the two brothers for his evangelistic and salvific mission not corruption. Such use of the Bible in the public sphere isolates and violates scriptures from their context.

West accuses Jacob Zuma, the former president of South Africa of “returning religion to the public realm, albeit in a more popular form than the initiatives by Mbeki” (West, 2012, p. 136). One of the most controversial tendencies of Zuma was his claims to be like Jesus Christ. The Sowetan quoted Zuma saying he was like Christ and that the media, and his

detractors wanted to nail him to the cross (West 2012, p. 136). Most probably Zuma was looking for sympathy from South Africans by comparing himself to Jesus Christ. The comparison ignores the realities of Jesus Christ being sinless and divine. Yet Zuma is human and prone to sin. While Jesus was executed unjustly, it may not be the same issue with Zuma who likely had issues to account for to the South African citizens. The comparison is yet another example of the use of the Bible in the public sphere in pursuit of a political agenda. According to West, Zuma also likened himself to Jesus Christ when he described a breakaway political party, Congress of the People (COPE) as Jesus' donkey and himself as Jesus in reference to the biblical story in which Jesus rode on a donkey as he entered Jerusalem (West, 2012, p. 136). Zuma went further and explained that the people were waiting for the son of man, that is, Zuma who was on the donkey, that is, COPE. The donkey, that is, COPE, did not understand that the songs of praise were for Zuma and not COPE. Clearly, Zuma's rhetoric had no respect for the biblical scriptures but was riding on them to communicate his political message to an audience assumed to associate with the Bible in one way or the other. The political message was more important to Zuma than the scriptures even though he probably assumed that the scriptural images would be more appealing to his audience, hence their use.

West highlights Zuma's utterances in which he claimed that Jesus or God would bless those who voted for ANC and that ANC would rule South Africa until Jesus came back because ANC was the only organization blessed by God when it was formed, and that Jesus Christ supported it or Jesus was a member of ANC (West, 2012, p. 137). The above appears to be an attempt to popularise ANC as a party and its politics by appealing to the most popular religion in South Africa, that is, Christianity. Jeffrey-Schwikkard observes that ANC's political strategy is one in which it "mixes religious rhetoric and a secular policy agenda" (Schwikkard, 2023) but it is not a religious party. Jeffrey Schwikkard's observation is critical to this conversation as it authenticates the supposition that religious rhetoric or the use of the Bible in the public sphere by politicians in Africa is more of a political strategy than anything else. Though some of the political leaders may have personal religious convictions or religious backgrounds,

their use of the Bible in politics may be more political than religious. Religion and the Bible are only evoked to serve politics and political leaders. Zuma's religious rhetoric to push a political agenda is not uncommon in Africa.

Kalu asserts that "in Africa, the political realm is sacralized or enchanted and politics is a religious matter precisely because it is a moral performance; it is about the undergirding values that determine how we govern ourselves or exercise power in the task of wielding the authority given to us." (Kalu, 2003, 1). In the same vein, Ellis & Ter Harr (1997) avow that religion is an important and indispensable aspect of human life even when it comes to politics in Africa as opposed to Western thought. The influence of religion and the use of the Bible in the public sphere is a major religio-political factor in Africa.

Such use of the Bible as exemplified above tends to violate sound hermeneutics and twist the biblical message to suit people's political and religious agendas hence the manipulation and abuse of the Bible. The South African example was included here for comparison's sake and to prove that the abuse of the Bible goes beyond Zimbabwe. The abuse of the Bible by African political leaders in the postcolonial era is testimony to the fact that they were products of the European missionary efforts to propagate Christian faith in Africa. While the European missionaries did a great job in their propagation of the Christian faith in Africa, some of their products had no sufficient depth in their articulation and application of the biblical message. This conclusion raises a very critical gap that the African church needs to fill, that is, holistic discipleship of its members so that they may be Christians before, for example, they become politicians.

3. Conclusion

The discussion of this paper highlights the extent to which the Bible has been abused during the colonial and post-colonial eras in Africa. There is continuity in the abuse of the Bible in the public sphere between the two eras in Africa. In both eras, the Bible is used to promote the interests of the elites or the ruling class at the expense of the poor, vulnerable, and downtrodden. What exacerbated the situation was the fact that some of

the clergy who were supposed to guide politicians as well as their congregations in the appropriate use of the Bible tended to participate in the abuse of the Bible to promote political agendas of the elite. We hope that the conversation raises awareness among the clergy, politicians, Christians, and citizens in general so that ultimately the Bible may be used with care in people's lives.

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Molly Manyonganise

7 **Varungu Vatema (Black White People) in Post-colonial Zimbabwe**

Reframing Black Theology's Relevance in an African Context

Abstract

Historically, Black Theology was touted as a quest for freedom from racial oppression by black people. A reading of James Cone's conceptualisation of Black Theology reveals how colour becomes symbolic of either the oppressor or the oppressed. He depicts the colour black to represent the oppressed while whiteness takes the place of the oppressor. While James Cone's theology was intended to speak to the existential situation of people of colour in North America, the existence of Apartheid in some African countries such as South Africa made this theology also relevant in such contexts. African scholarship on liberation theologies and focusing on Black theology highlighted the usefulness of Black theology on the African continent in light of the adverse effects of colonialism. However, the attainment of independence by African countries raised questions whether it was still appropriate to be talking about Black theology on the continent. It would appear that most students of theology appear to think that the presence of black-led governments automatically led to the eradication of socio-economic as well as political structures of domination. In this chapter, I seek to interrogate the concept of "black white" people (*varungu vatema*) within the Zimbabwe context. The intention is to argue that those that assumed leadership from white colonial rule have failed to dismantle the colonial systems of domination. Instead, they have become black elites who are white to the core, hence, the poor's reference to them as *varungu* (white people). In such cases, the chapter focuses on how Black theology speaks to the existential struggles of poor black people who find themselves suffering at the hands of black rulers who claim to have freed them

from the white oppressor. This is largely a desk research which utilizes secondary sources.

Keywords: *Africa, Black Theology, Colonial, Colour, Independence, Oppressor, varungu vatema, Zimbabwe*

1. Introduction

Liberation Theology emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Boff and Boff note that the first theological reflections that were to lead to liberation theology had their origins in a context of dialogue between a church and a society in ferment, between Christian faith and the longings for transformation and liberation of the people (Boff & Boff, 1987, p. 2). The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) greatly influenced the emergence of liberation theology specifically in Latin America. From Boff and Boff’s analysis, the Council produced a theological atmosphere characterized by great freedom and creativity (Boff & Boff, 1987). The clergy in Latin America were frustrated after realizing that most people to whom they were preaching were living in abject poverty. Martin avers that it was no longer possible for the clergy to preach to such people while at the same time ignoring their needs for food, shelter, and human dignity (Martin, 2003). The clergy were particularly enraged by the existing gross inequalities and widening disparities among the people precisely in the Third World countries which they ascribed to the exploitative policies of the imperialist countries (Martin, 2003). The Second Vatican Council had encouraged the clergy to be involved in people’s struggle for justice, hence, followers of Christ could not be seen to be condoning injustice. Therefore, theologians needed to be immersed in the struggle for the transformation of society through the liberation of the oppressed (Martin, 2003). As key figures in Latin America such as Gustav Gutierrez were having the consciousness of the need for a relevant theology that spoke to the existential realities in Latin America, black theologians in North America were also coming to realise that white theology in their context had failed to articulate their needs and experiences, so were also feminist theologians who began to challenge patriarchy in religious institutions. Therefore, liberation theology is a term that encompasses a number of theologies, namely, Latin American, black, African, feminist and womanist theologies. In this case, we talk of liberation

theologies in order to show that the focus of these theologies varies. While they all take liberation as the common concern, the source of oppression is perceived to be different though at times overlapping. However, Boesak rejects the forced distinctions created to separate all liberation theologies arising in North America, Latin America and Africa (Boesak, 1976). He argues that all these theologies are bound together by their concern for the liberation of the oppressed. This current chapter focuses on the relevance of Black Theology in contemporary Zimbabwe. It interrogates the concept *varungu vatema* (black-white people) within the socio-economic space of Zimbabwean society. The chapter argues that Zimbabwe's independence from racial oppression has failed to destroy colonial structures of domination. The metaphoric use of the term '*varungu*' (white people) denotes a society suffering from identity crises emanating from the emergence of a class resembling the former colonial masters. In such a context, the chapter argues that Black Theology remains relevant. In order to put this argument into its proper context, the article first provides an overview of Black Theology.

2. Black Theology: An Overview

Black Theology has a long history. Wilmore explains that the term "black theology" began to be used among a small group of black clergy in the United States during the second half of the 1960s (Wilmore, 1974, p. 211). For Wilmore this was a positive reaction among black church men to the secular black power movement and the black consciousness and cultural revitalization tendencies which accompanied it. In North America, Black theology is closely linked to James Cone. In fact, Joseph describes James Cone as the father of Black theology (Joseph, 2020). For Cone, Black theology represented the theological reflections of a radical black clergy who sought to interpret the meaning of God's liberating presence in a society where blacks were being economically exploited and politically marginalized because of their skin colour (Cone, 1984, p. 5). He, therefore, locates the origin of Black theology in three contexts, namely (i) the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s largely associated with Martin Luther King Junior; (ii) the publication of Joseph Washington's *Black Religion*;

and (iii) the rise of the black power movement strongly influenced by Malcolm's philosophy of black nationalism. This theology emerged, therefore, as the black clergy was compelled by the urgency of the time to make theological sense out of the struggle for black freedom (Cone, 1984, p. 24). For Cone, to advocate a Black theology meant that the black clergy wanted the whole world to know that it was searching for a radically new theological starting point that would clearly distinguish its perspective from the alternatives provided by whites and adopted by conservative blacks (Cone, 1984, p. 24). Hence, the term "Black theology" was invented at the end of the 1960s in the context of the National Congress of Black Churches (NCBC) theological commission as the theological counterpart to black power. For Cone, the phrase "Black theology" came into being as members of the black clergy "searched for a theological basis upon which to stand." (Cone, 1984, p. 20) He further argues that the term was created in response to black power at a time when the credibility of the Christian faith was being severely tested in the black ghettos of the church. Hence, he reveals that his first publication, *Black Theology and Black Power*, was a manifesto against whiteness and for blackness in an attempt to liberate Christians from white supremacy (Cone, 2018). Hopkins argues that in this publication Cone views the heart of the Christian message as liberation of the poor, who struggled against concrete structures preventing them from attaining their full humanity (Hopkins, 2012, p. 15). As such, Cone regarded the black power movement as the actual Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hopkins and Antonio argue that Black theology originated within a specific history constituted by peculiar cultural and political contexts confronted by definite social and spiritual challenges (Hopkins & Antonio, 2012). For example, all black theologians agreed that blacks had the right to self-identity – for instance, name change, African culture, linguistic style, slave tradition, racial lineage, and the right to self-determination, that is, controlling their political destiny and physical communities (Hopkins, 2012, 12).

Following from the above, liberation is at the centre of Black Theology. Hence, Hopkins avers that in the 1960s and 1970s, Black Theology centred the concept of liberation within religious and theological dialogue (Hopkins, 2012, p. 12). In his publication, *A Black theology of Liberation*,

James Cone argues that the theme of liberation is at the centre of Christian Theology. Cone accuses American white theology of not considering the struggles of blacks in America, and hence, paid no attention to the need for black liberation. Hence, for him

“The task of Christian theology is to analyse the meaning of hope in God in such a way that the oppressed community of a given society will risk all for earthly freedom, a freedom possible by the resurrection of Jesus. The language of theology challenges societal structures because it is inseparable from the suffering community.” (Cone, 2010, p. 4).

When white theologians accused Cone’s Black Theology of being reverse racism, he rebutted their argument. He argued that theology can never be neutral and fail to take sides in the face of oppression. For him, the language of theology must be one of liberation proclaiming the end of bondage and interpreting the religious dimensions of revolutionary struggle. He further argues that in a revolutionary situation, there can never be non-partisan theology. In fact, theology has to always be identified with a particular community either that of the oppressor or that of the oppressed (Hopkins, 2012). In this case, for Cone, a theology of the victims is authentic Christian theology while that of the oppressor is a theology of the anti-Christ. He argues,

“black theology is authentic Christian theology because it identifies with the oppressed black community while American white theology is a theology of the anti-Christ because it identifies with the white communities which means it projects God as approving white oppression of black existence.” (Cone, 2010).

For Cone, by defining the problems of Christianity in isolation from the black condition, white theology becomes a theology of white oppressors, serving as a divine sanction for criminal acts committed against blacks (Cone, 2010, p. 9). Hence, the blindness of white theology to the struggles of blacks, therefore, justifies the emergence of Black Theology in America. Cone argues

“The appearance of Black theology on the American scene...is primarily to the failure of white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society. It arises from the need of blacks to liberate themselves from white oppressors. Black theology is a theology of liberation which arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of

America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the black condition. It believes that the liberation of the black community is God's liberation." (Cone, 2010, p. 5).

Hence, Black theology has a specific task of analysing the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of oppressed blacks so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition, and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression. Hence, Black Theology is a theology of and for the black community seeking to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation in that community. In his publication, *For My People: Black theology and the Black Church* (Cone, 1984), Cone sought to set boundaries of the audience for which he was writing. Hence, he sought to close his ears to the criticisms levelled against him by white theologians. For him, they were not his audience after all. Cone explains the aim of Black Theology as that of interpreting God's activity as related to the oppressed black community. Hence, Black theology is Christian Theology because "there can be no theology of the gospel which does not arise from an oppressed community" (Cone, 2010, p. 5). For him, God is revealed in Jesus as a God whose righteousness is inseparable from the weak and helpless in human society. In the Old Testament, God took the side of the oppressed; he did not maintain neutrality. He argues,

"[T]he God of the biblical tradition is not uninvolved or neutral regarding human affairs; God is decidedly involved. God is active in human history, taking sides with the oppressed of the land. If God is not involved in human history, then all theology is useless, and Christianity itself is a mockery, a hollow, meaningless diversion." (Cone, 2010, p. 6).

He traces the liberation motif from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Using the Exodus event and Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4, he emphasizes that God is always concerned about the oppressed groups in society. Codorette, Giblin and Legge aver that Cone provided the Christian community with a powerful service by pointing to the suffering and oppression of minority people in developed countries and the dismal record of the Christian churches in confronting the racism in their midst (Codorette, Giblin & Legge, 1992, p. 6).

Cone in his publications obsesses with the symbolism of the colours, white and black. He argues that whiteness is the symbol of the anti-Christ.

In his opinion, it characterizes the activity of crazy individuals fascinated by their own image of themselves, and thus unable to see that they are what is wrong with the world. On the other hand, blackness represents all victims of oppression who realise that the survival of their humanity is bound up with liberation from whiteness. Hence, Black theology seeks to analyse the satanic nature of whiteness and by doing so to prepare all non-whites for revolutionary action. In a radical demand, Cone charges that if white theology desires to be Christian theology, it has to cease to be white theology and become Black Theology by denying whiteness and affirming blackness as God's intention for humanity. Cone's theorization of Black Theology found resonance with the experiences of South Africans under Apartheid. As such, it influenced the emergence of Black Theology in South Africa. The next section focuses on Black Theology in Africa paying particular attention to South Africa where the theology became prominent.

2.1 Black Theology in South Africa: A Reflective Analysis

Maluleke traces the origins of Black Theology on the African continent to Kimpa Vita who was the first to declare that Jesus was black (Maluleke, 2022). However, it is Cone's theology that influenced South African black theologians. Cone's ideas became useful to African black theologians especially those in South Africa who were confronted with the evils of Apartheid (Codorette, Giblin & Legge, 1992, p. 6). South African Black Theology takes after American Black Theology, and it aims at relating the gospel message to the social situation of segregation and oppression in which the blacks in South Africa find themselves (Ukpong, 1984). Hence, in South Africa, Black Theology emerged in response to structural white racism in the Christian communities and lack of cultural and economic power in the black community combined with a new youth movement (Hopkins, 2012, 15). For Hopkins, the South African Black theology was a direct offspring of its own black consciousness movement headed by Steve Biko (Hopkins, 2012). Hence, in 1970, the South African Christian Movement established the Black Theology Movement Project. Masenya avers that Black theology in South Africa challenged white men's biased interpretations of the Christian Bible. Black Theology in South Africa was, therefore, embedded in the desire to champion liberation at the national

level (Masenya, 1995, p. 150). Van Arde argues that Black Theology in South Africa emerged in a context of the liberation struggle, hence, it is synonymous with the Apartheid struggle (Van Arde, 2016).

Key figures in South African Black theology are Steve Biko, Allan Boesak and David Moore. Steve Biko headed the black consciousness movement against Apartheid. Biko's movement provided avenues that influenced black theological reflection and praxis in relation to the fundamental questions of integrity and authenticity in global struggles for freedom, equity, and dignity (Boesak, 2020, 201). Boesak shows how Black theology in South Africa was greatly influenced by both North American Black Theology and Latin American Liberation Theology (Boesak, 1976). He borrows a lot from Cone and Gutierrez's understanding of what Christianity means to the oppressed. He, therefore, argues that

“Black theology is a situational theology. It is the black people's attempt to come to terms theologically with their black situation. It seeks to interpret the gospel in such a way that the situation of blacks will begin to make sense. It seeks to take seriously the biblical emphasis in the wholeness of life, which has always had its counterpart in the African heritage, trying to transform the departmentalized theology blacks have inherited from the Western world into a biblical, holistic theology. It is part of the black struggle toward liberation from religious, economic, psychological and cultural dependency.” (Boesak, 1976, p. 13).

Just like Cone, Boesak views the Exodus event as well as Jesus' proclamation of liberation to the oppressed in Luke 4 as the cornerstones of Black theology with the South African context. Jesus is the liberator of the oppressed, hence, for Boesak, Black theology is Christological theology because Christ is its centre. Kobo puts the development of Black theology in South Africa into two phases (Kobo, 2018, p. 46). The first phase is the phase of Biko, Boesak and Moore and focused on racism as the cause of the socio-political situation in South Africa in 1970s. The second phase is that of Mosala, Maimela among others who shifted their focus from racism to classism as the chief problem of the socio-political challenges in South Africa. The failure by Black theology to factor in gender oppression received a negative critique from feminist and womanist theologians. However, Kobo notes that the use of Marxist class analysis in the second

phase brought to the fore women's struggles (Kobo, 2018). Such an analysis is crucial as it centres women's struggles in the discourse of liberation theologies.

2.2 A Feminist/Womanist Critique of Black Theology

Scholarship focusing on gender and theology have critiqued Black Theology for its gender blindness. Cone accepts that his overlooking the problem of sexism in the black community and society as a whole was a failure on his part. He explains

“I have become so embarrassed by that failure that I could not reissue this volume (1986) without making a note of it and without changing the exclusive language of the 1970 edition to inclusive language. I know that this is hardly enough to rectify my failure [...] simply by changing words. But it is an important symbol of what we must do, because our language is a reflection of the reality we create. Sexism dehumanizes and kills, and it must be fought on every front.” (Cone, 2010, p. xx).

He, therefore, called on male black theologians not to be dismissive of the existence of sexism and the need to confront it within their theology. In South Africa, Masenya notes that black male theologians failed to advance black women's interests (Maenya, 1995, p. 150). Womanist theologians in particular have challenged Black Theology's presentation of God and Jesus as male. Hence, Grant (Grant, 1989) and Cleveland (Cleveland, 2022) argue that Christ is a black woman, and that God is a black woman respectively. From Watters' perspective, “the black male Christ encompasses a single-dimensional understanding of the social oppression of racism, but fails to acknowledge the multi-dimensional oppression experienced by [black women]” (Watters, 2019, 93). In her analysis, Black Theology failed to understand that black women suffer from racism, sexism, and classism. In this case, if Black Theology is to speak to women's experiences, it has to acknowledge this reality.

In the next section, I provide a synopsis of the struggles that Zimbabweans have had to contend with in a post-colonial state. I should hasten to indicate that such struggles are not unique to Zimbabwe but run through most, if not all post-colonial African states. These struggles relate to the economic, political, cultural among many other struggles.

3. Post-colonial Zimbabwe: From Struggles against Racism to Class Struggles

Zimbabwe got its independence from British colonial rule in 1980 after a protracted war of liberation against racism. However, independence in Zimbabwe saw the advent of a new class of black elites resembling the erstwhile colonizer. Scholars on Zimbabwean history have shown how the country's transition from colonial to black rule was a failed one (Mandaza, 1986; Bond & Manyanya, 2003; Zamponi, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Muzondidya, 2011). Ndlovu-Gatsheni views Zimbabwe's transitions as always fragile and unstable (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). In his analysis, the defeat of the colonial white elite did not result in a stable and democratic transition in 1980. If anything, it opened floodgates to violent inter and intra-black elite struggles for power. As a result, the African political elite failed to dismantle the colonial structures of oppression and marginalization, but quickly became comfortable within it. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that Zimbabwe was born as a successor to the Rhodesian state rather than as a new alternative (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009, p. 302). This largely alienated the majority of Zimbabweans from engaging actively in the process of state formation. Like the colonial master, the black elite in Zimbabwe is bent to show the difference between them and the poor. The otherisation of the poor is so visible. At the dawn of independence, the politically connected, and the rich were able to shift physical spaces from high-density suburbs to middle and low-density suburbs. Zimbabwe's post-colonial education also produced individuals who became successful professionals and business people in their own right. In most cases, this was a new bourgeoisie closely associated with the ruling party (ZANU PF). They too assumed the behavior of the whites. As the black elite, they employ poor blacks from the rural and/or high-density areas as house cleaners and garden boys. In order to entrench the notion of servant, they require these workers to wear uniforms in the same way they were required in the colonial era.

During Zimbabwe's first decade of self-rule, the Lancaster House Agreement acted as the supreme law. It entrenched the property rights of the white minority specifically in agriculture thereby impeding the significant changes in the distribution of economic resources (Zamponi, 2005, p. 32).

In 1998, Emmanuel Chiwome, in *Masango Mavi* expressed his pessimism in the postcolonial state's ability to deal with challenges being faced by the citizens. Through the short stories in the literary text, Chiwome projects his doubts in the ability of the state to fulfil promises made during the struggle of independence particularly the failure to resolve the land question. However, it is interesting to note that even after Zimbabwe embarked on land distribution from the year 2000, the process was merely a survival strategy for the ruling elite and was not premised on the need for the poor to access land. While arguments have been proffered that a few white elites had large tracts of land in their possession, the ruling elite in Zimbabwe has amassed several farms each at the expense of the poor majority. Hence, the poor have been condemned to perpetual servitude as some of them seek employment in the black-owned farms. What is clear is that the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) produced a new breed of black farmers, which treats its farm workers in more brutal ways than the white farmers. Stories of how farm workers go for months without pay and food are always in the Zimbabwean media. Some of the media stories are: *Zimbabwe: The plight of ex-commercial farm workers* (Relief Web, 2004), *Farm workers disenfranchised* (Institute of war and peace, 2008) and *Zimbabwe: Plight of farm workers under Black employers worse-Union* (Tapfumaneyi, 2019). The general sentiment throughout the years has been that the new farm owners are engaging in unfair labour practices. They remain unchallengeable because of their close proximity to political power. The FTLRP ignored the former farm workers and it created a new class of citizens which stayed as squatters in their own country. Sachikonye, therefore, questions how the FTLRP could reduce poverty when it was causing another section of Zimbabwean society to live in squalid conditions (Sachikonye, 2003).

Furthermore, the scourge of corruption has benefitted the politically connected and powerful at the expense of the generality of Zimbabweans. This has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Beckman makes a critical analysis of post-colonial states (Beckman, 1988). As alluded to earlier, he observed a rapid growth of a domestic ruling class which has its roots in precolonial ruling classes. In his analysis, colonial export economies had prepared the groundwork by producing commercial and professional classes that were in the forefront of the nationalist movement.

Hence, independence created opportunities for rapid advance for such groups as well as for a fast-rising class of senior bureaucrats, army officers and managers within the state sector. As a result, there emerged a ruling class that distinguishes itself from the rest of the population in terms of its own material conditions and the amount of control it exercises over the allocation of resources (Beckman, 1988, 30). In such a scenario, the poor Zimbabweans have begun to view the rich as ‘*varungu*’ (white people). This allusion is riddled with connotations of how they behave as well as how well-off they are. For example, they can afford to employ and pay salaries to their staff. Furthermore, they have managed to maintain or surpass the standards of living set by the whites. They live a totally different lifestyle when compared to the poor and vulnerable classes. Hence, they possess ‘*hurungu*’ (whiteness) in their own right. In this case, the poor always refer to them as ‘*varungu vedu*’ (our white people). At times, the metaphor has been used to denote professional employers. It is, therefore, clear that though metaphoric, we still have white people in black skins. When used loosely, it refers to anyone who is able to pay for a service. Hence, it is common in commuter omnibuses to hear conductors referring to passengers as *varungu*.

The above discussion shows that Zimbabwe is a stratified society. The post-colonial state has enriched a few black elites. Otu notes the existence of various classes in Zimbabwe (Otu, 2010). In his analysis, there is a local bourgeoisie comprising the local white bourgeoisie and the local black bourgeoisie. The latter forms the bulk of the ruling class in Zimbabwe. Below them lies the working class, which is made up mostly of urban residents, working in both the public and privately owned industries. This is inclusive of civil servants and workers working in the manufacturing and service industries. The peasantry forms the lowest class in this stratified society which Makamure said cannot be wished away (Makamure, 1987). The way society is stratified in Zimbabwe is also visible within the New Pentecostal Movements (NPMs) where partnership in these movements is determined by how well-off one is. Within a context of socio-economic challenges, Zimbabwe witnessed the emergence of a parasitic movement that uses religion to “steal” from the most vulnerable of society. In the name of “giving to be blessed”, the movement has produced flamboyant church leaders who live in plenty while members of their churches wallow

in poverty. Instead of the state regulating the activities of such churches, the political leaders actually visit these churches for political gain. What then is the relevance of Black theology in contemporary Zimbabwe?

4. The Relevance of Black Theology in Contemporary Zimbabwe

In the same way that Cone saw Black theology as indispensable in the 20th century (Cone, 2010, p. 5), I argue that considering the class struggles prevalent in African societies makes this theology even more relevant in the 21st century. Cone explains some of the weaknesses of his Black theology (Cone, 2010). He accepts that he failed to incorporate a global analysis of oppression into *A Black theology of Liberation*. The absence of a clearly focused economic, class analysis weakened his overall analysis. He accepts that the problem of the human condition involved much more than just the issue of racism. He argues that “an exclusive focus of racial injustice without a comprehensive analysis of its links with corporate capitalism greatly distorts the multidimensional character of oppression and also camouflages the true nature of modern racism” (Cone, 2010, xxii). In his analysis, without class analysis, a global understanding of oppression will be distorted and its domestic manifestations seriously misrepresented. This speaks directly to the Zimbabwean context where obsession with one’s skin colour would distort the experiences of the downtrodden blacks by elite black folks. Before I focus on this, I wish to examine arguments about the relevance of Black theology in the contemporary South African context.

After the demise of Apartheid, the question asked was whether Black theology remained relevant. Many held that with the end of Apartheid together with the democratization of the country renders Black theology irrelevant (Solomons & Klassens, 2019). The argument has been that the dawn of democracy is a significant variable for those seeking to replace liberation with metaphors deemed more suitable for South Africa’s current context. South African Black theologians have battled with questions of whether the relevance of Black theology can be sustained beyond Apartheid. Concerns have been raised on how as a theology; it has now been confined within academic walls with no trace of a movement of resistance

within communities. The challenge with South African Black theology like its North American counterpart has been its obsession with race at the expense of other forms of oppression. It neglected to challenge the hidden connections between racism and oppression related to class, gender, and religion among others. Hence, South Africa like any other African country has gained political independence but devoid of economic independence. Like Zimbabwe, there also has arisen within it a parasitic and corrupt ruling black elite. The greatest challenge with Black theology in Africa is that it was never prepared to resist black rulers. It wrongly assumed that once white colonial rule has been defeated, its work was over. It did not envisage or create possibilities of itself taking part in the reconstruction of postcolonial African states. Its silence on the abuse of office by both political and religious leaders in Africa has given birth to varied perceptions on its relevance on the African continent as a whole.

At the root of such perceptions on its redundancy is the relevance of liberation as the focus of Black theology. Chimhanda asks a pertinent question (Chimhanda, 2010): Is the liberation agenda of Black theology in Africa complete? In trying to answer this question, I will refer to my experience in the Zimbabwean academy. In 2014, during one of my lectures in the African Theology course, one student asked whether Black theology was still relevant on the African continent considering that the continent had now been freed from racial oppression. This is a question which I had pondered over for quite a long time. I had wondered whether Black theology had become redundant. I then thought that with the prevalence of class struggles in post-independent Zimbabwe in particular, Black theology needed to speak to its existence. The question that arises, therefore, is how black Christ should be so that His word rebukes 'black white' people oppressing black-black people. I use the double barrels intentionally. I assume that the usage of '*murungu*' (white) denotes that class erases skin colour or dilutes it to resemble our yester-year colonizer while poverty darkens one's black skin to the extent that there is an observable difference between the rich and the poor though at face value, they are both black. Hence, West argues that reconciliation with God does not mean that one's skin is physically black (West, 1999, p. 17). For him, basically, it depends on the colour of one's heart, soul and mind. In his analysis, it is possible for people with black skins to have lily white hearts. In this case, one's

heart defines their identity, that is, whether they choose to identify with the oppressed or the oppressor. As such, concepts such as black power may still be useful in dealing with black-to-black oppression and dispossession.

Within the Zimbabwean context, the ecumenical movement has historically dealt with the state in a way that fits within the Black theology paradigm without necessarily naming it that way. For example, during colonial times, white missionaries challenged the government on the way it was treating blacks. For instance, after the promulgation of the Land Apportionment Act (1930), the Native Husbandry Act (1951) and the Land Tenure Act (1969), Bishop Ralph Dodge of the United Methodist Church warned Ian Smith, the then Prime Minister of Rhodesia to improve the way the government was treating blacks and also to ensure that they were accorded enough space or political participation, which would then lead to their contributing to decision-making or else their continued sidelining would result in them rising up against the regime. Banana views Bishop Dodge as “an unwavering crusader of social change in Rhodesia” (Banana, 1996, 135). Another notable missionary is Bishop Donal Lamont of the Roman Catholic Church. Through various pastoral letters, Bishop Lamont castigated the government for the way it was treating blacks. For example, in 1959, he penned a pastoral letter entitled “*Purchased people*” in which he criticised the racial policies of government (Verstraelen, 1998, p. 52). The major observations of the men of the cloth were that it was not prudent for the colonial government to monopolise power, responsibility and decision-making. Their criticism led Bishops Dodge and Lamont to be deported from Zimbabwe in 1964 and 1977 respectively. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Zimbabwe Catholics Bishops Conference (ZCBC), and the Evangelical Fellowship in Zimbabwe (EFZ) started to criticize that government after realizing that the benefits of independence were being enjoyed by a few black elites. In 2006, they released a pastoral letter titled “*A Call to Conscience*” and the “*Zimbabwe We Want*” document while the ZCBC, in 2007 published a pastoral letter titled “*God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed*”. Both letters were a vicious rebuke to the ruling elite that was devoid of conscience and had mastered the skill of oppressing the vulnerable in Zimbabwe. Another pastoral letter that made the political establishment uncomfortable was

released by the ZCBC in August 2020 and was titled “The March is not Ended”. Scholars of religion in Zimbabwe have engaged with these letters in order to show how the church in Zimbabwe continues to speak truth to power as well as raising the consciousness of Zimbabweans to the fact that freedom is their right (Chitando, 2013; Tarusarira, 2016; Manyonganise, 2013, 2020, 2022). The church in this case has framed itself as the voice of the voiceless.

However, despite all these engagements between the church and the state, the state has been unrelenting in the way that it treats the vulnerable in society. Hence, like Cone, I ask the question as to whether we still have enough intellectual, political, and cultural resources in Africa to fully undermine the vicious legacy of white supremacy. The persistent reference to whiteness could be evidence that while we loath it on one hand, we envy it on the other or maybe we have come to terms with the fact that colonial legacies are here (in Africa) to stay. If then Black Theology is to be relevant in contemporary African societies in general and Zimbabwe in particular, it needs to reinvent its tools of analysis and define its role in the reconstruction process of postcolonial African societies. It has to find the courage to resist oppression and dehumanization of the poor by their black brothers and sisters. As it stands, Zimbabwe needs a radical theology such as Black theology to call to order African authoritarian rulers who are exploiting African resources for their personal benefit while the majority of people in their countries suffer. A social analysis of the reasons why postcolonial Zimbabwean society is structured the way it is socially, economically, and politically is crucial for today’s Black Theology. It needs to journey with the poor in postcolonial African societies in their struggles of oppression, dehumanization and marginalization by black ruling elites and their petty bourgeoisie counterparts. In the midst of authoritarian regimes silencing the poor who are simply crying out for survival, Black Theology needs to provide voice and hope to the poor. Black Theology needs to recreate itself into a formidable movement of resistance, this time against ‘black white’ oppressors. It is they who have sold out the struggle for the total liberation of black people, hence, Black theology should call them to order and to account for such betrayal of trust. Kee

calls on Black Theology to confront white capitalism in America, corruption and unjustified wars in Africa for it to be relevant to the poor in both continents (Kee, 2006).

5. Conclusion

The intention of this article was to argue for the relevance of Black Theology in contemporary Zimbabwe in view of the existent class struggles many years after independence from colonial rule. In doing this, the study interrogated the usage of the term “*varungu vatema*” (black white people) in reference to the black ruling elite or those with capacity to pay for services. The article highlighted that the persistence of such colour symbolisms indicate the failure by liberation movements to dismantle the structures of power built by colonial governments. In such cases, the article argued that the black political elite and the emergent black bourgeoisie simply replaced colonial rulers but continued to operate within the same oppressive power structures. As a result, the poor majority in Zimbabwe have been alienated from the state as well as the parasitic and corrupt church leaders, particularly of NPMs. What this means is that the evil that Black theology spoke against during colonialism is alive and well in post-colonial Zimbabwe as in other African countries, South Africa included. It is, therefore, evident that Black Theology remains relevant to radically rebuke the black-black oppression and dehumanization. The chapter, however, pointed to the need for Black theology to carve and reinvent itself so that it becomes effective in the postcolonial reconstruction of African societies.

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8 Rethinking Multiculturalism in Africa and Diaspora

A Tussle with Biblical Perspectives

Abstract

The advocacy in Western nations of embracing all the new cultures that have moved into Western countries in recent decades (defined here as multiculturalism) is not just a Western phenomenon but is what actually underpins African philosophy expressed in the Zulu maxim “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” (“a person is a person through other persons”). In recent years, however, a number of world leaders have come to speak out against multiculturalism, expressing concerns about integrating immigrants through multiculturalist policies. Africa too, has not been left out; the eruption of xenophobic attacks in South Africa is enough proof that multiculturalism is also failing even on the African continent. What boggles my mind is what to say of multiculturalism, has it really failed, can it be regarded as not divinely willed? That multiculturalism appears not to be God’s design for humanity finds support in some biblical passages: God confusing people’s languages (Gen. 11:1–9) and Acts 17:26 which says God “has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings” (Acts 17:26). But can one really conclude that it is God’s intention that different ethnic groups should not stay together? Concluding so, however, appears to militate against the other biblically accepted position that “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:54). Paul in Eph. 2:14–17 talks of Christ’s death as a unifying element between Jews and gentiles. It is against these vexing positions that this article, using a cosmopolitan approach, seeks to interrogate the relevance of multiculturalism in this contemporary age.

Key Words: *Africa, Diaspora, God, Immigrants, Multiculturalism, Western world*

1. Introduction

It is a bone of contention as to whether multiculturalism is still relevant or not. A strong argument that has been echoed across Western countries is that multiculturalism undermines national unity, hinders cultural assimilation as well as leads to the fragmentation of society into several ethnic factions. Whilst the advocacy for multiculturalist policies had been strong following the devastating World Wars I and II, most Western nations have remained in their protectorate mode of keeping their boundaries of power. In the case of Africa, though multiculturalism had often found support as a result of the *Ubuntu* philosophy, the xenophobic killings that have been going on leave one with the burning question: “Is multiculturalism still relevant?” To foreground the study, I begin by providing a conceptual mapping to the discussion as well as a brief background to multiculturalism. The second part first looks at the shortcomings of multiculturalism from a Western perspective context and then goes on to examine the weaknesses of the same phenomenon in an African context. In speaking of Africa, I shall limit myself mainly to examples from Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is my assumption, however, that what is obtaining in these two countries is also happening in other parts of the African continent. The third part of the discussion is a tussle with biblical narratives hovering around the aspect of multiculturalism followed by discussions on the way forward.

2. Conceptualization of Terms

2.1 Multiculturalism

In the first place, it is important to note that multiculturalism is a subject of diverse geographical interpretations. According to Clayton, it may refer to the existence of differences among a population in terms of racial, ethnic, religious and other cultural characteristics (Clayton, 2009). Equally, it may be seen as a version of political integration which acknowledges the rights and needs of minority groups within the political mainstream. A working definition, therefore, that is used in this study is one given by Ivison who says multiculturalism refers to “(1) the state of a society or the world in which there exists numerous distinct ethnic and cultural groups

seen to be politically relevant; and (2) a program or policy promoting such a society.” (Iverson, 2015, p. 1) Since a multicultural state might entail one in which different forms of recognition are granted to cultural groups to secure valuable goods, cultural membership provides equally and avoids unfairly privileging dominant groups so that there is a “genuine connection with, and respect and space for the cultural other” (Sandercock, 2003). In such a society, people work together on matters of common and intertwined goals. It is in this context that I endeavour to discuss the relevance and existence of this theory beyond geographical boundaries of mixed race.

2.2 Cosmopolitanism as the Epistemological Lens

Graness defines cosmopolitanism as an inclusive normative theory that refers to a mode of thought where all people are seen as members of a single human community and all people are held to the same moral standards, not just their fellow countrymen or citizens (Graness, 2018, p. 1). Seen from this angle, therefore, borders between countries and between racial, religious, and cultural groupings are viewed as morally meaningless. The cosmopolitan approach finds support from Pogge, who asserts that all cosmopolitan viewpoints share three characteristics: universality (everyone matters equally, regardless of distance or lack of a shared community), individualism (every human being is ultimately what matters), and generality (every human being is the ultimate concern for everyone) (Pogge, 1994, p. 89). Conceptually, the relationship between the individual and the community from a cosmopolitan approach is also a central point of the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. Having shared the epistemological lens guiding this study, I now discuss the contentious issue of multiculturalism in our contemporary times.

3. Multiculturalism in Europe

By the 1930s, Europe was made up of many nations, each one with its own separate cultural and ethnic identity. A major problem for Europe involved overlaps – minority ethnic groups living within a different majority ethnic nation. This included Germans in both Czechoslovakia and Poland,

providing Hitler with an excuse to invade these countries and plunge Europe into war (Waxman, 2019). The Holocaust perpetrated against the Jews, a long-established minority in many countries, was the most disturbing example of ethnic cleansing in history and a total reversal of multicultural integrations.

After the two World Wars devastated Europe, there was a widespread desire to minimize ethnic conflict and this has, at length, led to the formation of the European Union (EU). The desire to form “an ever-closer union” of European nations was a direct consequence of Europe’s nationalistic conflicts (Bellamy, 2013). The EU is intended to surmount all of this, to unite the various European countries in a supranational federal system. Such a “closer union” was not meant to completely override the independence of member states. As reflected in Article 4 of the Post-Lisbon Consolidated Treaty of the European Union, “The Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the Treaties as well as their national identities, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional, inclusive of regional and local-government” (Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, 2020).

However, the ethnic landscape of Europe has become much more varied. Due to the enormous death toll from World War II, European nations – whose populations had drastically declined – were in dire need of labour, and immigrants were welcomed to work in industries. The majority of these immigrants originated from colonies ruled by European countries. Furthermore, several of the colonies had a fall in their national economies after gaining independence, but despite this, their populations increased significantly as a result of better access to healthcare. As a result, there was a population surplus, with many relocating to Europe.

It was mistakenly assumed that the immigrants would all successfully integrate into their various countries and become more of Englishmen, Frenchmen, or Germans. However, the truth is that many have wished to maintain their cultural identity, which has caused a great deal of conflict and anxiety. National governments and their people are putting pressure on one another to stop the further eroding of national identity and sovereignty. The rise of more subtle and xenophobic nationalisms and racisms is suggested for example by the Danish rejection of the Euro and the election success of extreme right-wing political parties in nations like Austria,

Belgium, and France. Furthermore, as the 1990s events in the Caucasus and the Balkans tragically demonstrated, there are powerful pressures from “suppressed nations” demanding their own national states, so that territory matches with identity (Hudson, 2001).

The failure of assimilation led to the promotion of multiculturalism. The objective was that ethnicities would dwell among one another while remaining culturally distinct through maintaining their various traditions, customs and ways of thinking. This concept has been promoted in mass media right across the cultural spectrum. Be that as it may, it has led not to societal union but to fragmentation.

It is against the foregoing issue of fragmentation that in 2011 during a security conference in Munich, the then-British Prime Minister David Cameron boldly entered a conversation about multiculturalism’s failure – one that many politicians would prefer to avoid. He maintained that in order to keep people from becoming radicalized in any way, the United Kingdom (UK) needed to forge a stronger sense of national identity. He also claimed that active liberalism was needed in place of the passive tolerance of previous years (Cabinet Office, Prime Minister’s Office & Cameron, 2011; Burns, 2011). Thus, Cameroon made it quite apparent that, in his opinion, multiculturalism had failed.

Some Muslim groups were incensed by Cameron's address, as was to be expected, but others questioned the timing. Dr. Faisal Hanjra, assistant secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, called Mr. Cameron’s address “disappointing”. Another sharp critique on Cameroon’s message came from the Islamic Society of Britain’s Ajmal Masroor who thought Cameron was not comprehending the gravity of the matter. Masroor contended that the prime minister was conflating a few unrelated topics, such as extremism and multiculturalism, with national identity (BBC, 2011).

While the Muslim world in particular responded sharply to Cameron’s message, a number of international politicians have come out also against multiculturalism. Concerns over the integration of immigrants under multiculturalist policies were voiced by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, former Australian Prime Minister John Howard, former Spanish Premier Jose Maria Aznar, and former German Chancellor Angela Merkel (News Wires, 2011). Cameron and others claim that multiculturalism’s failure is multifaceted: first, by pushing minority populations to live in

isolation from the mainstream and encouraging exclusion rather than inclusion, multiculturalism has fostered lifestyles; second, minorities maintain their ethnic customs and traditions, which are at odds with society at large; third, these scattered communities serve as a breeding ground for radicalization (Tarifa & Di Monte, 2016). As evidently clear, the critique against multiculturalism from these leaders was loud and clear. Can it be concluded that it was a matter of sheer insensitivity on the part of these European leaders towards the plight of foreigners in their midst? What about in Africa, do bonds of our motherland still hold? It is this issue of shared spaces by different nationalities and ethnic groupings in Africa that I now turn my focus on.

4. Multiculturalism in Africa

The advocacy of multiculturalist policies in Western nations since the 1960s, as pointed out earlier, is not just a Western phenomenon but is what actually underpins the African philosophy expressed in the Zulu maxim “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*,” (“a person is a person through other persons”), also common in Shona as “*munhu munhu nekuda kwevanhu*” meaning the same thing: “a person is a person because of others.” This philosophy also has since found expression in the words of John Mbiti, who coined the famous dictum: “I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106).

In Africa, *ubuntu/unhu* is the cog around which life revolves. What is enshrined in the *ubuntu* philosophy finds expression in the words of Ngwane who argues:

“The world of MUNTU is a vision of the world whereby Man is driven to create sustainable societies where the verbs to be and to become take primary place over the verb to have, and where everyone’s work, more than simply a means to a financial end, contributes towards building a better, more sustainable world for our children.” (Ngwane, 2018, p. 30)

What is quite disturbing, however, is the fact that Africa is fast degenerating into a society that no longer upholds what it has long been known for, namely, mutual recognition of and respect for each people and culture. In Zimbabwe, for example, the current times, in which we are living, show that it is no longer a place where the verbs “to be” and “to become” take

primary place over the verb “to have,” but rather an inversion of the said verbs. A cartel wants to keep oiling its pockets regardless of the suffering majority. Instead of everyone’s work being more than simply a means to a financial end and contributing towards building a better and more sustainable world for our children, financial gains are driving people’s mentality. From a vegetable seller to a heavy machinery marketer, focus is now on outwitting the buyer. Writing on poverty as a result of economic globalisation, Joachim Kügler captures so well this global trend when he says:

“The gap between those who are well off and those who suffer is getting wider and wider and additional threats like HIV/AIDS contribute to the ‘shadow of death’ which many people are living in. This process can be seen in the Western countries, but is much more dramatic in the global South, that is, in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.” (Kügler, 2012, p. 1)

One wonders then, what shall our children hang onto when our generation is gone? In Zimbabwe, it is not just the issue of the prioritization of “to have” which is a problem, lack of mutual recognition of and respect for other people and their cultures may be said to date back to the colonial times. We have, for example, Malawian descendants who first came to Zimbabwe as labour migrants during the period of colonial labour migration (Chibaro/Mthandizi), between the 1890s and the 1970s (Bhanye, 2023). These people have suffered stigmatisation of various sorts from the Zimbabwean people. Among the demeaning forms, one finds the use of the derogatory label “*MaBwidi*,” in reference to them, a term that characterises one as a halfwit. After independence in 1980, the government used to carry out raids in townships to flush out Malawians and other foreign nationals so as to deport them or force them into refugee camps. As for those who had managed to secure a Zimbabwean citizenship, they were not allowed to vote as their identity documents were engraved with the label “A” meaning “Aliens” (Manyowa, 2022). On several occasions, the then President, Robert Mugabe derogatorily referred to Zimbabweans of foreign descent as “*vanhu vasina mitupo*” (totemless people). Their denial of an opportunity to vote remained until Mugabe was removed from power. The same kind of ill-treatment towards people of Malawian origins happened to Mozambicans during the protracted war between Frelimo and Renamo rebels. Mozambicans who sought refuge in Zimbabwe were

either deported back or forced into refugee camps. A few who managed to evade arrests worked in rural areas and were mostly known by the derogatory terms “*Makarushu*,” “*Moscan*” or “*Bherebhedha*.” Even up to the time of writing, in and around townships, derogatory jokes about Malawians, Zambians and Mozambicans continue to be exchanged in beerhalls, barbecues and even in homes. Manyowa was thus right to remark, “Zimbabwe is not an ‘innocent’ country when it comes to xenophobia” (Manyowa, 2022).

Looking beyond the borders of Zimbabwe, the not-fully resolved conflicts which characterize the Great Lakes Region, for example, the armed conflict in Darfur, are also obtaining in the southern region of Africa. According to Ebegebulem, the Dafur crisis which started in 2003 is not a recent development but is rooted in ages of resources and racial conflict between Durfurians of Arab and African descent (Ebegebulem, 2012).

In South Africa, for example, while there is need to give credit to the great role played by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as it promoted relative peace and co-existence in the country, it failed to bridge the gap between black South Africans and their white counterparts. Some Afrikaner/Boer communities continue to cling to their old mentality that blacks are the cursed sons of Ham and, hence, should continue under the subjugation of the whites. The whites in South Africa have indeed remained in control of the economy as they continue to own vast tracts of land and other key economic structures such as the mining industry. This surely remains a time bomb as some revolutionary minded people like Julius Malema continue to call for the indigenization of the economy. While the ruling ANC party continues to take a kid-glove approach to the matter, the pent-up disgruntlement of the general public over such an imbalance of the economy has often been projected on the foreigners who are accused of taking over jobs and, hence, the xenophobic attacks as the result.

While South Africa prides itself as a rainbow nation, xenophobic attacks have been a longstanding phenomenon in post-Apartheid South Africa. Dating back to 1994, tens of thousands of foreigners have been killed and their businesses destroyed mainly as a result of their status as *makwerekwere* – a derogatory term for foreigners (Onu & Ngwube, 2022). Continual manifestations of xenophobia-fueled vigilante movements

such as Operation Dudula fly in the face of multiculturalism. Though perceived as an attempt to control rampant problems such as drugs, murder, crime and so on which are believed to be caused by out-of-control migration into South Africa, the bloody trail associated with it completely disfigures the rainbowness of the nation. The rhetoric peddled by some public officials, politicians and anti-migrant groups has helped fuel the myth that South Africa has been overrun by foreign nationals. Since these migrants are seen as having brought the country into a mess, the only way to rescue it, as believed, is by enforcing a *dudula* on them, meaning “to force out” as the word implies in Zulu (Charlie & Ford, 2023).

It is against this background of worldwide and unceasing racial conflicts that one can question the relevance of multiculturalism not only in the Western world but especially here in Africa. Do we really need multiculturalism, or it is just an advocacy devoid of any real substance? If it is God who created humanity, what are his intentions for humanity, does he intend different ethnic groups to live side by side or every nation to have boundaries of their dwellings as alluded in the book of Acts (Acts 17:26)? To find God’s possible intentions for humanity, an appeal perhaps to the Biblical texts may help throw some light into this dilemma.

5. The Tower of Babel

The first text that is of interest in this chapter is Gen. 11:1–9. Here is a recount of how God confused the languages of all the earth; and from there scattered humanity over the face of all the earth. The tower of Babel story has an *etiological* element in that the author tries to account for the origin of different languages as well as the etymology of “Babylon” and thus the Babylonian empire which caused havoc on Israel in the early sixth century B.C.E (Jursa, 2023). However, the etiological element is overshadowed by the theological impact of the story, namely, disobedience to God and the spread of sin upon the face of the earth.

Behind the story, one is able to see that since time immemorial different ethnic groups have been scattered all over the face of the earth and speak unique languages which makes it impossible, thus, for them to understand each other let alone work together. The story may, thus, be viewed as a critic as well as a warning to the challenges of trying to bring people

of different ethnic backgrounds to live and work together which, in other words, spells nothing other than the failure of multiculturalism.

That multiculturalism appears not to be God's design tends to find support in other biblical texts. We hear from the book of Acts that God "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings" (Acts 17:26). Here, the author makes it plainly clear that each nation, each people upon the face of the earth has been allotted a portion of the earth's surface to call its own. It is against these premises that it becomes unjustifiable for one nation to invade the territory of another or for individuals to encroach and dwell in other people's territories without them being welcomed.

Equally interesting is what Jesus has to say when asked, "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matt. 24:3). He warned that "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matt. 24:7). The word "nation" here is translated from the Greek word *ethnos*, from which we get the words *ethnic* and *ethnicity*. What Jesus is basically saying here is that prior to the parousia, his second coming, there would be a time of great ethnic conflict which basically is one of the inevitable results of mingling diverse people or groups together.

Can one, therefore, conclude and say it is God's intention that different ethnic groups should not stay together? Is multiculturalism really a failure? Concluding that God does not intend ethnic groups to stay together militates against the other biblically accepted position that "God shows no partiality" which is alluded in Acts 10:44–48. The pericope as a whole stand as one of the turning points in the history of the early Church. Before the Gentile community, represented here by Cornelius, could be members of the Christian community, Peter had to unlearn something. As pointed out in the Barclay's Commentary, strict Jews were of the opinion that God had no use for the Gentiles to the length even of saying that help should not be given to a Gentile woman at childbirth, because that would only be to bring another Gentile into the world (Barclay, 1956–1959). The lesson that even Jewish Christians could not argue as they listened to Peter as he gave his account was that God shows no partiality as he had given his Spirit to the Gentiles, too. Prior to this incident, Peter was already on the way to unlearning some of the rigidity in which he

had been brought up as he had found his feet in the house of a man named Simon, who was a tanner (Acts 9:43), an unclean profession in Jewish eyes. Later, when the emissaries of Cornelius came to knock at his door, they came no farther than the door knowing the Jewish outlook but Peter showed them hospitality by letting them in (Acts 10:23). These events speak to the biblical foundations of multiculturalism.

Paul in Eph. 2:14–17 talks of Christ’s death as a unifying element between Jews and Gentiles. He says:

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity... so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.” (Eph. 2:14–17)

Commenting on this passage, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops brings to light that the Gentiles lacked Israel’s messianic expectation, lacked hope for salvation and knowledge of the true God but through Jesus all these religious barriers between Jews and Gentiles had been transcended and now Jews and Gentiles were united into a single community imbued with the same Holy Spirit and worshiping the same Father (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2019–2024). In short, what the text shows is that it is part of God’s plan to bring peoples of different nationalities together irrespective of what appears irreconcilable between them. The enmity, xenophobic tendencies, racist attitudes and all other forms of hatred among different groups were all atoned for by Christ on the cross. Out of evil, therefore, God created the best for humanity. This has been and remains part of God’s ways to bring good out of evil.

6. Challenges as Opportunities for Improvement

Indeed, concerns over the integration of immigrants under multiculturalist policies by international world leaders have been loud and clear in as much as concerns are being raised against those labelled *makwerekwere*,

but should we sacrifice all that is *unhu* in us because of the said challenges? No matter what it takes, *Ubuntu* calls us to believe and feel “your pain is my pain, your wealth is my wealth and your salvation is my salvation” (Ngwane, 2018, p. 30). Without *Ubuntu*, in other words, humankind is enveloped by greed, selfishness, immorality, pride and other vices (Kelly, 2015).

Alongside the issue of drugs and other crimes being blamed on the foreigners, a fact which cannot be denied when one considers the number of foreigners in South African jails – in 2017, for example, there were 11, 842 foreigners in South African prisons, 918 for murder and 454 for rape (Manyowa, 2022) – the issue of limited resources often comes up. Not to say the law should not take its course when it comes to critical issues, but there is perhaps still need to awaken the spirit of African brother- and sisterhood in us. As Africans, I believe we are stronger when we are together. Painful though it may look when we consider what is in us as human but we should not allow ourselves to feel at home when a brother/sister next door is dying of hunger even if we feel the only reserves remaining are for us. We may not all be saints but Mother Theresa’s words must ring a bell in us when she says, “A life not lived for others is not a life,” and, “Love to be real, it must cost – it must hurt – it must empty us of self” (Turnbull High School). Immigrants themselves should not take this as open licence to expect showers of love flowing only their direction, they too need to reciprocate. They too need to feel for the people whose daughters are being raped, dear ones being robbed or murdered and work to promote the welfare of every person in their neighborhood regardless of race, color or origin.

Even the biblical texts referred to above, when interpreted from a cosmopolitan perspective, they do actually complement each other. Save for administrative purposes, borders between countries do not serve any other high purpose. Seen from this angle, borders between countries and between racial, religious, and cultural groupings need to be viewed as morally meaningless. Challenges, therefore, that arise as a result of multiculturalism should not be viewed as an evil in themselves that validate the relegation of this noble pursuit. What is perhaps of importance is to look at these challenges as opportunities to improve our relations as humanity as well as work for the good of our Mother Earth. As noted above, out of

evil (cross) God created the best for humanity. This has been and remains part of God's ways to bring good out of evil. Instead, therefore, of seeing our diversity as a source of conflict, we need rather to remodel our diversity by working for justice as one so that no group or leader takes advantage over others.

7. Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion, I attempted to understand the challenges associated with the advocacy in Western nations of embracing all the new cultures that have moved into Western countries in recent decades. I have also noted that though multiculturalism underpins the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, the philosophy has now been put to test as several African nations have a record of different ethnic groups butchering each other in xenophobic and genocide attacks. The record of killings both in Europe and Africa appeared to spell none other than the failure of multiculturalism. To find a way forward in dealing with the challenges associated with multiculturalism, I have probed what the Creator's intentions could be for humanity. Two vexing positions have been discussed, on one side is the allusion in Acts 17:26 that God intends each nation to stay within its given boundaries and the other position finds expression in Eph. 2:14–17 which talks of Christ's death as a unifying element between people of different backgrounds. While on the surface the positions may look opposed to the other, the moment we bring the Christ figure into context we would find that boundaries were just meant for administrative purposes. Through the unifying element of Christ's death, it is possible for different ethnic groups to live side by side. Through Jesus, all ethnic, religious, political and social barriers between peoples of nationalities have been transcended and now all have been united into a single community imbued with the same Holy Spirit and worshipping the same Father. Even for nations which do not bow to the God of the Christian world, religious pluralism teaches us that every individual in a religious diverse society has the rights, freedoms, and safety to worship or not to, according to their conscience. Just as individuals have those given rights, they should always remember that they also have a duty to respect and promote the rights of other people different from them. Seen from that angle, therefore, one

can be able to say that instead of looking at the challenges that arise as a result multiculturalism as an evil in themselves that validate the abandonment of a multiculturalist advocacy, there is need perhaps to look at them as opportunities to improve relations between humankind and change the face of our planet Earth for the better.

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9 The Catholic Church and Psychosocial Support for Survivors of Violent Conflicts in Kenya's North Rift

Abstract

Violent ethnic conflicts have devastating consequences on individuals, families, and communities. The physical, emotional, and psychological trauma that survivors of such conflicts experience can leave lasting scars that would affect their ability to lead healthy and productive lives. However, the community's psychosocial support can play a crucial role in the healing journey of survivors, particularly when provided from a religious perspective. Recent studies show that religion and spirituality help improve health indicators in patients, although this improvement may vary across illnesses and patients. From evidence of field work done between 2018–2020 on the Catholic Church's role in Peacebuilding, this chapter explores the way in which Church's community engagement, contribute towards psychological and/or trauma healing, for survivors of violent ethnic conflicts in Kenya's North Rift. The chapter uses a number of narratives from emergent themes from field data, as well as literature review. Data was gathered through focus group discussions, observation, and in-depth oral interviews. The arguments centre on the relevance of religious activities, and importance of community support systems in providing a sense of safety, belonging, and empowerment to survivors of violence. The support systems are in the form of support groups and therapy spaces, which are largely hinged on the theory of social capital, and the theory of contact. Ultimately, the chapter shows that a holistic approach to healing integrates psychosocial, religious/spiritual, and communal dimensions to provide a viable framework for supporting survivors of violent ethnic conflicts.

Keywords: *Catholic Church, Community Support Systems, Social Capital, Theory of Contact, Psychosocial Support, Violent Conflicts*

1. Introduction

The presentation of this chapter is methodologically conceptual and analytical, though with a few snippets of empirical data. It is geared towards engaging the role of religion in psychosocial support of survivors in the aftermath of violent conflicts. While the circumstantial focus of the chapter is Kenya's North Rift, where the author has been researching on how non-state actors assist in peacebuilding, the chapter also takes a broader perspective that allows for an analysis of the Catholic Church's frameworks that contribute to psychosocial support for survivors of violent ethnic conflicts. Specifically, the interest is in interrogating how those who have undergone violent conflicts relate not just to religion, but also use religion as an institution of psychosocial healing. Largely, the chapter looks at the institutional role of the Catholic Church, thus, religion as an agency in psychosocial support of survivors of violent conflicts.

Psychosocial support in the context of this chapter relates to the facets that enable cognitive, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of survivors of violent conflicts. These facets relate to love, care, provision, and protection of the survivors, either by use of the agency that is religion, or by encouraging the community members to engage in activities that enhance these facets. These activities and processes are aimed at improving the wellbeing of individuals and communities holistically, while helping with the integration process that allows for normalcy after the effects of violence including life and material loss, and trauma of those affected. Psychosocial support speaks to processes that enable individuals and communities going through difficult situations to build resilience through available institutions in the society. The term depicts the need for those going through different crises, to engage with their local environment and communities through the available structures that contribute towards a hope for a better future and social connectedness, as snippets from a past research will show.

The research on the Catholic Church and their work on peacebuilding was carried out in West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet, Turkana, Uasin Gishu and Nandi counties in the period between September 2018 and March 2020. Although the research largely focused on peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, survivors' psychosocial needs and their struggles seemed to

be an emergent theme. From the preliminary leads, and especially focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interviews (KII) data, analysis is made to show how mobilization for peacebuilding within communities provide support systems for the psychosocial needs of survivors of violence. It should be clarified that the said research's objective was to survey, and document evidence of the Catholic Church's peacebuilding efforts, and projects thereof. Subsequently, the chapter uses anecdotal evidence from the research to argue for further research and strengthened efforts by the Church and other agencies working in the area, on this challenge, that a wide array of literature seems to flag.

The communities in Kenya's North Rift region are largely pastoral (Leff, 2009), although there are pockets where agriculture is widely practised especially in the Uasin Gishu, Nandi and Elgeyo Marakwet counties. While in some pockets of the region conflicts are purely defined by historical wars on access and ownership to land (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022), in other cases, the conflicts are largely among pastoral communities resulting from a number of factors. For the pastoral groups, their economic activities are largely defined by the wellbeing of their livestock (Andebo & Kibet, n.d.). Ironically, the area is the poorest in the country (Mkutu & Wandera, 2016), as it seems to be quite marginalized (Olsson, Eklundh & Ardö, 2005), and indeed suffers the worst of droughts in the country, leading to recurrent loss of their herds (Witsenburg & Adano, 2009; Bolton, 2017). These droughts are related to the global and local changes in climate (Boko et al., 2007; Andebo and Kibet, n.d). The loss of herds of sheep, goats and cattle in the areas that are hit hard by climate change in a way necessitates replenishing (Bollig, 1990; Boko et al., 2007) through what was culturally known as cattle rustling and originally used as game of power (Bolton, 2017; Bollig, 2009). Many pastoralist communities in the region traditionally raided cattle from other communities to build or restock herds. This was done in a way that was stealth, and if need be, with traditional weapons (or none), constraining violence to low levels (Bolton, 2017). This has since changed due to economic hardships. Most raids now leave victims dead, physically challenged, and in economic want (Bolton, 2017; Leff, 2009; Halden, 2007, Olsson, Eklundh & Ardö, 2005; Mahmoud, 2011; Scilling, Opiyo & Scheffran, 2016; de Vries, Leslie & McCabe, 2006).

Scholarly work now shows that cattle raids have become quite fatal and are seriously threatening the lives of communities that are affected in a myriad of ways. Bolton argues that while traditional cattle raiding in East Africa was driven by concerns of raising dowry, replenishing stocks, demonstrating bravery, and taking revenge, this has changed in the last three decades (Bolton, 2017). Raiding has now transformed into a commercialized illicit cattle trade (Bolton, 2017). With the economic and climate crises in the region (Leff, 2009; Boko et al., 2007; Mahmoud, 2011; SRIC, 2016; Greiner, 2013), the raiding of cattle has intensified, and is complicated by presence of arms (Mkutu, 2007). Given the area's location, where raiders can access three international borders of Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia with ease, regional organized crime is eminent. Raiders can easily find regional central marketplaces to launder the stolen cattle as Bolton (2017) explains. In fact, there remains to be a causal link between the movement of cattle, arms, and other illicit goods (Bolton, 2017; Leff, 2009; Mkutu, 2006; Mkutu, 2008; Eaton, 2008; Bevan, 2007). Further, given the involvement of high-level political leaders profiting from this illicit trade (Mkutu, 2007; Mkutu, 2008; Bolton, 2017; Bollig, 1990), the cattle raiders raid with impunity as they enjoy the protection of these leaders. The raiders have now turned into organized militias (Bolton, 2017; Leff, 2009), who are heavily armed, and pose a threat to the limited security personnel in the region, given its marginalization.

Given these developments, it is clear now that the traditional customary norms that constrained violence through local peace pacts which took care of the extremes of raids have now diminished. Other scholars argue that the traditional leaders and systems that were once respected and would control conflicts have slowly waned (Devine, 2016) with the leaders accused of conniving with the warriors for raids and benefiting from the trade of stolen livestock (Bollig, 1990). Further, the systems of common pasture regulation (Bolton, 2017) that once existed to regulate the communal land are no longer given much attention.

Research warns against reading pastoralist conflict through the lens of "culture", that is, pathologizing nomadic and semi-nomadic people as inherently problematic (Devine, 2016; Bolton, 2017; Greiner, 2013), where rustlers steal from their "enemies" as a way of retaliation, gaming, and a means to acquire more, mainly to pay dowry and debts (Bolton, 2017).

This however does not imply that the conflicts happen without a cultural context. The caution is on understanding the dynamics of cattle rustling and the contexts that complicate the vice. Bolton (2017) and Greiner (2013) further indicate that pastoralist conflict is often misrepresented as a localized, outmoded and “primitive” practice of “cattle rustling,” yet pastoralist conflict is often a manifestation of broader conflicts in the region’s “peripheries” and overlaps with marginalization, tensions over power, wildlife conservation, climate change issues that affect access to pasture and water. Other scholars link the conflicts to a wider continental picture of many and complex reasons for conflicts in Africa, including inadequate governance, rampant corruption, heavy dependence on natural resources and ongoing cycles of violent conflict (Halden, 2007; Olsson, Eklundh & Ardö, 2005).

Picking an example of Turkana and West Pokot; the two counties share one of the longest borderlines in Kenya, which has been described as a conflict corridor. The borderline, as Shalom-SCCRR (2020) explains, is predominantly inhabited by the pastoralist from both the Turkana and Pokot communities who have over the years been in conflicts over cattle raids (Devine, 2016; Kratli & Swift, 1999; Eaton, 2008). The conflict hot spots along the borderline are Loima Sub-County, Turkana South Sub-County, Pokot Central Sub-County, and Pokot North Sub-County. The causes of inter-communal conflict along the Turkana-West Pokot borderline are a result of intricate factors that include governance policies, socio-economic and political marginalization, availability of illegal arms, competition over natural resources, inadequate land tenure system, insecurity, inadequate utilization of traditional mechanisms for addressing conflict among many other factors (Shalom-SCCRR, 2020; Devine, 2016; Kermut, 2016; Okumu, 2013). These different factors explain the structural nature of the conflicts (Devine, 2016).

Since the conflicts have been going on for a while and in fact may be termed as the most persistent in the history of Kenya (Devine, 2016), once in a while, the government uses the military for disarmament. The process is always brutal, not just to the gangs and bandits, but also the communities as they are coerced and forced to provide information on the targeted groups. This is more devastating given that some of the community members have already suffered losses of their cattle, injuries, and

death of their loved ones during the raids. Some of the most affected are the old, children, women, and the defence teams that are mainly made up of the youth. The violence, theft and continued fights result in loss of lives, massive loss of livestock, displacement of people, weakened inter-communal relations, disruption to socio-economic activities and livelihood systems, destruction and closure of education facilities, stalled development among many other negative effects. Further, the few communities engaged in agricultural activities are hindered from accessing large areas of pasture, water, and fertile agricultural lands during and after the conflicts (Shalom-SCCRR, 2020). Besides breeding personal and social hatred, these effects contribute to futile efforts towards reconciliation, and affect the broader agenda of social cohesion (Gathogo, 2012). The largely unspoken, invisible and unaddressed resultant effects of these conflicts is trauma, fear, and depression that affect the survivors' psychological and emotional lives. This is a silent distractor of individuals' self-esteem, and the development process.

There have been sporadic efforts to support the survivors when and where conflicts happen, although the help is never enough. Most of these efforts seem to focus on humanitarian assistance (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022, Kilonzo & Onkware, 2020, Shalom-SSCCR, 2020, Devine, 2016). This then implies that the psychosocial and emotional needs of the affected communities are hardly given attention. Some institutions, like the Church though, live within these communities. In fact, one may argue that the community members are the Church. This then speaks to dual perspectives of providing support. The spiritual as well as social/communal support, by either the Church leadership and members, as well as the larger community to those suffering diverse mental and emotional challenges. But is this the case? The sections below explain this.

2. Psychosocial Support and Religion

Religion can simply be defined as an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent [God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality] (Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001). This implies that there is some form of a structure that defines what constitutes religion. This is unlike spirituality,

which mainly focuses on individual's belief practices that need no approval from a structured system. Studies in the mid and late 19th Century proved that religion is important for mental health. It would be associated with positive mental, physical, and emotional health outcomes (Cohen & Koenig, 2004; Moreira-Almeida, Koenig & Lucchetti, 2014). This is unlike before when religion was associated with psychotic episodes and negatively associated with mental health (Cohen & Koenig, 2004).

Although some studies show that for mental health patients who attributed first-episode psychosis to supernatural causes or consulted a traditional healer before presenting to formal mental health services had more negative symptoms and spent longer without formal treatment (Burns, 2012), the question for low income and resource settings, would be, what options do these patients have? It is even more challenging for survivors of violence, or those still undergoing violence, with no help from the state. How often do these victims of violence think through the pain and suffering and the questions that require answers for their challenges? What are their chances of survival? How can their situations be located within religious perspective with an aim of getting help? This chapter focuses on these questions to provide a framework through which the Church and community members think through the psychosocial challenges posed by conflicts, and hinge on the facets available for support.

On the overall, psychosocial support for the survivors of violence contribute to greater achievements of mental health, which, according to WHO, "is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (WHO, 2014, p. 14). It is proven that psychological factors may involve stressful events that may be contributory factors to psychosocial disorders (WHO, 2001; WHO, 2021). Subsequently, the chapter is right to point out that the challenges that are experienced by the survivors of violent conflicts in the North Rift face major psychosocial challenges that require institutional attention and support. It is also evidenced that mental health-related challenges affect 65% of people living in the rural areas in most African countries (Aderinto, Opanike & Oladipo, 2022). It is in these areas where communities are marginalized and living in extreme poverty. Omigbodun, Ryan, Fazoranti, et al. argue that people with psychological

challenges, and their families, are threatened by poverty and their very survival remains on the line (Omigbodun, Ryan, Fasoranti et al., 2023). Without some form of tangible support, the situation remains catastrophic.

But what evidences the need for psychosocial support systems among survivors of violent conflicts in Kenya, and particularly this region? The African Region has an average of 1.6 mental health workers per 100 000 population compared to 13 mental health workers per 100 000 at the global level (WHO, 2022). There are mental health policies and strategic plans in 76% of Member States, up by 4% from 2017 (WHO, 2020; WHO, 2022). Regardless, only 14 people per 100,000 visit outpatient mental health facilities in Africa, compared to the recommended global estimates of 1051 per 100,000 people (Aderinto, Opanike & Oladipo, 2022), with an average of 1.6 mental health workers per 100 000 population compared to 13 mental health workers per 100 000 at the global level (WHO, 2022).

In Kenya, there is no mental health surveillance system (Jaguga & Kwobah, 2020), yet the prevalence rates of mental disorders range from 29% to 56.3% (Aillon et al., 2014; Jenkins et al., 2015; Ndetei et al., 2016). There is only one psychiatrist for every 500,000 Kenyans (Office of the Auditor General, 2018), and less than 68 (1%) of healthcare facilities in Kenya that can deliver some form of mental health service (Office of the Auditor General, 2018). The situation is worse in rural areas, where basic healthcare facilities are a challenge to find, and lack the necessary services.

In low resource settings, as the statistics above have shown, most people with psychological needs receive no treatment and care. Compared to cancer and other diseases, such illnesses are largely neglected. It may be argued that the cultural perception of mental health issues relates the condition to traditions of witchcraft and/or a connection to the spiritual concerns (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, 2013). Subsequently, when one is undergoing extreme stress that may lead to psychotic episodes, and to a point that they cannot be able to engage with everyday activities in a normal way, one would culturally be described as mad or “possessed”. Such people in most cases may visit a religious leader for counselling and/or prayers, or a traditional healer for diagnosis and treatment/healing (Burns, 2013; Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, 2013). Their families too may call for spiritual help from religious leaders or cultural intervention by traditional healers.

This is especially so in the rural areas where the communities might not only be unaware of health interventions that address these concerns, but also, the health facilities specializing in mental health issues are also lacking.

Stigma is also a factor that affects the health-seeking behaviours of the patients. Since communities view psychological illnesses as related to spiritual attacks, and in certain instances relate these to witchcraft, those going through these challenges are likely to face discrimination from their families and close community networks. Therefore, it remains relevant for the Church to not just provide enablers for psychological, but also social support. The latter is more relevant for direct therapy to the challenges the survivors of violence are facing, as seen in the different activities by the communities as supported by the Catholic Church below.

3. The Catholic Church's Role in Psychosocial Support

From the field data, some of the highlights that indicate the need for psychosocial support included the following voices:

“I know he [referring to her neighbour] and others who were in his company, stole my cows and destroyed my property. I have deliberated on hiring thugs to kill him because I cannot live to see him every other day, and he is just free.” (Part of a story of a middle-aged woman during a FGD at Burnt Forest, in October 2018).

“I lost my husband and a child to the violence. I am just tired. See now I am living as a squatter yet my family had land. Sometimes I feel that it might be better not to live. Death might take away all the pain.” (A middle-aged woman during an FGD at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Eldoret November 2018).

“They [referring to perpetrators of violence] raped my physically challenged daughter and my wife. They beat them up and tied them leaving them helpless. I was away at work at the time and I could not help my family. We were separated for over a month as they suffered the ordeal. Tell me, which man does not protect his family. How am I supposed to live with myself?” (A 36-year-old male during an in-depth oral interview at the Sacred Heart Cathedral in October 2018).

“This war will never end. We expect it every time and again, especially when there are political triggers. How long are we going to live in fear? How many of our people can we watch die every time there is war?” (A middle-aged man in an FGD on 13 September 2018, at St. Patrick Catholic Church, Burnt Forest).

“Our people are not fine. If someone lost a house, children, husband, wife or a relative; if they were physically assaulted, raped or sodomised; if their property was destroyed and they are struggling to make ends meet; if they live in fear; and all the problems associated with the conflicts, what can you tell them to heal quickly. It is not easy. It is a process that takes long. As Church leaders we try, but it is difficult. They are hurting.” (Njoki, not her real name, a secretary to one of the Catholic church parishes, and a coordinator of PCPs activities in a KII at St. Patrick Catholic Church, Burnt Forest 14 September 2018).

From the past research, these are just a few indications that psychosocial needs are dire, and although the Church and other agents might be targeting the physical needs of the survivors, the psychosocial needs require attention.

For conflict resolution and peacebuilding among the warring communities, the Catholic Church has worked through a model, the *Amani Mashinani* Model, that has 12 steps. These include: Analysis, intervention and interruption of the conflicts; protection, sanctuary and relief; one-to one meetings with community leaders/representatives; enlarged meetings of small to small-group with wider representation; sharing of food as a symbol of agreement to begin dialogue; intra-ethnic meetings; airing of grievances from the conflicting sides; preparation of the agenda and inter-ethnic meetings; reporting back and caucusing with communities; peace connector projects; social contracts; and, monitoring and ongoing development of the agenda (Korir, 2009; Kilonzo & Onkware, 2020; Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). Although not clearly pronounced, embedded within these twelve steps are enablers of spiritual and psychosocial support. The section below will pick a few and exemplify and cite voices of those that have benefited from the in-direct psychosocial support activities resulting from the model. This is to show that the Church has the potential to build a more comprehensive framework for psychosocial support.

3.1 Protection and Sanctuary

Most conflicts in the area will lead to displacement. Both past and recent conflicts have meant that most of those affected relocate to safer places or take refuge in churches or police stations. With such displacements, daily activities are affected. Children are unable to attend classes, and their parents as well unable to undertake their everyday activities. At times, the attacks are characterised by torching of houses, killings, and maiming. The deaths and destruction of property, especially people's homes cause deep trauma to those affected. From the study findings, the Catholic Church is said to provide temporary sanctuary, which partly relieves the survivors. In the churches, the survivors receive humanitarian aid, and through the priests and nuns, receive some form of counselling. The survivors also build some form of agency because they are able to share their problems, and although they may not have solutions to the same, the dialoguing and airing of their traumatic experiences is therapeutic. Bringing the survivors together is therefore one way of enhancing community dialogue through the Church's theory of contact, which the leadership believes is resourceful in many ways. In an interview in 2019 at the Sacred Heart Cathedral, a lady survivor who was once hosted in the Church, and now attends services at the Church explained:

“For us to be here, it meant that we had lost almost everything, and we knew when we go back to our homes, there would be nothing waiting for us. We were however lucky that there is a place like this where we could hide our children as we waited to see what happened next. Here we were not afraid, and we could sleep, even if it was on the floor, but knowing that we were safe. We also had sessions with the priest and nuns who were talking to us, and we appreciated their concern. It helped a little.” (O.I. 5/2/2019).

This reprieve, even though for a short while, at the height of violence, was useful to the survivors. However, it also implies some interventions like providing temporary sanctuary, are short-lived for trauma patients, and the institutions involved may have extra responsibilities integrating affected community members fully, as well as follow-up on their mental health.

3.2 Peace Connector Projects (PCPs)

One way in which integration can be attained is through establishment of long-term peace-connector projects (simply referred to as PCPs). These, although from face-value may seem to be economic ventures to revive and replenish what was lost through the conflicts, they serve a number of important purposes. The theory of contact, as the Church argues, is meant to ensure that members of the community, especially those warring, remain in touch, and can dialogue in diverse ways. The dialogue process is key because it relieves the psychological pain and reminds communities that they are still human beings, and, they have a shared future. The PCPs, are also meant to disrupt the conflicts. Through the projects, communities are reminded of more important things than war. The founding Bishop of the *Amani Mashinani* model, the late Cornelius Korir, is cited as having often said “How long will you fight? You may pose a little while to plant because a hungry stomach need food. Not war. Once you plant you can continue with the fight as the crops grow.” (Korir, 2009; Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). Of course, one would clearly see that once the fight is disrupted by planting, the warring groups would not go back to war immediately after planting, and as such, the Bishop would distribute planting seeds, in a process where he would ensure that the warring groups shared seeds from one container. This is a way of psychologically disrupting those involved in killings and destruction of property and reminding them of useful involvements. It is a psychological approach to ending war. The idea of PCPs playing the role of bringing the warring parties together for dialogue to take effect also serves as a psychological and emotional support space and for continued peacebuilding. If well-organized, the PCPs harbour in them the potential to support those who need mental and emotional therapy; but if not watched, can also turn out to spaces for extreme hatred. Take an example of common cattle dips and common schools that the Church either re-innovated or built, along the borders of the warring communities (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). The idea is that community members must meet in, or around these facilities. During parents’ meetings in the schools, the parents from both sides are able to communicate on matters affecting their children. Similarly, the youth taking care of the cattle, and the elders manning the cattle dips have to talk when they meet around the cattle dips (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). This

is part of dialogue processes that in the end may create an avenue for conflict resolution and peacebuilding process. The dialogue sessions are also moments of therapy. Management of these facilities therefore become key if there has to be notable benefits, especially for trust that is important for healing of the survivors of violence.

The PCPs bring community members together to enumerate their problems and discuss workable solutions. In one of such meetings, the most pressing need identified was lack of houses for survivors whose houses had been torched during the violent encounter. The communities then resolved to build houses and/or re-innovate those that had been partly destroyed, with the help of the Church, (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). Such actions that allow for expression of the power of social capital also act as foundations for trust for those undergoing traumatic experiences since both perpetrators and survivors are involved in the rebuilding and/or re-innovation of the houses. This, in a way serves to stabilize the relationships among communities.

Other PCPs include connector bridges across rivers or small valleys, where they never existed before. These are targeted at villages occupied by communities of different ethnicities, as a way of encouraging dialogues. They are symbolic, that is, indicate that each side of the divide is welcome to visit the other and begin conversations of healing and peacebuilding (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). This therefore implies an indirect way for the communities to forge a way forward and deal with the traumas that affect them.

3.3 Merry-go-round and Table Banking

Closely related to the PCPs, although an activity that is run purely by the community members without the intervention of the Church are merry-go-rounds and table banking. The Britannica Dictionary defines merry-go-round as “a large round platform that turns around in a circle and has seats and figures of animals (such as horses) on which children sit for a ride”. In the context of human activities referred to here, it is a terminology that literally translates to happiness going round the circle. A group with a common interest of benefiting each other agrees to pull certain resources together whenever they meet, or at an agreed time, and through an agreed format, distribute these resources to groups’ members. It builds

on the concept of social capital that allows for members to use their available resources to help those that are challenged.

The activities vary from farming, where members of the group help each other in farm work in turns, thus labour as a resource; to contribution of resources such as domestic animals, kitchenware, food, and money, among others. For money as a merry-go-round activity, there is a wide practise called table banking. In this case, members meet on the specified day and contribute money around a table/sitting (thus the coinage, table banking), which is immediately loaned out to individuals who are in need, and in turn, they pay with small interest. In every sitting, the collected money may be loaned out in entirety, or whatever is not loaned out, may be deposited in the group's bank account. The loanees agree to pay back the money during similar meetings, around the table/sitting, without fail, and with a little specified interest. There is no collateral needed for these loans, and members act as each other's surety (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). This is a form of trust that enables the members not just to work on social modalities (unwritten constitution), but also have relationships that are built on trust. Woven around this is trust; it is social and psychological therapy. Members who at one point were the worst of enemies, can forge relationships, on their own, and under their own defined unwritten "constitutions" to help each other through their social and economic challenges.

Most of the communities visited had these group activities running, and members explained that benefits spanned beyond economic gains. The cohesive role played by these activities, which then build some form of trust among the members, was hailed. This in the end has a positive influence on the survivors' mental health. Getting into a merry-go-round or table banking group is some form of signing of a contract where members agree to work with each other towards a common goal. Although the contract is not to resolve the underlying issues of conflicts, it signifies a serious process of engaging in dialogue, and also solving the social and economic challenges. Implied in this is a process of healing from fear, hatred and trauma, since such forums provide an avenue for storytelling, consulting, borrowing of ideas, and in the end, trust.

3.4 Social Contracts

These are both formal and informal agreements made between individuals, groups, or communities, to either work together in harmony, or to engage in certain activities that are deemed relevant for peacebuilding. This is the second last stage of the peacebuilding model by the church. This implies that it may take a while before social contracts of any nature can be signed because for any parties to sign these, there has to be trust. Trust is built over a long period of time, and subsequently, these seem to be long term solutions for survivors of psychosocial problems. Further, it can only be perceived that within and outside the confines of these agreements are just possibilities of psychosocial and spiritual support activities. This is because the activities are not specifically tailored for mental, emotional, and psychological support, although they have a component of social integration as seen in intermarriages and oath-taking forms explained below.

3.5 Intermarriages

The intermarriages happen among the ethnic groups that live in this area, and who also are engaged in the conflicts (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022). The research participants argued that when there are intermarriages between the ethnic groups, it is a ray of hope that the communities will be enjoined and enjoy some kind of intercultural unity. It is a way of signing a social contract of friendship, of closer relations. Although this may be a long-term, and an indirect intervention, it gives a promising hope and future for those going through psychosocial instabilities. Literature shows that in traditional society set-up, marriages are a way of resolving conflicts, and building long-lasting peace (Eze & Okey-Agbo, 2016). This may apply to date since from the research, participants seemed to support ethnic intermarriages as a way of uniting the families and the two communities at large. They argued that it could be a long-lasting move towards healing.

3.6 Oath-taking

An oath is a solemn declaration that mainly invokes God or spiritual world. This means that they are binding and there are consequences that result from violation of the declarations. According to Burkert, “The function of an oath is to guarantee that a statement is absolutely binding,

whether it be a statement about something in the past or a declaration of an intent for the future.” (Burkert, 1985, p. 250). Oaths, therefore, are serious forms of social contracts. They are so serious that communities are hesitant to jump into signing them, and therefore there has to be a form of negotiations and a series of events, meetings and well-laid down ways in which this should happen.

Oath-taking in the context of spiritual and psychosocial support was demonstrated in the sense in which the Church was willing to bend ways in which it operates to accommodate culture. In one of the research sites during data collection in 2018, one of the priests in the churches we visited was preparing for oath-taking for warriors from two different ethnic groups, which to them meant the need for a complete end of war (Onkware and Kilonzo 2022). For the two communities, getting into a social contract therefore indicated possibility of an end to an era of hostility. Although this may not seem to be directly related to addressing of psychological torture that the survivors of violence go through every time there is a conflict, a closer analysis shows that it can be a permanent solution towards attaining a solution to the violence. Although research shows that these conflicts are persistent in the region that is characterised by different ethnic groups (Devine, 2016; Mkutu, 2008; Eaton, 2008), peace, that contributes to psychological tranquillity may begin just with a few peace agreements, such as through oath-taking, among a few communities, which can then extend to others.

3.7 Prayer and Worship Groups

Literature has shown that those undergoing psychological problems in Africa are faced with the dilemmas of cultural beliefs and stigmatization (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, 2020). Further, they lack sensitization and enough health facilities that can deal with mental/psychiatric problems (Burns, 2012). This is coupled with lack of resources (Aderinto, Opanike & Oladipo, 2022; WHO, 2022). The easy and readily available help is religion (Burns, 2012). It is a therapy to their psychological challenges. This can be in the form of individual or prayers and worship. It can also be in the form of individual visits to the Church leaders, and/or invitation of these leaders to the affected homes, for prayers and counselling. For the perpetrators of violence, the psychological disturbances may be resolved

through “cleansing” or “exorcism”. Reviewed literature shows that some of the religious and spiritual activities associated with positive mental health include: attendance of services, religious activities – private or group - which may include prayer, singing, scripture reading, feeling of connection with a high power, religious beliefs (Cohen & Koenig, 2004, p. 255).

For group meetings, these are organized in the churches at specified days. They are meant not just for prayer but also for socialization. The members are also encouraged to meet in their small Christian communities (SCCs). These are the smallest cells that serve as the family cell of the church for pastoral work. They then report their activities, needs and concerns to the Church and when necessary, to sub-parishes, parishes, and dioceses. In the field, these were highlighted as the starting points of peace connector projects, whereby those meeting, besides prayer and worship, come up with development ideas on how to better themselves socially and economically. Once such dialogue begins, therapy among those with psychosocial challenges is on course.

In some other related meetings, the church would organize for prayers and worship, and sharing of meals. This involves the broader community, not just church membership. Since the Catholic Church serves not on an ethnic but communal basis, all community members attend the meetings. They argued that besides the activities of the meetings, which are prayer, singing and worship, the meetings are important spaces for starting dialogue, sharing of burdens, and charting the way forward for peace, which is important for their psychological and emotional stability. One such example given was an activity that involved two ethnic groups at the border of Pokots and Marakwets, where they came together for prayers and worship, then made a huge cross as a sign of agreement and placed it on top of the highest hill. They named this place Kapsait Lady Queen of Peace. On January 1, members of both communities join in a procession to the cross on the hill to celebrate the peace success stories. They slaughter animals donated from both sides to celebrate as they hold interdenominational prayers (Kilonzo & Onkware, 2022, p. 198). This is therapeutic for those who have gone through psychosocial challenges in the past. St. Paul in 1st Thessalonians 5:16 encourages all to rejoice even in the hardest of circumstances. Iwański refers to it as “Rejoice Therapy” (Iwański,

2023), and such short moments of celebration and unity are significant in giving hope to the desolate.

4. Conclusion

The chapter has explored various ways in which the Catholic Church encourages communities to engage in activities that directly or indirectly contribute to the psychosocial needs of survivors of violent conflicts in some of the affected areas in the North Rift region of Kenya. Although these are emergent ways from data gathered from a large study on the role of Church in peacebuilding activities in the area, the argument the chapter makes is that institutions that work to resolve conflicts and provide support to communities going through conflicts, should work to provide services beyond the immediate physical needs. Mental/psychosocial and social needs are important. Going forward, there is a need to consider a holistic approach that targets not just the visible losses but also the psychosocial and emotional trauma of the survivors.

The chapter further argues that the Church, and religion in general seems to have an advantage of trust from the community members transitioning from conflicts. This advantage may be useful in a number of ways: first, to the Church itself, since it is a community/grassroot institution, and as such in a position to build communities of practice that are more in touch with the challenges facing survivors; second, it may act as a mediator between the communities and/or survivors, with other agents of change, include state agencies, and provide important networks and connections that are beneficial for sustained psychosocial support. Here, we would argue that the Church is the community. This is to say that churches are made up of community members, and this gives the Church leadership an advantage in understanding the challenges within these communities. Some of the mechanisms used, such as the SCCs and PCPs evidence the ease with which the Church can penetrate into the communities, and subsequently, how feasible the Church can be an agent through which other institutions gain entry and trust from the survivors of violent conflicts. These are valuable access points in addressing psychosocial needs of survivors of violent conflicts.

Finally, the chapter argues that there is need for more psychosocial targeted solutions that are not assumed within the existing peacebuilding mechanisms. This is to say that more methodical efforts need to be made to focus on the silent, but fatal challenge of mental health in general. These should categorically be substantiated from efforts that address the material needs, so that survivors understand where they can seek for help, and what institutional mechanisms support psychological issues. However, this is not to say that the latter should be at the detriment of material support. The two are interrelated as the chapter has already shown, and a holistic approach will be viable, within non-state actors and government facilities.

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Stefanie Beck

10 Afrikanische Migration, die Bibel und die Massai

Abstract

Migrationen gibt es seit Urzeiten und sind kein Phänomen der Moderne. Fremdsein und Heimatlosigkeit sind zentrale Themen im biblischen Diskursfeld und werden in der Apostelgeschichte im Kontext der Gastfreundschaft und Verkündigung reflektiert. Vor allem das Migrantenpaar Priszilla und Aquila tritt aufgrund ihrer Missionstätigkeiten in den Vordergrund. In der heutigen Zeit sind Migranten und Migrantinnen, insbesondere aus den Ländern des afrikanischen Kontinents, in den Medien omnipräsent. Doch wie sieht die Realität auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent aus? Aus welchen afrikanischen Ländern fliehen die Menschen aufgrund von Kriegen, Hungersnöten und Dürrekatastrophen und ziehen in ihre Nachbarländer oder verweilen als Binnenflüchtlinge im eigenen Land? In diesem Artikel wird in einem Gesamtüberblick die innerafrikanische Migrationssituation aufgezeigt. Im Weiteren wird auf eine Migrationsform, nämlich die des Nomadismus, näher eingegangen. Der halbnomadische Stamm der Massai-Pastoralisten, die vorwiegend den Süden Kenias und den Norden Tansanias besiedeln, wird dabei in den Blick genommen. Die besondere Lebensweise der religiösen Massai, die den Berg Ol Doinyo Lengai verehren, war auch für die ersten Missionare, die die Krieger zu evangelisieren versuchten, eine Herausforderung.

Keywords: *Afrika, Tansania, Migration, Nomadismus, Massai, Evangelisation, Apostelgeschichte*

1. Das Phänomen Migration

Migrationen sind kein modernes Phänomen, es gibt sie seit Urzeiten. Als Migrationen (lat. *migrare*: wandern, auswandern, sich verändern) bezeich-

net man räumliche Bewegungen von Menschen, die von Dauer sind. Gemeint sind dabei jene Formen von regionaler Mobilität, die „weitreichende Konsequenzen für die Lebensverläufe der Wandernden haben und aus denen sozialer Wandel resultiert“ (Oltmer, 2020, p. 20). Warum sich Menschen für eine Migration entscheiden, hat durchaus vielfältige Beweggründe. Seien es wirtschaftliche, soziale, politische, religiöse oder persönliche Motive, sie stehen je nach Relevanz und Gewichtung eng miteinander in Verbindung (Oltmer, 2020, p. 22). Voraussetzung für eine Migration sind häufig die Hoffnung und Erwartung auf Verbesserung der Erwerbsmöglichkeiten und damit verbunden bessere Lebensbedingungen. Oltmer differenziert folgende Erscheinungsformen globaler räumlicher Bevölkerungsbewegungen: die Arbeitswanderung und die Gesellenwanderung, die Bildungs- und Ausbildungswanderung zum Erwerb schulischer, akademischer oder beruflicher Qualifikationen, die Dienstmädchen-/Hausarbeiterinnenwanderung, die Entsendung von sogenannte Expats und die Heirats- und Liebeswanderung.

Nicht selten erwägen ältere Menschen, die finanziell unabhängig sind, eine Lebensstilmigration, häufig aus klimatischen und/oder gesundheitlichen Überlegungen heraus. Demgegenüber als alternativlos ist die Gewaltmigration zu betrachten, die aus einer Nötigung zur Abwanderung (meist aus politischen, ethno-nationalen, rassistischen oder religiösen Gründen) resultiert. Eine weitere Form ist der Sklaven- und Menschenhandel, die Deportation zum Zweck einer Zwangsarbeit. Das bedeutet, dass jede Art von Arbeit oder Dienstleistung von einer Person unter Anordnung von Strafen verlangt wird.

Zuletzt sei der Nomadismus und die Siedlungswanderung genannt, mit dem Ziel des Erwerbs von Bodenbesitz zur landwirtschaftlichen Bearbeitung, auf die im Verlauf konkreter eingegangen wird, sowie die Wanderarbeit/der Wanderhandel (Oltmer, 2020, p. 30–31).

1.1 Migration und Fremde in der Bibel

Ein konstitutives Moment in der Migrationsforschung ist der Begriff der Fremdheit. In allen Kulturen und Religionen ist das Fremd- und Anderssein thematisiert worden – und ist auch gegenwärtig präsent. Der Anderswoherstammende, der Andersartige kann befremdlich, beängstigend und unheimlich, sogar bedrohend wirken, wie Stählin 1954 über den *ξένος*

schreibt. Auch die neue Umgebung kann für einen Anderswoher stammenden bedrückend oder bedrohend wirken, insgesamt kann das Fremde per se gegenseitig Furcht auslösen.

Im Alten Testament erfährt das jüdische Volk immer wieder das Fremdsein. Die Israeliten sind Fremde in Ägypten, kommen als Fremde in das Verheißene Land und die judäische Oberschicht wird 597 v. Chr. ins babylonische Exil verschleppt (1Kön 15,29; 2Kön 17,6).

Im Griechisch-Römischen Kulturkreis wird ξένος zudem mit Freund übersetzt, einer, der mit dem anderen gastfreundlich verbunden ist (cf. Stählin, 1954, p. 3); denn bereits in der Antike wusste man, dass eine jahrelange Feindschaft zu Kriegen führen kann und es klüger sei, sich mit dem Fremden anzufreunden, anstatt ihn als Feind zu sehen (Grün, 2017, p. 26).

Zahlreiche Migrationstexte über Flucht und Vertreibung, über Wandschaften des Volkes Gottes und die Diaspora finden sich in der Bibel. Menschen begeben sich aufgrund von Hungersnöten in die Fremde, wie zum Beispiel im Buch Rut, das den Überlebenskampf der beiden Witwen, Rut und Noomi, in einer von patriarchalen Strukturen bestimmten Welt beschreibt.

Geprägt von der Migration ist das Neue Testament, so wie auch die Erzählung von Jesus von Nazareth, der in seiner Kindheit mit Josef und Maria vor Herodes nach Ägypten (Mt 2,14) flieht. Als Wanderprediger in Galiläa macht Jesus in seinem weiteren Lebensverlauf Erfahrungen der Fremdheit und Heimatlosigkeit. Auch für seine Jünger, die das Reich Gottes verkünden, ist die Heimatlosigkeit, verbunden mit dem Selbstverständnis, fremd (und als Gäste) auf dieser Welt zu sein, Bedingung, was ein bedeutendes Kriterium der ersten Christen ist (Polak, 2017, p. 76):

„Diese alle sind im Vertrauen auf Gott gestorben und haben das von Gott Versprochene nicht erhalten, sondern haben es nur von ferne gesehen, begrüßt und bekannt, dass sie Fremde und Asylantinnen auf der Erde sind.“ (Hebr 11,13).

1.2 Priszilla und Aquila – Gastfreundschaft und Verkündigung

Die Ausbreitung des frühen Christentums beruht auf Fluchterfahrungen, Grenzüberschreitungen und Migrationen, die in keiner anderen biblischen Schrift so intensiv reflektiert werden wie in der Apostelgeschichte. In der Apostelgeschichte sind die beiden Diasporajuden, Barnabas und Paulus, als die ersten international wandernden Apostel bekannt. Paulus, der in der wohlhabenden und multikulturellen Stadt Tarsos aufwächst, wird von Kahl als ein „interkulturell sensibler Verkündiger des Evangeliums in der Migration“ (Kahl, 2018, p. 5) bezeichnet.

Neben den drei Missionsreisen des Paulus treten in der Apostelgeschichte auch Paare wie Priszilla und Aquila auf, die missionarisch tätig sind und das Evangelium verkünden. Die beiden gehören zu den bedeutendsten Zeugen, die die christliche Botschaft verbreiten. Paulus findet (εὐρών) den Juden Aquila und seine Frau Priszilla. Die beiden haben erst vor kurzem (προσφάτως) Rom aufgrund des Claudius-Edikts verlassen und sind jetzt in Korinth, wo sie bereits vor der Ankunft des Paulus ihren Glauben an Jesus Christus bezeugen. Als Vertriebene aus Italien üben sie, wie Paulus auch, das Handwerk der Zeltherstellung aus (Apg 18,1–3).

Der nächste Ortswechsel ist in Apg 18,18 beschrieben, als Priszilla und Aquila zusammen mit Paulus über Kenchreä nach Syrien aufbrechen. Aus welchen Gründen sie aufbrechen, wird nicht genannt. Die gemeinsame Reise endet in Ephesus, wo Paulus das Paar zurücklässt (κατέλιπεν), was abermals nicht begründet wird (Apg 18,19).

Ersichtlich wird bei Priszilla und Aquila, dass die Migrationen deren Leben bestimmt, was sie als „dynamisch agierende Figuren erscheinen lässt“ (Müller-Fieberg, 2018, p. 200). Sie wechseln innerhalb des Römischen Reiches mehrmals den Wohnort, sei es aus freien Beweggründen oder gezwungenermaßen. Insofern sind Priszilla und Aquila ein Beispiel dafür, was es heißt, immer wieder alles hinter-sich-zu-lassen und beruflich wie auch sozial neu anzufangen.

Verbunden sind die Ortswechsel mit ihren missionarischen Tätigkeiten, die sie über alles stellen und dadurch in den drei großen Gemeinden – Rom, Korinth und Ephesus – namentlich in die Geschichte eingehen.

Ein für die Theologie wesentliches Merkmal, das Priszilla und Aquila auszeichnet, ist die Gastfreundschaft. Sie stellen Paulus in Korinth ihr Haus zur Verfügung und arbeiten mit ihm zusammen (Apg 18,3). In Ephesus nehmen sie den Alexandriner Apollos bei sich auf und fördern ihn (Beck, 2022, p. 249). Priszilla und Aquila werden damit zu Apollos' Fürsprecher und motivieren ihn, dass er nach seiner Weiterreise auch in Achaia Gastfreundschaft erfahren wird (Apg 18,27). Sie zeigen damit nicht nur eine vorbildliche Rolle als Gastgeber, sondern auch dass sie aufgrund ihrer Missionstätigkeit ein Netzwerk haben, von dem Apollo profitieren kann (Müller-Fieberg, 2018, p. 202).

2. Der afrikanische Kontinent und die innerafrikanischen Migrationen

Der afrikanische Kontinent ist in vielerlei Hinsicht von Migrationen bestimmt. Am bekanntesten sind wohl Bilder aus den Medien mit afrikanischen Migrant*innen, die einen Weg über das Mittelmeer nach Europa suchen: Neben dem westafrikanischen Nigeria kommen die Flüchtlinge überwiegend aus den ostafrikanischen Ländern wie Eritrea, Sudan oder Somalia. Der Blick auf die Statistiken zeigt allerdings, dass ein Großteil der afrikanischen Migrationen zwischen den einzelnen afrikanischen Staaten verläuft (16,3 Millionen Menschen: Stand 2018). Die Mehrzahl der Menschen sind Binnenflüchtlinge, sogenannte „internally displaced persons“, die ihre Heimatorte aufgrund von Kriegen, Konflikten oder Hungersnöten verlassen, jedoch innerhalb der eigenen Landesgrenzen verbleiben (ca. 75% aller Vertriebenen auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent). Das Epizentrum der Migrationsbewegungen ist Ostafrika, wo sich rund zwei Drittel aller Flüchtlinge auf die fünf Aufnahmestaaten Uganda, Äthiopien, Kenia, Tansania und die Demokratische Republik Kongo verteilen (Brankamp, 2018).

Auslöser für eine Migration können die besseren Arbeitsbedingungen sein, die andernorts erwartet werden. So zieht beispielsweise der Wirtschaftsgigant Südafrika nicht nur zahlreiche Arbeitsmigrant*innen aus den Nachbarstaaten wie Botswana oder Simbabwe an, sondern ist generell ein beliebtes Ziel von Wirtschaftsflüchtlingen afrikanischer Länder. Medien zeigen Szenen von Geflüchteten auf ihrem Weg nach Europa. In

ähnlicher Weise ereignen sich diese auch auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent, insbesondere in der zentralen Region Sambia, wo regelmäßig Migrant*innen entlang der ostafrikanischen Flüchtlingsroute verhaftet werden. Schlepperketten haben sich entlang der ostafrikanischen Route gebildet, die die Menschen vom Horn von Afrika über Kenia und Tansania weiter durch Sambia und Botswana bis nach Südafrika schleusen (Hilse, 2015). Die Motivationen und Beweggründe der Menschen, sich für Wanderungen und räumliche Mobilitäten zu entscheiden, sind vielfältig und haben dabei weitreichende Konsequenzen auf deren Lebensverläufe (Oltmer, 2020, p. 20).

2.1 Überblick über die Situation in den afrikanischen Ländern

Um einen ersten Einblick zu erhalten, werden die aktuellen Zahlen aufgeschlüsselt. Weltweit sind so viele Menschen wie nie zuvor auf der Flucht. Laut dem aktuellen Global Trends Report waren Ende 2022 weltweit 108,4 Millionen Menschen auf der Flucht (im Vergleich dazu waren es 2019 79,5 Millionen). Dabei sind mehr als die Hälfte Binnenflüchtlinge, also innerhalb ihres Heimatlandes auf der Flucht, oder sie fliehen in ihre Nachbarländer. Laut UNHCR beherbergten die subsaharischen Länder Ende 2021 gut ein Fünftel aller Flüchtlinge weltweit. Im Folgenden wird ein Überblick (in alphabetischer Reihenfolge) über die afrikanischen Länder gegeben, die hauptsächlich von der Flüchtlingsthematik betroffen sind und für die die Migration besonders relevant ist:

In Ägypten gab es seit 1902 verstärkte Migrationsbewegungen, als mit dem Bau des Assuan-Staudamms begonnen wurde. Dies führte zu Abwanderungen nach Saudi-Arabien, Kuwait und in die Arabischen Emirate. 1963/64 kam es zu staatlichen Zwangsumsiedlungen von 120.000 Nubiern, wovon 50.000 in den Sudan nach Khashim el-Girba umgesiedelt wurden und 70.000 Nubier in Kom Ombo (südliches Ägypten) Land erhielten (Dalay & Emmermann, 2016, p. 23). Bis heute ist Ägypten ein Migrationsstaat und liegt als „Herkunfts-, Transit- und Zielland im Zentrum regionaler Migrationsprozesse in Nordafrika und im Nahen Osten“ (Tsourapas, 2020).

Der südafrikanische Staat Angola blickt auf einen 27 Jahre andauernden Bürgerkrieg (seit der Unabhängigkeit 1975 bis 2002) zurück und ca. vier Millionen Menschen leben seither als Vertriebene in den Nachbarländern

(Escoval, 2016, p. 50). Im Oktober 2018 zogen 200.000 Menschen aus dem Nordosten Angolas in den Südwesten des Kongo, vertrieben von der angolischen Regierung. Aufgrund der Dürrekatastrophe 2022 flohen tausende Angolaner in das Nachbarland Namibia (Amnesty International, 2022).

Das nie kolonialisierte Land Äthiopien stellte 2018 einen Negativrekord auf: Etwa 1,5 Millionen Menschen wurden vertrieben – in keinem anderen Land waren es mehr (cf. Domradio, 2019). Äthiopien ist eines der Länder auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent, das die meisten Flüchtlinge aufgenommen hat. Im August 2023 lebten dort 942.000 Flüchtlinge, hauptsächlich aus dem Südsudan, Eritrea und Somalia. Schätzungen zufolge leben derzeit ca. 4,4 Millionen Binnenflüchtlinge in Äthiopien (vgl. 2019: ca. 3 Millionen Menschen), während die gesamte Region am Horn von Afrika von einer der schwersten Dürrekatastrophen seit den letzten vier Jahrzehnten heimgesucht wird (UNO, 2023). Neben den Binnenflüchtlingen hat Äthiopien ca. eine Million Flüchtlinge aus den krisengeschüttelten Nachbarländern Südsudan, Eritrea und Somalia aufgenommen, die in Flüchtlingscamps nahe der Grenze leben.

In Burkina Faso nimmt seit 2019 die Gewalt erheblich zu. Am 24. Januar 2022 putschte das Militär gegen Präsident Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. Seither zählt das Land ca. zwei Millionen Binnenvertriebene (UNO, 2024). Auch das ostafrikanische Land Burundi hat seit der Unabhängigkeit hohe Flüchtlingszahlen aufzuweisen. Zu erwähnen sind die ethnischen Spannungen, die sich 1972 in einem Aufstand der Hutu mit blutigen Massakern entluden. Schätzungen zufolge wurden ca. 200.000 Menschen ermordet und ca. 300.000 Hutu flohen in das Nachbarland Tansania (Fugmann, 2016, p. 124). In der Gegenwart berichtet die UNHCR von 430.000 Flüchtlingen seit 2015, die aufgrund der besorgniserregenden Menschenrechtssituation das Land verlassen haben und neben Tansania auch im Kongo, Sambia, Kenia und in Uganda Zuflucht suchen (UNHCR, 2018). Dschibuti, das Land am Horn von Afrika, gilt seit Jahrtausenden als Transitland par excellence. Mehr als 360.000 Afrikaner schifften seit 2008 von hier in den Jemen ein, darunter ca. 80% Äthiopier sowie Somali und Eritreer. Im Rekordjahr 2016 erreichten 120.000 Afrikaner die jemenitische Küste. Auf der nur 25km langen Strecke zwischen Dschibuti und dem

Jemen gibt es einen regen Flüchtlingsaustausch; die Menschen migrieren sozusagen von einem Kriegsgebiet in das andere (Hahn, 2022).

Aus Eritrea, dem kleinen Land am Roten Meer, sind im Verlauf des Bürgerkriegs über 800.000 Menschen geflohen (Dangmann, 2016, p. 160). Die meisten Flüchtlinge leben in den Nachbarstaaten Äthiopien und Somalia, ca. 74.000 Eritreer leben laut einer neuen Studie zur Zuwanderung in Deutschland (BAMF, 2021).

Als ein Land mit drei Krisen zählt Kamerun derzeit mehr als eine halbe Million Menschen, die auf der Flucht sind. Viele Menschen sind nach Nigeria geflüchtet und leben dort in Flüchtlingslagern, da die Gewalt in Kamerun von Seiten der Terrororganisation Boko Haram zugenommen hat (Gänsler, 2020). Zudem herrscht seit 2016 ein Bürgerkrieg im Nordwesten Kameruns, weshalb hunderttausende Menschen in die Zentralafrikanische Republik fliehen. Grundsätzlich gilt die Lage in der zentralafrikanischen Region als angespannt, so dass auch Kamerun 460.000 Flüchtlinge aufgenommen hat, darunter 120.000 Nigerianer*innen.

Nach der manipulierten Präsidentschaftswahl 2007 in Kenia stand das ostafrikanische Land an der Schwelle zum Bürgerkrieg. Es wurden viele Menschen getötet und über 600.000 vertrieben. Kenia gehört zu den afrikanischen Ländern, die viele Flüchtlinge aufnehmen, auch trotz verschlechterter Sicherheitslage durch die Terrormiliz Al Shabaab. Im August 2023 lebten 644.000 registrierte Flüchtlinge in Kenia, hauptsächlich aus der Region vom Horn von Afrika, sowie aus Somalia und dem Südsudan. Sie sind in den beiden großen Flüchtlingslagern Kakuma und Dabaab untergebracht, unter den Geflüchteten sind überwiegend Frauen und Kinder (UNO, 2023).

Im Indischen Ozean liegt ein Inselstaat: die Komoren. Tausende von Flüchtlingen versuchen jedes Jahr von der ehemals französischen Kolonie auf die Insel Mayotte (seit 2013 Frankreichs 101. Département) und damit in die EU zu gelangen. Die Insel, die ein Magnet für illegale Flüchtlinge ist, liegt drei Bootstunden von den Komoren entfernt, und das Meer zwischen Mayotte und den anderen Komoreninseln wurde 2013 vom Präsidenten der Komoren zum größten Unterwasser-Friedhof mit 10.000 Toten deklariert. Die meisten Geflüchteten sind Komori; daneben befinden sich auf dieser Fluchtroute auch Menschen aus dem Kongo, Somalia und Ruanda. 2015 gab es außerdem einen Flüchtlingsstrom aus Syrien: die

Syrer*innen kamen per Bus in die Türkei, flogen mit dem Flugzeug auf die Komoren und mit dem Boot nach Mayotte. Aktuell leben ca. 100.000 illegale Migranten auf Mayotte und warten auf eine Einreise-Chance nach Frankreich (Belz, 2023).

Ein Land, welches aufgrund langanhaltender Konflikte nicht zur Ruhe zu kommen scheint, ist der Kongo, der derzeit 5,6 Millionen Binnenflüchtlinge zählt. Ca. 900.000 Kongoles*innen leben als Flüchtlinge in anderen afrikanischen Nachbarländern, und im Gegenzug dazu leben ungefähr 530.000 Flüchtlinge aus Burundi, der Zentralafrikanischen Republik, Ruanda und dem Südsudan im Kongo.

Von dem Haupttransitland Libyen aus versuchen viele Menschen über das Mittelmeer nach Europa zu gelangen. Im August 2022 hielten sich ca. 680.000 Flüchtlinge in Libyen auf, überwiegend aus dem Niger, Sudan und Tschad (Europäischer Rat, 2023). Der „failed state“ ist seit dem Arabischen Frühling im Bildungs- und Gesundheitswesen zusammengebrochen und seit langem nicht mehr in der Lage, seine Außengrenzen, insbesondere die zu den südlichen Nachbarländern Tschad, Niger und Sudan, zu kontrollieren.

2012 kam es zu einem bewaffneten Konflikt im Norden von Mali, bei dem Tuareg-Rebellen die Sezession von Mali erklärten. Aufgrund des Terrors und der blutigen Kämpfe flohen über 400.000 Menschen in die Nachbarländer Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauretanien; innerhalb von Mali sind 371.000 Menschen auf der Flucht (UNO, 2023).

Mosambik gilt heute als eines der wichtigsten Transitländer für Migrant*innen aus Äthiopien und anderen afrikanischen Staaten mit dem Ziel Südafrika. Von 1977-1992 herrschte dort ein Bürgerkrieg mit 900.000 Toten und fünf Millionen Vertriebenen. Seit 2017 weitet sich eine dschihadistische Welle der Gewalt in der nordischen Provinz Cabo Delgado aus, was dazu führt, dass derzeit ca. 946.000 Menschen innerhalb Mosambiks vertrieben sind (UNHCR, 2022). Rapide verschlechtert hat sich nach dem Sturz des Präsidenten Mohamed Bazoum im Juli 2023 die Situation im Niger. Schätzungen zufolge leben zwei Millionen Menschen im Ausland, und Überfälle der Boko Haram verschlimmern die Flüchtlingssituation zusehends (UNO, 2023). Von den terroristischen Übergriffen sind aktuell 682.000 Personen betroffen, darunter 335.000 Binnenflüchtlinge.

In Nigeria, dem bevölkerungsreichsten Land des afrikanischen Kontinents ist die politische Lage instabil, insbesondere im Norden, wo die Terrormiliz Boko Haram aktiv ist. Bis 2021 sind 383.000 Nigerianer in die Nachbarländer geflohen; drei Millionen Menschen leben als Binnenvertriebene im eigenen Land (UNO, 2021).

Im Jahr 2005 führte in Simbabwe der ehemalige Präsident Robert Mugabe († 2019) die Operation Murambatsvina (Shona für „Müllentsorgung“) durch, als er 700.000 Menschen aus ihren Häusern vertreiben und mit Bulldozern die Siedlung Port Farm (bei Harare) platt walzen ließ (The Guardian, 2005). Daraufhin erhielten 1,9 Millionen Flüchtlinge eine Sondergenehmigung, bis zu 12 Monate legal in Südafrika zu leben.

In der Region des Horns von Afrika, das auch als Wiege der Menschheit bezeichnet wird, liegt das kriegsgebeutelte Land Somalia. Massive Flüchtlingsströme gab es 1991 nach dem Regierungsumsturz (Lassotta, 2016, p. 557). Es flohen ca. 900.000 Menschen in die Nachbarländer, hauptsächlich nach Kenia, Dschibuti, Äthiopien und in den Jemen. Aktuell leben rund drei Millionen Binnenvertriebene in Somalia (UNO, 2023).

Seit April 2023 sind im Sudan erneut Kämpfe zwischen der Regierung und dem Militär ausgebrochen, woraufhin sich die humanitäre Lage massiv verschlechtert hat. Im Moment spricht die Welternährungsorganisation (FAO) von 20,3 Millionen Menschen, die unter Hunger leiden. Eine Million Menschen ist bereits über die Landesgrenze hinaus geflüchtet, und 4,2 Millionen Menschen sind auf der Flucht im eigenen Land (UNO, 2024).

Südafrika ist das Ziel von zahlreichen Migrant*innen aus den Sub-Sahara-Ländern, und viele von ihnen halten sich illegal im Land auf, darunter mehr als 2 Millionen Simbabweer.

Das ostafrikanische Tansania gilt als Aufnahmeland der Flüchtlingsströme aus den Nachbarländern Burundi, DR Kongo und Ruanda.

Für den Tschad stellt der Darfur-Konflikt im benachbarten Sudan eine große Herausforderung dar. 2013 strömten hunderttausende Flüchtlinge in das Land, das zusammen mit Nigeria gegen die Terrororganisation Boko Haram kämpft. Im Moment leben ca. 1,1 Millionen Vertriebene im Tschad, darunter 380.000 Binnenflüchtlinge (UNO, 2023)

Als ein Vorbild in der Flüchtlingspolitik gilt das ostafrikanische Land Uganda. Es hilft aktuell 1,5 Millionen Flüchtlingen, so vielen wie kein anderes Land in Afrika (UNO, 2023).

Politische Instabilität prägt die Zentralafrikanische Republik, in der von 2013-2019 ein Bürgerkrieg herrschte, weshalb ein Viertel der Bevölkerung auf der Flucht ist (UNO, 2023).

Dieser Überblick zeigt, dass es auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent ein hohes Mobilitätsaufkommen gibt. Die Entwicklung der Flüchtlingszahlen in den afrikanischen Ländern entspricht dem globalen Trend, einer Zunahme der Zahlen. In den letzten fünfzehn Jahren ist die Zahl der Flüchtlinge in Afrika um ein Dreifaches angestiegen, was bedeutet, dass jeder fünfte Flüchtling südlich der Sahara lebt (UNO, 2022/2).

Häufig wird in den öffentlichen Diskursen der Eindruck vermittelt, dass Millionen von Menschen (nur) nach Europa migrieren. Tatsache ist, dass ein Großteil auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent migriert, in Nachbarländer flieht oder als Binnenflüchtling im eigenen Land verharrt. Die Ursachen bestehen meist aus einer Kombination von Flucht vor Krieg/Gewalt, von Verfolgung, von Armut, von Dürre und Naturkatastrophen sowie dem Wunsch nach individueller Freiheit. Insbesondere die Dürrekatastrophen oder das gegenteilige Extrem in Form von langanhaltenden Regenfällen/Überschwemmungen (El Niño-Phänomen) mit resultierender Obdachlosigkeit haben auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent infolge der globalen Klimaveränderungen zugenommen. Sie stellen für viele Menschen größte Herausforderungen dar, vor allem für die Nomadenvölker und Ethnien, die seit Jahrhunderten als mobil gelten und einen wandernden Lebensstil führen.

2.2 Nomadismus auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent

Eine Erscheinungsform von räumlicher Bewegung ist der Nomadismus. Menschen werden als Nomaden (gr. *νομάς*: weidend, herumschweifend) bezeichnet, die aus wirtschaftlichen Gründen heraus keine sesshafte Lebensweise führen. Bis heute leben Millionen von Menschen als Nomaden in afrikanischen Ländern. Die bekanntesten Nomadenstämme werden im Folgenden kurz vorgestellt:

Die Afar mit über vier Millionen Nomaden leben im Osten Eritreas, im Nordosten Äthiopiens und in Dschibuti. Sie ernähren sich hauptsächlich von Brot und Dromedar- und Ziegenmilch. Aufgrund von Dürrekatastrophen ist für die Afar die Beschaffung von Wasser die größte Herausforderung.

Bereits im ersten Jahrhundert vor Christus gelangten die ersten Beduinen (arab. *badawī*: Nomade) nach Nordtunesien und stellten dabei eine ernstzunehmende Bedrohung für die römischen Afrika-Provinzen dar. Heute leben die Wüstennomaden im Sahara-Gebiet einen Kamel- und Kleintiernomadismus (Nemitz).

Von der Oase Siwa in Ägypten bis zum Nigerbogen erstrecken sich die Siedlungsgebiete der Berber, zu denen auch die Tuareg der südlichen Sahara gehören (Kogelmann). Der Name der Berber stammt wohl von dem griechischen *βάρβαρος* (Stammler, Laller) ab. Heute leben ungefähr siebenzig Millionen Berber hauptsächlich in Marokko und Algerien.

Ein den Tuareg verwandtes Volk sind die Tibbu im Tibesti-Gebirge in der Republik Tschad, deren schätzungsweise 500.000 Angehörigen von der Schaf- und Kamelzucht leben.

Weiter halten sich in den sudanesischen Provinzen Darfur und Kurdufan die Misseriye auf, die zu den Rindernomaden gezählt werden.

In Tansania, südlich des Ngorongoro-Massivs im zentralen Ostafrikanischen Graben leben die letzten Buschmänner Ostafrikas, die Hadza oder auch Hadzabe, was übersetzt „wir Menschen“ heißt. Die ungefähr tausend Jäger und Sammler leben bis heute mit Pfeil und Bogen.

Im ostafrikanischen Kenia finden sich einige Nomadenvölker wie die Rendille, die Samburu oder die Turkana. Die Rendille, die verwandt sind mit den Somali-Halbnomaden, leben im Norden Kenias, im Gebiet der Chalbi Wüste, der trockensten Region des Landes, und betreiben Kamelzucht (Laghai, 2014).

Ebenfalls im Norden Kenias, an der Grenze zum Südsudan, ist der Turkana-See. Hier halten sich die Turkana, ein nilotisches Volk mit etwa einer Million Angehörigen auf. Ein weiteres nilotisch-hamitisches Nomadenvolk sind die Samburu, die als Halbnomaden in kleinen Siedlungen leben

(cf. Nemitz). Die Samburu haben nicht nur aufgrund ihrer roten Umhänge, Speere und Traditionen Gemeinsames mit den in Tansania lebenden Massai, auch ihre Sprache leitet sich aus der Maa-Sprache ab.

Eine mit den Tutsi verwandte Ethnie, die von Westen Tansania bis Uganda und Ruanda angesiedelt sind, sind die Viehhirten der Hema.

2.3 Die Massai-Nomaden und die Bibel

Eine Gruppe von Nomaden, die in den letzten drei Jahrhunderten vom Südsudan nach Tansania vordrangen und die ihre Feinde aus den meisten Teilen Ostafrika vertrieben haben, sind die Krieger der Massai. Sie verfolgten Löwen und töteten diese mit Speeren, kämpften gegen andere Stämme und waren zur Zeit des britischen Mandats eine der schlagkräftigsten Streitkräfte auf dem afrikanischen Kontinent (Monbiot, 1996, p. 71). Heute wird von den Massai im Süden Kenias und im Norden Tansanias eine Form des Halbnomadismus gelebt, eine mobile Weidewirtschaft, in der sich die Weide- und Siedlungsplätze saisonal und periodisch verändern. Die Lebensbedingungen für die Massai sind herausfordernd, da sie immer von Dürren und Umweltkatastrophen geprägt sind. In der Wirtschaftsform des Seminomadismus wandert nur ein Teil mit der Rinderherde mit, während meistens die Frauen und kleinen Kinder oder ältere Stammesmitglieder in den „Boma“ (Hütten) zurückbleiben und dort Ackerbau betreiben oder den bunten Massai-Perlenschmuck herstellen (Wiemann, 2019).

Heute wird die Ethnie der Massai auf ca. 430.000 Menschen geschätzt. Sie geraten immer wieder mit der tansanischen Regierung wegen der Nutzungen von Landflächen in Konflikt und werden aufgrund von staatlichem Verkauf der Ländereien zwangsumgesiedelt, weshalb Tausende von Massai von einer daraus resultierenden Obdachlosigkeit betroffen sind (Länderreport, 2021).

Die Kuh steht im Mittelpunkt der Massai-Pastoralisten: Die Massai leben durch ihre Rinder. Die Rinder geben ihnen Nahrung wie Milch, Blut und Fleisch, sie liefern Baumaterial für das Massai-Dorf, und die Felle dienen als Kleidung sowie als Matratzen zum Schlafen. Somit bringt die Kuh den Lebensunterhalt für alle. Bei den Massai ist die Polygamie existenziell: Sie dient dem gemeinsamen, wirtschaftlichem und sozialem Überleben.

Ohne die Polygamie wäre eine Existenz unter den harten Lebensbedingungen der Massai-Steppe nicht möglich (Voshaar, 1998, p. 70). Die Massai sind religiöse Menschen. Sie beten zu ihrer Gottheit Eng'ai (Enkai: Gott, Himmel, Regen, das Göttliche), die auf dem Berg Ol Doinyo Lengai lebt. Eng'ai hat Leben und gibt Leben, befruchtet und bringt Fruchtbarkeit. In der Bedeutung für Eng'ai übersetzt als „das“ Göttliche, bleibt die Geschlechterfrage unbeantwortet. In der Massai-Sprache sind jedoch alle Attribute, die mit Eng'ai in Verbindung stehen, in der weiblichen Form (Voshaar, 1998, p. 131). In den Gebeten und religiösen Riten der Massai dienen zeremoniell Flüssigkeiten wie Milch, Speichel, Honig und Blut integriert als heilige Symbole.

Ein wichtiger Ort ist der Oreteti-Tree (Feigenbaum), für die Massai ein heiliger Baum, der lange, bevor die Missionare ins Land kamen, als ein spiritueller Ort galt. Er ist wie eine Synagoge, eine Moschee oder Kirche für die Massai und gilt bis heute als ein Ort, an dem ihre wichtigen Rituale und Zeremonien praktiziert werden. So pilgern zum Beispiel ältere Massai mit den jungen vor der Beschneidung zum Oreteti, um dort zu beten und um Vergebung für die Sünden zu bitten, oder auch die Massai-Frauen kommen zum Oreteti, wenn sie für ihre Kinder beten oder darum, schwanger zu werden.

Bereits die Briten sahen es als ihre Pflicht an, die Massai „in ein ordnungsliebendes, gottesfürchtiges Volk zu verwandeln“ (Monbiot, 1996, p. 72) und sie sesshaft zu machen. Nach Auffassung der Massai kann man ein Land nicht dauerhaft besitzen; es gehört nicht ihnen, sondern Gott, und nur wegen der Gnade Gottes kann man darauf leben (Lev 25,23: Das Land darf nicht endgültig verkauft werden; denn das Land gehört mir und ihr seid nur Fremde und Halbbürger bei mir).

In den 1950er Jahren begannen die ersten katholischen Missionare in der Massai-Steppe mit der Evangelisierung von drei Massai-Dörfern: Emairete, Mti Mmoja und Embopong. In ihrer Evangelisierung mussten sich die Missionare der Massai-Kultur und deren polygamen Lebensform anpassen und konzentrierten sich auf das Lehren und Taufen. Im Jahr 1963 wurde die Diözese Arusha gegründet. Die Trennung Arushas von der Diözese Moshi ermöglichte den Missionaren, nicht nur ihre eigenen Prioritäten zu setzen, sondern auch ihren Fokus auf die Evangelisierung

der Massai zu richten (Hodgson, 2005, p. 125). Sie übersetzten die Messen und suchten nach alternativen Methoden zur Evangelisierung in Form von kulturell sensiblen Liturgien oder modifizierten Beicht- und Kommunionpraktiken.

Sie entwickelten drei Zugänge: einen individuellen Ansatz, einen schulischen Ansatz und den Boma-Ansatz von Pater Donovan. Die Missionare stießen in Diskussionen und Dialogen über die Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede der religiösen Überzeugungen häufig bei den Massai-Männern/Stammesältesten auf Ablehnung; die Massai-Frauen jedoch wollten das Evangelium hören und konvertierten zunehmend zum Katholizismus. Der Boma-Ansatz sah vor, zuerst Kontakt zum Boma-Ältesten aufzunehmen und um Erlaubnis zu bitten, mit den Bewohner*innen der Boma sprechen zu dürfen. In diesen Treffen wurden die Massai zu ihren Erzählungen und Überlieferungen über ihre Gottheit Eng'ai, die Schöpfungsentstehung, den Tod und über andere religiöse Konzepte befragt. Nach einiger Zeit begann Pater Donovan mit den Massai über die christlichen Vorstellungen und Gemeinsamkeiten zu diskutieren (Hodgson, 2005, 129). In einem weiteren Schritt überarbeitete er die Gleichnisse in Übereinstimmung mit den Symbolen und Szenarien der Massai-Kultur, um einen Diskurs über Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen den religiösen Überzeugungen der Massai und der christlichen Botschaft anzuregen. So wurde zum Beispiel aus der Geschichte des barmherzigen Samariters die Geschichte vom barmherzigen „Ormeek“ (Massai: Fremder).

Aufgrund der hohen Analphabetenrate war es eine große Herausforderung, Methoden in der Erwachsenenarbeit zu entwickeln. Aus diesem Grund entwarf Pater Ralph Poirier (1963–81 in der Massai-Evangelisierung tätig) eine Methode, der folgend er das gesprochene Wort mit Bildern kombinierte, woraus spezielle Plastikscheiben mit Strichmännchenbildern entstanden (Hodgson, 2005, p. 130). Pater Poirier nutzte diese Bilder als Grundlage zur Diskussion und baute Beispiele aus dem Leben der Massai ein (Poirier, p. 30). Letztendlich kreierte er ein Diagramm mit zehn Spalten, wie zum Beispiel die Geburt Jesu (siehe im Diagramm 1D). Dabei ging es den Missionaren nicht darum, dass die Massai ihren Stamm verlassen, sondern darum, dass sie die Botschaft Jesu verstehen,

wonach sie mit ihrem Stamm heilvoll in den „Stamm Jesu“ eingeschrieben sind.

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SECTION 3

Contextual Readings of the Bible

11 The Exodus Narrative: Coloniality and Decoloniality in Creative Tension

Abstract

The Exodus narrative is one of the most used, referenced, and popularised books and stories from the Old Testament, especially in oppressed and exploited communities. This is the story of God's divine intervention in the sordid life experience of the Hebrews who had migrated and lived in Egypt for a long period of time, enjoying a period of relative comfort, which is then followed by a period of severe oppression and exploitation, a period of enslavement. In the midst of this enslavement, God powerfully intervenes and forces their release from captivity and leads them to their promised land, Canaan, where they were going to live in comfort and plenty. Using a decolonial approach, this chapter seeks to interrogate the colonial tendencies in the text and story, in the readings and interpretations in order to rid this text and narrative of the colonial tentacles that have made a story of liberation one of oppression, as well. This chapter assumes that the "the character of Pharaoh", "doctrine of election", "the promised land", and "the character of Moses" have some aspects of coloniality embedded in them, making the text of liberation a colonising and colonial text. It also assumes that "God's intervention for the exploited", "the Hebrew midwives", and "the Princess of Egypt" provide a strong basis for arguing for the decolonising potential and decoloniality of the text and narrative.

Keywords: *Exodus, Narrative, Decoloniality, Coloniality, Epistemicide*

1. Introduction

One of the defining narratives in the emergence and development of the Hebrew, Israelite and Jewish identity has been the exodus narrative. This narrative grew until it was fixed in writing and is now preserved as the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. The exodus is recalled and celebrated throughout the Old Testament, as well as in the

New Testament. The narrative and the book have for centuries or millennia survived with a creative tension between liberation and domination, allowing it to be a resource for readers who are exploited, as well as those who are exploiting. This chapter seeks to approach this creative tension through the lenses of coloniality and decoloniality. There are aspects of the exodus narrative that readily lend themselves to colonial intentions while others lend themselves to decolonial intentions. Ideas around election and the promised land appear to be central to the colonial ideology that can be perceived in the narrative, while those around the liberation of an exploited group of people and the divine option for the oppressed, are central to the decolonial tenets that can be read out of the narrative. While I will refer to the narrative more, adequate attention will be paid to the book in which the narrative has been kept stable for centuries.

The Hebrew title of the Book of Exodus is *Sefer Shemot* (“Book of Names”) and it is derived from the opening words, “*ve’elleh shemôth*”, which mean, “And these [are] the names.” Sometimes the book is simply referred to as “*shemôth*” or “names” (Fluegel, 1910, p. 5). This title appears to make sense only as a conjunction between Genesis and Exodus because the closing sentence in Genesis becomes the opening sentence in Exodus. When considering the contents of this book, this Hebrew title does not appear to do justice to the overall contents because Exodus is not obsessed with names but rather with the lived experiences of Hebrews in Egypt, their liberation through divine intervention and their journey into the wilderness and beyond. The English title “Exodus” is an anglicized version of a Greek word that means “exit” or “departure.” The Greek word for “Exodus” is found in Ex. 19:1: “In the third month after the sons of Israel had *gone out* of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.” So, our English title “Exodus” came to us from the Greek LXX¹ via

¹ “**Septuagint**, the earliest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew. The Septuagint was presumably made for the Jewish community in Egypt when Greek was the common language throughout the region. [...] The name Septuagint (from the Latin *septuaginta*, ‘70’) was derived later from the legend that there were 72 translators, 6 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, who worked independently to translate the whole and ultimately produced identical versions.” (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia 2024).

the Vulgate² (Fluegel, 1910, p. 5). In a way, the Greek version of the Old Testament captured the essence of the contents of this book in its choice of name for the book, choosing to spotlight the “Exodus” and not the connecting line between Genesis and Exodus.

“The book of Exodus is the second book of the Hebrew Bible, but it may rank first in lasting cultural importance. It is in Exodus that the classic biblical themes of oppression and redemption, of human enslavement and divine salvation, are most dramatically and famously expressed.” (Baden, 2019, p. xi).

Indeed, if the life of the Hebrews, Israelites and Jews is one punctuated by contestation, exploitation, freedom, liberation, domination, and salvation, then the Exodus stands tall in providing a theological basis for approaching these lived experiences. While in contemporary Christian communities one is readily aware of the contestation that exists between two forces – one for good and another for evil, in the images of God and Satan, the Exodus was among the earliest Hebrew literatures to come up with this duality of opposing forces.

“The first chapters of this book produce before our eyes two leading characters, Moses and Pharaoh. They represent the two great forces of human society, the two phases of our human nature. Two powers are ever in contention in our social world, in eternal antagonism, yet ever working in harmony for the preservation of the race and for its unfolding, its stability on one hand, and its gradual, cautious advance, on the other hand. These two forces are the principles of Conservatism and of Progress.” (Fluegel, 1910, p. 5).

While appreciating the views of Fluegel above, I would characterize the figures of Pharaoh and Moses as representing coloniality and decoloniality, while also being aware of the adaptability of the forces of coloniality and their capacity to infect, influence and control forces of decoloniality. This section will briefly discuss the dichotomy of book and story when it comes to Exodus, showing how these two forms have often reinforced

² “Vulgate, (from the Latin *editio vulgata*, ‘common version’), Latin Bible used by the Roman Catholic Church, primarily translated by St. Jerome. In 382 Pope Damasus commissioned Jerome, the leading biblical scholar of his day, to produce an acceptable Latin version of the Bible from the various translations then being used.” (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2023).

each other. This will be followed by an analysis of the colonial aspects that are associated with the Exodus, showing how these elements have shaped especially the use of the Exodus in colonial and post-colonial contexts. A section focusing on decolonization, decoloniality and a decolonial approach leads us to question the import of the story at its point of origin, which is the aspiration for freedom and liberation. A re-imagination of the Exodus from a decolonial approach occupies the penultimate section followed by the conclusion.

2. The Book/Story of Exodus

The Exodus shares its development to several stages, beginning with the experience of redemption and liberation from Egyptian bondage by some Hebrews,³ which grew into a tradition of liberation and freedom passed on orally from one generation to another. These communal memories of the cataclysmic divine intervention continued to grow and centuries later, it was believed to have happened and when writing became possible, the stories were written down, eventually being preserved as the Book of Exodus. While Christian communities, that were not Jewish, only got access to the Exodus through the mediation of the book, they also began a tradition of re-telling the story so that there has also been a Christian Exodus narrative that owes its origins to the book. Old Testament scholars from the critical era have tended to agree broadly that three Pentateuchal sources – that is the Jahwist (J), the Elohist (E) and the Priestly Source (P) – were all used in compiling the canonical book of Exodus. The idea of sources behind the making of the Pentateuch and in this case, the Exodus, is informed by the inconsistencies that are observed in the text and by the realization that oral traditions through which the story was preserved for

³ It is not clear if Hebrew was an ethnic or social identity, while traditionally it was assumed that Hebrew was an ethnic identity for the descendants of Abraham. However, the rise of social scientific approaches, especially in the works of Norman K. Gottwald, Hebrew was taken as a social identity, making reference to a social class and not an ethnic group. It referred to people joined by their social status and not by their ethnicity (Gottwald, 1979; Gottwald, 2002).

centuries are never consistent across different communities. According to Douane Garret,

“Since the development of the documentary hypothesis, scholars have expended much effort attempting to show what sources lay behind Exodus. They are concerned to show whether a given text is from J, or E, or P (or even D), or whether it is from a source outside of the standard four documents. In a study that combines source criticism with tradition criticism, George Coats attempts to untangle what he believes are the threads of the traditions about Moses in Midian narratives. William Propp subjects every passage in Exodus to a documentary hypothesis-driven source analysis, and he generally sticks with the traditional J, E, and P. Unlike many contemporary scholars, he believes it is possible to distinguish Exodus E from Exodus J. Thomas Dozeman, on the other hand, rejects the existence of E altogether (at least for Exodus), and in his source analysis he focuses primarily on P and the ‘Non-P History’. The latter is a kind of amalgamation of more recent interpretations of J and of the Deuteronomist; it is said to have been completed in the postexilic era. He essentially divides all of Exodus between these two sources, the ‘P History’ and the ‘Non-P History.’ [...] Much of this discussion is of doubtful value, either in terms of gaining better tools for interpreting the text or in terms of finding criteria for dividing it into its supposed sources.” (Garret, 2014, pp. 15–17).

Without outrightly dismissing the value of source criticism in Pentateuchal studies, a lot has already been said about its efficacy and even with more than a century of investments in it, it remains a contested terrain. This chapter will not seek to immerse itself into the specificities of the documentary hypotheses, save to agree with scholars that see materials associated with the sources J, E and P as intricately interwoven in the book of Exodus to the point where it can become difficult, maybe even impossible, to successfully disentangle the strands into independent units. While indeed there are fundamental theological, stylistic, and linguistic differences, there are also areas where common expressions are shared since they shared some kind of common community bank of oral traditions. While the book or text is the one in which questions of sources are critical, the story or narrative rarely considers the idea of sources other than the believed experiences of ancestral figureheads. To this extent, it is critical that

“a distinction must be made between the biblical book of Exodus – the text that comes between Genesis and Leviticus and constitutes one-fifth of the canonical Pentateuch or Torah – and the Exodus story.” (Baden, 2019, p. xi).

There is no contestation among scholars that most, if not all, Old Testament books are relatively later than the stories they re-present in written format, the same is true of the book of Exodus. The book was possibly a late development in the life of the ancient story of the Exodus. In some sense, the books artificially cobble together chunks of materials circulating at various points in various contexts, sometimes combining previously unrelated materials and not always following a chronological order and in other cases leaving out materials that would have been part of a shared narrative. This is the history that led Itumeleng Mosala to call biblical texts both in their canonical versions but also in the process that led to their creation as sites of struggle (Mosala 1989). In analysing the book of Exodus, Joel Baden makes some interesting observations when writing:

“Moreover, the biblical book, while containing the central core of the Exodus story, is among the most variegated in the Bible. It also includes poems, law codes, architectural plans, and rituals. Each of these has had its own interpretive trajectory – especially the extensive description of the tabernacle, which occupies nearly a quarter of the biblical text of Exodus and provides the foundation for, among other things, the traditional Jewish definition of what constitutes forbidden work on the Sabbath. Similarly, many of the individual episodes and characters within the story could be the subjects of their own biographies. [...] And, as interesting as they are, these various elements are all overshadowed in the history of interpretation by the grand narrative in which they are set.” (Baden, 2019, pp. xi–xii; see also Coover-Cox, 2010).

While the story of the Exodus gave rise to the book of Exodus, it must also be acknowledged that the book of Exodus gave rise to another story of the Exodus and in fact our access to the story of the Exodus is mediated by the book of Exodus. According to Dempster,

“The story of the Exodus is the central salvation event in the Old Testament. The account of the liberation of a band of Hebrew slaves from horrific oppression in Egypt is the event that shaped virtually everything in the biblical imagination. One scholar remarks that ‘[t]here are over 120

explicit Old Testament references to the Exodus in law, narrative, prophecy and psalm, and it is difficult to exaggerate its importance.' Another writes, 'This act of God, the leading of Israel out of Egypt – from Israel's point of view, the march out of Egypt, the Exodus, is the determinative event in Israel's history for all time to come.' In many ways it provided the ground floor of that imagination for the majority of ancient Israelites, for thinking not only about faith but history, the future, nationhood, law, and ethics." (Dempster, 2008, p. 4).

The single event, whether it happened historically or not, whether it happened with the multitudes suggested in the book of Exodus or not, (the story) captured ancient Hebrew and Israelite imagination and shaped their interpretation of their lived experiences. And yet, in the quotation above, the story appears to be known for its liberation motif, its redemptive goal, which are decolonial tenets. The central motif of the Exodus story appears to be the deliverance of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. As Wolf says, "Exodus is a book of salvation and deliverance, relating how the Israelites gain their freedom from Egypt under the mighty hand of God" (Wolf, 1991, p. 149). While the liberation-salvation motif was considered for a long time as the central concern of the Exodus, the book of Exodus does provide an alternative motif, a goal of the Exodus, which is the conquest of a land and the subjugation of people that were occupying that land. In this dimension of the story and book, the exodus was not simply about liberation it was also about capturing, dominating and exploitation. Accompanied by the twin doctrines and theologies of election and promised land, the enslaved Hebrews did not see liberation as an end but a means to an end, that of possession, ownership and exploitation. This understanding is expressed in the book of Exodus and beyond. For example, in Ex. 1:8,

"and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites." (Ex. 1:8).

This can also be inferred in Deut. 7:6,

"For you [Israel] are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." (Deut. 7:6).

These are some of the ideas in the Exodus story that easily lend themselves to a colonial ideology and in fact, these aspects of the story were used by Dutch settlers to justify their expropriation of land from indigenous South Africans and the same happened in other instances of conquest of other Indigenous lands by white people.

3. Exodus and Colonial Ideological Framework – The Theology of Election and Promised Land

The language of colonization is not one that is directly extrapolated from the biblical text, not from the book of Exodus nor any other Old Testament book. However, ideas that lend themselves to a colonial reading are replete throughout the Old Testament, which made it possible for the Bible to be used by colonizing forces, especially from Christendom Europe. *Colonial ideology* denotes a system of ideas and beliefs that legitimized the European move to conquer, subdue, dominate, and rule the world. The ideas of “natural selection”, “survival of the fittest”, “white supremacism”, and a “hierarchy of human races⁴” were central in legitimizing colonization. The belief in the “white man’s burden” to civilize, evangelize and industrialize the “heathens” made colonization sound and look like an honourable service to the peoples of the world. We now know it was far from being honourable! The association of white and good in Christian scriptures, liturgies and traditions coupled with encounters with diverse peoples in the age of explorers led to the rise of the racialization of humanity into “white” and “black” and some in-between, resulting in the institutionalization of white supremacism, whiteness and racism (Harris, 2018).

Not only were white supremacism, whiteness and racism aspects of colonial settlers’ self-understanding, the services offered by missionaries were similarly influenced and contributed to the sustenance of the domination

⁴ “Race, the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups on the basis of inherited physical and behavioral differences. Genetic studies in the late 20th century refuted the existence of biogenetically distinct races, and scholars now argue that ‘races’ are cultural interventions reflecting specific attitudes and beliefs that were imposed on different populations in the wake of western European conquests beginning in the 15th century.” (Takezawa, Wade & Smedley, 2024).

of Africans by Europeans (Rodney, 1972). White supremacism and whiteness “reflect the Eurocentricity behind the Christianization of Africans, with angels represented according to European codes equating Whiteness with perfection, beauty, and purity. When positive values are only represented through White characters, it is impossible to develop a positive image of Blackness” (Mokoko Gampiot, 2017). Colonization was, therefore, the total domination of conquered peoples expressed through governance, epistemologies, theologies, economies, social and legal systems. There are ways in which the Egyptian Pharaoh can be re-presented as a colonizing and enslaving force while the Hebrew or Israelite ideas of being the elect and the promised land can similarly be read as colonizing. This section seeks to pursue this line of thinking with an intentional focus on elements of the Hebrew/Israelite exodus story. *Coloniality* refers to the continuity of the colonial form of domination, exploitation, and racialisation by the dominant racial groups in the post-colonial era (Ramantswana, 2016, p. 181). The end of direct political control and domination sometimes clouds the view, making coloniality operate in the spaces as an invisible force that maintains the privileges that flow to the elites. It refers to the continued influence and authority of colonial systems, epistemologies, theologies and more – even in contexts where traditional colonizers are physically absent. Igboin writes, “the history and experience of colonialism and its constant recalibration in postcolonial Africa have adversely affected African indigenous cosmologies, epistemologies, cultures and experiences” (Igboin, 2023).

The Exodus is set against the background of a people who are exploited, enslaved, and dehumanized for no apparent reason other than that “there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Ex. 1:8a). However, from the perspective of the Egyptians, the exploitation was a means to an end. According to Kenneth Ngwa,

“[a]t the outset of Exodus, we encounter interlocution around Pharaoh’s hypothetical but deeply harmful claims about the children of Israel: ‘Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they may increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land’ (Exod. 1:10).” (Ngwa, 2002, p. 14).

The position taken by the supposed new Pharaoh is one of enslaving and colonizing as a pre-emptive strike against perceived and potential enemies. As the Hebrews were excluded from the luxuries of Egypt, how could they be kept at bay while firmly stuck within? A system of total domination could achieve both, excluding them by labelling them as different and inferior while enslaving them, thereby keeping them firmly in the sight of Egyptian taskmasters. This forced labour-cum-enslavement of Hebrews to construct and develop Egypt is the backdrop to the Exodus story and experience and its power. While they cry for freedom and liberation, the Hebrews are thoroughly dominated so that they cannot extricate themselves from their predicament but can only hope for some superior force to liberate them, a hope that allows the plot of the story to introduce the figure of Moses, a force for good to challenge and dismantle that of Pharaoh. While the figure of Moses comes through the story of Exodus as the liberator, this chapter will seek to look at the colonial threads in this figure, threads that this chapter considers late in origin compared to the liberation threads.

Moses is a survivor of genocidal attempts by the Pharaoh, who had instructed the mass extermination of all Hebrew boys (Ex. 1:16), as part of a policy of domination and extermination of the Hebrew identity, by exploiting the people to death and killing boys while retaining girls, the Egyptians were overseeing a total extermination of the Hebrews (Ngwa, 2022). There are two interesting dimensions to the story of Moses for this chapter, first, Moses survives the genocide by being hid under the nose of the Pharaoh as he was adopted by the Egyptian Princess. Second, Moses, the Hebrew boy, becomes an insider in the oppressive system that sought his extermination, raised and equipped to be its functionary with the system being confident that it had fully erased his identity. When Moses intervenes in a normal case of an Egyptian taskmaster executing the systemic exploitation of the Hebrews, the system that raised him realised his identity had not been completely erased, hence, it sought to handle Moses like the Hebrew that he was. This marks the beginning of the Hebrew career of Moses, who escapes into Midian, away from the Egyptian systems' reach. Away from the colonial space of Egypt, Moses encounters God, and the Exodus story as it now flows through the book combines the colonial

and decolonial aspects of the career of Moses. In this section, we limit our analysis to the colonial elements.

The God that Moses encounters is presented as universal, seen in the fact that this God will intervene for the Hebrews in Egypt without regard to the Egyptian gods. This universal God, however, identifies the Hebrews as “my people”, who are separate from “their taskmasters”, this distinction is critical in that it creates the dualism of “us” and “them” (Ex. 3:7) and goes on to identify the goal of God’s intervention as being “to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Ex. 3:8). While the oral story of the Exodus identifies the Israelites as the “Chosen People” or the “Elect People of God”, the words for chosen or elected are totally absent in the book, yet there are indirect references to the special status of the Hebrews. Based on the cited texts above, it is apparent that Moses was not only being groomed to be a liberator, he was rather being groomed to be a colonizer because his mission was to extricate the Hebrews from enslavement in order for them to colonize, dominate and exploit the peoples that were occupying the lands they were going to take over, almost as their reward for being enslaved in Egypt.

The intentional or unintentional weaving of Christendom European colonial project and the Hebrew/Israelite Exodus story created a religious justification for the colonization of the rest of the World by European states, kingdoms and empires (Gunda, 2021), yet the colonial tendencies of the Exodus were forced, suggesting these aspects were themselves late in development when compared to the decolonial tendencies in the story and book of Exodus.

4. Exodus and Decolonial Ideological Framework – The Option for the Vulnerable

We are aware that as Europe stood shaken by World War II, many colonized nations, states and peoples took advantage to demand the end of colonization and their independence. This is a period widely known as the decolonization period beginning in the 1950s. *Decolonization* refers to the

process of resisting colonization, a process of unlearning the epistemologies of colonialism, a process of undoing the outcomes of colonization and finally, a process of un-being or un-becoming what the colonial ideology had made the colonized into. In its early manifestations, decolonization was thought “to refer to the formal processes of political change” (Horrell, 2023, p. 39), expressed mostly in the visible change of leadership. Political domination was the most visible manifestation of colonization, hence, the early processes of decolonization focused on “governance power”, in politics, society, church, education and industry. I think the strongest power of colonization was the least visible, the “back office” of the colonial project – the systems, epistemologies, theologies, social norms and values. Decolonization involves challenging the particular systems – legal, political, economic, and ecclesial modes of knowing, social norms and values that have been superimposed through colonization. It is a process to remember, reclaim and reimagine, it is about recreating community by affirming and re-affirming the marginalized and suppressed voices.

Decoloniality is understood and defined in relation to coloniality and decolonization, by which it refers to the commitment to perpetual resistance to manifestations of coloniality in society and a commitment to continually decolonize. Decoloniality concerns itself with resisting not simply Eurocentric perspectives but rather colonial ideologies of superiority, privileges, domination, and exploitation (Idamarhare, 2014, p. 53). The beneficiaries of coloniality are not always fixed hence the focus on ideology, systems, and epistemologies. In the area of biblical studies “epistemic decolonisation” is critical (Horrell, 2023, p. 39), because for long biblical studies have been thought of as the exclusive domain in which white European males were the experts, thereby perpetuating colonial biblical “epistemicide” (Santos, 2016, p. 149). The history of the Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS) series dating back to 2009 was an intentional quest to challenge this form of coloniality in biblical studies by creating an alternative platform for marginalized biblical scholars. The intentionality of destabilizing the existing platforms with their coloniality is expressed through the acronym, which can be read as “bias”, exercising the right to execute the option for the marginalized. In his work with African PhD students and scholars,

such as Musa Dube, Ezra Chitando, Kudzai Biri, Susan Kilonzo, Mark Aidoo, Gerald West, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Francis Machingura, Rose Gabaite, Lovemore Togarasei, Obvious Vengeyi and many others, Joachim Kügler took an intentional and deliberate commitment to create an alternative platform from within the citadels of white biblical studies supremacism. Challenging the traditions and assumptions that doubted biblical studies and contributions of African scholars. Through his stewardship, BiAS is now in its 15th year and boasts over 40 volumes!

While we observed the almost artificial and forced nature of the colonial aspects of the Exodus story and book, the decolonial elements read as more natural to the story and the context of the Hebrews that it is most probable that in its earliest stages of development, the Exodus story was a decolonial and liberation story, which was later embellished with the colonial elements once the situation of the Hebrews/Israelites had changed. According to Fluegel,

“Send forth My people that they shall serve Me in the wilderness” [Ex. 5:1], is the motto of the Hebrew's mission, the formula of his Investiture. Let them go forth and civilize the world. Let them scatter and spread over the earth and teach the pure God belief, the Ten Words, the one human race, sympathy and justice to fellowmen. This Israel taught and acted upon, he alone was sincere, others were politic.” (Fluegel, 1910, p. 33).

In fact, this motto occurs seven times in the book of Exodus, Ex. 5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; and 10:4. In each of these instances, the promised land is not mentioned as being part of the reason why the enslaved Hebrews must be released by the Egyptians. The reason for their release is invariably stated as to allow them to “celebrate or observe a festival of the Lord”, “worship the Lord”, and “to serve the Lord” and this is meant to happen in the wilderness. The Exodus was meant to free and liberate the enslaved without necessarily replicating the Egyptian systems of bondage. In folk songs, this core of the Exodus has been turned into hymns and choruses that cast the Exodus as a decolonial and decolonization intervention, one whose aim was to challenge the colonizing systems of Egypt, dismantling them by disengaging and resisting them by no longer serving them. “An entry into the discourse of resistance is located ‘within the context of historical struggles and conflicts’ of ancient and contemporary communities”

(Wittenberg, 1996, p. 231). The Exodus story is about resistance to oppressive Egyptian systems from which the Hebrews seek to extricate themselves and to disable the system that thrived on the back of exploitation and enslavement. The Exodus was about denying this system its critical but unacknowledged resource, the enslaved people. While this core gives us the first side of the Exodus, a second critical element of the Exodus seeks to answer the question, “and then what?” Is decolonization only interested in dismantling the colonial systems? The answer to this question can be deciphered from Ex. 19:3-6,

“Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, *you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.* These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.” (Ex 19:3–6).

When looked at from these two elements, the Exodus was not meant to create a new generation of enslavers and colonizers, but rather it was meant to create a new kind of kingdom, one in which responsibility, accountability, justice and righteousness were not to be expected of some but not others, as was the case in Egypt, the symbol of the colonizing kingdoms and systems, the Israelites will be *priestly* and *holy*, Israel was being “consecrated to ethical, mental and spiritual interests” (Fluegel, 1910, p. 32). Being consecrated to a higher moral responsibility comes with a higher responsibility to raise the consciousness of the people to resist colonizing tendencies and principles irrespective of their sponsors, as priests, the Israelites are to spread the principles of justice and righteousness and to raise awareness on the divine option for the vulnerable, only a socially, politically and economically conscious populace can effectively resist coloniality (Gunda, 2009). When read in the light of the texts about the distribution of land among the 12 tribes of Israel, it gets even more interesting because when priesthood is assigned to one tribe, the tribe of Levi does not receive any tribal land (Josh. 13:33) because as priests, they were meant to serve all the other tribes. In the Exodus, the Hebrews/Israelites are meant to be the priests for all the people, making the conquest

of the land something that was likely added to the aspirations of Israel but one that had not always been part of the Exodus story. What remains uncontested in the story is how it revolves around the lived experiences of the enslaved beginning with their experience of being human, living in peace and experiencing normal challenges as a community, including famine. The story continues with the experience of being marginalized, enslaved and erased from history such that the story of Exodus “begins as communal work of interrogating and transforming structures and systems that produce erasure, alienation, and singularity” (Ngwa, 2022, p. 18). Even though coloured by the racist white supremacism logic of 20th century Europe, there are connotations of interest for this chapter in the work of Fluegel;

“Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness’, in this wild struggle for existence; that by their cultivating man’s ethical and spiritual elements, they became the pioneers of a higher civilization than that handed down by Phoenicia, Babylonia or Egypt. This means our text. Juda had the task of clearing the wild forests of barbarism, of removing the rubbish of paganism, of popular ignorance and superstitions, of implanting the seeds of truth, reason, fraternity and justice unto all, of teaching the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men, inculcating human dignity and spirituality.” (Fluegel, 1910, p. 33).

Simply stated, Israel or the Hebrews were being led into a form of existence and of community in which justice and dignity of all people were the core values and they were being tasked with sharing these values with the rest of the world. We understand that at the height of European colonialism, “justice unto all” might have carried the connotations and meaning of “justice unto all white Europeans”. To realize this new form of being and belonging, the Israelites are to observe various ethical demands but two of which stand out. In Ex. 22:21–24, the Israelites are commanded,

“You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.” (Ex. 22:21–24).

The three groups identified in these verses, the stranger, widow and orphan, are among the most vulnerable groups, showing that the Lord had

not taken the option for the Hebrews/Israelites but rather in the Exodus, the Lord was executing the option for the vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed people. It is instructive that this text uses categories that are not ethnicity-bound, but rather categories that are universal and not limited to any specific ethnic or cultural group. This is an option that also remains critical for the success of decolonization and decoloniality, both are commitments to stand with the vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed and to remove the systems that continue to create and sustain vulnerabilities and marginalizations. The alternative community that is being championed by the Exodus is one that creates a oneness that is not colonizing and one that does not seek to erase but to co-exist, priests were not meant to live apart, they were to be integrated and included into all communities without losing their identity.

“[W]hat risk does a partially displaced (diaspora-home) community and its earthy environments face if identity formation is modelled after the allure of imperial ideology that wrestles communal multiplicity into singularity, evident in Pharaoh’s anxieties about the epistemological and demographic multiplicity that made up the exodus community (Exod. 1:7, 9; cf. 12:38)? How does community resist the costly allure of privileged singularized existence? The story of Exodus is not only multilocal, but also polyphonic and perennially communal. No single heroes are allowed and none ultimately survive the robust multiplicity that the story produces. Instead of colonial, patriarchal, and imperial singularity, the story produces an ethos of communal oneness – oneness with the divine, with others, and with the earth itself.” (Ngwa, 2022, p. 15).

In seeking the extermination of the Hebrews by working them to death while killing young boys, Pharaoh sought to create a forced oneness in which other identities were systematically eliminated. One of the decolonial interventions is actually a response to the extreme strategy of the Pharaoh.

“The midwives refuse to become agents of death. But more importantly, they move the story beyond the confines of Pharaoh’s deadly time zone, saying of the Hebrew women: “they give birth before the midwives arrive” (Exod. 1:19). The midwives decenter Pharaoh’s necropolitics because the Hebrew women engender multiplying biopolitics.” (Ngwa, 2022, p. 16).

The Exodus story becomes a contest between the politics of death being championed by Pharaoh and the politics of life, with the Hebrew midwives taking centre-stage. Not only are the Hebrew midwives resisting and undermining Pharaoh's decree, the Hebrew women are participating in the resistance by nursing children out of Egyptian gaze. The role of women in creating a mass of critically and socially conscious Hebrew community is often underestimated. It takes three women to place Moses in the public space, Moses' mother, Moses' sister – Miriam – and the Pharaoh's daughter – the princess, the soft underbelly of the empire facilitates radicalization and resistance to be brought into the inner core of the empire (Ngwa, 2022, pp. 16–17).

5. Re-membering/Re-imagining the Exodus

We grew up on a diet of the Exodus story, it was a story, it was songs, it was a metaphor, it was history. The story found expression in many contexts and never lost its potency across generations. What gave this story its potency was its adaptability that allowed readers not only to identify with some of the central characters in the story but it allowed readers to read themselves into the story, identifying their own oppressors with the oppressors in the story. It is not surprising that liberation wars in Africa were imagined as some type of exodus-liberation model, with leaders cast in the light of Moses (Gunda, 2010). Approached from this perspective, it follows that “the reason why Exodus is ultimately not about moving a people from one location to another, but about the ability of such movement to bring liberation to Egypt, the Wilderness, and the Mountain, and therefore to the generations that inhabit those narrative spaces and places” (Ngwa, 2022, p. 16). The place names such as Egypt, Red Sea or the Wilderness are cast as symbolic and representational, representing enslaving, oppressive and exploitative systems and institutions. They snare their victims to the point of eliminating the possibility of potential alternative sources of power that the victims are resigned to their fate. The migrants, enslaved and exploited cannot imagine any other way of living that even during the process of being liberated they are still hungover their oppression, and still considers it as the only way of living hence the journey toward liberation is punctuated by requests to return to Egypt (Ex. 15:23–24;

16:2–3; 17:1–3; Num. 14:1–4). In these texts, the Hebrews constantly regurgitate the colonial logic that there is nothing better than the death-dealing Egyptian oppressive system because at least it allows its victim a reasonable way of dying. Coloniality is at play as the Exodus staggers toward sustaining a transformational experience of an alternative way of being, of community and of life.

Interestingly, while it was possible for God to directly, and without human mediation, intervene in the experiences of the Hebrews in Egypt, God chose to accompany human actors in executing the divine plan to free the Hebrews. This is critically important in the context of decoloniality, the belief that God's plan is for all human beings, notwithstanding the multiple diversities that exist among them, ought to live in communities built on the values of justice (fairness), equality (equity), inclusion and belonging – this plan still requires active characters from within and without the community of the oppressed to create a decolonial or alternative reality, the Moses-Princess combo for liberation. The collaboration or partnership between Moses and the Princess is one that is of critical significance because by the single decision to adopt Moses and place him inside the palace, the princess had initiated an alternative centre of power within the existing centre of power. The existing centre of power assumed it could snare and entice an erasure of identity and sense of belonging in the small boy. Imbibing the strategies of the centre of power and deploying its resources – material and social capital, the boy grows up to be a formidable force. The resistance to the oppressive system was not only playing out on the birth stools, it was now playing out in the palace itself and this collaborative approach was central in dismantling the enslaving and colonizing system represented by Pharaoh. This is the most likely response to Marc Ela's question, "What is the message of the Book of Exodus today for millions of Africans in their religious, cultural, political and socio-economic situations?" (Ela, 1991). It is about freedom and liberation, it is about dismantling oppressive systems and structures, it is about the coming together of victims and well-meaning beneficiaries of the enslaving and colonizing powers for an alternative way of being. It is about challenging the centre of power from within and from without.

The oldest Exodus tradition or story anticipates the liberation and freedom of the oppressed and elicits from its hearers and readers, a sense of belonging and of being in “solidarity with individuals and groups who are refused the dignity of being human, to denounce the abuses of established systems and to intervene to protect the weak” (Mtshiselwa, 2021, p. 504). A decolonial approach to the Exodus can create and foster lines of solidarity between allies that can sponsor resistance within and without the centre of power. This approach can re-equip the Exodus story to raise the consciousness of victims and survivors of the racist, imperial, colonizing and oppressive systems (Ngwa, 2022, p. 14). A decolonial approach to Exodus cannot be an event but a process that will remain alert to the potential of these oppressive systems to adapt to changed circumstances, especially their capacity to camouflage themselves behind faces of supposed victims, something that allowed the transformation of Moses (Joshua) from liberator to colonizer and oppressor, when considering the secondary development of the Exodus to becoming the story of colonialism. This is particularly key when reading the Exodus in post-colonial contexts because the Exodus remains a living story and book that many still consider instructive for their daily struggles (Masenya, 2005, p. 1).

6. Conclusion

In its development in ancient Israel, the Exodus narrative and book underwent some fundamental revisions, beginning as an anti-oppression and pro-liberation story to becoming a manifesto for colonization and oppression, colonizing toward ancient Canaanites and neighbouring peoples. The rise of Christianity as the empire religion during the Roman empire, provided a new impetus to the coloniality elements of the story of Exodus, and this particularly became apparent during the rise of colonial and imperial Europe – a period during which the Exodus became a legitimating force for the colonial projects of European states and kingdoms. The case of Apartheid South Africa illustrates this point extremely well, the Afrikaners understood themselves as divinely ordained to possess the land of South Africa even if it meant driving indigenous peoples out of their ancestral lands. A decolonial approach to the Exodus story and book opens opportunities to question not just the ethnicities of the oppressors

but rather the principles of oppression to guard against the capacity of the oppressive systems to re-brand themselves and lend themselves to newer and subtle forms of coloniality. Decolonization must seek to sponsor, promote, or establish alternative centres of power, alternative principles by which communities relate, as well as equipping for the skills to unmask masked coloniality. The combination of the Princess and Moses provides a critical template between resisters from within working and enabling resisters from without.

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Mark S. Aidoo

12 A Transformational Leadership Approach for Conflict Transformation Practice

An Akan Intercultural Study of Esther

Abstract

Conflicts are normally complex, multidimensional, and dynamic, making it difficult to propose a simple, easy solution. The leader's capacity to see warning signs that affect the healing of relationships and respond appropriately to bring about real change in people goes beyond resolution to transformation. This chapter explores how Esther employed conflict transformational strategies after Haman's edict ignited social conflict among the Jews to ensure empowerment that made the Jews triumph over the Persians. It looks at Esther's interactive processes that led to empowered relationships, reconciled tensions, and redefined interests, and shows how conflict transformation resonates with African traditional forms of conflict interventions. The approach is intercultural applied Bible studies, bearing in mind that interpretation across cultural boundaries has to be conceived as a multiple-way activity that is sensitive to both the culture of the Bible and the culture of the reader. The Ghanaian-Akan culture is used for the mutual engagement of conceptions and viewpoints. It proposes that Esther's approach can serve as a model for traditional leaders in the Akan traditional setting of Ghana to ensure transformed relationship during conflict situations.

Keywords: *Conflict Transformation, Alternative Dispute Resolution, Akan, Intercultural, Akan Tradition, Social Change*

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the story in the book of Esther from an intercultural Bible studies approach to highlight Esther's interactive processes in

conflict transformation that created new opportunities for social change, and social bonds at a time when the Jews were about to lose their lives. It looks at the relationship patterns, tensions, and interests of the personalities as key principles of conflict transformation and how these resonate within Akan traditional conflict resolution ideologies. The aim is that Esther's conflict transformation approach can mutually enrich Alternative Dispute Resolution in Akan traditional practices. The lessons can also complement the principles of transformational leadership practices. Leaders who pursue conflict transformation depend on the strengths and opportunities during conflict situations as powerful tools for fostering new changes within organizations and communities. Although conflict transformation is of considerable interest in itself, my purpose goes beyond presenting a theory of instrumental practice to context-sensitive behavioral patterns that are decisive in determining the social outcomes that transform conflicts. Moreover, the potential higher costs that accrue during conflicts in Akan societies can be minimized when one aims at transforming conflicts into positive opportunities.

The Intercultural Bible studies approach, which informs the discussion, operates on the assumption that interpretation across cultural boundaries has to be conceived of as a multiple-way dialogue that is sensitive to both the culture of the Bible as well as other cultures so that there is mutual engagement of conceptions and viewpoints. African intercultural applied Bible studies, like inculturation and liberation hermeneutics, seek to integrate African cultural thought in biblical exegesis so that there is cultural mediation (Loba-Mkole, 2008, p. 1362). It is a dialogical process that invites readers of the Bible to examine interpersonal relationships and reflect on those cultural issues that make people behave in particular ways, giving space for how it means in other cultures (Manus, 2003, p. 41). It also compares the ideologies promoted by the world of the biblical text and the world of the reader so that the emerging outcomes promote interdependence of cultures and interculturality. For Musa Dube, it is about reading the Bible with, through, and for cultural texts, contexts, and concerns since the Bible interacts with many cultures (Dube, 2010, p. 369). Hence, the cultural contact zones in the text that reveal attitudes and endorse certain constructs are reread to highlight the liberating interdependence of cultures (Dube, 2010, pp. 369–374). Lalsangkima Pachuau also

admits that intercultural interpretation has to be sensitive to diverse cultures and should engage conceptions and viewpoints from other cultural settings (Pachauu, 2015, p. 14). The diverse cultural mobility and cross-cultural issues should not threaten the existence of fixed cultural boundaries. In this present study, aspects of Akan traditional and cultural practices gleaned from proverbs, wise sayings, and maxims are used to dialogue with the story in Esther 4–8 where one can find the heightened conflict situation. The Akan are about 15 people groups of southern Ghana in West Africa that involve multi-ethnic and multi-lingual identities but speak a mutually understandable language, usually called Akan. The major language groups among the Akan are Mfantse, Asante Twi, and Akwapim Twi.

2. Conceptual Framework

Conflicts are normally complex, multidimensional, and dynamic. There is usually no simple, easy solution to conflicts. One cannot easily predict the outcomes of interventions or their consequences. In some cases, the pains and wounds created during conflicts hardly heal, causing further strains and distorted relationships even when resolved. The leader's ability to see conflicts as opportunities to one's advantage can be an ideal intervention. Such an approach can bring qualitative healing and respond appropriately to ensure growth and mental acceptance. This approach goes beyond resolution to transformation. Resolution of conflict and transformation of conflict are usually considered similar and describe a generic conflict outcome. However, the transformation of conflict, theoretically, goes further toward qualitative changes in individual behaviors of the parties, even in unresolved situations than the resolution of conflict construct. Conflict transformation assumes that conflict resolution can sometimes be difficult, if not impossible. However, one can utilize some of the situations within a conflict in such a way that some individuals engaging in conflict can move from a negative, destructive tactic to admit what is more positive, empowering, and constructive.

Some conflict theorists and practitioners have agreed that many conflicts are better off being transformed than being resolved. Notable among such

scholars and practitioners who have promoted the term “conflict transformation” include Adam Curle (1990), Johan Galtung (1995; 1996), John Paul Lederach (1989; 2003), James Laue (1991; 1993), Louis Kriesberg (1997), and Diana Francis (2002). They argue that conflict transformation focuses on the values of reducing suffering while increasing well-being, acknowledging interdependence between people, promoting justice, and changing the structure of society. It aims at a qualitative shift in individual behaviors of the parties that leads to a transformation in their relationship. Conflict transformation is “to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (Lederach, 2003, p. 22). It has also been defined as actions and processes which seek to alter the various characteristics and manifestations of conflict by addressing the root causes of a particular conflict over the long term. It aims to transform negative destructive conflict into positive constructive conflict and deals with structural, behavioural and attitudinal aspects of conflict. The term refers to both the process and the completion of the process (Austin, Fischer & Ropers, 2004, pp. 464–465). A transformed approach, thus, rests on the capacity of a leader and followers to look beyond the immediate situation and its overwhelming demands to see windows that open toward change. The resulting effect is a generalized learning from historical experience for social change. The theories relating to conflict mediation, prevention, resolution, and transformation can be very fluid and confusing since there are different schools of thought. In this study, as argued, conflict transformation differs significantly from what is termed conflict management or resolution.

Conflict management is the art of designing appropriate ways to guide the inevitable conflict into appropriate channels, comprising one or more initiatives aimed at controlling or limiting the level of violence. Cordula Reimann (Reimann, 2004, p. 48), however, uses the term conflict management as an umbrella for the field when discussing conflict transformation. Haynes et al., on the other hand, use conflict resolution as an umbrella term for a field that includes mediation, conflict management, and conflict transformation, holding that conflict transformation is one of four strategies for conflict resolution (Haynes, Haynes & Fong, 2004). It

needs to be noted, also, that the process of conflict management is the foundation for more effective conflict resolution. Niklas Swanström and Milkael Weissmann argue that “Conflict resolution refers to the resolution of the underlying incompatibilities in a conflict and mutual acceptance of each party’s existence, while conflict management refers to measures that limit, mitigate and/or contain a conflict without necessarily solving it.” (Swanström & Weissmann, 2005, p. 25). Louis Kriesberg also points out ways in which practitioners place a somewhat different emphasis on different terms such as “management”, “dispute”, “settlement”, “resolution”, and “transformation”, and adds that “conflict resolution means solving the problems that led to the conflict, and transformation means changing the relationships between the parties to the conflict” (Kriesberg, 1997, p. 64). John Paul Lederach avers that conflict resolution works towards “achieving an agreement and solution to the presenting problem creating the crisis” (Lederach, 2003, pp. 29–33) by using tools to end the conflict, while conflict management focuses on providing tools to mitigate conflict so it does not escalate. However, conflict transformation assumes that individual conflicts are influenced by larger cultures, systems, and structures that promote the continuation of conflict and when these elements are seen as positive signs, they bring about growth. Thus, conflict transformation has key characteristics inherent in conflict resolution (eliminate) and conflict management (control), or to some extent, conflict transformation is, to many people, a reaction to the conflict resolution school, although there are some distinctions.

Other key terms are conflict prevention and conflict settlement. Michael Lund defines conflict prevention as “actions taken in vulnerable places and times to avoid the threat or use of armed force and related forms of coercion by states or groups to settle the political disputes that can arise from destabilizing effects of economic, social, political, and international change” (Lund, 1996, p. 37). Kriesberg also posits that conflict settlement refers to “suppressing the conflict itself, without dealing with the deeper causes and relations” (Kriesberg, 1997, p. 64).

In all, for transformation to happen, a strategy should be developed that incorporates “the appropriate parties, issues, and combination of inducements for the desired movement at a particular time” (Kriesberg, 1989, p. 119). The movement should have structural–behavioral and subjective–

attitudinal features. Structurally, the process should be dynamic involving a change in the mixture of behaviors. Subjectively, feelings and beliefs need to change, so that the adversaries have increased mutual acceptance or mutual respect (Kriesberg, 2008, p. 402). The interaction between adversaries is the primary way in which relations become transformed (Kriesberg, 2011, p. 54). Changes in the conditions generating those feelings and beliefs are critical but not necessary in conflict transformation.

Aspects of African traditional conflict management and resolution aim at achieving the same end as transformation. The emphasis is more on persons, not the problem, and harmonious living not justice. There are times when one has to sacrifice rights and privileges for peace to be sustainable. Benk Fred-Mensah, focusing on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), asserts that “Traditional conflict resolution mechanism is defined as the ‘capability of social norms and customs to hold members of a group together by effectively setting and facilitating the terms of their relationship [...] sustainability facilitates collective action for achieving mutually beneficial ends’” (Fred-Mensah, 2005, p. 1). Ernest Uwazie also mentions that in Africa, “ADR programs focused on practical skills building and creation of foundational knowledge on interpersonal, community disputes, namely negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and some combination of processes” (Uwazie, 2014, p. 2). As such, ADR from an African perspective focuses on the communal benefits that accrue out of the use of African approaches in Akan traditional dispute processes including transformation. ADR does not suggest that conflicts should be simply eliminated or controlled, since there is something that can happen in conflict situations that can be used to build peace, both in terms of changing destructive relationship patterns and bringing about social or systemic change. The Akan says *tekyerema na se mpo nye a woko naaso watsena faakor* (“the tongue and teeth usually fight yet they stay at one place”). At times, the teeth may bite the tongue yet it is the same tongue robbed at the back of the teeth that can show the extent of harm done. Both the tongue and teeth collaborate when food is to being taken even where the teeth hurt the tongue. Such collaboration, harmony, and togetherness are key principles in promoting peace.

Ghana has legalized out-of-court arbitration under The Arbitration Act 1961, Act 38. Arbitration, which also seems to be an umbrella term, is a

confidential and compromise solution process that helps minimize the effects of disputes. Africans believe in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) because public law courts function to interpret the law and issue judgments toward justice and not necessarily to resolve and transform conflicts. Litigations at the law courts are often grounded in adversarial processes and most cases do not bring about satisfaction and promotion of good neighborliness (Ibrahim, 2018, p. 89).

From the Akan traditional perspective, there are cases in which non-natives are not given the same opportunities as natives. The distinction is usually subjective, based on the traditions and the court's processes. On one hand, Akan tradition upholds *adze wɔ fie oye* ("when something is at home it is good"), meaning one has to think of what is beneficial for one's own people first. The motif is when favor comes upon one's fellow it can be communally shared, but the same cannot be said about outsiders. Again, *ɔhɔhɔ nni nkɔ, yɛ ɔmanifoɔnɛɛ* ("let the stranger eat and go, makes the citizens lean"). This means non-natives cannot be happy and take the benefits elsewhere at the expense of natives. One's own people cannot suffer for non-citizens to be satisfied. The preference to consider one's own people first makes the Akan say, *ɔhɔhɔ nsene kuromani* ("A stranger is not better than a fellow native"). All this is to say that the Akan cultural ideologies can be potentially unfair to non-natives. On the other hand, the Akan ADR and traditional processes can be trusted because the gods and the ancestors who are the final arbiters are impartial, fair, and just. The distinctions between natives and non-natives become blurred when all have the community at heart.

Good leaders play a major role not only in looking out for the windows of opportunities during times of conflict but also in shaping ideas, developing strategies, and changing relationship patterns (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012, p. 81). In this light, there are some resonances between the goals of conflict transformation and transformational leadership. Transformational leaders are said to have the ability to stand out and activate followers' abilities toward newer motivations and desires and bring about change toward a higher level of morality and performance. They create new visions and energize others to refocus and revitalize new commitments toward institutionalized change. Gary Yukl defines transformational leadership as "the process of influencing major changes in the attitudes and

assumptions of organisational members and building commitment for the organisation's mission, objectives, and strategies" (Yukl, 1989, p. 269). Such leaders bring about change by illustrating four main characteristics: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985, p. 219). In other words, by being visionary, motivational, and captivating, transformational leaders bring meaning and purpose to address challenges in an organization. They also stimulate followers to develop new ideas, motivating them to take alternative routes to problem-solving, and to take a closer look at all possible solutions. As Bass and Avolio posit, transformational leaders stimulate the interest among followers so that they approach issues from new perspectives, generate awareness of a mission to be undertaken, and motivate followers to higher levels of ability to look beyond their own interests toward those that will benefit the group (Bass & Avolio, 1994, pp. 2–3).

Let us turn to the book of Esther to examine how Esther the Queen created opportunities to achieve conflict transformation, focusing on changing relationship patterns, reconciling tensions, and redefining interest.

3. Transforming Conflicts in the Book of Esther

The Book of Esther shows how Esther the Queen deals with the challenges and struggles of conflict when she hears of an imminent death threat on the Jews in Persia during the exile. Esther, who is part of the minority Jews, takes the lead role in the struggle for the survival and salvation of her people using indirect but unassuming ways to transform the conflict in such a way that the Jews take a more positive and constructive approach to the otherwise negative and destructive situation. Chapters 4–8 of the book of Esther deal with reactions to the edict that sought to destroy, kill, and annihilate the Jews on the thirteenth day of the Jewish month of Adar (3:13–14). Esther, the queen, intervenes and Haman, who instigated the conflict, is exposed and killed and eventually the Jews triumphed over the Persian lords. How then does Esther transform the conflict using the life-giving opportunities to create constructive change processes in power relations? What are some of the Akan cultural ideologies that resonate with Esther's strategies?

3.1 Changing Relationships Patterns

Mordecai and the Jews hearing about the edict react publicly by putting on sackcloth and ashes, weeping loudly and bitterly (4:1–3). Mordecai, once again, breaks the law of the king by going to the king's gate in sackcloth. He is provocative, although he is powerless as an exile and as one who depends on the overlord for his existence (White, 1989, p. 169). Esther sends him new clothes to change from the mourning clothes when her servants prompt her about Mordecai's behavior, only for Mordecai to refuse them. To Esther, such a public demonstration at no mean place other than the king's gate is a serious crime even though motivated by a great concern. To manage the situation, a respectable servant of the queen, Hatach, is detailed to act as a mediator to find the way forward.

Esther's intervention makes Mordecai shift from public demonstration toward ADR. Mordecai sees an opportunity in the status of Esther as his daughter who is married to the king, and as such can she mediate in that grave situation. In ADR, where parties to a conflict do not have confidence in themselves to seek reconciliation or resolution, they rely on other parties' initiative and effort to address the conflict. Traditional leaders such as chiefs, queen mothers, heads of families, and elders command the respect of their community members and are trusted to be neutral, unbiased, and fair in the amicable arbitration and conciliation of disputes and conflicts (Wood, 2014, p. xvii). This is because the deities play a key role in their judgments. Mediation, from the Latin "mediare" which means "heal" connotes a process of arbitration that brings about healing and transforming relationships of disputing parties. Any mediation from the Akan perspective that does not end in healing is not worth its sort. The traditional system of arbitration, known among the Akan as *dwanetoo* ("mediation") has a notion of seeking refuge, that is hiding behind an authority who can calm tempers, compensate for losses, and coactivate a compromise to compel peace and healing of relationship. The *Dwanetoo hene* ("Mediation chief") is expected to be an advocate for the one who comes to seek help but should also stand by the other party. Such a person should have an identity and image worthy of respect to all. The *Dwanetooahene*, akin to *Baale* of the Yoruba, and *Xeer* in Somali, aims at some form of settlement or agreement through customary processes toward harmonious neighborliness (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014, p. 114). Mordecai's tone and command to

Esther to “go to the king” even when it is customarily inappropriate, unless invited, reveals his uncompromising stance (4:8). The narrator captures Mordecai’s response to Esther by the use of the Hiphil infinitive construct *הָשִׁיב* translated “return” (4:13), thus indicating an intense and authoritative word of response. Esther had made it clear that the period was unlawful but Mordecai sends a strong word to Esther to go since he would not wait for a good opportunity. I do not agree with Iain Duguid who says that Mordecai uses the language penitential prayer when commanding the queen in the sense of seeking mercy and pleading before the king (Duguid, 2006, p. 91). If going to the king was a good option, why did Mordecai not initially petition the king but rather wear sackcloth as a way of protestation? Mordecai felt that Esther had to step into the conflict and resolve it, not considering the cost, adding that Esther may have come to leadership “for such a time as this” (4:14). Another possible meaning for “such a time as this” (4:14) is that Queen Esther is in that position just to intervene at the “wrong time” to save her people.

Both Mordecai and Esther understand that the Jews are facing a dangerous crisis but their approaches toward “relief and deliverance” (4:15) are different. Esther, in my view, seems to be hesitant to follow Mordecai’s strategy on several levels even though she continued to submit to his instructions. First, there is no need to further break the laws of the Persian king and go to him uninvited as Mordecai commanded. Second, her hesitation to appear uninvited is not a result of cowardice or refusal to see herself as a Jew. Rather, she feels that diplomacy is the best way to address the problem, an approach Mordecai did not suggest. Third, doing the right thing at the right time can offer a stronger chance of saving the Jews. All along, Mordecai did not do the right thing at the right time, thereby creating problems for himself and the entire Jewish population. Fourth, and most importantly, conflicts, especially when the signet ring is used as a seal on the edict, cannot be resolved. Finally, it would be unwise to approach such an enormous death threat simply by seeking to manage the problem. Therefore, a conflict transformation strategy will be ideal for a conflict such as this. Hence, the relationships between the Persians and Jews need to be reexamined to unearth opportunities for transformation. Esther has to change the perception of Mordecai and the Jews and realign

their patterns of relations so that he can see the Persian servants on their side.

Mordecai, who was Esther's foster father, wanted to continually exercise his parental authority over Esther even though she is married and enthroned as a queen. Jo Carruthers rightly observes that, Mordecai's heavy-handedness is noted because he forgets that the queen cannot be treated like a daughter, and he sees Esther's royalty as only beneficial in so far as it enabled her to better fulfill her duty as his daughter (Carruthers, 2008, p. 170). The Akan people, however, believe that there are the elders or the parents before a great person is born. However, the relationship patterns change when one assumes a position of authority, and all of the elderly should submit to the one enthroned. Recognizing the identity of those in authority is a virtue Africans uphold. Mordecai's words to Esther the queen, thus, do not show the true moral virtues of a subject. He did not realize that a servant could not refuse an offer from the queen of the powerful Persian empire or order the queen about, no matter what. Esther may be a young girl but she occupies a sacred throne and cannot be treated as a child. The Akan says *Opanyin nto bo-hyew nto abofra nsam* ("An elder does not roast hot stone and put it in the hand of a child"). In other words, it is immoral for a well-meaning adult to assign a great task to a young person who cannot handle it (Opoku, 1997, p. 50).

Esther knew the mission to the king was a death mission but she decides to go, hence her statement: "if I perish, I perish" (4:16). Carey Moore sees Esther as a heroine because she was ready to face death (Moore, 1979, p. 53). Such a brave sacrificial mission echoes the tale of two Ghanaian-Akan heroes in the 17th Century, Nana Tweneboa Kodua of Kumawu-Asante and Egya Ahor of Gomoa-Mfantse, who voluntarily offered themselves to be killed to save their communities from calamities even though they were royals. Nana Tweneboa Kodua's sacrificial death brought victory to the Asante kingdom in a time of war while Egya Ahor's death brought an end to a strange disease that was taking the lives of many people in the community. Generally, women and men do not labour equally in enhancing life because ways to achieve life in its fulness in the African setting are somehow gender-specific. Women are traditionally life-givers through childbirth while men are life-savers. When women are coerced to give up life in a bid to save others, it is unacceptable. Patriarchal ideas that insist

women should not care about their lives or well-being but must sacrifice for others need to be challenged and reviewed. Mordecai did not see Esther's claim to a right to life because he was blinded by his own self-interest.

Esther carefully analyzes the situation and using her intellectual prowess sets in motion a secret plan. She first gains the trust of all so they support her in fasting. Such a constructive change in the approach to the conflict revitalizes the Jewish people's energies. After the three-day fast, Esther goes to the king and favor locates her, making the king allow her to live and make a request. Esther thus invites the king and Haman to a banquet, perhaps a sure bait to catch the two great men in their tracks to alter the relationship. The tables have turned and Esther need not go to the king; the king rather comes to Esther. The second banquet's invitation by Esther for the two after the first one sees the king anxiously sending eunuchs to hasten to bring Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared (6:14). It is the king, rather than Esther, who is worried about Haman's delay to the banquet although Haman is very important for Esther's agenda. Esther suspended putting forward her request, although the king's interest in knowing Esther's petition and grant became a real need during the two banquets (5:3,6; 7:2). When it came to naming her request to the king, Esther pleads for life rather than a gift of half the kingdom promised. Esther laments over the threats she and her people are facing. Her tone appears mild and helpless as she pleads with the king:

Let my life // be given me // as my petition,
and my people // ... // as my request (7:3).

The ellipsis in Line 2 is intentional and purposeful. She does not specifically say what the king should do for her people, but the ellipsis indicates what she wanted – the Jews should be given to her. The king has already promised to give half of the kingdom to Esther if she so desires. Giving the Jews to Esther may change the effect of the edict which the king was ready to support without thinking about the consequences. If Esther moves all the Jews into half of the kingdom promised to her, how can the Persians enter that kingdom to destroy the Jews? The Akan says *obi ntoto namporɔree mfa nhyɛ ne yonko anom nse no se: 'W'anom bɔn'* ("no one bakes rotten meat and puts it into his companion's mouth and says to him: 'Your

mouth stinks’”). In other words, one cannot blame someone for something that the person is not responsible for. She cannot force the blame on the king in deciding against his own people. Significantly, Esther was wise and knew the implications of her request although she is open to all ideas (Aidoo, 2020, p. 128). If Esther and the Jews are killed then it is the king, and not Haman, who has caused it.

Mordecai has earlier made Esther understand that even though she is a queen, she would not be spared if all the Jews are annihilated (4:13). As Sidnie White avers, Esther acts primarily based on her loyalty to the Jewish community (White, 1989, p. 172). The enemy’s threat is very much a threat against Esther herself. She has to rely on power play, but she is not ready to physically show to Haman that she also has power, and is leveraging her position to claim what belongs to her, or maneuvering herself into being in control. Haman should play to her emotional plot of either surrendering or pleading in a manner that would make him stupid. Esther accordingly transforms the atmosphere in such a way that the problem becomes that of Haman’s. She makes the king shift from being loyal to Haman at all costs to her interest. Esther’s approach to conflict transformation puts her in control of wealth, court appointments, and access to the king.

3.2 Reconciling Tensions

A conflict transformational approach rests on the capacity to see positive windows that are open in negative situations. Such a vision calls for collaboration and co-operation. Briskin, locating the strengths of transformational leadership in community building, inclusive decision-making, and heroic leadership skills, posits that although the leader’s presence is very important, it does not take one person to bring about change (Briskin, 2011, p. 521). It is said that when a broomstick stands alone it cannot sweep well. Likewise, when broomsticks are tied together, they cannot be broken easily. Esther’s story is impressive on the level of how she involved all the people around her by first calming the tensions. She reacted to the news of the death threat in an intrigued, brave, and mature way by also involving her servants. Her demeanor when she heard about the threat was not that of weeping loudly and uncontrollably but bringing all people – Jews and some Persians – on board to fast and support her plan (4:16).

She used food and wine to transform the anxieties of both the leaders. Haman was haughty and needed to be brought low. The king was ignorant and needed to be guided to make a new decision.

The atmosphere in the kingdom was tense because of the edict. The Jews, including Mordecai, were worried and needed to be pleased. Much as weeping and wearing of sackcloth are associated with fasting in the biblical world (Neh 9:1; Dan 9:3; Ps 35:11; Jon 3:5), Esther's call for a fast seems to downplay the earlier public demonstration so that they remain in their rooms. The prophet Isaiah also reveals how the Lord desires social justice and compassion rather than wearing sackcloth in fasting (Isa 58:3–14). Perhaps, Esther's fast deemphasized weeping aloud and wearing sackcloth which was consistent with spirituality to reduce the tension in the community. The people were only told not to "eat and drink for three days, either day or night" (4:15). This was a complete fast because it included the night (Moore, 1979, p. 51).

Esther uses the main elements of peace-making, as listed in Article 33 of the UN Charter – negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, and resort to regional arrangements – to address the problem (Goodrich & Hambro, 1949, p. 591–592). Such a comprehensive approach fits ADR. Her heroic strategy to calm the tensions, name and shame the enemy of the Jews, and use silence may probably not have gone well with the Jews who were desperate. Managing someone like Mordecai to understand how to reconcile tensions with silence can be a handful task, yet she succeeds in calming him when she declares a fast. Eventually, her strategy gives the Jews the upper hand and they celebrate their hope with feasting, thus causing fear to seize their overlords (8:15–17). Such leaders with skills that inspire high performance and effectiveness are worth emulation (Sarros, Cooper & Santora, 2008, p. 145).

Esther's immediate inner tension comes to the fore when she has to reveal her Jewishness to the king and identify with "her people", against the command (מִצְוָה) of Mordecai not to disclose her identity (2:10). Certainly, her identity cannot be concealed in such a plea before the king; it will definitely come out and may be construed as a deception to the Persians. She has to come to terms with herself first, as a Persian queen before revealing her Jewish identity. Putting on her Persian royal robes and standing before the king echoes how identity matters in conflict transformation. That is to

say, she adopts a wise and sophisticated approach of a *Dwantoahene* (“transliterate”) to navigate new circumstances. She first identifies with the Persians more than the Jews. Her calm unmitigated faith, coupled with her beauty in the royal robes, may have helped reduce the tensions between her and the king. In all of her actions, she epitomizes a transformational leader who shows a strong sense of intelligence, collective purpose, and drive that gives energy and motivation to others instead of regret.

Esther’s initiative to be a savior in the impending death threat, echoing Christological resonances, does not follow any Jewish law or strategy but brings to mind a qualitative shift in the approaches of inclusivity and exclusivity. She does not see the problem as “I” against “them” or “my people” against “your people”. She frames her words in a way that does not make her side with one group over the other. She will lose her people and the king will lose her. Each party, nonetheless, is interdependent on the other in that complex situation. Still, she sees the adversary not as the problem but rather as the answer to the problem. The paradigm shifts in her inclusive-exclusive approach led to the advantage of the Jews over the Persians, thus transforming the relationship between the Jews and the Persians.

3.3 Redefining Interests

Africans derive their sources of adjudication from wisdom and traditional knowledge of the forebears and the gods, and as such it is expected of those who sit on the stool of the forebears to play key roles in matters of conflict. The gods help the adjudicators arrive at the truth and to know how to reconcile all parties. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms among Akan in Ghana, for example, also referred to as Restorative or Transformative justice aim at repairing the harm done to victims and relationships rather than only punishing offenders. As such, the interest of all parties has to be weighed and addressed for peace to prevail. The problem at stake becomes a burden for the state while reconciliation becomes the burden of the feuding parties. Matters of criminal justice, however, are centered on the victim rather than the State since the offender will eventually live in the same community as the victim. Therefore, there is the need to consider the feelings and interests of both the victim and

the offender with the intention of transforming all parties to live in social peace and harmony (Adjei & Ackah-Yensu, 2021, p. 106).

Esther calling for fasting shows her interest in connecting with her God to guide her path to success. She used banquets in a bid to make her interest come second. Being emotionally secure, she trusts God who prepares a table for his people in the presence of their enemies (Ps 23:5). Her first intention was not to seek the death of Haman but to make the king come to terms with the problem so that a solution could be brokered. If the queen belongs to the king, then the use of “I and my people” (7:4) may imply that Esther is drawing the Jews into the circle of the king. The Akan says *wotane kookoo a wonndi ne mba* (“we do not hate cocoyam but eat the growing ones”). The king cannot stand against the Jews who have provided a queen for him.

Esther makes it clear that Haman is fighting the king instead of the Jews. Esther says she would have accepted it and kept quiet if she and her people were only sold into slavery, but on account that the threat is intended to affect the king’s well-being she would not keep quiet. Significantly, Esther’s words *כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שְׁנוּהַ בְּנִיּוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ* “for no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king” (7:4; NRSV), is difficult, making translators offer diverse views. For example, the NKJV uses “although the enemy could never compensate for the king’s loss.” The Jerusalem Bible uses “it is well beyond the means of the prosecutor to make good the loss that the king is about to sustain”, while the NIV uses “because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.” It is not clear whether she was talking about compensation, financial loss, or loss of dignity. Either way, it seems Esther’s reference to the ‘damage to the king’ shows that the king would eventually be the loser. Jon Levenson explains that “Esther would not bring the king’s prime minister down merely to cancel a sale of her people into slavery, but annihilation is another matter and supersedes any financial loss the king may sustain by counteracting his previous decree” (Levenson, 1997, p. 100).

When Esther names Haman as the enemy to the Jews to the king, it makes the identity of Haman shift from being an adversary to a petitioner. It did not occur to Haman that his downfall was in motion as his wife predicted (6:13). He is only interested in saving his life and needs a mediator. He presses Esther to mediate for him with no success, making him change

from his standing position to “falling” (נָפַל) on the couch where Esther was sitting (7:8). The Hebrew participle, נָפַל denotes to fall accidentally, perhaps indicating that Haman’s action was not intentional. It could also mean falling prostrate on the ground (Koeler & Baumgartner, 2001, p. 709–710). Generally, falling prostrate on the ground or holding the feet was a common posture for pleading for mercy but Haman chooses to lie on the couch. Perhaps, Haman wants to overwhelm Esther by absolutely competing for the same space used by Esther. His action can therefore be interpreted as attacking to overwhelm her so that she comes to his side.

In Akan culture, seizing a married woman’s wrist or sharing the same seat with a married woman is traditionally considered a violation. Esther, whom Haman was so proud of, was probably silent all along as if Haman was not important. The king comes in to find Haman action in an odd position and interprets it as Haman violating Esther. The Hebrew verb כָּבַשׁ (7:8), translated as “violate” or “molest” can denote degrading, bringing into bondage, or subduing others. It may give the impression that Haman is further sexually abusing Esther. For the king, that is not the posture for pleading. It is ironic that Haman “seals his own fate by literally throwing himself upon Esther, in the king’s absence, to beg for mercy” (Larkin, 1996, p. 60). Hence, it is the sexual molestation – not Haman’s original plot – that caused the king to condemn Haman to death (Wijk-Bos, 2002, p. 137).

In African thought, the enemy is never tolerated. An enemy, from a competitive securitarian view, is any opposing force that stymies an individual’s ability to well-being in life as guaranteed by destiny. An enemy’s right to sovereignty, life and liberty is therefore limited. In enemy discourses, people are not just motivated to reconsider the response to the violence done. The Akan says, *onipabɔnefoɔ na yɛwɔ no sɛpɔ* (“It is a bad person who gets the executioner’s knife”), and also *onipabɔnefoɔ wuo nyɛ ya* (“the death of a bad person does not pain people”). When an enemy is known, some psychological processes such as „trauma” become central, generating emotions such as fear, anger, and hatred. An Akan proverb says, *etse ase na nyi tamfo a, nna ewu* (“whoever is alive but has no enemy is already dead”). Again, *obi ngu nsa nhyira n’atamfo* (“no one pours libation to bless the enemies”). It is also said: *wo tamfo wu anɔpa na wo wu anwumɛ a, ɛnyɛ hwee* (“if your enemy dies in the morning and you die

in the evening, it is no matter”). That is to say, it is good to see one’s enemy fall, it is acceptable.

Esther stimulates the hanging of Haman by creatively challenging Haman’s interests before the king and promoting an environment where new ideas can be explored to address the problem. Haman, who wanted all to bow before him, now bows before Esther to plead for his life. Haman, who sees the Jews as his enemies is now called the enemy. As such, Harbona, a servant of the king saw the new use of the pole erected by Haman for Mordecai and suggested to the king to hang Haman on it (7:9–10).

4. Conclusion

Esther’s conflict transformational approach led to changing relationship patterns, reconciling tensions, and redefining the interests of the Jews so that they became empowered. Esther used an adaptive approach to conflict transformation by displaying transformational leadership skills when the edict was published that the Jews should be destroyed, killed, and annihilated on the thirteenth day of Adar. She knew that some conflict situations can give opportunities for personal and social development and not follow the confrontational approach of Mordecai and the Jews when she heard about the conflict. Esther paid attention to the needs and concerns of all but redefined each one’s interest. She provided support, coaching, and mentoring as well as challenging others to gain a new understanding of conflict situations. By accepting to intervene and calling for a fast, Esther depended on spiritual strengths and made the Jews who were wailing and weeping become transformed so that in the end, they became a symbol of fear among the natives. She emphasized the collective good, shared responsibility, teamwork, and positive spirituality.

Esther displayed a high level of emotional intelligence to manage conflicts so that positive outcomes can accrue out of it. She is aware of her own emotions and the emotions of others but goes as far as building positive relationships with Haman and navigating the complex social situations of transforming conflicts. To be effective in conflict transformation, one should transcend individual personal egos, challenge the status quo sagaciously, and stay focused on the goal. Esther set an example of creativity

and innovation in the effort to create new ways to address issues efficiently. Such an approach brings an increase in productivity and profitability, although it involves risk-taking. In conflict transformation, the tables should turn; the weakling becomes empowered to take control of the situation. Transforming one's identity matters a lot.

It has been observed that some conflicts cannot be resolved so one should create opportunities for new social change and new social bonds. Whereas others look at constructive or destructive ways to manage or resolve a conflict, conflict transformation looks at the changing relationship patterns to serve as an important component of gaining some advantages. Esther's approach, therefore can augment the conflict intervention models in Africa, especially the Akan traditional setting of Ghana, to ensure transformed relationships during conflict situations. The life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase peace and respect, and construct means and norms for dealing with conflict. Calming tensions, naming and shaming, and silence are key elements in conflict transformation. Leaders who integrate conflict transformation into their leadership approach can create healthier, more resilient organizations.

Professor Joachim Kügler, a German biblical scholar, who created opportunities for African biblical scholars to share their scholarship with the world, especially in Germany for over 20 years, has shown how to transform African negative situations into positive ones, even as someone who is not from Africa. His support through the Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS) series and Exploring Religion in Africa (ERA) has transformed positively the apparent conflict between African scholarship and the rest of the world. Like Esther, African scholars can tap into the systemic, social, and spiritual dimensions of transformation to help not only resolve other academic conflicts in Africa but also to rebuild relationships. Being transformational gives a better chance to promote growth in African societies.

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13 Appreciation of Difference and Hospitality in Intercultural and New Testament Perspectives

Abstract

In Early Christianity, the meaning of Gospel fundamentally implied the belief that the God of Israel extended his grace, mercy and justice to peoples across cultures, religions, and regions. On the social plane, the necessary consequence of this belief in the significance of the Christ event, was the creation of cross-cultural communities. Everyone, regardless of status, place of origin, gender and religio-cultural heritage was welcomed in these faith- und living-communities. The members were all regarded as children of God and therefore as brothers and sisters of an equal standing. Joining these communities did not require one to leave his/her culture behind but only those cultural aspects or attitudes that aim at disrespecting or hurting others. The hospitality extended to potential new members in the Christ believing communities included an appreciation of difference. At the same time, the ethos of these communities did not allow for any claims of superiority.

Keywords: *Hospitality, Difference, Intercultural, Human Dignity, Communal*

1. Introduction

Under the direction and mentorship of Joachim Kügler, dozens of theologians from sub-Saharan Africa, hailing especially from Southern African countries, developed and completed their PhD studies or post-doctoral projects at Bayreuth University and Bamberg University. The projects that took shape in Bamberg were usually concerned with creating an interface

between a critical study of New Testament texts and their possible meanings, on the one hand, and the development of biblical interpretations that were relevant in particular societal contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand. At the same time, Joachim Kügler provided space for intercultural exchange between young scholars from various African countries amongst one another and with German colleagues, especially at international conferences held in Bamberg. Presupposed here was a general attitude marked by the appreciation of difference informed by the conviction of a shared humanity. Such an attitude is, of course, at the heart of what Gospel meant in Early Christianity as is evident in the writings of the New Testament. In accordance with these witnesses, I define Gospel in the following way:

It is the good news about the salvific, i.e., life boosting turn of the God of justice and mercy towards the world, indiscriminately appreciating each and every one regardless of origin or status and integrating all into one community of God. This became a reality in and through Jesus Christ. The community of those who believe in this significance of Christ, is supposed – and enabled – to make Gospel transparent by living according to its integrative values of justice and mercy.

According to this Gospel, dignity is extended to each and everyone. Early Christianity used to operate with family metaphors to express the experience of a shared dignity across cultural, gender or status related divides. In this contribution, I will first connect the concepts of communal belongingness and dignity to experiences and conceptualizations within West African cultures before I will discuss some New Testament passages in this respect. I will conclude with some observations on the reflection of New Testament insights pertaining to the relevance of an inclusive community in the context of an emerging nation state, in the songs of Ephraim Amu. The particular focus on Ghana is due to my own research and life experience in that West African country (Kahl, 2007).

2. The Communalistic Concept of Human Dignity in West-Africa

To live in communities seems to be an all-pervasive feature in West-African cultures. This phenomenon comes into sharp focus especially when

seen from a Western perspective, and it has been described by a number of African philosophers and theologians (Gyekye, 1996). In order to illustrate this point, I would like to share but two experiences of intercultural *misunderstanding* that I observed in Ghana on trips that I took there with students from Germany:

- After a few days in Ghana some of the students would typically withdraw from the group, and they would just want to rest, to think, and to regain their strength. And they would insist to be left alone in their room. The typical reaction of our Ghanaian guests would be: Why, is she sick?
- Once, I had sent my students ahead from Accra to a village close to Mankessim where they were to stay overnight. At about midnight I received a phone-call from the group. They were bitterly complaining that I had put them into a dangerous situation. What happened? When the students got to the house I had rented for them, there was light-off in the whole village and it was pitch dark. The family staying there tried to help them in carrying the luggage into the house; the students however were afraid that their suit-cases would be stolen. Inside the house, the family would not leave the students alone but was getting ready to sleep together with them in the huge hall. The family was just expressing hospitality, meanwhile the students were fearing for their very lives.

What comes to expression in these two examples is a clash of individualistic and communalistic values. When discussing the concept of human dignity in West-African contexts it is essential to take note of the communalistic organization and understanding of life. This knowledge system, which is informed by communal life experiences, also comes to expression in the grammatical structure of West-African languages. I give an example from the Akan language family: The question “What is your name?” is rendered in Twi: Yɛfrɛ wo sɛn? This literally translates: They call you how? The answer is accordingly: Yɛfrɛ me XYZ – They call me XYZ. Compare the German: Wie heißt du? The expected answer is: Ich heiÙe XYZ. In the Twi version, the pronoun “they” constitutes the grammatical subject of the act of naming, and this personal pronoun stands at the very beginning of the sentence. In telling your name in this way, one brings to expression that you are related to a group of people by means of which you give respect to those before you, i.e. those who named you. This

aspect is neither denoted or connoted in the German example which puts the personal pronoun of the first person singular at the beginning of the sentence, in conjunction with heißen, i.e. a verbum intransitivum, which by definition excludes the involvement of another active subject and which therefore can also not be used in the passive voice.¹ In my understanding, these differences at the level of utterance are not accidental or peripheral as might be suggested from a structuralist perspective. These differences are significant because they point to rather different ways to construct and perceive of reality.

The Ghanaian exegete John Pobee has suggested that the organization and communication of reality in West-Africa, at least for the traditional experience of life, is informed, and gives expression to a communalistic ontology. A West-African equivalent of Descartes' well-known formula should be cognatus ergo sum, i.e. I am related by birth, therefore I am (Pobee, 1979, p. 197). This means, people understand themselves on a fundamental level as being part of, and actually as being dependent on a network of relationships, and that at different levels.

Synchronically, i.e. in a relationship within an extended family. Within this setting I have to play the role expected of me: to be respectful and obedient to those older than I, to take care of those younger than I, the same way those ahead of me have taken care of me. The communalistic understanding of life is however not limited to the extended family. It also comes to expression by addressing one another as brother or sister when belonging roughly to the same age group. This address can also be extended to visitors from foreign countries.

Diachronically, in two directions: first, with respect to the ancestors, and second, with respect to those yet unborn, connected with the responsibility to continue the family line into the future.

Spiritually: The observable world is considered as being embedded in a wider spiritual realm. Spiritual forces, both life enhancing and life threatening, are potentially at work in every aspect of the life of an individual as well as of the community or society, i.e., the causes of a predicament could be traced to the activity of a spirit.

¹ Therefore, the German "heißen" is also not functionally identically with the English verbum transitivum to call/to be called.

Within this framework of relationships the concept of human dignity in West-Africa is to be understood. A precise description of the concept of human dignity within this context is given by the well-known Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye whose insights are quoted here at length:

“A conception of human dignity and the sanctity of human life is explicit in the Akan maxim:

All human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth.

This insistent claim that every human being is a child of God has moral overtones or relevance, grounded as it is in the conviction that there must be something intrinsically valuable in God. Human beings, as children of God, by reason of their having been created by God, and possessing, in the Akan belief, a divine element called soul, ought to be held as of intrinsic value, as ends in themselves, worthy of respect. A concept of human dignity can be linked with – or derived from – the concepts of intrinsic value and respect. Also implicit in the maxim is the equality of the moral worth of *all* human beings – of all the children of God.

Concepts of human dignity, intrinsic value, and equal moral worth generate a notion of moral rights that, as deriving ultimately from God or as belonging fundamentally to every human being as creature of God, could be linked with the notion of innate rights. Such rights would belong to every human being by nature. Thus, to the extent that what are called human rights, they can be derived from conceptions of human dignity. That is to say, a human rights concept can certainly be said to be already involved in conceptions of human dignity. The conception of human dignity compels the recognition of rights – some rights – not only in an individualistic but also in a communal context. In other words, the derivation of human (individual) rights from supernaturalism cannot be confined to an individualistic context. [...]

Individuality [...] is not incompatible with communalism. Communalism as understood and practiced in the traditional African society does not, on [sic.] my interpretation, absorb individuality, but accommodate it and make it coexist with individuality. The significant implication of this accommodation or coexistence is that communalism is not at variance with the concept of individual right – that is, human rights. It is indeed the exercise of individual rights – which include the right of the individual to

exercise his or her unique qualities, talents, and dispositions – that enhance cultural development and insure the material and political success of the community.” (Gyekye, 1996, pp. 150–151).

This concept of human dignity is inherent in traditional culture, regardless if Akan, Ewe, or Ga. The right to individual freedom and development is not denied but related to the rights and needs of the wider community. It is expected of the individual to show some degree of responsibility for the community. In this context there are also instances where human dignity is being threatened. These instances, however, need close attention and careful examination, especially when the Western or modern perspective comes in, due to unavoidable and instant intercultural misunderstandings.

For example, in Northern Ghana we encounter the phenomenon of so-called witch-camps which, from a Western perspective, might be quite irritating. Some Western NGOs have campaigned for the dissolution of these camps, and in the West people would readily give their support. Amongst Europeans typically the atrocities committed against so many women during the witch-hunts in European history would come to mind immediately coupled with the conviction that evil witches do not exist. In West-Africa, however, it is a fact that the belief in the existence of witches is widespread. The so-called witch-camps in the rural areas of the North in Ghana are very often the only places where individuals branded as witches can find refuge. To just dissolve these camps would not solve the problem but would in fact aggravate the situation for the inhabitants who have no other place to go. It seems to me that the solution of the problem is quite complex, and it involves social, educational, and last but by no means least, spiritual strategies, e.g. involving traditional priests, malams or pastors to pray for the well-being of those residing in the camps (Kirby, 2015; Kahl & Lademann-Priemer, 2020).

3. A New Testament Perspective on Human Dignity and Communal Integration

In theology, the concept of universal human dignity is traditionally being linked to the *imago dei* concept as it is presupposed in the first creation narrative (Gen 1:26–27). And the Old Testament is replete with examples

of abuses of human dignity, like the narrative of Tamar being raped by Amnon (2Sam 13:1–22). In this paper, however, I would like to draw our attention to the New Testament which has been somewhat neglected in this respect.

First of all, I would like to point out Paul's understanding of the Christ event, at its most fundamental level. Here I can draw on the Pauline studies of the South-African born New Testament scholar Hendrikus Boers (Boers, 1971; Boers, 1994). Boers shows that Paul was fundamentally concerned with refuting claims to religious exclusivism by interpreting salvation through Christ in a universalistic manner: Christ has died for all to partake in divine grace. This egalitarian dimension of Paul's reasoning comes to expression in Gal 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Taken out of context, this verse could be misunderstood as denying or erasing difference, as if there were no more Jews or Greeks, no more slaves or free persons, no more women and men in Christ or among the believers. In the Christ believing communities founded by Paul there continued to be a variety of people with distinct religious, cultural and status backgrounds. In Early Christianity, the communication of Gospel aimed at the creation of cross-cultural faith and living communities that were prepared to invite and appreciate people from all walks of life. In order to understand appropriately what Paul wanted to communicate, I render the verse in the following way, connecting it to the immediate context:

"You all are sons (i.e. children) of God through the faith that you have in Christ Jesus. As such as you have been baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ (like a dress), regardless of (you) being a Jew or gentile, a slave or a free person, male or female, for you all have been joint together as one in Christ Jesus. But if you belong to Christ, then it follows that you are offspring of Abraham, i.e. heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:26–29).

In Paul's writings we have evidence that in his understanding of the Christ event, God is particularly concerned with bestowing his grace and justice on those whose dignity has been undermined in society by those claiming religious and social privileges. God balances former imbalances and he restores dignity and equality. Typically in 1 Cor 1, Paul emphasizes that those who do not count in this world are the privileged addressees of God's salvific activity:

“Brothers (and sisters), think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” (1Cor 1:26–29).

On the surface level of his expressions or in concrete situations, however, Paul constantly compromises his theological insight. When dealing with the question of the role of women in the congregations (1Cor 12 and 14) or of the status of slaves (1Cor 7; Philemon) we see him struggling to doing justice to his fundamental belief and to the solution of burning problems, at the same time.

Now it is remarkable that the Pauline understanding of salvation also comes to expression in the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels; most clearly in the Gospel of Luke (only the Magnificat of Marie in 1:46–55, esp. 52: “He pushes the mighty ones from the thrones and he lifts up the low ones”; and his version of the beatitudes in conjunction with the following condemnations of the rich in 6:20–26). God here, as in 1Cor 1, shows a clear predilection for the poor, the oppressed and disregarded ones, aiming at a reversal of societal power-relations. However, not only in the sayings-material of the Synoptic Gospels, but also in the very narratives about Jesus’ activities is communicated what seems to be at the heart of the Gospel: Jesus extends the blessing and salvation of God especially to those who are being disregarded in society or actually regarded as devoid of human dignity and who are excluded from community – the sick, the demon possessed, the sinners, the unclean ones, the foreigners. Against this background it also makes sense that in the Gospel narratives a particular emphasis is laid on Jesus’ concern for children and on the commitment to Jesus by women which exceeds that of his male followers.

It is quite revealing to read the Gospel of Mark from the perspective of human dignity. In fact, Mark should be read as a narrative about the affirmation of human dignity on both a fundamental level and on a structural level for those who read and understand.

Fundamentally, the Markan narrative in chapters 1–15 describes the ironic unfolding of the plan of Jesus’ enemies to get rid of him. His shameful

death on the cross serves as a gross expression of the negation of his human dignity. However, the Gospel of Mark does not end there. It continues in 16:1–8 with the miraculous restoration of Jesus' life which indicates the divine affirmation of his dignity. As miracle this event presupposes God's intervention, and it is the shortest miracle narrative in the New Testament, encapsulated in just one Greek word describing as one narrative move the transformation of a certain situation into its very opposite by means of just one action:² *ēgerthē* – He has been resurrected. This word in the aorist passive voice is a *passivum divinum* and should be understood as saying: God has resurrected him (from the dead). By means of this act, God has inverted the verdict of the Roman and Jewish authorities.

Now interestingly, within the Gospel narrative Jesus basically emulates God's salvific activity when he restores people from sickness to health, from death to life, from insanity to sanity, from social exclusion to inclusion. These are paradigmatic restoration stories which bring to expression what the Gospel about the unfolding Kingdom of God (Mk 1:14–15) is all about: the restoration of a dignified life. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the ultimate and fundamental miracle story of Early Christianity and it serves as the model for the other miracle stories. It is therefore no coincidence, that in a number of these stories the verb *egeirein* (to raise, to wake up) occurs indicating restoration (Mk 1:31; 2:9.11.13; 3:5; 5:41; 9:27; 10:49). These restorations are not only according to the will of God, they also need divine power. Therefore, right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus is bestowed with the divine spirit (Mk 1:10–11) which allows him to overpower Satan (Mk 1:12–13) and by implication all demonic, i.e. life threatening and dignity undermining evil spirits.

Interestingly it is especially the miracle healing stories which communicate the affirmation of human dignity and the re-integration into the community. I would like to point out some relevant motifs in the first three miracle healing stories in the first chapter of Mark (Kahl, 1994).

² Cf. the definitions of "Récit" and "Programme narratif" in Greimas & Courtés, 1993, p. 307: The simplest form of a narrative – récit simple – could be described as "le passage d'un état antérieur (...) à un état ultérieur opéré à l'aide d'un faire (...). Dans cette perspective, le récit simple se rapproche du concept de programme narratif."

3.1 The Healing Stories in Mk 1

3.1.1 Mk 1:21–28: Jesus Delivers a Man from an Unclean Spirit

Jesus teaches in the synagogue at Capernaum. The people witnessing the event are utterly astonished about the authority (*exousia*) with which Jesus teaches (v. 22). The reader, however, will not be astonished since s/he knows from Mk 1,1ff who Jesus is! Up to this point within the narrative it is only the unclean spirit residing in a man who knows about Jesus' identity. And he also knows that the presence of the "holy one of God" means destruction for the unclean spirit (v. 24). Consequently, Jesus rebukes (*epitimaō*: *terminus technicus* in exorcism stories) the spirit, commanding him to shut up and move out: *phimōthēti kai exelthe ex autou* (v. 25). The spirit acts accordingly (v. 26). Again the people are surprised and filled with fear; sensing Jesus' power they wonder what this means (v. 27).

In this story comes to expression the Early Christian conviction that Jesus is able to overpower spirits that take possession of people making them unclean. It should also be noted that this incidence takes place in a synagogue, a place where it was expected of people to come before God in a purified state. The exorcism at this very location implies that Jesus is able to restore the purity of the possessed man by driving out the unclean spirit. The reader understands: Jesus' purity is more contagious than the impurity of spirits.

The dimension of a spiritual power struggle between divine and Satanic powers is fundamentally presupposed in the Gospel of Mark. To listeners and readers in antiquity, this was nothing strange but expected. From the short temptation story in Mk 1:12–13 – in narrative function a test after Jesus, the hero of the story, has been bestowed with the divine spirit – it can be concluded right at the opening of the Gospel that this power struggle has been ultimately decided in favor of Jesus.

3.1.2 Mk 1:29–31: Jesus Delivers Peter's Mother-in-law from Fever

The fever of the sick woman is most likely conceived of as a spirit, for the fever is portrayed as active subject of the performance bringing about the dissociation of fever and woman. The fever engages in this action after Jesus establishes a physical contact with the woman while grasping her hand. Clearly Luke has understood this episode as a spiritual deliverance

incident, for according to his version Jesus rebukes (*epitimaō*) the fever. The activity of rebuking is typical for ancient including New Testament exorcism practices.

It is also significant that Jesus touches the woman supposed to be infected with a fever spirit, i.e. he does not shy away from having physical contact with a person considered as spiritually contagious. He takes her serious as fellow human being who is in need not only of healing but also of relationships expressing love and compassion. It should also be noted that Jesus raises her up, which is rendered by the Greek word *egairein*, which of course is the same verb used in 16:4 indicating Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The miracle healing story in 1:29–31 functions as a minor resurrection story reflecting the fundamental miracle story of the New Testament, i.e. Jesus' resurrection.

Hermeneutically we can say: The will of God is manifest, whenever people are being lifted up, when they can walk upright again, when broken communal relationships are healed and re-established. In V. 31 it is communicated that the women served them. According to the form-critical analysis of miracle stories this signifies the successful restoration of the woman: Now she can take up again her function in the household. In a semantic universe, however, where illness can be attributed to the activity of evil or unclean spirits, the concluding sentence of the episode takes on an additional function which might be well appreciated in a West-African perspective: Her serving the guests with food is indicative of a social reintegration in the sense that the guests accept her services, i.e. they are not afraid of being infected by a spirit dwelling in her. They trust the effectiveness of Jesus' deliverance and they accept the woman.

3.1.3 Mk 1:39–44: Jesus Delivers a Man from Leprosy

A person with leprosy approaches Jesus begging him for healing, i.e. purification (*katharisai*). He presupposes that Jesus has the ability to bring about purity and appeals to his will. Jesus is deeply moved by the request (*splagchnistheis* – Matthew and Luke omit this emotional motif since it does not fit their conceptions of Jesus who is, especially in Luke, supposed to be in control of himself) and he agrees to engage in the required act: He touches the leper with his hand, i.e. Jesus establishes physical contact

with a person who in antiquity was stigmatized and isolated from relationships. Jesus commands healing and the leprosy as active subject leaves the person. Again, it is presupposed that a sickness causing spirit was responsible for the predicament rendering the person unclean. Therefore, in this episode the verb “to cleanse”, “to purify” occurs three times and the noun purity/purification once. The purity of Jesus, due to his indwelling spirit from above, overrides the impurity caused by the leprosy spirit. In order for the man to be accepted into society, Jesus sends him to the priest to declare him clean, and to bring the necessary offerings.

The miracle healing stories in Mark, and the same holds true for the other Synoptic Gospels, exhibit a common structure:

1. Jesus establishes a relationship to those excluded from society or regarded devoid of human dignity.
2. He removes the spiritual cause of the exclusion by means of a stronger spiritual antidote.
3. He prepares the formerly excluded person for re-inclusion into the community.

It should also be noted that in these narratives, those stigmatized and excluded from relationships are being usually put at center stage (clearly Mk 2:1–12; 3:3; 9:36).

3.2 Spiritual and Social Dimensions of Sickness and Healing

A close and contextual reading of the miracle healing episodes in the Gospel of Mark reveals two essential aspects which usually go unnoticed in a Western exegetical perspective:

3.2.1 The Spiritual Aspect of Sickness and Healing

Very often it is presupposed that the sickness has a spiritual cause. In many cases this is attributed to the activity of a so-called unclean spirit. Within the semantic universe of the ancient Mediterranean world in general and within Early Christianity in particular this was nothing strange but rather self-evident. Therefore, we should reckon with the possibility that the involvement of a spiritual agent in causing a sickness might be presupposed in a given story even though this might not be explicitly stated. There, however, might be hints within a story which are indicative

of such an involvement. This is particularly the case when a sickness occurs grammatically as the active subject of a clause, as in Mk 1:31: “And the fever left her”, or as in Mk 1:42: “And immediately the leprosy went away from him.” In such cases, a stronger power is required to overcome the unclean spirits, i.e. the spirit from above (cf. Mk 1:10–11).

3.2.2 The Social Dimension of Sickness and Healing

It is no coincidence, that the spirits causing sickness and/or strange behavior, are usually qualified as unclean or impure. If a person in Jewish antiquity was regarded as impure, this not only affected negatively his or her access to the temple, it also meant constant social stigmatisation bringing to expression the fear of infection, not just with sickness but with the spirit of the sickness. Within this semantic universe the proclamation of the advent of the Kingdom of God – the new, just, salvific, reconciled, and all-inclusive divine society – only made sense when it included the deliverance from unclean spirits. Therefore, miracle healing stories in the New Testament are usually concluded by the description of an activity indicating social inclusion and the restoration of relationships.

Kingdom is a term denoting a particular form of socio-political organisation widespread and taken for granted in antiquity. The Kingdom of God, as proclaimed by Jesus, is unique since it means the inclusion of everyone with an emphasis on those whose dignity was disregarded in society. Despite the fact that Mark portrays Jesus as successful miracle worker – and he does so in order to communicate his conviction that this Jesus who died at the cross, is the Son of God – it would be problematic to over-emphasize miraculous healings at the expense of the significance of the inclusive character of the Kingdom of God. According to the faith and the experiences within Early Christianity as witnessed to by the New Testament writings, healing was always regarded as a free gift from God; it never was regarded as precondition for the entry into God’s Kingdom. The latter would actually contradict the teaching of Jesus and the experiences of his followers many of whom suffered persecution, sickness and premature death (cf. only the Beatitudes in Mt 5 and Lk 6). In the Synoptic Gospels, the miracle healing stories have the basic function of signifying the advent of the all-inclusive Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 12:28 par. Lk 11:20). As such, they foreshadow the expected ultimate salvation.

The last miracle healing story in the Gospel of Mark occurs in Mk 10:46–52. Formerly blind Bartimaeus decides to follow Jesus on his way into Jerusalem. Following Jesus is the appeal of Mark to his readers. The disciples of Jesus in Mark, however, are those who never fully understand who Jesus is. They function as example for those who have not yet understood the implication of the miracles of Jesus nor their own mission! The readers are expected to understand and act accordingly. They are called to emulate the example of Jesus.

Mk 12:28–34 – the so-called double commandment of love – gives a summary of Jesus’s teaching: The respect, and we can say the human dignity that I expect granted me, I should also grant others. The individual is seen here in a net of respectful relationships between God, others and oneself. When these relationships get imbalanced, human dignity is potentially being threatened, e.g. in the case of an extreme individualism in the modern world. In the Western world this individualism is increasingly coupled with a loss of faith that God has bestowed us with his grace and dignity.

Communicating the Gospel in Early Christianity meant giving witness to others of its integrative meaning and significance, aiming at the possible inclusion of each and everyone into one faith and living community of brothers and sisters across cultures. The narrative of Acts of the Apostles is Luke’s version of this witnessing process that led to the transgression of boundaries and to the creation of cross-cultural faith and living communities (Acts 1:8; Acts 11:19–26). Peter is led by divine revelation to the fundamental insight of the meaning of Gospel: “In truth I understand that God is not partial, but in every nation the one who fears him and does justice, s/he is pleasant to God.” (Acts 10:34–35; cf. Rom 2:11).

As recent research has shown, this is also the meaning of the last verses of the Gospel of Matthew (28:18b–20). This passage has, however, been severely misconstrued in mission history up till present times as implying a forceful conversion of others into the Christian faith. The meaning of the passage as the conclusion of the trajectory of Matthew’s Gospel narrative is: The disciples of Jesus should now that Jesus has been rejected in much of Judaism, go forth and include people of every nation as possible addressees of the Gospel. Everyone is invited to listen to the good news of the divine inclusion of all into God’s people as one community of brothers

and sisters (Reinbold, 2012, pp. 176–205). This universal extension of divine grace and justice is at the heart of Gospel as it had been experienced and communicated in Early Christianity.

4. Ephraim Amu: *Yen ara asase ni & Biakoye*

Ephraim Amu, a child of Peki and the outstanding Ghanaian musician of the 20th century, has pointed out the danger of modern individualism for society. In his famous Twi song *Yen ara asase ni*, originally written in 1929 in Peki-Ewe, he has this to say – I present the English translation by Philip Laryea of Akrofi-Christaller-Memorial Centre in Akropong.³

Yen ara asase ni / This is our own land

This is our own land, it is precious to us,
 Blood did our forefathers shed to obtain it for us.
 It is the turn of me and you to continue.
 Unproductive knowledge, cunning and selfishness
 Have destroyed our life
 And have affected our love for our land.
 Whether our nation will prosper
 Or whether it will not prosper
 It is an established fact that this depends on
 The conduct of her people.
 Book knowledge that is vain
 Or property acquired without toil,
 And dishonesty, destroy a nation and defame it.
 Obedience and respect, wishing your fellows well always,
 Unlimited dedication to everyone's needs,
 These bring peace and progress to a nation.
 Whether a nation prospers
 Or whether it does not prosper
 It is an established fact that this depends on the
 Conduct of her people. (Laryea, 2008, 43–44)

³ I have adjusted the English translation at a few places for better clarity.

Amu's song brings to expression the insight that an undue concern with one's own affairs at the cost of caring for the needy, is a threat to the peace and progress of a nation. The Biblical concept of the love of the neighbour is clearly present in the song, cf. the lines "Obedience and respect, wishing your fellows well always, unlimited dedication to everyone's needs, these bring peace and progress to a nation". In a sermon Amu delivered around 1970 in the chapel at Peki Training College, he complains "that we are being inspired by a vision of our own selfish ends" (Laryea, 2008, p. 48). Amu, however, integrates New Testament values with African traditional values such as neighbourly love and unity which to him serve as the foundation for building a lasting and socially progressing nation. In his song *Biakoɛ* of 1933 which has become "the union song for all Singing Bands in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana" (Laryea, 2008, p. 50), Amu explicitly refers to the teachings of Jesus concerning unity:

Biakoɛ / Unity

With our minds and deeds,
 Our way of life and zeal
 We show that oneness is proper and worthy.
 It is a command of Jesus,
 We shall live it today and forever.
 Neighbourly love is good, unity is good.
 It refreshes us, it encourages us,
 It makes us mature and progressive,
 It transforms us through and through
 And so let us hold on to it at all times. (Laryea 2008, p. 51).

Philip Laryea has shown that Amu's lyrics at this point have been informed by the double-commandment of love as presented in Lk 10:25–27. Jesus' values coincide with traditional African values concerning community life in rejecting an individualistic self-understanding and conception of life as it dominates Western thinking and existence.

5. Conclusion

The Gospel is not a matter beyond culture. The Gospel becomes alive within distinct cultures and concrete life situations. It both challenges certain aspects of our cultures, and supports others. As we have seen, at the

heart of the Gospel lies the insight that each and everyone is bestowed with divine grace and dignity from above. The church, called to emulate the example of Jesus, should also be with those whose dignity is being undermined in our societies. The church should be a place where everybody is somebody.

An undue emphasis on individual as well as on communal rights paves the ground for abuses of human dignity. What is needed in the church, is a Christ centered balance of both, the individual and communal dimensions of human existence, which is to be realized always in relation to particular situations in culture and context.

Identifying abuses of human dignity and strategies to be employed in preserving or restoring human dignity is a matter of ongoing intercultural debate. Since cultural strangers will have difficulties understanding matters in a different culture at depth, they should refrain from passing premature judgment. However, we in the one Church of the Gospel should not get tired to remind one another of our special service towards those whose human dignity is threatened of being undermined. And we should assist one another in devising programs aimed at the implementation of strategies to overcome unbearable situations, making use of our diverse resources.

Our common theological ancestor Dietrich Bonhoeffer claimed during the Nazi era that the church should not continue chanting Gregorian hymns, unless the church stands with the Jews who were severely persecuted at that time. This might serve as a call onto us to stand united as brothers and sisters, trying to have the Gospel become transparent in our activities for, and together with those whose human dignity is being disregarded.

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14 The Bible, Diversity, Belonging and Inclusion

Abstract

Diversität, das Gefühl von Zugehörigkeit und Inklusivität sind Themen, die in unserer Gesellschaft aktuell eine große Rolle spielen. Ist die Gesellschaft zur Entstehungszeit biblischer Texte zwar eine gänzlich andere, so lassen sich doch gerade aus der Briefliteratur des Neuen Testaments einige Grundprinzipien zu diesen „modernen“ Themen herausarbeiten, etwa aus dem Galaterbrief des Apostels Paulus. Dieser stellt sich in Galatien nicht nur der Herausforderung, den Christusglauben gegen dort wirkende Gegner zu verteidigen. Er sieht sich zudem der Schwierigkeit gegenüber, dass dieser Christusglauben mit vielen Traditionen angereichert ist, die aus dem Judentum stammen, allen voran die Abrahamssohnschaft. Da er es in Galatien mit Heiden zu tun hat, ist es spannend nachzuvollziehen, wie er es schafft, dass auch sie – ohne Beschneidung und Gesetz – an solchen Traditionen teilhaben und dazugehören können. Nahezu modern mutet es hierbei an, dass in Christus die Deutungskategorien der damaligen Zeit verschwinden: Versklavung und Freiheit, Heiden- und Judentum sowie „männliche“ und „weibliche“ Verhaltensmuster werden bedeutungslos. Durch den einenden Glauben an Christus eröffnet Paulus ein inklusiv abzielendes Programm, dessen Gehalt sich bis in die heutige Zeit aktualisieren und erhalten lässt.

Keywords: *Paulus, Galaterbrief, Diversität, Zugehörigkeit, Inklusion*

1. Einleitung

Die Frage, auf welche Weise sich soziale Fragen der Gegenwart, wie etwa Diversität, Inklusion bzw. Inklusivität oder ein Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit in der Bibel wiederfinden, ist diffizil. Selbstredend ist eine Übertragung „moderner“ Themen nicht eins zu eins möglich, es geht vielmehr um die

Frage nach grundlegenden Prinzipien hinsichtlich des Umgangs miteinander. Eine Ausweitung auf die Bibel als ganzes Buch würde diesen Rahmen natürlich bei Weitem sprengen; aus diesem Grund ist es notwendig, sich auf Passagen zu beschränken. Fündig wird man etwa beim Apostel Paulus. Er sieht sich im ersten Jahrhundert nach Christus vor Fragen gestellt wie: Wie feiert man ein Mahl in Erinnerung an Jesus als Christus und Herrn? Unter welchen Umständen darf man mitfeiern? Und was macht ein solches Mahl im Kern überhaupt aus?

Exemplarisch soll sein Brief an die Galater ausgewählt werden, da durch die in Galatien gegen Paulus agierenden Fremdmissionare die Zugehörigkeit vieler zu Christus infrage gestellt wird und damit die oben beschriebenen Fragestellungen berührt sind. Aus diesem Grund ist der Apostel gezwungen, besonders klar Stellung zu beziehen und zu benennen, was Christusgläubige und deren Versammlung ausmacht – und was nicht. Dabei soll gezeigt werden, inwiefern Prinzipien zu den Gesichtspunkten *Diversity*, *Belonging* und *Inclusion* vom Schreiben des Apostels abgeleitet werden können.

2. Diversität bei Paulus

Beim Versuch, biblische Texte unter dem Aspekt der Diversität zu beleuchten, gilt es zuallererst festzuhalten, dass dieser Begriff – je nach Kontext, in dem er erscheint – ganz unterschiedliche Bedeutungen haben kann. In Bezug auf die Beschreibung einer Gesellschaft handelt es sich dabei „um eine Vielfalt im Sinne von Alter, Behinderung, ethnischer Herkunft, Geschlecht, Religion oder Weltanschauung und sexueller Identität“ (Rohmann & Mazziotta, 2017, p. 9).

Bei den frühen Christusgläubigen sind vor allem Streitfragen virulent, die die ethnische Herkunft und Religion des Einzelnen betreffen, wobei sich jene Teilbereiche zu dieser Zeit kaum voneinander scheiden lassen. Besonders deutlich tritt dies im Galaterbrief des Paulus hervor. Um dem Aspekt der Diversität dort zu betrachten, sind zunächst dessen äußere Umstände zu beleuchten; doch dabei muss hier vieles im Unklaren bleiben. Man weiß nicht mit absoluter Sicherheit, welche exakte Personengruppe mit den „Galatern“ gemeint ist, und die Suche danach ist mit einigen Schwierigkeiten verbunden.

2.1 Der Galaterbrief – Abfassungsort und -zeit

Bezüglich der genauen Lokalisierung der Provinz Γαλάτῖα lassen sich vor allem zwei Thesen finden, die in der Forschung als realistisch angesehen werden: Zum einen gibt es die *Provinzhypothese (südgalatische Hypothese)*. Folgt man ihr, so ist mit Galatien die römische *Pronvincia Galatiae* gemeint, die die Landschaft Galatien und das Gebiet bis zur kleinasiatischen Südküste (Pamphylien, Pisidien etc.) umschließt. In dieser Gegend lässt sich die Existenz einer alten und stattlichen jüdischen Diaspora nachweisen. Ihr gegenüber steht die *Landschaftshypothese (nordgalatische Hypothese)*. Demnach ist mit „Galatien“ die Landschaft im zentralanatolischen Hochland rund um die Städte Ankyra, Pessinus und Tavium gemeint. Dort besteht eine wenig hellenisierte Landbevölkerung, eine jüdische Diaspora ist nicht nachweisbar (Frey, 2012, p. 241).

Die nordgalatische Hypothese geht mit einer späteren Datierung des Briefes einher, es stünden daher sowohl Galater- als auch Römerbrief „als Zeugen der Rechtfertigungsbotschaft am Ende der paulinischen Wirksamkeit und eröffneten die Möglichkeit zur These, die Theologie des Paulus habe sich dorthin entwickelt“ (Becker, 1998, p. 14). Gerade dieses inhaltliche Argument soll an dieser Stelle überzeugen, da der Argumentationsgang des Apostels viel Tiefe mit sich bringt.

Dieser ist auch nötig, weil er sich in Galatien mit gegnerischen Agitatoren auseinanderzusetzen hat, die die von ihm gegründete Gemeinde stark ins Wanken bringen. Nicht umsonst wird die Situation, der Paulus sich stellt, als *galatische Krise* bezeichnet (John, 2016, pp. 164–177). Sollen anhand der Geografie Schlussfolgerungen auf die Gruppe der Galater gefällt werden, führt das also zumindest zu einigen theologischen Unwägbarkeiten.

2.2 Die galatischen Gegner

Eine andere Form der Annäherung an die Galater wäre es, mit dem zu arbeiten, was der Text hergibt; und dort spielt vor allem inhaltlich die Position der paulinischen Gegner eine wichtige Rolle, um Rückschlüsse auf deren „Zielgruppe“ bei der Mission zu treffen.

Begibt man sich auf Spurensuche nach den paulinischen Gegnern und ihren Lehren, gilt es zu beachten, dass deren Darstellung stets aus den Augen des Paulus erfolgt: Man sieht sie und deren Verkündigung so, wie

er sie zeichnet. Ihm und seinen Gegnern ist zwar gemein, dass beide Menschen ansprechen, die an Christus glauben; doch im weiteren Verlauf des Briefes treten markante Unterschiede zu Tage, die sich besonders auf die Merkmale beziehen, welche entscheidend dafür sind, was die Gruppe Christusgläubiger ausmacht und wie sich diese ausgestaltet. Es geht folglich auch – aber nicht nur! – um die identity markers dieser Gruppe.

So wie sich Paulus mit seinen Gegnern thematisch in seinem Brief indirekt auseinandersetzt, wird schnell eine Sache klar: Er stellt sie als „christliche Missionare mit einem Verkündigungsprofil, das Paulus als dem seinen diametral entgegengesetzt porträtiert“ (Vollenweider, 2018, p. 654), dar. Das lässt sich vor allem an ihrer soteriologischen Auffassung ablesen, die die Beschneidung und die Verpflichtung auf das Gesetz für die Gläubigen fordern:

“Their soteriology implies that salvation is only for the Torah-abiding, covenant people of Israel. Gentiles may be saved, but only when they become Jews by going through circumcision and by observing the commandments of the Torah. This kind of soteriology was diametrically opposed to Paul’s universalistic soteriology, which was solely based on the grace of God through faith in/of Jesus Christ, not on the ‘works’ of the Torah – and which, therefore, does not discriminate between Jews and Gentiles.” (Park, 2003, pp. 51–52).

Der Vorwurf der Gegner an Paulus könnte folglich lauten, dass er seiner Gemeinde in Galatien den Weg zum Heil versperrt, indem er die „falschen“ Identitätsmerkmale an sie heranträgt: Glaube (Gal 3,6f.) und Taufe (Gal 3,27) statt Gesetz und Beschneidung. Die laute Forderung der Gegner nach der Beschneidung der Christusgläubigen ist dabei erst zum Ende des Briefes beim Namen genannt (Gal 6,12); auf sie ist jedoch im Verlauf des Briefes bereits mehrfach angespielt: Es geht konkret um ihre Absicht, die Beschneidung der Galater zu erwirken, die sie allem Anschein nach als entscheidendes Kriterium ansehen, um zur Gruppe Christusgläubiger zu gehören.

Doch warum ist die Beschneidung, die in der Antike alles andere als frei von Risiko war, für seine Gegner nicht verhandelbar? Die vehemente Forderung danach bringen diese augenscheinlich mit der Zugehörigkeit zur Sohnschaft Abrahams in Verbindung. Das macht auch das Arrangement der paulinischen Themen im Mittelteil seines Briefes erklärbar, in dem

etwa auch Abraham als israelitischer Stammvater eine zentrale Rolle einnimmt (Gal 3).

Die Argumentation seiner Gegner könnte ungefähr lauten: Wer Abrahams Sohn werden möchte – und darauf wollen weder Paulus noch seine Gegner verzichten –, muss sich und sein Haus beschneiden lassen. In diesem Zusammenhang ist auch die Einhaltung des Gesetzes einzuordnen, denn „Gesetzesgehorsam ist Voraussetzung und notwendiger Ausdruck der Zugehörigkeit“ (Söding, 1991, p. 311).

2.3 Diversität „im Innern“

Anhand des Bildes, das Paulus von seinen Gegnern zeichnet, und anhand der Themen, die in Galatien auf dem Tisch liegen, lassen sich nun wiederum Rückschlüsse auf die Galater ziehen. Daraus lässt sich ablesen, welche Einflüsse von außen sich die Gemeinde zu eigen gemacht hat. Hierbei stellen die Gegner einen großen Einflussfaktor dar: Deren grob gezeichnetes Profil lässt darauf schließen, dass sie „hellenistische (d.h. Griechisch sprechende) Judenchristen (oder beschnittene, d.h. Proselyten gewordene ehemalige Heidenchristen)“ (Frey, 2012, p. 248.), in jedem Fall aber Christusgläubige und nicht einfach Juden waren, die ihre Form des Christusglaubens nun an die Gemeinde in Galatien herantragen.

Für die Gemeinde der Galater heißt dies wiederum, dass sie sich als Gruppe beschreiben lässt, die Begeisterungsfähigkeit und ein großes Interesse an Religion und Spiritualität gehabt haben dürfte. Dafür spricht die Tatsache, dass Paulus ihre Gemeinde gegründet hat, als auch ihre Abkehr durch die dort wirkenden Irrlehrer, die von ihnen trotz des Glaubens an Christus die Beschneidung und Einhaltung der Gesetze fordern. Konkret geht es somit um die Zuwendung zu wesentlichen identity markers, die von der paulinischen Gegnerschaft an die Galater herangetragen werden.

So ist es auch auffällig, dass Paulus wichtige Glaubenstraditionen, die für ihn als pharisäischen Juden unverzichtbar zu sein scheinen, für diese heidnische Gemeinde umdeutet: Er öffnet etwa die Abrahamssohnschaft für *alle* Christusgläubigen und macht sie von der Beschneidung unabhängig (Gal 3) oder interpretiert die Isaak-Ismael-Tradition um und vergleicht toraobservante Juden mit letztgenannter Rolle (Gal 4), so dass sich schlussfolgern lässt, dass Paulus mit den Galatern wohl – zumindest zu

einem gewissen Anteil – „Neueinsteiger in die jüdisch-christliche Glaubenswelt“ (Scherer, 2011, p. 136) vor sich hat und ihnen somit das Terrain jüdischen Glaubens erst vorerschließen muss.

Man kann festhalten, dass Paulus seinen Galaterbrief an eine Gemeinde verfasst, die an Christus glaubt, sich aber an gewissen jüdisch geprägten Einflüssen orientiert. Zudem scheinen sie Welt- beziehungsweise Elementarmächte (Gal 4,3 τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) zu verehren und sich auch paganen Kulturen offen gegenüber zu zeigen (Wischmeyer, 2012, pp. 145–146). Es lässt sich daher mit Sicherheit sagen, dass die Galater, bevor sie missioniert wurden, Heiden waren und heidnische Kulte ausübten, die während der Abfassung des Galaterbriefes wohl auch wieder im Kommen sind (Becker, 1992, p. 287). Die Gemeinde wird also entscheidend von äußeren Einflüssen geprägt und steht vor der Herausforderung, die eigene Identität diskursiv zu erringen. Divers ist die Gemeinde der Galater damit nicht nur aus ethnischen, sondern vor allem aus religiösen Gesichtspunkten – sofern sich dies zu dieser Zeit überhaupt trennen lässt.

2.4 Diversität „im Äußeren“

Die Diversität, die sich innerhalb der galatischen Gemeinde feststellen lässt, wird wie bereits beschrieben durch äußere Einflüsse ergänzt. Der Missionar Paulus selbst ist und bleibt sein ganzes Leben lang Jude; allerdings gibt es auch innerhalb des Judentums bei Weitem keine Einheitlichkeit. Der Apostel ist zur Gruppe der Pharisäer zu zählen, die sich auch durch eine besonders genaue Kenntnis der Schrift auszeichnet. Gerade dieser Schriftgelehrte, erkennt in Jesus den Christus und richtet seinen jüdischen Glauben ganz in Hinblick auf den Messias aus. Aufgrund der hier vorliegenden Diversität ist es auch nicht zielführend, von „dem Judentum“ als Sammelbegriff zu sprechen, sondern eher vom Judentum, das Paulus prägt, und damit dem pharisäischen.

Die religiöse Vielfalt erschöpft sich somit nicht in der Unterscheidung von Juden(christen) und Heiden, sondern lässt sich sogar innerhalb des Judentums nachweisen. Das bedeutet, dass nicht nur die Galater als zu missionierende Gruppe unterschiedlichen Einflüssen unterliegen, sondern auch Paulus und dessen Gegner als Missionierende aus einem ethnisch-religiösen Milieu stammen, das von einer gewissen Diversität geprägt ist. Dass der Apostel um sein Missionswerk bei dieser Gruppe mit

den dort wirkenden Gegnern ringt, unterstreicht die kulturelle Vielfalt, der er sich bei seiner Verkündigung gegenüberstellt, zumal die frohe Botschaft Christi allen gelten soll, jüdischen wie heidnischen Christusgläubigen – das beteuert Paulus höchst selbst in Gal 2. Die Frage, mit der sich der Apostel nun beschäftigen muss, besteht darin, auf welche Weise jeder und jede aus dieser heterogenen Gruppe zum Christusgläubigen werden kann. Besonders spannend gerät diese Frage deshalb, weil der Christusglaube aus Sicht des Apostels nicht ohne zahlreiche jüdische Glaubensströmungen auskommt.

3. Eine Botschaft der Zugehörigkeit – alle sind *einer* in Christus

Der Begriff der Zugehörigkeit betrifft den Menschen im Kern dessen, was ihn ausmacht. In der Psychologie findet man diesen Begriff vor allem, wenn es um die Relation von Individuum und Gruppe geht: „Der Mensch ist ein soziales Wesen. Sein tiefstes Bedürfnis ist es, sich innerhalb einer klar definierbaren Gruppe akzeptiert zu fühlen. Wir nennen dieses Gefühl ‚Zugehörigkeitsgefühl‘“ (Schoenaker, 2006, p. 26).

3.1 Zugehörigkeit wozu?

Das Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit ist allem Anschein nach ein tiefes Bedürfnis, das auch für die Galaterinnen und Galater gilt. Sie wollen ebenfalls dazugehören, nämlich zur Gruppe derer, die an Christus glauben. Bevor man sich der Frage widmen kann, auf welche Weise die Galater der Gruppe Christusgläubiger angehören können, ist es aber zunächst nötig, diese Gruppe genauer zu definieren. Schwierig wird es für die Gemeinde besonders deswegen, weil es zwei verschiedene Antworten auf die Frage gibt, was Christusgläubige ausmacht: von Paulus und von seinen Gegnern. Zentral für die paulinische Botschaft ist es, dass alle Christusgläubige durch die Taufe und den Glauben gleichwertig sind und gleichermaßen dazugehören. Besonders deutlich wird dies in Gal 3,26–29:

„26 Denn alle seid ihr durch den Glauben Söhne Gottes in Christus Jesus.
27 Denn ihr alle, die ihr auf Christus getauft seid, habt Christus angezogen.
28 Es gibt nicht mehr Juden und Griechen, nicht Sklaven und Freie, nicht männlich und weiblich; denn ihr alle seid einer in Christus Jesus.
29

Wenn ihr aber Christus gehört, dann seid ihr Abrahams Nachkommen, Erben gemäß der Verheißung.“ (Gal 3,26–29).

Aus sozial-ethnischer Sicht springt hier sofort ins Auge, dass Paulus die gesellschaftlich etablierte und binär strukturierte Trias der Gegenüberstellungen Jude – Grieche, Sklave – Freier und männlich – weiblich¹ in Christus als überholt betrachtet, da alle in ihm *einer* (εἷς) sind. Die Besonderheit dieser Gleichstellung lässt sich mit einem Hinweis auf die damals patriarchal geprägte Lebenswelt herausstellen: Sicherlich wird es für einen freien Mann zu dieser Zeit eine erhebliche Umstellung gewesen sein, sich auf Augenhöhe mit einer weiblichen Sklavin zu befinden. Der Schlüssel hinter diesem Verständnis steckt in den oben zitierten Versen. Dort fällt vor allem die Wendung des *Seins in Christus* auf, der in der neueren Forschung eine zentrale Stelle zum *Identitätsverständnis* des Paulus beigemessen wird: In Christus betreten alle Glaubenden eine Sphäre, die die Deutungskategorien seiner Zeit übersteigt und unwirksam werden lässt (Schnelle, 2014, p. 519). Die Diversität derer, die an Christus glauben, verliert deshalb schlagartig ihre Relevanz, sobald sie *in Christus sind*.

3.2 Die kollektive Identität in Christus

In Gal 3,26–29 wird damit auch das Programm einer *kollektiven Identität*², die Paulus für Christusgläubige hat, offenkundig: Es distanziert sich von einem System mit klassischen Rollenbildern, die in der antiken Gesellschaft vorherrschen, geht weit über das Establishment seiner Zeit hinaus,

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- 1 Auffällig ist, dass Paulus nicht die Begriffe „Mann“ und „Frau“, sondern die Adjektive „männlich“ und „weiblich“ verwendet. Kügler konkretisiert, dass es an dieser Stelle nicht darum geht, „den persönlichen Körper der Einzelnen geschlechtsneutral zu machen, sondern die Geschlechtszuordnung der gemeindlichen Funktionen aufzulösen“ (Kügler, 2021, p. 79). Bei diesem Antagonismus geht es somit nicht vornehmlich um die Geschlechtlichkeit und damit die individuelle Identität einer Person, sondern besonders um Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit als Deutungskategorien.
 - 2 Assmann führt zur kollektiven Identität aus: „Unter einer kollektiven oder Wir-Identität verstehen wir das Bild, das eine Gruppe von sich aufbaut und mit dem sich deren Mitglieder identifizieren. Kollektive Identität ist eine Frage der Identifikation seitens der beteiligten Individuen. Es gibt sie nicht ‚an sich‘, sondern immer nur in dem Maße, wie sich bestimmte Individuen zu ihr bekennen. Sie ist so stark oder so schwach, wie sie im Bewußtsein der Gruppenmitglieder lebendig ist und deren Denken und Handeln zu motivieren vermag.“ (Assmann, 2013, p. 132).

beschreibt etwas Neues, so nie Dagewesenes und sprengt bisher virulente Deutungskategorien (Dautzenberg, 1999, p. 99). Damit distanziert sich diese Umschreibung von Identität auch auf formaler und inhaltlicher Ebene von den traditionellen Rollenbildern der Lebenswelt des Paulus und überbietet bisher wirksame gesellschaftlich-hierarchische Strukturen: Paulus weist in Christus *alle* Gläubigen als *einer* aus, sodass deren Vielzahl (und Diversität!) in Christus ihren identitären Brennpunkt als Einheit findet. Die maskuline Form εἷς wird deshalb verwendet, weil es explizit um die Frage geht, wer *Sohn* Gottes ist (Kügler, 2021, pp. 77–78). Es geht aber nicht um eine neutrale All-Einheit, sondern um die Konzentration aller auf *eine Person*, wie ein Blick in Gal 3,16 deutlich macht:

„Abraham wurden die Verheißungen zugesprochen und seinem Nachkommen. Es heißt nicht: und den Nachkommen, als wären viele gemeint, sondern es wird nur von einem gesprochen: und deinem Nachkommen; das aber ist Christus.“ (Gal 3,16).

In Hinblick darauf wird ersichtlich, dass sich die Umschreibung des *Einer-Seins* in Christus aus Gal 3,28d als Programm einer kollektiven Identität Christusgläubiger interpretieren lässt, die auf symbolischer Ebene definiert wird und auch zunächst nur dort definiert werden kann. Das *Einer-Sein* in Christus und die Partizipation an ihm gilt als der soteriologische Höhepunkt des Briefes. Und dieses *Einer-Sein* – das lässt sich für die Zeit des Paulus nicht oft genug betonen – gilt *allen*, die an Christus glauben.

Was das für die Ausgestaltung der Gemeinde zur Folge hat, wird an späterer Stelle des vorliegenden Artikels Beachtung finden. Ein Augenmerk gilt es vorher darauf zu lenken, was die Zugehörigkeit für Konsequenzen mit sich führt. Wer nämlich an Christus glaubt, hat an den Glaubens Traditionen teil, die in ihm – als *dem* Nachkommen Abrahams – vereint sind: Er darf sich als Sohn Gottes (Gal 3,26) sowie Nachkomme und Erbe Abrahams verstanden wissen (Gal 3,29). Warum gerade diese Form der Kontinuität, die an einen Stammbaum erinnert, wichtig ist, wird deutlich, wenn man auf die jüdische Prägung des Apostels blickt.

Zwar ist es auf der einen Seite schwierig, vom „Judentum“ als einheitlichem Ethnos zu seiner Zeit zu sprechen, gab es doch viele jüdische Strömungen. Andererseits weiß man, dass Paulus der Gruppe der Pharisäer

zuzuordnen ist und sich selbst als jemanden beschreibt, der sich für seinen Glauben ereiferte. Mit diesem Wissen leuchtet ein, warum Traditionen wie die Abrahamsnachkommenschaft für ihn so bedeutend sind, dass der Glaube ohne diese für ihn nicht denkbar wäre; denn Paulus ist und bleibt schließlich zeit seines Lebens Jude, er kann eine solche Glaubenstradition nicht einfach über Bord werfen.

Wenn jedoch Heiden in die Kontinuität zum Stammvater gestellt werden sollen – oder anders formuliert: wenn Heiden zu Abraham *dazugehören* sollen –, dann ist dies zunächst problematisch, da sie sich nicht auf dessen „biologische“ Abstammung berufen können. An dieser Stelle kommt Christus ins Spiel: Indem Paulus ihn als *den* (singulären!) Nachkommen Abrahams ausweist, werden in ihm auch alle Glaubenstraditionen vereint, die auf Abraham zurückgehen. Somit erlangen all jene, die zu Christus gehören, auch das, was in ihm vereint ist (Beierlein, 2023, pp. 207–209).

Bemerkenswert ist bei Paulus, dass gerade in seiner patriarchal geprägten Lebenswelt für alle diese Zugehörigkeit zu Christus möglich ist. Sie beschränkt sich nicht etwa auf freie, jüdische Männer, sondern zielt auf die gesamte Gesellschaft ab. Führt man sich diese Form der Zugehörigkeit vor Augen, ist es schnell klar, was ein Zugehörigkeitsgefühl aus paulinischer Sicht ausmacht: Es muss für jeden Menschen zugänglich sein – unabhängig von der gesellschaftlichen Deutungskategorie, der er möglicherweise zugeordnet werden kann. Paulinisch verstandene Zugehörigkeit ist schließlich für alle da.

4. Inklusivität als Ausdruck der Zugehörigkeit

Der englische Begriff *inclusion* und der deutsche Begriff „Inklusion“ sind nicht deckungsgleich. Während der Begriff „Inklusion“ vorwiegend im Zusammenhang mit Menschen mit Behinderung verwendet wird, ist der Begriff der *inclusion* weiter gefasst: Er beschreibt die Grundhaltung, auf andere Perspektiven einzugehen, mit der Absicht, niemanden per se auszugrenzen und Vielfalt innerhalb von Gruppen anzuerkennen (Guijarro, 2008, p. 13). Übersetzen lässt er sich deshalb besser mit dem Ausdruck „Inklusivität“.

4.1 Inklusivität – gerade für Heidenchristen

Die Grundhaltung, niemanden per se auszuschließen, findet sich auch im Galaterbrief. Sie ergibt sich aus dem Gedanken der Zugehörigkeit zu Christus, der sich an den identity markers der paulinischen Verkündigung ablesen lässt: Definiert sich die kulturelle Formation seines Missionswerkes durch den Glauben an Christus und die Taufe, steht dem seine Gegnerschaft gegenüber, die sich auf die Beschneidung und die Einhaltung des Gesetzes und somit auf originär jüdische Identitätsmerkmale stützt. Beide – Paulus und seine Gegner – stehen vor der Aufgabe, jüdische Glaubenstraditionen für eine Gruppe zugänglich zu machen, die sich jedoch nicht auf einen jüdischen Ursprung berufen kann. Anders gefragt: Wie können Heidenchristen zur Gruppe Christusgläubiger dazugehören, in der sich doch so viele ursprünglich jüdische Glaubenstraditionen finden lassen?

Das Problem besteht zunächst darin, eine Kontinuität herzustellen, die es „biologisch“ nicht geben kann, denn eine Berufung auf den abrahamitischen Stammbaum zieht die Definition einer Gruppe nach sich, die sich durch die Abstammung auf einen Urahn ausdrückt. Die galatischen Gegner scheinen dieses Problem lösen zu wollen, indem sie die Beschneidung als Zeichen des Bundes auch für Christusgläubige in Geltung stellen, was konsequenterweise auch die Observanz der Tora nach sich zieht.

4.2 Inklusivität durch inklusive identity markers

Paulus stellt bereits im zweiten Kapitel des Briefes dar, dass er betraut ist mit dem Evangelium „für die Vorhaut“. Eine Beschneidung der heidnischen Christusgläubigen kommt für ihn nicht infrage. Stattdessen setzt er dem den Initiationsritus der Taufe entgegen, der zwei entscheidende Vorteile mit sich bringt:

- Die Taufe ist geschlechtsneutral. Das bedeutet, dass auch Frauen innerhalb der Gemeinde rituelle Bestätigung ihrer gleichwertigen Position erfahren können.
- Die Taufe ist ohne Risiko. Gerade unter den hygienischen Voraussetzungen der Antike verlief die Durchführung der Beschneidung nicht immer ohne Komplikationen.

Im Sinne der Inklusivität bietet die Taufe einen entscheidenden Vorteil, denn sie ist – anders als die Beschneidung – geschlechtsneutral und damit nicht nur Männern vorbehalten. Durch die Taufe haben nun auch Frauen die Möglichkeit, sich die Zugehörigkeit zu einer Gruppe rituell bestätigen zu lassen. Der identity marker der Taufe leistet somit etwas, was die Beschneidung nicht leisten kann: Er grenzt per se niemanden von vornherein aus.

Ergänzt wird die kulturelle Formation zudem durch den Glauben, der ebenfalls einen inklusiven identity marker darstellt, denn „glauben können alle“ (Wolter, 2009, pp. 142–143). Dabei ist die Zugehörigkeit zu den Söhnen Gottes gleich doppelt abgesichert. Einerseits sind sie durch ihren Glauben und die Taufe *in* Christus und erlangen damit Teilhabe an allem, was sich in ihm als *dem* Nachfolger Abrahams konzentriert. Andererseits wird ihnen die Sohnschaft Gottes dadurch zuteil, dass sie *wie* Abraham glauben:

„6 So auch bei Abraham: Er glaubte Gott und das wurde ihm als Gerechtigkeit angerechnet. 7 Erkennt also: Die aus dem Glauben leben, sind Söhne Abrahams.“ (Gal 3,6–7).

Der Apostel inkludiert die Heiden durch ihren Glauben in die Nachkommenschaft Abrahams, was zur Folge hat, dass für sie verschiedene Glaubensinhalte des Judentums aktiviert werden. Hierbei wird die jüdische Abrahamstradition unter Absehung der Glaubensprüfungen auf den Glauben des Stammvaters reduziert. Das geschieht aber ganz im Sinne der Zugehörigkeit derer, die sich nicht auf ihn als ihren Urahn berufen können – ohne dass sie sich der Beschneidung unterziehen oder dem Gesetz verschreiben müssten (Beierlein, 2023, pp. 208–209).

Selbiges gilt auch für die Glaubenstradition der Rechtfertigung vor Gott (Gal 3). Auch diese knüpft der Apostel daran, dass man wie Abraham *glaubt*. Der Glaube kann damit als zentraler Bestandteil der *kulturellen Formation*³ derer, die in Christus sind, angesehen werden, durch den jene

3 Den Komplex des gemeinsamen Symbolsystems, der für die soziale Zugehörigkeit eines Menschen grundlegend ist, bezeichnet Assmann mit dem Sammelbegriff der „kulturellen Formation“. Die kulturelle Formation ist als Medium zu verstehen, durch das kollektive Identität ausgedrückt, aufgebaut und aufrechterhalten wird (Assmann, 2013, p. 139).

Zugang zu zentralen Glaubenstraditionen erlangen, die mit ihm in Verbindung stehen – unabhängig von Geschlecht, Herkunft und sozialem Stand der Gläubigen. An dem entgrenzenden identity marker des Glaubens lässt sich die inklusive Stoßrichtung des Apostels ablesen. Ganz im Gegensatz zu seinen Gegnern ist folglich nicht die Beschneidung und die Verpflichtung auf das Gesetz, sondern der Glaube notwendig, um in Kontinuität zu Abraham zu treten. Wer in Christus ist und zur Gruppe Christusgläubiger gehört, darf sich auch dieser Glaubenstraditionen sicher sein: Er (oder sie!) ist dann Sohn Gottes (Gal 3,26), Nachkomme und Erbe Abrahams (Gal 3,29) und durch seinen Glauben an Gott gerecht gemacht (Gal 3,6).

Dem gegenüber verkünden die Gegner des Paulus eine kulturelle Formation, die durch die Observanz der Tora ergänzt wird. Auch hier ergibt sich dasselbe Problem, das die Beschneidung mit sich bringt. Da ein Leben, das sich an der Tora ausrichtet, einen ursprünglich jüdischen identity marker darstellt, liefe die Verwendung der Tora als identity marker Gefahr, jene auszugrenzen, die die Tora nicht haben – ganz zu schweigen von der Problematik, dass aus Sicht des Paulus durch den Kreuzestod attestiert wird, dass sich kein Einziger an das Gesetz gehalten hat. Der Glaube an Christus hingegen ist ethnisch „unabhängig“ und bietet somit die Möglichkeit, jede und jeden zum Ausdruck bringen zu lassen, *Sohn Gottes* und *einer in Christus* zu sein, ohne besondere Voraussetzungen oder Bedingungen zu erfüllen. Was dies für die reale Lebenswelt der Gläubigen bedeutet, ist der nächste Schritt bei der inklusiven Ausrichtung der paulinischen Mission: Der Glaube hängt nämlich nicht in der Luft, sondern bedarf der praktischen Umsetzung; nicht zuletzt ist es zentrales Charakteristikum des Glaubens, dass er *in der Liebe wirksam wird* (Gal 5,6).

4.3 Glaube konkret – der Gottesdienst

Der Ort für dieses *Wirksamwerden* findet sich im Gottesdienst der Gemeinde. Besonders das Herrenmahl soll in den Augen des Paulus für die Gemeinde Christusgläubiger inklusive Funktion haben, da es wohl das entscheidende Element der kulturellen Formation bildet, in der die kollektive Identität in Christus lebensweltlich umgesetzt und real erfahrbar

werden kann (Gal 3,28): Hier kann der Zugehörigkeit zu Christus Ausdruck verliehen werden.

Schließlich findet sich im Herrenmahl die materiaethische Ebene, in der der Glaube an Christus regelmäßig dadurch sichtbar gemacht werden kann, dass man auch die anderen Gläubigen als Söhne Gottes und Abrahams annimmt. Wie das auszusehen hat, beschrieb der Apostel bereits in Gal 3,26–29: durch absolute Gleichwertigkeit eines und einer jeden.

Das *Sein in Christus* ist somit zunächst auf symbolischer Ebene zu verstehen, strahlt jedoch konkret auf die Identität jedes einzelnen Gläubigen aus und wirkt spürbar auf sie ein, da die Ekklesia der Ort ist, an dem die Partizipation aller Mitglieder an Christus durch die Aufhebung der etablierten gesellschaftlichen Gegensatzpaare abgebildet werden kann:

„Als Ort sozialer Begegnung und Interaktion, und damit potentiell auch als Bezugsrahmen ethischen Nachdenkens, ist ohne Zweifel auch die frühchristliche *ἐκκλησία* anzusehen. Das Besondere dieses Begegnungsortes ist, dass er quer zu anderen Begegnungsorten steht, die sich etwa anhand sozialer, beruflicher, geschlechtlicher oder ethnischer Differenzierung abgrenzen lassen.“ (Löhr, 2012, p. 8).

Diesem geeinten Bild der Gemeinde widerspricht vor allem der Antiochenische Zwischenfall, den Paulus in Gal 2 beschreibt. Dort wird Petrus vorgeworfen, dass er sich vom Mahl, das er mit Heidenchristen abzuhalten pflegte, zurückzieht, als das Gefolge des Jakobus hinzukommt. Hier wird eines der Probleme deutlich, die die Diversität der Gruppe Christusgläubiger mit sich bringt: Unter welchen Umständen können etwa einstige Heiden und Juden, die beide an Christus glauben, miteinander Mahl halten, wo das Judentum doch diverse Speisegebote kennt?

Petrus stellt sich durch seinen Rückzug dieser Thematik nicht. Für Paulus ist die Sache klar: Dass die gemeinschaftsstiftende und verbindende Funktion, die er verkündet, den abgrenzenden Speisegeboten aus Gal 2 konträr gegenübersteht, wird umso deutlicher, wenn man sich die Konsequenz ins Gedächtnis ruft, die eine Fortführung solcher Gebote mit sich brächte. Dies würde nichts anderes als die Leugnung bedeuten, dass heidenstämmige Christusgläubige zur Gemeinde gehören können und dürfen, es käme einer Negierung ihrer Identität *ἐν Χριστῷ* und gleichzeitig eines Beharrens auf dem eigenen Status gleich, der anderen nicht zugänglich gemacht werden dürfe.

Die Herrenmahlsfeier soll diesem genau entgegenwirken, stellt sie doch ein Erinnerungsmahl an Christus dar, das sich von einem profanen Mahl eben genau dadurch unterscheidet, dass man sich auf Augenhöhe begegnet. Durch den erlösenden Tod Christi, der allen und für alle gilt, sind Modelle, die qualitative Unterschiede bei den Gläubigen machen, überwunden (Kügler, 2010, pp. 45–46). *In Christus hinein* getauft (Gal 3,27 εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε) und *in Christus zu sein* (Gal 3,28 ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) bedeutet zum einen, *gleichwertig* zu sein – auf einen Begriff gebracht, verkündet Paulus hier einen „urchristlichen Egalitarismus“ (Kügler, 2010, p. 53), – zum anderen ist dieses Sein in Christus auch Ausdruck der Gottessohnschaft (Kügler, 2009, pp. 56–60), was einen zentralen Gedanken der kollektiven Identität in Christus offenlegt: alle sind *einer* (Gal 3,28d); die binär strukturierte Trias aus Jude und Grieche, männlich und weiblich sowie Sklave und Freier verliert als Kategorie jegliche Bedeutung (Gal 3,28a–c).

Die Inklusivität der paulinischen Botschaft lässt sich folglich anhand der von ihm verwendeten identity marker ablesen. Worauf dieser Anspruch gründet, findet sich bei Wolter treffend formuliert:

„Christliche Gemeinden müssen darum immer wieder neu herausfinden, durch welche Handlungen sie ihre christliche Identität als eine soziale Identität so zur Anschauung bringen, dass in ihr erkennbar wird, dass die Zugehörigkeit zu Jesus Christus eine Sozialität stiftet, die alle kulturellen Unterschiede – und dazu gehören auch die kulturell determinierten Unterschiede in den politischen und ethischen Überzeugungen – übergreift und die Kirche Jesu Christi in der Welt im Sinne von Phil 2,15 ‚strahlen‘ lässt.“ (Wolter, 2009, p. 152).

Bei all der Vielfalt, der sich Paulus unter anderem in Galatien gegenübersehen sieht, unterscheidet sich seine Verkündigung in einem Punkt somit maßgeblich von der seiner Gegner: Die Zielrichtung des Apostels ist stets *inklusiv* ausgerichtet mit der Absicht, dass für alle, die an Christus glauben wollen, der Weg durch den Glauben und die Taufe offensteht.

Die Botschaft, die Paulus im Galaterbrief hinterlässt, birgt damit auf gewisse Weise ein inklusives Grundprinzip: Damit Menschen die Zugehörigkeit zu einer Gruppe ausdrücken können, muss dies durch Merkmale geschehen, die für sie umsetzbar sind. Auch heutige Gemeinden müssen sich der Herausforderung stellen, innerhalb (und auch außerhalb!) des

Gottesdienstes sichtbar zu machen, dass jede und jeder in der Gemeinde *einer* in Christus ist. Für diese Sichtbarmachung gibt es aber kein pauschales Rezept, sie beherbergt eine Dynamik, die sich durch die Frage realisiert, inwiefern die Gleichheit aller Getauften dargestellt werden kann. Das ist aber auch unabdingbar, denn inklusiv kann eine Gemeinschaft nur dann sein, wenn sich jede und jeder zugehörig fühlen kann – unabhängig von der Diversität aller.

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15 Eschatological Intersections: Tracing the Function of Afterlife Beliefs

Abstract

Historiographically, evaluating afterlife conceptualizations reveals an intricate matrix of beliefs across civilizations. Preeminent within this schema is Ancient Egypt, whose eschatological paradigms, typified by figures like Osiris and rituals such as the “Opening of the Mouth”, experienced diachronic shifts across its dynastic epochs. Such conceptualizations were not insular, with clear intersections manifesting in Germanic spectral reverence and indigenous African ancestral veneration. The Qumranic eschatology, with its Judaic nuances, further enriches this discourse. Intriguingly, these motifs find a salient convergence within the Johannine Gospel, which merges the transcendence of mortality with the divine filiation in its proclamation of Jesus as both the “Logos” and the “Son of God”. Notably, this religious tapestry has contemporary political ramifications in Africa, wherein eschatological and Christological constructs are strategically deployed for governance and legitimacy. This analysis underscores the indelible imprint of afterlife doctrines, coupled with the “Son of God” motif, on both theological and socio-political terrains, with a pronounced resonance in the African milieu. Politicians have conscripted both ancestral and divine authority by intertwining the spiritual with the secular to fortify their position amidst the socio-political challenges. This synthesis sheds light on the profound influence of afterlife beliefs and Christological motifs and their pragmatic deployment in the socio-political landscape, notably palpable in African contexts.

Keywords: *Eschatology, Intersections, Beliefs, Afterlife, Function*

1. Prolegomena

The genesis of this chapter stems from a multifaceted exploration at the intersection of several scholarly pursuits and personal connections. As an academic endeavour, it serves as both a reflection of my own scholarly journey and a tribute to the intellectual heritage fostered by Professor Kügler, whose profound impact resonates through his diverse research interests. Professor Kügler's doctoral thesis on the Book of John and Johannine theology, coupled with his Habilitation in Egyptology focusing on the nexus between Pharaoh and Christus, underscores his interdisciplinary approach and scholarly depth. Furthermore, his supervision of my thesis on Jewish Apocalypticism and our collaborative efforts in publishing articles on apocalypticism and eschatology have laid the foundation for this exploration.

At its core, this chapter not only delves into the intersections of afterlife beliefs but also serves as a testament to what could be considered as foundational bricks to *Kueglerism* or *kueglerology*. Beyond academia, Professor Kügler's affection for Africa and his fascination with the utilization of the Bible on the continent provide additional layers of significance to this inquiry. The parallels drawn between similar experiences in Africa and Germany not only highlight the universality of certain human experiences but also underscore the intricate interplay between culture, religion, and politics. By delving into German afterlife beliefs, this chapter also acknowledges Professor Kügler's German heritage and seeks to unravel the historical reverberations that may have implications for African religion and the political sphere. Thus, this chapter embarks on a journey that transcends disciplinary boundaries, weaving together strands of scholarly inquiry, personal connections, and cross-cultural reflections.

2. Introduction

Beliefs about the afterlife, play a crucial role in shaping worldviews and influencing human behaviour across various societal sectors. These beliefs are often influenced by factors such as economic theory memory and identity (Schmidt, 2000; Newman 2010) and the desire for a joining of faculties. They can also serve as a means of enforcing social contracts and

have a significant impact on the cultural and structural makeup of communities. The concept of the afterlife, as a distant reality with its own system of values and rituals, has been a central aspect of ancient mythological systems (Sumchenko, 2022; Assmann, 2011). Furthermore, the afterlife beliefs of different religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, have been found to influence end-of-life care. These beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping doctrines making them particularly resonant and meaningful for adherents by associating them with eternal consequences (Moreman, 2016). These beliefs are central to the reinforcement of ritual and worship across global religions, prominently featured in funeral rites, memorial services, and rites of passage that often include elements designed to prepare the deceased for the afterlife or to honor their memory. In this chapter, the focus will be primarily on the role of afterlife beliefs in various cultural contexts. The discussion will explore how these beliefs have been strategically employed within the socio-political space, especially, in the quest to consolidate power and legitimize political players.

3. Ancient Afterlife Beliefs

3.1 Psychological Function of Afterlife Beliefs

At the psychological core of identity construction in many cultures are the beliefs pertaining to the afterlife (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2017). These serve as distinguishing religious markers. They act as a thoroughgoing tool to foster a sense of community and belonging among individuals, thereby reinforcing social norms and collective identities (Ellemers, 2017). This integration of afterlife beliefs into community practices and individual identities underscores their significant role in societal cohesion.

Moreover, afterlife beliefs instil moral dimensions that either reward or punish individuals based on their earthly behaviours as encapsulated by the metaphorical expression from the Babylonian context: “thou have been weighed.” This moral framework can promote ethical conduct and discourage behaviours that are socially undesirable (Willard et al, 2020).

Additionally, these beliefs provide crucial explanations for what transpires after death, helping to alleviate fears associated with the unknown and

offering individuals a sense of security about their eventual fate. Consequently, beliefs in the afterlife also assist individuals in finding meaning and purpose in life, influencing decisions related to careers, relationships, and personal development, and guiding them through existential uncertainties and the fear of death (Georgiadou & Pnevmatikos, 2019).

3.2 Economic and Political Function of Afterlife Beliefs

In the economic realm, cultural investments into afterlife preparations are substantial, profoundly influencing industries related to funeral services, tomb construction, and religious offerings. Gunda calls this the “death industry” (Gunda, 2001). Such expenditures reflect how afterlife beliefs shape economic behaviours, including charitable giving, ethical business practices, and investments in religious activities that are thought to yield benefits beyond this life (Krüger, 2008).

Moreover, afterlife beliefs play a crucial role in the legitimization of authority. Rulers and political institutions often invoke these beliefs to justify their power, asserting divine selection or portraying their laws as consonant with divine or cosmic justice. This alignment of state or cultural laws with perceived divine mandates regarding the afterlife enables leaders to exercise considerable control over their subjects. By leveraging the promise of heavenly rewards or the threat of eternal damnation, they enforce compliance and maintain power dynamics.

3.3 Background and Context

Assmann’s assertion that death is central to culture resonates universally, as humans are inherently preoccupied with mortality and what comes after (Assmann, 2010). This fascination with the afterlife is seen in various cultures, such as the Sumerians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Israelites, Germanic tribes, and the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Each culture has developed unique beliefs about the afterlife that shape their worldview and societal structures. The ancient Sumerians, civilization, spanning circa 4500–1900 BCE, for example, believed in a shadowy afterlife realm called Kur, which later evolved to include divine judgment and a celestial paradise for the righteous. Sumerian funeral rites and burial practices were also important in constructing social identity and rein-

forcing hierarchies. These beliefs and practices demonstrate the intertwined nature of afterlife beliefs and social structures, and how they evolve over time (Crawford, 2004; Kuijt, 2008; Shushan & Flood, 2009).

3.4 Afterlife Beliefs in Babylon and Assyria

Babylonian afterlife beliefs, deeply rooted in antecedent Sumerian traditions, reveal a complex understanding of mortality and the metaphysical journey post-death. These beliefs, encapsulated in significant mythological texts and rituals, highlight a cosmology centred around a somber and inexorable vision of the underworld. The influence of Sumerian cultural and religious practices is evident in the Babylonian conception of the afterlife, often depicted as the “Land of No Return” (De Cruz & De Smedt, 2017; Scurlock, 1995). This portrayal reflects a continuity of the Sumerian depiction of the underworld not as a realm of moral retribution but as a final, immutable state irrespective of one’s earthly deeds or status. Central to these cultural narratives is the figure of Nergal, the formidable Babylonian god of the underworld, plague, war, and devastation, who reigns alongside his consort Ereshkigal (Meek & Mehlman, 2023). One of the most poignant reflections of these afterlife beliefs is found in the epic narrative “The Descent of Ishtar into the Underworld”. This mythological text illustrates the journey of Ishtar, the goddess of love and war, as she traverses through the seven gates of the underworld, each gate stripping her of her power and identity. The Epic of Gilgamesh, another cornerstone of Babylonian literary heritage, explores themes of immortality and the human confrontation with death. This story, along with elaborate funeral practices that included burial with goods, incantations, and offerings to deities, illustrates the Babylonians’ meticulous efforts to equip the deceased for their underworld journey, aiming to secure a more favorable passage. The Assyrians also held complex beliefs about the afterlife, picturing it as a shadowy realm called “Irkalla” or “Kur”. This sombre, joyless underworld was believed to be a place where the deceased existed in a bleak, insubstantial state, with their destinies heavily influenced by the gods based on earthly behaviours. Assyrian funerary practices varied by social status, with the elite buried in ornate tombs and commoners often cremated, but all practices emphasized the importance of proper burial rites and elaborate ceremonies to secure a peaceful afterlife. These beliefs

and practices, including the notion that immortality was reserved for monarchs and heroes who could ascend to live among the gods, underscored the Assyrians' view of death and the afterlife as deeply intertwined with divine judgment and providence (Faulkner, 2003; Pritchard, 2011).

3.5 Afterlife Beliefs in Egypt and their Social Function

I have deliberately taken the time not only to honour Professor Kügler with a more extensive coverage of Egyptian afterlife beliefs but also to argue that Egypt's afterlife beliefs merit greater attention in scholarly discourse. This assertion is predicated on the elaborate nature of Egyptian afterlife beliefs, as evidenced by their intricate portrayal in religious texts, rituals, and monumental architecture. In contrast to many other cultures, Egypt boasts a well-documented and material culture pertaining to afterlife beliefs, underpinned by substantial archaeological evidence. Archaeological sites such as the Valley of the Kings and the pyramids serve as repositories of invaluable insights into Egyptian religious practices and cosmological views. Moreover, Egypt's profound influence on African and European perspectives regarding the afterlife is noteworthy, as it has played a significant role in shaping beliefs and rituals across continents. The dissemination of Egyptian religious concepts and iconography has left enduring marks on diverse societies, contributing to the evolution of their understanding of death and the hereafter. Therefore, in discussions of afterlife beliefs, Egypt warrants heightened scrutiny and analysis compared to other cultures. Its rich cultural and religious heritage, coupled with its far-reaching impact, underscore the importance of prioritizing the study of Egyptian afterlife beliefs within academic discourse.

3.5.1 Old Kingdom

The belief in an afterlife held a pivotal place within the cultural and religious landscape of ancient Egypt, evolving significantly from the pre-First Dynasty period through to the New Kingdom. This elaborate system of beliefs and practices underscored the Egyptians' deep-seated concerns with immortality, divine justice, and the moral integrity of the soul, which were thought to determine one's fate in the afterworld (Taylor, 2001; Assmann, 2010; Abbas, 2020; Hornung, 1999). Unlike their contemporaries,

such as the Sumerians, the ancient Egyptians developed a particularly intricate and culturally profound understanding of life after death, which became a core component of their civilization's identity. As with the Sumerians afterlife conceptions were both influenced by and reflective of broader societal changes, indicating a dynamic interplay between evolving cultural norms and religious innovations. The integration of complex rituals, detailed mythological constructs, and a robust pantheon of deities governing the afterlife highlights an elaborate theological notion that was both shaped by, and shaped, the cultural and historical dynamics of ancient Egyptian society.

The conceptualization of the afterlife in ancient Egypt was not static but evolved significantly over time, with each kingdom refining and adding layers to these beliefs. This development is exemplarily traced through the major Egyptian funerary texts which unfolded across various periods, reflecting a deepening, and expanding understanding of the afterlife.

Additionally, the evolution of Egyptian funerary texts, such as the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead, illustrates the Egyptians' meticulous efforts to secure a favourable afterlife. These texts not only offer profound insights into the Egyptians' visions of the netherworld but also indicate an increasing democratization of the afterlife beliefs.

The transformation of these beliefs was not merely theological but was also influenced by changes in the administrative, social, and political landscapes that shaped religious doctrines.

The journey to the afterlife in ancient Egypt was envisioned as a path fraught with challenges and judgments, culminating in the Hall of Maat. Here, in a ritual that highlights the civilization's commitment to moral integrity, the deceased's heart was weighed against the feather of Maat, symbolizing truth, and justice. This practice underscores the Egyptians' profound linkage between ethical conduct and one's posthumous destiny (Tarlow & Stutz, 2013; Assmann, 2005).

3.5.2 Middle Kingdom

In the Middle Kingdom of Egypt (circa 2055–1650 BCE), the concept of the afterlife held profound significance within both religious and societal contexts. Central to this belief system was the association between the afterlife and the pharaoh, who was considered the earthly manifestation of

the god Horus. As the son of Osiris, the god of the afterlife, and Isis, the goddess of magic and motherhood, the pharaoh was believed to have a unique connection to the afterlife and was responsible for ensuring the well-being of his people beyond death. This divine affiliation bestowed upon the pharaoh immense power and authority, including the ability to intercede on behalf of his subjects in the afterlife (Kügler, 1997; Badawy, 1967). The afterlife not only provided a framework for understanding the transition from earthly existence to the realm of the gods but also motivated individuals to lead virtuous lives and adhere to societal norms, as their actions in life were believed to determine their fate in the afterlife. Additionally, the pharaoh's role as the intermediary between the mortal realm and the divine realm served to ensure the continuity of life after death for both himself and his subjects, thereby playing a pivotal role in maintaining societal order and stability. Throughout the Middle Kingdom period, the relationship between the son of God and the afterlife remained central to Egyptian religious and cultural practices, contributing to the shaping, and sustaining of Egyptian society amidst various periods of change and transition.

1. Divine Kingship and Social Hierarchy

The belief that the Pharaoh was the “Son of God” effectively elevated him above the rest of society, establishing a divine justification for his supreme rule. This notion was intricately linked with the pharaoh’s role as the intermediary between the gods and the people. By positioning the pharaoh as a god on earth, the belief system reinforced his top-tier status within the social hierarchy, making him central to both governance and religious worship (Kügler, 1997; Roubekas 2015; Grajetzki, 2024).

2. Afterlife Beliefs and the Justification of Social Order

The elaborate afterlife beliefs, which included detailed depictions of the afterlife in the Pyramid Texts, supported the notion that social and moral orders on earth were mirrored in the afterlife. Since the pharaoh was responsible for maintaining *ma’at* (cosmic order and truth) during his lifetime, his effective rule impacted not just the earthly realm but also ensured order in the afterlife. This dual responsibility justified the social

stratification seen in Egypt, where the pharaoh's divine role necessitated a support system of various subordinate classes (Richards, 2005).

3. Exclusive Religious Knowledge and Practices

The Pyramid Texts, which were reserved primarily for the pharaohs and inscribed in their tombs, contained spells, rituals, and guidance necessary for navigating the afterlife. This exclusivity of religious knowledge underscored the divine and elevated status of the pharaoh and the royal family, thereby legitimizing their higher place in society. Ordinary Egyptians lacked access to these sacred texts and, by extension, the most direct means of securing a favorable afterlife, which reinforced their lower status.

4. Architectural Symbolism and Eternal Life

The construction of pyramids as monumental tombs for the pharaohs symbolized their continued dominance and divine status beyond death. These structures were not just burial sites but were seen as portals to the afterlife where the pharaohs could continue to exercise their godly duties. This physical representation of the pharaoh's journey to the afterlife served as a constant reminder of his pivotal role in both the earthly and divine realms, further solidifying the social structure.

Rituals and ceremonies in ancient Egypt served as vital mechanisms for reinforcing social bonds and affirming existing hierarchies, particularly centred around the Pharaoh. Participation in these religious activities, largely restricted to the elite and priestly classes, emphasized the social distinctions within Egyptian society, with common folk often excluded from these rites (Kügler, 1997). The integration of the "Son of God" belief with afterlife expectations further facilitated cultural and religious continuity, linking the divine status of the pharaoh with his posthumous existence. This narrative not only solidified the established social order but also made it challenging to challenge the hierarchy without questioning the fundamental religious and cosmic structure (Stevenson, 2016). To conclude, the "Son of God" belief, alongside afterlife beliefs, played a fundamental role in constructing and maintaining the caste system in ancient Egypt, perpetuated through religious doctrines, rituals, and monumental architecture. These beliefs not only justified the prevailing social and political structures but also ensured their longevity and stability (Johnson &

Marsha, 1991). During the Middle Kingdom, these beliefs evolved and became more ethically oriented, reflecting a significant departure from earlier conceptions of the afterlife (Hornung, 1999). Initially exclusive to royalty, access to funerary texts and practices gradually expanded to encompass the broader population, contributing to the legitimization of the social hierarchy. The evolution of funerary texts, such as the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead, illustrates the Egyptians' meticulous efforts to secure a favourable afterlife, while also democratizing access to these beliefs across society (Arnold, 2008).

From the significance of rituals and ceremonies in ancient Egypt, the integration of religious beliefs with political structures underscores their multifaceted role in shaping society. This integration, exemplified by the "Son of God" belief, not only reinforced existing hierarchies. However, during the Middle Kingdom, there was a challenge to this status quo, due to their entwinement with cosmic and religious order. Consequently, these beliefs played a fundamental role in constructing and perpetuating the social and political systems of ancient Egypt.

3.5.3 Middle Kingdom Afterlife Beliefs and Social Cohesion

During the Middle Kingdom of ancient Egypt (circa 2055–1650 BCE), a significant evolution in afterlife beliefs occurred, reflecting broader social and religious transformations within the society. This period is marked by the democratization of religious practices and an increased emphasis on personal morality, both of which played pivotal roles in enhancing social cohesion and reinforcing the social order during a time of political consolidation and cultural shift.

3.5.4 Democratization of Afterlife Beliefs

Previously, the elaborate rituals and knowledge surrounding the afterlife were predominantly reserved for the Pharaohs and the elite (Kügler, 1997). However, with the advent of the Coffin Texts, which emerged in the First Intermediate Period and were expanded in the Middle Kingdom, there was a marked shift. These texts, derived from the earlier Pyramid Texts, were now accessible to the nobility and the burgeoning middle class. By inscribing these texts on coffins intended for non-royal individuals, the

religious practices concerning the afterlife were opened to a broader segment of society.

This broader accessibility not only democratized afterlife preparations but also played a significant role in social cohesion. As more individuals gained access to these protective spells and guidance for the afterlife, there was a collective investment in the cultural and religious systems that underscored Egyptian life. This shared participation in religious practices helped to unify various social classes under a common religious and cultural framework, strengthening societal bonds and reducing disparities in religious knowledge.

The Middle Kingdom also saw a deeper integration of the concept of Ma'at – representing justice and cosmic order – into personal morality. This era emphasized leading a life in accordance with Ma'at as essential for receiving a favourable judgment in the afterlife. Unlike earlier periods where ritual and tomb construction predominated, the Middle Kingdom placed a greater emphasis on ethical living as a prerequisite for afterlife rewards (Karenga 2003; Simpson et al. 2003; Shaw 2003; Grajetzki, 2024).

This shift towards moralistic and ethical dimensions in religious practice suggests that personal virtue became a crucial determinant for securing one's place in the afterlife. Such a shift likely encouraged individuals to adhere more closely to societal norms and ethical behaviours, thereby fostering a more cohesive and stable society. By making moral accountability a key aspect of religious and afterlife beliefs, the Middle Kingdom facilitated a social environment where communal values and personal ethics were deeply intertwined.

The religious innovations of the Middle Kingdom in ancient Egypt, such as the use of Coffin Texts and the emphasis on moral living, aimed to restore social cohesion and state authority. These changes were made after the political fragmentation of the First Intermediate Period. By aligning religious reforms with afterlife preparations and integrating moral virtues into everyday life, Middle Kingdom rulers increased their legitimacy and created a more unified and morally accountable society. The democratization of religious practices and the focus on personal morality contributed to social cohesion and sustained the cultural and political life of ancient Egypt during a time of significant transformation (Grajetzki, 2024).

3.5.5 The New Kingdom

The New Kingdom (circa 1550–1070 BCE) marks a critical epoch in the evolution of religious and cultural practices, particularly with regard to afterlife beliefs and their integration with the political narrative of the time. This period was distinguished by a significant deepening of afterlife doctrines, underpinned by an increasing emphasis on moral integrity and facilitated through the proliferation of detailed funerary texts, such as the “Book of the Dead”. These developments illustrate the complex interplay between religious beliefs and the political framework, shaping a highly structured spiritual and societal landscape.

During the New Kingdom, the democratization of religious texts, notably through the dissemination of the “Book of the Dead”, represented a shift towards more accessible religious expressions that extended beyond the royal and noble classes to include wealthier members of society. This broader access to religious spells and guidance, previously the privilege of the elite, functioned to unify the social fabric under shared spiritual and moral values. The texts provided detailed instructions for navigating the underworld (Duat), emphasizing that the eternal fate of the soul was contingent upon adherence to the principles of Ma’at—truth and justice. This focus on moral rectitude was pivotal for achieving a favorable outcome in the afterlife, reinforcing societal norms and ethics (Zago 2018; Lévi, 2006).

The religious innovations of the Middle Kingdom in ancient Egypt, such as the use of Coffin Texts, the Son of God motif, and the emphasis on moral living, aimed to restore social cohesion and state authority. These changes were made after the political fragmentation of the First Intermediate Period. By aligning religious reforms with afterlife preparations and integrating moral virtues into everyday life, Middle Kingdom rulers increased their legitimacy and created a more unified and morally accountable society. The democratization of religious practices and the focus on personal morality contributed to social cohesion and sustained the cultural and political life of ancient Egypt during a time of significant transformation.

The historical development of afterlife beliefs in ancient Egypt, from the Pre-First Kingdom Period through the New Kingdom, exemplifies a profound interplay between religious doctrine, political authority, and societal norms. Initially, these beliefs were simple extensions of earthly existence

but evolved into a complex spiritual odyssey governed by divine laws and underscored by moral integrity. Artistic representations in tombs and temples evolved significantly across these periods, reflecting the deepening theological concepts.

The evolution of afterlife beliefs across the three kingdoms not only shaped the Egyptian civilization but also left a lasting impact on the global cultural and religious landscape, influencing various doctrines and practices related to life after death in different cultures. This legacy underscores the significance of the Egyptian approach to death and the afterlife, reflecting a civilization intricately engaged with the ethereal journey beyond mortality. The evolution of afterlife beliefs across the three kingdoms not only shaped the Egyptian civilization but also left a lasting impact on the global cultural and religious landscape, influencing various doctrines and practices related to life after death in different cultures. This legacy underscores the significance of the Egyptian approach to death and the afterlife, reflecting a civilization intricately engaged with the ethereal journey beyond mortality. Transitioning to a discussion of afterlife beliefs in Post-Exilic Israel, we observe a similar trend of evolving conceptions that departed from earlier notions of a desolate existence in sheol.

3.6 Afterlife Beliefs in Post-Exilic Israel

Initially, ancient Israelite beliefs about the afterlife were vague, generally conceiving of a shadowy existence in sheol, a place devoid of activity or distinction. However, during and after the exile, these views began to expand and transform significantly. The post-exilic period introduced more elaborate concepts such as the resurrection of the dead, final judgment, and rewards or punishments in the afterlife, marking a shift from the earlier, more uniform, and desolate notion of sheol (Segal, 2010; Setzer, 2004; Wright, 2007).

The development of these beliefs has been a subject of scholarly debate, particularly concerning the influence of Persian religious thought, which was known for its dualistic cosmology and a well-defined eschatology featuring heaven and hell, final judgment, and resurrection. Some Scholars argue that the interaction with Zoroastrianism during and after the Babylonian exile could have introduced new dimensions to Jewish eschatology (Wright, 2007). However, this perspective is not universally accepted, with

scholars arguing that the changes in Jewish afterlife beliefs could equally derive from internal developments and reinterpretations of existing traditions rather than direct borrowing from Persian beliefs (Akbar, 2019; Lusthaus, 2009).

In the Qumran community, afterlife beliefs also held significant political implications. The community had distinct views on eschatology, which included dualistic battles between the forces of good and evil, and a pronounced belief in an imminent apocalyptic resolution. These beliefs likely served to strengthen group identity and cohesion, offering a theological justification for their separation from mainstream Jewish society, which they viewed as corrupt. The afterlife beliefs underscored their self-conception as a community of the elect, predestined to play a pivotal role in the eschatological events (Davis et al. 1997; Collins, 2010).

The afterlife beliefs of the Qumran community served multiple functions, encompassing religious, political, cultural, and eschatological dimensions. Politically, these beliefs facilitated solidarity among community members and provided a rationale for their divergence from mainstream Jewish society, framing their separation as a righteous stance against perceived moral corruption. Religiously, the afterlife beliefs informed the community's understanding of divine judgment and salvation, offering assurance of divine favour and inspiring commitment to religious practices in anticipation of eschatological fulfilment. Culturally, these beliefs contributed to the formation of a distinct communal identity, shaping their rituals, communal practices, and social structures (Aune 1972; Magness, 2016).

Moreover, the Qumran community embraced a concept known as realized eschatology, wherein they actively engaged in the fulfilment of eschatological prophecies in their present reality. This perspective imbued their daily lives with a sense of purpose and urgency, as they perceived themselves as agents of God's transformative work in the world. By aligning their beliefs and actions with their eschatological expectations, the Qumranites sought to manifest the promises of salvation and divine intervention in their communal life. Thus, realized eschatology played a crucial role in shaping the Qumran community's worldview and guiding their communal practices, reinforcing their commitment to their religious and ideological principles (Magness, 2016).

The political function of afterlife beliefs in Qumran also influenced early Christian texts, including the Gospel of John. Scholars such as Charlesworth have noted parallels in the eschatological outlook of the Qumran texts and the Johannine community, particularly the emphasis on light versus darkness and the predestined victory of good over evil. The Gospel of John's portrayal of Jesus as the pre-existent Son of God who brings eternal life to his followers reflects a theological and possibly an eschatological framework that might have been familiar to members of the Qumran community. This portrayal would have served a unifying and legitimizing function, reinforcing the identity and mission of the Johannine community within the broader context of Jewish and emerging Christian thought (Charlesworth et al., 1990; Charlesworth, 2018; Hakola, 2005; Ripley, 2020; Scheffler, 2016; Wróbel, 2020).

The legacy of the Qumran community that spilled into the New Testament is the subject of analysis by Kügler who delves into the legacy of the Qumran community as it pertains to the New Testament, particularly focusing on the centrality of the Son of God in the Gospel of Luke within an Egyptian cultural context. Through a historical examination, Kügler explores how the Christology of the Son of God in Luke's Gospel is intricately intertwined with various cultural and religious influences, including Egyptian royal traditions, biblical theology, Jewish interpretations of scripture, and Hellenistic-Roman ideologies. This investigation sheds light on how Luke, as a Christian author, navigates these diverse cultural and religious landscapes to construct a distinctive Christian framework. Additionally, the analysis scrutinizes how established patterns surrounding the concept of the Son of God are challenged and redefined through the character and actions of Jesus, highlighting the transformative nature of his role within Christian theology (Kügler, 1997).

These interactions and evolutions of afterlife beliefs in post-exilic Israel and their manifestations in communities like Qumran illustrate the complex interplay of cultural, theological, and political factors that shaped Jewish and early Christian eschatological thought. These interactions and evolutions of afterlife beliefs in post-exilic Israel and their manifestations in communities like Qumran illustrate the complex interplay of cultural, theological, and political factors that shaped Jewish and early Christian

eschatological thought. Transitioning to the topic of afterlife beliefs in Germany and their socio-political function, we observe a distinct parallel between the evolution of eschatological beliefs in different cultural contexts.

4. Contemporary Afterlife Beliefs

4.1 Afterlife Beliefs in Germany and their Socio-Political Function

The traditional German belief about the afterlife finds its roots in ancient Germanic pagan religions. These ancient Germanic tribes, including the Saxons, Franks, and Goths, held a polytheistic worldview, with a belief in multiple gods and spirits. The afterlife, known as “Walhalla” or “Valhalla” was seen as a glorious hall where fallen warriors were welcomed by the god Odin (Davidson, 1943; Schjødt, 2011; Lindow, 2021). The traditional German belief about the afterlife, a result of centuries of evolution, has been shaped by the amalgamation of various cultural, religious, and historical influences, notably through interactions with Rome and Christianity. This synthesis of pagan and Christian ideas not only enriched the German religious and cultural landscape but also impacted its tradition, politics, and economics significantly (Dechesne et al., 2003). Studies reveal that the development of these afterlife beliefs is influenced by a combination of religious instruction and the natural progression of cognitive abilities in children, suggesting both environmental and developmental factors play a role (Krauss et al., 2021). Additionally, the relationship between afterlife beliefs and health suggests that these beliefs contribute to a greater internal locus of control and can positively influence wellbeing (Ewen et al., 2020). Conversely, negative, or uncertain perceptions of the afterlife are associated with increased distress following significant life losses, such as the death of a spouse, underscoring the role of afterlife beliefs in psychological adjustment (Carr & Sharp, 2014). The interweaving of pagan and Christian afterlife beliefs has also been observed in other regions, such as Ireland, where Christianization of political discourse has layered a new Christian worldview atop an older pagan one (O’Brien, 2022). This phenomenon highlights how afterlife beliefs are not only a

reflection of religious and cultural synthesis but also influence broader societal frameworks.

Ancient Germanic tribes, including the Saxons, Franks, and Goths, had complex funeral rituals rooted in their polytheistic beliefs. These rituals focused on preparing for the afterlife, particularly for warriors to enter Valhalla. The deceased were buried with items indicating their social status, such as armour or fine clothing, as well as weapons, jewellery, and household goods. Norse tribes preferred cremation, while the Franks and Saxons practiced inhumation (Dierkens et al., 1997). Distinctive grave markers and communal feasts were used to honour the deceased. The interaction between Germanic tribes and the Roman Empire led to cultural and religious exchanges, with Germanic tribes adopting Roman concepts of the Underworld and moral judgments in the afterlife. This assimilation also introduced Roman burial practices, contributing to hierarchical societal structures. The belief in the afterlife has deeply influenced German society, impacting religion, culture, tradition, politics, economics, and art. It has shaped Germanic mythology and rituals, integrating pagan customs into Christian traditions, and fostering a sense of unity among Germanic tribes. Ultimately, the belief in the afterlife has played a crucial role in shaping German identity and societal norms, perpetuating a reverence for death and the afterlife throughout Germanic cultural heritage.

4.2 Afterlife Beliefs and the Nazi Reign

The role of afterlife beliefs in shaping German identity and national consciousness has undergone significant evolution across historical epochs, particularly during periods of heightened political upheaval such as the rise of German nationalism and the era of Hitler (Baird, 1982; Lemmons, 1994; Smith, 2012). During the Nazi regime, traditional afterlife beliefs underwent a process of reinvention and reinterpretation, aligning with broader religious and mythological motifs to serve the regime's ideological agenda and foster a robust sense of national unity and destiny.

Under Hitler's rule, there was a deliberate endeavour to revive and recontextualize Germanic pagan traditions and symbols, crafting an idealized narrative of ethnic purity and historical grandeur. The concept of Germanicness was accepted by as part of a broader Aryan antiquarian model (Mees, 2004). Central to this narrative was the glorification of heroic death

and martyrdom, reminiscent of ancient Germanic warriors purportedly chosen by Odin to dwell in Valhalla. This glorification served to instil a profound sense of duty and valour among the populace, particularly the youth and military, reinforcing the notion that sacrifices made for the Fatherland would be commemorated in a warrior's afterlife. Symbol and ritual were essential forms of ideological presentation and reinforcement, with the myth of resurrection and return playing a central role (Baird, 1982; Casquete, 2009).

Moreover, institutions like the SS, under the leadership of figures such as Heinrich Himmler, amalgamated pseudo-religious and mystical elements drawn from ancient Germanic beliefs to fashion a racially pure elite embodying the heroic deeds of their forebears. Rituals and symbols steeped in a mystical interpretation of Germanic paganism were utilized to construct a new religious identity, supplanting traditional Christian doctrines with a nationalist and racial creed. Public ceremonies and rituals, replete with references to gods and mythical heroes, further entrenched the association between martial sacrifice and the promise of eternal honour, reinforcing the regime's ideological tenets and fostering a sense of collective destiny among the populace.

The reinterpretation of afterlife beliefs served as a potent tool in the propagation of Nazi ideology, facilitating the fusion of ancient mythical legacies with contemporary political objectives. By harnessing these beliefs, the regime sought to fortify group cohesion, rationalize conquest and warfare, and suppress dissent, thereby consolidating its grip on power and advancing its expansionist agenda. This strategic manipulation of afterlife beliefs underscores the profound influence such beliefs can wield over national consciousness and political actions, particularly in contexts characterized by fervent nationalism and authoritarian rule. However, the usage of afterlife beliefs is not merely a matter relegated to ancient Near Eastern or Egyptian kingdoms; rather, it persists as a significant issue in present-day Zimbabwean politics.

The Shona belief in the afterlife has evolved over time, initially focusing on the notion that only the spirits of kings would become *mudzimu* (Mudenge, 1988). This parallels the hierarchical structure of Egyptian afterlife beliefs, where certain individuals were afforded special status in the

afterlife. Additionally, the concept of *Nyikadzimu*, akin to the Egyptian underworld, reflects similarities in how different cultures conceptualize the afterlife as a distinct realm. Furthermore, data regarding the state of the dead in Zimbabwe suggests a belief in death as a transition to another realm rather than the cessation of life, mirroring Egyptian beliefs in the continuity of existence beyond death.

4.3 Afterlife Beliefs in Zimbabwe and their Socio-Political Function

The belief in the afterlife holds significant cultural and existential importance within the Shona community, as evidenced by (Mwandayi, 2011). exploration, alongside the scholarly contributions (Shoko, 2016; Bourdillon, 1991; Mbiti, 1990). This belief extends beyond the Shona culture to various African societies, reflecting a broader shared worldview regarding the spiritual realm and its influence on human affairs.

Among the Korekore-Shona ethnic group in Zimbabwe, the afterlife is conceptualized as a realm where deceased ancestors maintain a vigilant presence, actively observing and influencing the lives of the living, shaping social and religious practices. This belief system serves as a foundational framework for understanding life's purpose and provides solace during times of adversity, resonating with similar beliefs among the Akamba ethnic group in Kenya.

In Shona traditional cosmology, death is perceived not as the end of life but as a transition to an alternative spiritual existence, where individuals transcend bodily limitations. This perspective informs various aspects of social, economic, and political life. Socially, afterlife beliefs play a central role in identity construction through elaborate burial rites and communal mourning customs. Economically, they contribute to the development of a distinct sector termed the “death industry”, encompassing funeral services and related businesses. Politically, the manipulation of these beliefs serves to legitimize authority and consolidate power, often through appeals to ancestral reverence and spiritual authority.

In Zimbabwean society, afterlife beliefs serve as multifaceted phenomena, influencing identity formation, religious and moral frameworks, and economic activities. Gunda's research supports the notion of the economic impact of these beliefs, while their political exploitation underscores their

diverse influence within Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape (Gunda, 2001). The concept of judgment in the afterlife is integral to many traditional belief systems, serving as a moral guide that encourages adherence to societal norms and values. This belief structure profoundly shapes the social, political, and religious dimensions of these communities, underscoring their enduring significance and complexity. For the Shona, the afterlife is not merely a distant concept but an intrinsic aspect of everyday life, particularly evident in their interactions with ancestral spirits known as *vadzimu*. These spirits are viewed as active agents in shaping daily existence, bestowing blessings that manifest in various forms of material and spiritual prosperity. This syncretic worldview blurs the boundaries between the spiritual and material realms, offering a terrestrial experience of "heaven on earth" that resonates with broader theological concepts within contemporary religious movements, such as the prosperity gospel.

4.3.1 Burial Rituals

Mwandaŷi's extensive work on burial rituals highlights that "The burial rituals among the Shona are varied and complex, aiming to honour the dead and guide their spirits into the afterlife (Mwandaŷi, 2011).

The historical influence of the Portuguese on the Shona people has led to the incorporation of Christian beliefs about the afterlife into their traditional beliefs. The Shona have a nuanced understanding of spiritual phenomena, including apparitions. Across various African ethnic groups, there is a progression from basic spiritual practices to complex and syncretic systems, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity. In Shona beliefs, divine judgment is a central idea, extending into both the afterlife and present existence. Adversities and afflictions are seen as consequences for moral transgressions or neglect of rituals. Death is viewed as a transition into the ancestral realm, where spirits continue to influence and protect their living descendants. However, meeting moral and societal criteria is necessary to enter the esteemed ancestral lineage. Those who fall short may become restless spirits capable of afflicting the living. The Shona also believe in the existence of ghosts, who serve as reminders of unresolved grievances and the need to address societal injustices. These beliefs emphasize the integration of moral, social, and spiritual dimensions in Shona spirituality.

The interaction with Western powers elicited not only a transformation of religious beliefs among the Shona but also posed challenges to indigenous political power structures and influential figures. Indigenous power players engaged with Western political actors through the strategic deployment of religious and social narratives. Nehanda Nyakasikana's manipulation of afterlife beliefs serves as a poignant example of this phenomenon, echoing historical instances such as Christ's strategic manoeuvring of afterlife beliefs during encounters with the Roman Empire.

4.3.2 Nehanda, Christ and Manipulation of Afterlife Beliefs

Nehanda Nyakasikana, a revered spiritual and political figure in Zimbabwe, assumed a pivotal role in the resistance against colonial rule during the late 19th century. Her leadership and subsequent execution by British colonial authorities in 1898 transformed her into a symbol of martyrdom and liberation. In recent years, discussions surrounding her alleged resurrection have ignited considerable debate within Zimbabwe, echoing messianic narratives akin to those surrounding Jesus Christ in Christian theology.

Both Nehanda and Christ hold significant cultural and historical prominence within their respective contexts. Nehanda, a revered spirit medium in Zimbabwean Shona culture, and Jesus Christ from Christian theology, exhibit intriguing parallels and contrasting narratives in their stories and influences. The resurrection narrative of Nehanda, an eminent spiritual leader, has emerged as a focal point of contention within Zimbabwean discourse. Following her execution by British colonial authorities, Nehanda symbolized resistance and liberation, with claims of her resurrection surfacing in contemporary debates. These discussions draw striking parallels with the resurrection narrative of Jesus Christ, as both figures symbolize hope and empowerment for their communities. Moreover, the narratives challenge prevailing power structures and envision a future characterized by justice and liberation.

4.3.3 Political Implications

The intricate relationship between religious beliefs and political power is evident throughout history, particularly in African societies where leaders have strategically utilized these beliefs to reinforce their authority and

suppress dissent. By aligning themselves with divine mandates, rulers legitimize their governance and strengthen their control over the populace. This manipulation often involves the appropriation of religious rituals and symbols to solidify their position.

Within Shona culture and broader African societies, beliefs surrounding the afterlife, judgment, and resurrection hold significant cultural, social, and political implications. These elements have frequently been exploited by leaders to maintain dominance, leveraging religious rituals and symbols for political gain. The ongoing debate surrounding Nehanda's resurrection mirrors narratives of messianic figures like Jesus Christ, challenging entrenched power structures while offering hope for a more equitable future.

Critical examination of the intersection between politics and religion is crucial to ensuring that these deeply ingrained beliefs serve as agents of empowerment rather than tools of oppression. Nehanda's iconic status, stemming from her leadership in anti-colonial resistance and subsequent execution, underscores her symbolic importance in the struggle for freedom and justice. Claims of her resurrection not only reaffirm her significance but also reignite aspirations for national guidance and liberation, challenging existing power dynamics and envisioning a future defined by justice and autonomy.

4.3.4 Manipulating the Manipulated

The enduring legacy of Nehanda, a revered spiritual and national icon in Zimbabwe, has been tactically employed by the Zimbabwean government to strengthen political narratives and consolidate authority. Nehanda's pivotal role during the liberation struggle, characterized by her prophetic declaration "My bones will rise again" (Nyambi, 2021) served to galvanize diverse ethnic groups against colonial oppression, lending the independence movement both historical and ethical legitimacy. This symbolic capital has persisted into the post-independence era through various commemorations and representations, resonating deeply with the cultural and spiritual ethos of Zimbabwean society.

Examples of this enduring legacy include the naming of roads and hospitals in Nehanda's honour, integrating her memory into the nation's infra-

structure as a perpetual reminder of her contributions to national sovereignty. More recently, the unveiling of Nehanda's statue in Harare and her depiction on Zimbabwean currency notes have carried significant political implications, signalling the government's alignment with her enduring symbol of sovereignty and resistance. These gestures extend beyond mere homage, strategically invoking a sense of unity and patriotism, particularly during periods of political turbulence or economic hardship, thereby legitimizing prevailing political agendas and countering perceived neo-colonial influences.

The discourse surrounding Nehanda's resurrection intersects deeply with both politics and religion, exerting a notable influence on contemporary Zimbabwean society. Political leaders have capitalized on this belief to bolster their legitimacy and reinforce their authority by aligning themselves with Nehanda's legacy as a champion of freedom. While this strategic invocation serves to consolidate political power, it also risks exploiting religious sentiments to suppress dissent and control the populace.

5. Conclusion

The examination of afterlife beliefs across diverse cultures and historical epochs illuminates their profound impact on theological, cultural, and socio-political landscapes. This comprehensive exploration underscores the intricate interplay between religious doctrines, cultural practices, and political authority, revealing the multifaceted nature of afterlife beliefs and their pragmatic deployment in various contexts.

Throughout history, afterlife beliefs have played a central role in shaping worldviews, guiding human conduct, and reinforcing societal norms. These beliefs serve as identifiers of religious identity, fostering communal cohesion and a sense of belonging among adherents. Additionally, they provide ethical frameworks that incentivize virtuous behaviour and deter socially undesirable actions. Economically, afterlife beliefs influence practices related to funerary rites, burial customs, and religious offerings, contributing to the development of industries such as the "death industry". Furthermore, these beliefs serve as instruments for the legitimization of authority, as rulers and political entities invoke them to justify their power and enforce compliance among their populace.

From the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom, Egyptians developed a sophisticated understanding of the afterlife, incorporating moral dimensions and elevating the pharaoh as the intermediary between mortal existence and the divine realm. These beliefs structured Egyptian society, reinforcing social hierarchies, and providing a framework for understanding life's purpose and continuity beyond death.

In Post-Exilic Israel, afterlife beliefs underwent profound transformations influenced by Persian religious thought and internal reinterpretations of traditional doctrines. Concepts such as resurrection, final judgment, and posthumous rewards or punishments marked departures from earlier notions of an obscure existence in sheol. These beliefs played pivotal roles in shaping Jewish and early Christian eschatological thought, revealing complex intersections between cultural, theological, and political dynamics. In Germany, afterlife beliefs have been shaped by the amalgamation of diverse cultural, religious, and historical influences. The fusion of pagan and Christian ideologies has left indelible imprints on German religion, culture, tradition, politics, economics, and art. Notably, during the Nazi regime, afterlife beliefs were cynically manipulated to advance ideological agendas, reinforcing notions of racial purity, martyrdom, and national destiny. This manipulation underscores the profound impact of afterlife beliefs on national consciousness and political actions. In Zimbabwe, afterlife beliefs carry significant cultural, social, and political implications within the Shona community. These beliefs shape identity formation, religious and moral frameworks, economic activities, and political narratives. The strategic manipulation of afterlife beliefs, exemplified by figures like Nehanda Nyakasikana, serves to legitimize authority, consolidate power, and foster collective unity and national purpose. Nehanda's story illustrates the utilization of afterlife beliefs to reinforce political narratives, challenge existing power structures, and offer aspirations for justice and liberation. The study of afterlife beliefs across civilizations underscores their profound influence on theological, cultural, and socio-political terrains. These beliefs shape worldviews, guide human behaviour, and serve as pivotal instruments for economic and political functions. The exploration of afterlife beliefs in diverse contexts highlights their diverse manifestations and pragmatic applications, shedding light

on the intricate interplay between religion, culture, and politics throughout history. Ultimately, the study of afterlife beliefs provides invaluable insights into the complex dynamics of human societies, revealing the enduring impact of these doctrines on humanity's collective consciousness.

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16 Exegetical Question: *θησαυρός* may not be *πλοῦτος*. Re-interpreting *μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* (Matt 6,19)

Exegetical Reflection in Honour of Prof.
Dr. J. Kügler, a Treasure for African New
Testament Science and Applied Biblical
Studies

Abstract

This study intends to suggest an alternative reading of the concept “treasure”, which is found in Jesus’ command “not to treasure for yourselves treasure on earth” (Matt 6,19). For its literary section, the paper will employ selected steps of the exegetical method which include inter- and intratextual reading of the concept under study, found in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, as well as its use within the religio-economic context of the Near East. This is here argued as paramount in coming up with an alternative understanding of treasuring within the context of the Sermon on the Mount. On the level of application, the study will utilise the Zimbabwean context as a case study, for the purposes of observing how the pericope is currently being interpreted by the proponents of involuntary material poverty, as well as the advocates of the Gospel of prosperity, two seemingly antagonising poles within Zimbabwean denominational Christianity. Whilst both camps appeal to biblical passages to justify their stance in relation to material wealth, Matt 6,19–21 included, the main question in this regard will be to determine whether the pericope under study fits in the discourse. The hypothesis is that when understood within the context of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus possibly inaugurated his new movement distinct from the one advocated by the Jewish temple, his use of the Old Testament concept “treasure” referred to temple wealth

more than it would fit in the discourse regarding individual accumulation or not accumulation of material wealth, technically referred to as *πλοῦτος* in the Synoptic Gospels.

Keywords: *Gospel, Matthew, Treasure, Accumulation of Wealth*

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe, like most countries in the Global South, has experienced an episode of extreme forms of conceptions of the Christian religion in relation to material wealth. The advent of the mission churches, especially the Catholic Church, witnessed the widespread proclamation of the gospel of involuntary poverty and detachment as a whole mark of conversion, with the vilification of material wealth, which was preached to be mundane and sometimes evil. The impossibility of converts to “serve both God and mammon” (Matt 6,24) was stressed, leaving them with no option but work for heavenly wealth. With the coming on board of charismatic Christianity, an antithesis of the dominant gospel of detachment seemed to have been one characteristic mark which resulted in the younger generation to “convert en masse” from mission churches into becoming full and active member of the latter, since they saw in them a fulfilment of their longing to fight and win against involuntary poverty. As this process continued, there seems to have developed yet another extreme, the over emphasis of the acquisition of personal, material wealth, even without taking care of how one acquires the same.

At the centre of these extremes are some biblical passages which are interpreted in a directly opposite way to support their respective worldviews, leaving a situation of at least two opposing poles running parallel, both claiming to be an authentic form of real Christianity. One such passage at the centre of the gospel of involuntary poverty and detachment is Matt 6,19–21. This pericope came to be dominantly interpreted as exhorting believers not to accumulate personal, material wealth here on earth, but rather work for heavenly and spiritual wealth, since it is in heaven that real wealth is preserved, given that heaven is the real destination that believers ought to aspire for as they shun the current passing world.

2. The meaning of *θησαυρός* in Matt 6,19 and its Implications for Zimbabwe

2.1 Exegetical Questions

Does the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 concern itself with castigating individual accumulation of *μαμωνᾶς*, or *πλοῦτος* (earthly riches) per se in the same sense as Matt 6,24 or it is concerned with something different? Secondly, if it does, is this individual accumulation of earthly riches the only way treasure (*θησαυρός*) can be understood in Scripture? Third, if there are other convincing senses in which *θησαυρός* may be rendered, what then will be the status of Matt 6,19–21 in the discourse pertaining to the acquisition and securing of individual earthly riches?

My inquiry is here to trace and investigate how *θησαυρός* (treasure) is used in Scripture, the context of the Near East, and history, still emphasising this material dimension, and thereby endeavouring an alternative interpretation. It is noteworthy that Matt 6,19–21 will be treated as a unit, which reads:

19 Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν· 20 θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν ἰούδὲ κλέπτουσιν· 21 ὅπου γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ θησαυρός ἴσου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδία ἴσου (NA28).

19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matt 6,19–21, RSVCE).

As numerous scholars delved into studying at length various portions of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, fairly few have treated Matt 6,19–21 as an independent pericope. Several scholars treat it as an opening part of a longer section (Matt 6,19–34). For Davies & Allison this pericope does not answer the "how" of treasuring because it is already given by what comes before it; to be rewarded are those who do not practise piety in public but give alms and prays secretly (Davies & Allison, 1988, p. 625).

Some view it as a conclusion of what comes before it (Matt 6,1–18). Pennington thus: Matt 6,1 and 6,19–21 form an *inclusio* around 6,2–18. Hence for him, 6,19–21 must be viewed as a concluding part of what comes before it (Pennington, 2007, p. 114).

Regarding the message of this pericope, scholars seem to be unanimous that it discourages accumulation of material possessions and finding solace in them as the “be-all and end-all” of one’s life. This message is brought about most especially as these verses are viewed in the light of such pericopes as Matt 19,16–30 in which individual, material wealth accumulation is seen as a blockage for one to attain Heaven since it is earth centred. But is this everything that can be said about the pericope?

2.2 Exegetical Issues

The pericope at first glance seems to be unconnected with what comes before or after it; with Matt 6,18 concluding on the teaching of fasting in secret, and Matt 6,22 teaching about “the eye as a lamp for the body”. However, I subscribe to the above position by Pennington that Matt 6,19 agrees with Matt 6,1 with which they form an *inclusio*. All the same, I maintain that Matt 6,19–21 is an independent unit whose meaning can be deduced. Within the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 seems to fit as a hinge in Jesus’ inauguration of his movement as he pointed out what was detestable in the old, dominant temple religion. Thus, this pericope seems to be the only indirect reference to the temple economy which may be said to have been buttressed by the physical cleansing of the temple in Matt 21, and may be read side by side as will be shown below.

Literary devices found include repetitions such as “treasuring treasure”, and metaphors like rust, moth and thieves. Present in the pericope vividly, is the use of comparative language; not earth but heaven, put across in the form of the strong, prohibitive negative imperative, in which $\mu\lambda\prime$ (never) is used with the present imperative $\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\tau\epsilon$ and the affirmation $\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\tau\epsilon$ $\delta\grave{\epsilon}$ which is antithetical (Smyth, 1984, p. 608).

2.2.1 The Concept of “treasure” Linked to the Temple Wealth in the Old Testament

In the Septuagint (LXX), one of the senses in which θησαυρός is used, is that in reference to “the material wealth of the house of the Lord” (τοὺς θησαυροὺς οἴκου κυρίου) (1 Kings 7,37; 2 Kings 24,13). In the Masoretic Text (MT), אֶצֶר is held to be the equivalence of the LXX θησαυρός. Its contextual meanings range from threshing floor, “riches of the house of the king” (אֶצֶר בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ), “riches of the house of the Lord” (אֶצֶר בֵּית יְהוָה) and “treasury” (בֵּית הָאֶצֶר) in 1 Kings 14,26; 2 Chron 36,18; 1 Kings 7,51–52 and 2 Chron 9,12 respectively.

The term is also used cosmically to refer to heaven as a treasure house (Deut 28,12; 32,34). Taking cognisance that θησαυρος can mean both treasure and treasury and refers to individual and communal material wealth as found in different contexts in Scripture; my concentration in proposing an alternative interpretation of the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 will be on θησαυρός as communal treasuring. The question regards what this institutional wealth or treasure was, how it was accumulated and the ideology that might have supported the accumulation, and finally, who benefited from it? This might be suggesting a reading of Matt 6,19–21 from a contextual point of view regarding the economic life in Israel as a community, following the suggestion of Eubank, who seems to have done justice to this topic by pointing out especially the economic language that Matthew uses in this pericope and elsewhere (Eubank, 2014, pp. 77–91).

According to Marty in addition to tithes of agricultural produce and animals, Israelites paid a shekel tax to support the Jerusalem temple economy (Marty, 2006, p. 108). Temple wealth thus consisted of taxes, tithes, offerings, contributions, donations and treasures that came from Jews in various circumstances (Exod 30,13). These treasures were in the form of gold, silver, grain, wine, oil, wood and they sustained the temple economy. Gold and silver are thought to have been donated and deposited the most.

As a result, the Jerusalem Temple became an entity, because temple treasuries and the treasures made it a kind of a national depository that even required security and a running administration. Wright notes that temples functioned as banks of antiquity, and to extend the metaphor, the temple storehouses were bank vaults (Wright, 1990, pp. 69–81). If comparative studies are anything to go by, then evidence of the temple as an

alternative for people to store their personal treasures can be found especially from Mesopotamia and Greece. Marty states that despite risks, persons in the community deposited their precious commodities in the temple store rooms in confidence that 1) the deity would protect the treasured items, and 2) the excellent temple administrative staff would keep meticulous records (cf. Marty, 2006, p. 143). Initially, the temple labelled, sealed and stored items with intentions of returning them to their owners exactly as deposited.

This might explain the reason why temples were targets when foreign powers struck, for instance Judah; Joash seized all the gold and silver that was in the temple (2 Chron 25,24); the Chaldeans vandalised and burnt the Jerusalem Temple, and through them, God brought the “treasures of the house of the Lord”, among other things, to Babylon. Likewise, “Shishak king of Egypt took away the treasures of the House of the Lord and the treasures of the king’s house” (1 Kings 14,26).

Marty quotes Ezra 1,9–11’s inventory of the Jewish temple which was handed to Mithredath the treasurer by Cyrus king of Persia which had 5 400 gold and silver vessels and Ezra 2,13–14 which shows a bigger quantity, 5 469 vessels (cf. Marty, 2006, p. 44). Around 70 AD, the Romans are said to have destroyed the temple and again carried away the treasures of the temple according to Josephus. These plunders, which happened in different epochs, show that the temple appears to have had a flourishing depository in which treasure was put and kept, and this came to be termed the “treasury of the House of the Lord.” Kingsley brings to light the findings of 15 years of archaeology that there were three levels of storerooms around the temple’s three sides, each story with approximately thirty chambers (Kingsley, 2007). He estimates about 50 tons of gold as having been the treasure of Herod’s temple which fell in the hands of the Romans under Vespasian. Thus, *θησαυρός* appears in a material sense, and most importantly, linked to the temple riches. However, historical Books of the Old Testament seem to only tell us that there were treasures in the temple, but not much is said on the “how” this treasure was treasured.

Hauck contends that this idea of “payment to God” was distinctively extended in later Judaism (Hauck, 1965, p. 136). The good works of the righteous, especially his almsgiving, are regarded as his *θησαυρός* stored for eternal life. A hint from Deut 14,28 and Mal 3,10 which command “the

payment to the House of the Lord of a full tithe”, may point to the fact that tithes sustained this treasury and as Malachi expressed, bringing a full tithe is giving to God and it will result in him blessing the people abundantly here on earth.

These and similar theological conceptions, seem to have worked as ideologies that mobilised anyone rich or poor, to treasure treasures for themselves and for the poor in the temple, actively awaiting divine blessing. This theological justification might have emphasised on the compulsory storing of treasure in the temple under oath, as well as contribution towards the temple arm of charity, as shown by sections in Deuterocanonical texts of the late first millennium which support the role of the temple treasury as storing aid “for the widows and orphans” (2 Macc 3,6.10–11; 4 Macc 4,3.7).

It appears that Jewish authorities campaigned hard in discouraging the populace to pursue other forms of treasuring, for example, depositing with a private individual as reflected in Tobit 4,20; 5,2–3; 9,5; in preference for the temple treasury. Citations from the Psalms especially “they feast on the abundance of your house” (Ps 36,8–9); “he fills you with finest wheat” (Ps 147,14); “and I will abundantly bless its provisions; I will satisfy its poor with bread” (Ps 132,13–15) support the position of God who satisfies his people with good things and the role of the temple as that of catering for the needs of the disadvantaged.

2.2.2 Treasure in the NT

Some NT writers seem to have applied the OT concept of *θησαυρός* as individual, material wealth as found in Luke 12,33–34; Mark 10,21; 1 Tim 6,17–19; James 5,1–3, and not having direct allusion to the temple as above. Their exhortation thrust was on detachment; those who renounce earthly riches invest for the future and they will only be given their reward at the coming of the Son of Man. Mark and Luke claim the possibility of a double enjoyment of this investment or treasure; both in this present life and the life to come. According to Mark, those who renounce their possessions will receive, “a hundred times now, in the present time and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10,30). Luke, too, in 18,29–30, has this aspect of double recompense as shown in the words *ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ* “in this age” and *καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζῶνι αἰῶνιον* “and in the age to

come eternal life”. “In his Gospel, Matthew heightens the contrast between earthly poverty and the riches of the coming age.” (Eubank, 2014, p. 87).

2.3 Treasure and “treasuring” in Matthew

In Matt 6,19–21, Jesus might have also been condemning the concept of *θησαυρός* in relation to temple treasuring still in practice, which had become corrupt. The common fund, purportedly meant to cater for the orphan, widow and alien; and temple taxes and donations meant to support the cult, might have benefited the authorities. Surprisingly, Jesus does not mention the temple directly, in the whole Sermon where he might be expected to do so at length, since he is mentioning issues to do with righteousness (except in Matt 5,27 where there is mention of bringing an offering to the altar).

2.3.1 Interpretation

My hypothesis is that in these few words, Jesus seems to have prohibited the Jewish normalised, communal form of treasuring up treasure in the temple treasury. This hypothesis builds on the syntax used to communicate a strong, negative prohibition in a combination of *μὴ* and *δὲ* plus a present plural imperative, which makes the issue appear serious and all embracing. This might have been a revolutionary and provocative swipe against the temple cult authorities, together with the dominant ideology that supported the treasuring in the temple. His physical cleansing of the temple later in Matt 21,12–13 in which he lamented that the temple had been turned into “a den of robbers” instead of being “a House of prayer”, might be a follow up on this.¹

¹ The orientation by the authors after the cleansing of the temple is different in Matthew and John’s accounts. In Matthew Jesus laments precisely, what authorities had turned the temple into “a den of robbers”, quoting Jer 7,11. Maybe this may point to the corruption in temple trade dealings and treasuring in the temple in particular, which possibly swindled the poor while pretending to be God instituted. In John, the emphasis is on Jesus who is consumed by the zeal for God’s house, quoting Ps 69,9, which may point to something different from Matthew’s (Matt 21,12–13 and John 2,13–17).

It might be that in the verses of this pericope, he tactically referred to this temple practice without mentioning it directly since doing so was extra sensitive and posed as a red line in his confrontation with the authorities who feasted from the same. In this sense then, “rust and moth” may refer to corrupt human beings, (possibly the Jewish aristocracy which included priests and kings), who appropriated for themselves what was supposedly offered to God; and “thieves” may refer to foreign powers, who plundered the temple first anytime they invaded Jerusalem.

Rust and moths are found in continuous contact with the things they feed on and their effect of destruction is slow but sure. This may then point to the corruption of temple authorities who controlled the temple cult and ultimately the temple economy. The digging through of the thieves, might be lamenting the occasional temple plunderers, Egyptians, Babylonians in the past, and contemporary to Jesus; the Romans who are recorded especially by Josephus, to have had indirect influence of the temple cult, to the extent of imposing client kings and chief priests from the aristocracy like Caiphas and religious leaders like Annas the Elder, ultimately robbing the temple riches.

Thus, it might be possible that Jesus used figurative language as he castigated the corruption within the temple economy of his time, where internal functionaries as well as external invaders arguable shared the spoil though in different ways, as they looted the temple storehouses. This is demonstrated by the characteristics of the elements that Jesus figuratively chose in putting his message across to his hearers, where σῆς (rust) and βρῶσις (moth) are said to consume (ἀφανίζω) and on the other hand, κλέπται (thieves) διορύσσω (dig through), all for the purposes of looting the temple treasury.

In order to evade the likely rampant corruption, Jesus appears to be saying that generosity to the poor must be done directly, secretly (Matt 6,1–4), and this is equivalent to treasuring in Heaven. People must by-pass the temple treasury arrangement, which is but treasuring on earth, for in it are rust and moth. Bauernfeind notes that the LXX apart from other senses, also uses moth figuratively in reference to human, feminine malice as in Sirach 42,13, and transitoriness as in Job 27 (Bauernfeind, 1971, pp. 275–278). I suggest that Jesus in Matt 6,19f; Lk 12, 33 is not so much demanding a resolute turning aside from all perishable treasures, but his

thrust might be on the agents of destruction which are difficult to notice though their after-destructive effects are severe.

Jesus was not addressing a group of rich young-men like the one in Matt 19,16–30 in a “business seminar” of some sort, but *οἱ ὄχλοι*, possibly made up of the poor, foreigners and rich alike; yet this message was meant for them all. If this message was addressing a practical phenomenon in practice, in which both the poor and rich compulsorily participated, then the temple cult comes to mind first. This might be warning them to stop even believing that treasuring their treasures in the temple was synonymous to treasuring with God in Heaven; but something else, namely, reaching out to the poor directly and performing acts of righteousness through almsgiving.

In fact, the Gospel of Matthew is strong on the aspect of individual, direct touch of a needy person by a believer, minus the temple treasury channel. This teaching is found, too, on the lips of Jesus to the rich young man, to whom he exhorted to “go and sell his earthly riches, give alms to the poor and so have treasure in heaven” (Matt 19,16–30). Even the final judgement is said to be based on whether this direct, hands-on generosity towards the disadvantaged was directly put in practice (Matt 25,31–46).

2.3.2 Implications for Zimbabwe

If the above hypothesis, which sought to liberate treasure which is understood by most interpreters as *πλοῦτος*, is anything to go by, then the pericope of Matt 6,19 may be more useful in the evaluation of denominational leaders who prey on the tithes and offerings of unsuspecting believers, as “they eat on behalf of God”. It is in the public domain that the luxurious lives that men and women of God lead in Zimbabwe, to the extent of owning private helicopters, are sustained by the offerings of congregants who are either convinced that they are treasuring in heaven, or seeding as they wait for their turn to harvest. Some of these religious leaders seem to be in partnership with influential politicians, as may be witnessed by their evasion of prosecution when their victims cry for justice.

To a greater extent therefore, the employment of this pericope in the discourse on whether a believer may acquire mundane wealth or follow the route of involuntary poverty may not be in line with the sense that has been argued for above. Seemingly, the message this time concerns the

plunderers of the treasure, both direct and indirect ones like rust and thieves, following the metaphors used in the pericope. It may therefore be a wakeup call to contemporary believers to evaluate the why of their tithing, and to be proactive in assisting the needy of their communities since the contemporary church functionaries apparently think of themselves first before the widow and the orphan. This therefore renders deficient the concept of keeping wealth on earth which religious leaders of this category propagate as the one discouraged by the passage and not necessarily its acquisition. How this enrichment of individual religious leaders is synonymous to gathering in heaven, whilst fulfilling the beatitude of inheriting the world with its milk and honey, remains elusive. Even the accompanying rhetoric that Jesus suffered for once on the cross in order for us to enjoy not only spiritual salvation, but the goodies of the present world, narrows the circle of the ones enjoying the benefits of the said resurrection as victory over poverty and suffering. More so, turning to the other extreme position which engages Matt 6,19 to instruct involuntary poverty, there might be need to revisit this understanding by first suggesting the above argued sense of treasure, as well as suggest a positive view of materiality. Upholding the teaching of the ungodliness of material wealth seems to have romanticised poverty by indirectly encouraging reluctance and lack of aggressive initiatives in fighting against material poverty, in favour of handouts. The ramifications of this seemingly Platonic understanding of the pericope which vilifies materiality while embracing the metaphysical, seem to persist to the effect that most members of especially mainline churches still embrace un-vowed poverty as heavenly, leaving them as a major constituent of that section of the population that arguably fails to adapt in the ever changing capitalistic world as they fail to put even food on their table. A positive view of physical wealth, coupled by a well-balanced ethic of acquisition, may need to be retaught so as to build a halfway building between two extremes; namely, advocacy of involuntary poverty and acquisition of riches without taking care of the how of acquiring.

Unintentional poverty is here distinguished from the intentional vow of poverty which some religious and priests in the Catholic Church take voluntarily as one of their Evangelical Counsels, alongside obedience and chastity.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this work argues for the need to differentiate between at least two senses of wealth found in the New Testament; namely, treasures, mammon and riches. It went on to evaluate how two antagonistic views within Christian traditions have arrived created perceptions amongst their congregants regarding worldly riches through their interpretations of treasuring treasure in heaven as found in Matt 6,19.

Regarding the first task, I argued that individual material possessions or wealth, which is referred to as *πλοῦτος* in such New Testament, passages as Matt 13,22, Luke 16,11 and 1 Tim 6,17, or *μαμωνᾶς* in Matt 6,24, may to a larger extent be said to be distinct from the “riches of the house of the Lord” which are referred to as *θησαυρούς* in Matt 6,19.

While *θησαυρός* is generally used in reference to individual, material wealth, that could be invested elsewhere, it is also found especially in the historical books of the Old Testament, to refer to the material wealth of the temple treasury that included gold, silver, offerings, tithes and taxes that people deposited either to retrieve it later or to contribute to a fund that catered for the poor. Very few scholarly materials exploring institutional treasuring in the Jerusalem Temple exist, though comparative studies show that temples in the Ancient Near East had an economic function apart from a religious one, and sometimes this economic function was given a religious icing. Scholars have suggested that this wealth was huge, and it was also used to fund temple functionaries and the temple economy.

Understanding *θησαυρός* in the context of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus inaugurated the new whilst castigating the abuses of the old, it may be considered likely that in Matt 6,19, he was in dialogue with the temple treasure and treasury which according to the context of the first century, had been infested by internal corruption and external technical plunder. It is this contextual reading that I suggest as crucial in a contemporary reading of the pericope within the Zimbabwean context, where focus seems to have confused *θησαυρός* for *πλοῦτος* with the resultant interpretations creating two extremes; advocacy for involuntary poverty as a

gateway to heaven, as preached by missionaries on one hand, and the antagonism of such an understanding by proponents of the gospel of prosperity on the other hand.

Whilst the inclination towards the gospel of prosperity by new age mega churches has been rebutted by most commentators, little attention seems to have been paid to the reason why such a Gospel appealed especially to the younger generations vis a vis the ever changing capitalistic economy which emphasises on competition, and acquisition, akin to “the survival of the fittest” principle. Though the reasons may be many, this analysis has argued that the treatment of *θησαυρός* in mainline churches left no space to appreciate and celebrate the created material order, as humanity’s domain which may be accumulated and used diligently. The Platonic influence which viewed the extra material (world of forms) as the real, and the material as corrupted, resulted in the lack of encouragement especially to the younger generation to accumulate wealth responsibly. This resulted in the promotion of the other extreme in the interpretation of the pericope, which sanctioned the embrace of involuntary detachment to material, personal wealth as heavenly.

My suggestion is therefore that in the pericope of Matt 6,19–21, Jesus commanded his followers not to store treasure anymore in the temple, because doing so, they risk losing their hard won wealth to corrupt individuals (rust and moth), and plunderers (thieves) who would dig through and steal. Rather, they had to treasure their treasures with God by helping the needy cases directly, without the intermediary role of the temple which he alluded to without directly mentioning. Therefore, Jesus might have likely used *θησαυρίζω* in the same sense that Proverbs used *δανείζω* (Prov 19,17); that is, treasuring as in lending to God through the poor, and this lending will be repaid; thus *ἀνταποδιδῶμι* (Prov 19,17).

Lending to God through the poor as a theme is found in many occasions in Matthew where Jesus exhorts the individual to be directly proactive, and personal, as in Matt 25,34–46 in which even the final judgement will be based on this direct involvement in acts of righteousness. This went against the ideology of giving to the temple as giving to God in Deuteronomy, some Prophets like Malachi and the Psalms.

If this is anything to go by, then Jesus’ new teaching attacked the very core of survival for the elite, who benefited much from the treasury given the

thousands of pilgrims who frequented the temple during major feasts, plus the many offerings that were obligatory on the populace. I would propose that this teaching in the context of the Sermon on the Mount is possibly an “ideological cleansing of the temple”, in which Jesus did not target this time the recipients of the taxes and treasures, but the payers and contributors. In the physical cleansing recorded in Matt 22,12–13, he might be said to have targeted the recipients, possibly temple functionaries and religious authorities, an event which Matthew places in the Passion Week, maybe to emphasise its treasonous nature, and so would merit Jesus' death. One of the accusations levelled against him during his trial was his attack on the temple institution.

Considering “the crowds” (οἱ ὄχλοι) who were his audience as constituted of Israelites and non-Israelites who also had temples in which as demonstrated above, treasures were kept, the effect of Jesus' words were far reaching in affecting even the deposits of those temples had people put Jesus' words in action.

Finally, considering the two extreme positions in Zimbabwean Christianity regarding a believer's supposed relation with material accumulation, which as already said, is best rendered by a contextual understanding of *πλοῦτος* more than *θησαυρός*, it can be said that the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 may be utilised in a quest for a moderate position in which the total vilification of wealth which encourages involuntary poverty and dependence on donor funding, as well as the accumulation of excessive materiality even without the emphasis on the “how” of acquiring, may need to be challenged. As argued above, this pericope may need to be read in relation to other pericopes like Matt 25,46ff in which alms giving directly to the poor, is considered more of treasuring with God which will be recompensed.

This will therefore encourage a positive look on material wealth, as well as encouraging Christian morality during and after this acquisition. Encouraging involuntary detachment then waiting for handouts from donor organisations in the name of Matt 6,19–21, may need to be repealed in the same way that excessive accrument of material wealth regardless of the “how” as well as the end of the same may need to be evaluated. This maybe in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim at

fighting extreme poverty, whereby the mindset is addressed and the constituency that grovels in involuntary poverty come to be empowered to be self-reliant as they move out of their conditions to a better pedestal with the same Word of God, but this time contextually interpreted, as their beacon of enlightenment.

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SECTION 4

Biblical Studies for Social Transformation

Gerald O. West

17 Contending with a Disabled Bible

From Retribution to Redemption

Abstract

In honouring both Joachim Kügler's commitment to biblical scholarship and to African contexts, this essay reflects on the Ujamaa Centre's work over more than twenty-five years with organised communities of those living with disability. The essay follows the See-Judge-Act process, so familiar to Kügler, beginning with See: the reality of those living with disability in South Africa (and further north in the continent). The essay then turns to actual biblical text (Judge), from three different perspectives. First, I reflect on texts used against those living with disability, recognising a pervasive voice in scripture which discriminates against and stigmatises those living with disability. Second, I reflect on texts selected by those living with disability as potentially useful resources in their struggle for a full and dignified life. Third, I reflect on the kind of Bible that these two trajectories evidence, a Bible that is inherently a site of struggle with respect to disability – a disabled Bible. Fourth, the essay also reflects on the pervasive interlocking theological system of retribution that stigmatises, discriminates, and condemns those living with disability, alongside their HIV-positive, unemployed, and queer compatriots. Finally, the Act component of the essay reflects on the ongoing work of the Ujamaa Centre in this area and the kinds of actions particular organised groups of people living with disability take up.

Keywords: *Disability, Retribution, Redemption, Theology, Exclusion*

1. Introduction

"I am often blamed for not being healed. Is it because of my sin? Some people say if I confess my sins, I will be healed" (ConneXion, 2011). This was one of the voices within a resource sent to the Ujamaa Centre in a disABILITY ConneXion document, "A Bible Study to Develop a Biblical

View of Disability” (ConneXion, 2011). Patricia Bruce, a colleague with scholarly and familial engagement with disability studies (Bruce, 2010), within the Biblical Studies department of the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics, of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, invited the Ujamaa Centre to meet with the national coordinator of disABILITY ConneXion, Erna Moller and her colleagues on the 30th June 2011. Moller sent us the Bible study document, from which I have taken this quotation. disABILITY ConneXion were inviting the Ujamaa Centre to train them in doing Contextual Bible Study (CBS). This was the beginning of the Ujamaa Centre’s work with disABILITY ConneXion, and other organised groups of people living with disability.

This essay reflects on the Ujamaa Centre’s work specifically within the context of disability and more generally within the trajectory of retribution theology. We begin with the recognition that the Bible is itself – intrinsically – a site of theological and ideological contestation, before turning to reflect on the relationship between disability studies and biblical studies. We then turn to the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) praxis of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research (Ujamaa Centre) as it is summoned by organised communities of those living with disability to re-read the Bible with them. Finally, the essay reflects on a pervasive form of biblical theology – retribution theology – which interconnects a number of marginalised communities, including those living with disability, those living with HIV, those who have survived and those who have not survived gender-based violence, those who are unemployed, those who practice alternative masculinities, and those who inhabit alternative sexualities.

2. Contending Trajectories in the Bible

In the late 1970s, Walter Brueggemann proposed the biblical literature could be analysed as reflecting two contending ideological and theological trajectories, each grounded in particular struggles across biblical history and sociology. Brueggemann refers to these trajectories using different terminology: the Mosaic liberation trajectory/the royal consolidation trajectory; the have nots trajectory/the haves trajectory (Brueggemann, 1993, p. 201); the structure legitimation trajectory/the embrace of pain trajectory (Brueggemann, 1985a, p. 31); contractual theology/compassionate

theology (Brueggemann, 1985a, pp. 45–46); retribution theology/redemption theology.

Briefly, but incisively, the structure legitimation trajectory is the dominant ideo-theological voice in the Bible; it is a theology that “provides an ordered sense of life that is lodged in the sovereignty of God, beyond the reach of historical circumstances”; it is a theology which asserts that not only does God govern, “but there is an order that works through the processes of history, even if that purpose is not always visible”; such a theology “tends to serve the ruling class, which regularly identifies the order of creation with the current social arrangement”; and while this theological trajectory tends to make universal ahistorical claims, this ideo-theological voice “is wrought by power agents who have a socio-political point to score and who mean to defeat alternative views and legitimate their own” (Brueggemann, 1985b, pp. 395–396).

The other trajectory, the embrace of pain trajectory, is a crucial but “minority voice” in the Bible; it is a theology “that this is a rigorous protest against claims that the dominant order is God’s order; “this theological stance insists and affirms that the legitimated order”, what is claimed to be God’s order, “can be addressed, assaulted, impinged upon, and transformed”; and this theological trajectory summons the “risk” of actual historical protest which invites God “to participate in the critique that will permit a newness” (Brueggemann, 1985b, pp. 405–406).

In the late 1980s, Itumeleng Mosala offered South African Black Theology a similar, though more complex (West, 2020), analysis. Mosala’s focus was not on coherent ideo-theological trajectories across the Bible; his focus was on the particular ideo-theological struggles which produced a particular biblical text, both in its initial formation and in its subsequent redactions (or reuses). Mosala reconceptualises the notion of “source”, refusing to restrict its reference to “different literary sources or different historical provenances”, and insisting instead on “different social class, cultural and gender sources”, and on historical-sociological provenances “that would raise the important factor of [class, cultural, and gender] struggle in and beneath the text” (Mosala, 1989, p. 10). Not only is the Bible “the product and record of class, race, gender, and cultural struggles”, it is also “the site and weapon of such struggles”, ancient and contemporary (Mosala, 1989, p. 11).

For both Brueggemann and Mosala the pervasive contestation is economic and political. Neither of them engages specifically with disability, though both would recognise its inclusion within their categories of “have nots” (Brueggemann, 1993, p. 201) or “the poor and exploited” (Mosala, 1989, p. 193).

3. Disability Studies and Biblical Studies

I borrow this sub-heading from the work of Hector Avalos, who has given us a very useful overview of the relationship between these two areas of study (Avalos, 2019). He begins by situating biblical studies work within the wider field of disability studies. Disability studies “centers on the differential valuation of human beings based on their perceived physical and/or mental features and ‘abilities’” (Avalos, 2019, p. 344). Adopting the epistemology of this marginalised sector of our society, Avalos goes to state that “the disability rights movement often encourages use of the term, ‘people with disabilities’ (PWD), to emphasize the fact that a disability need not define one’s entire spectrum of abilities or worth” (Avalos, 2019, p. 344). Significantly, he locates disability studies within the “broader study of embodiment or corporeality” (Avalos, 2019, p. 344).

What is particularly useful about Avalos’ survey is how he delineates different approaches within biblical studies to disability. The biblical studies approach he identifies, with a disability studies approach, “seeks to redeem the biblical text, despite any negative stance on disabilities, by re-contextualizing it for modern application”, recognising “the ill social effects created by linking sin and disability/illness in the treatment of the disabled (e.g., the claim that AIDS is God’s punishment for a sinful lifestyle)” (Avalos, 2019, p. 347). Implicit in this approach is the recognition of contending theological perspectives in both biblical text and contemporary context concerning disability. Another approach, which is closer to Mosala’s analysis, rejects the usefulness of the Bible within disability studies, recognising within the dominant redactions of the biblical text that the Bible itself “has negative portrayals of disability that should be rejected in modern society” (Avalos, 2019).

Like Brueggemann and Mosala, in the work of the Ujamaa Centre we work with a Bible where there are contending views on disability. A dominant biblical theological trajectory, as Avalos notes, is that there is direct relationship between sin and sickness, including disability. Alongside this trajectory, contending with it, is a minority (an almost absent, in Mosala's terms) theological trajectory in which disability is a site of struggle in which God works with those living with disability, acknowledging their humanity, their dignity, their agency, and their ability.

A good example of these two biblical trajectories or perspectives or voices in a single biblical text is the well-known story in John's gospel. In John 9, Jesus has come directly, according to John, from the Jerusalem temple, where he has been contending with the scribes and Pharisees (John 8:3, 13), who are part of the temple leadership. Specifically, Jesus has rejected a theology of retribution, aligning himself to the "woman caught in adultery" (John 8:3), refusing to "condemn" her (John 8:11). No sooner has Jesus escaped the violent response (John 8:59) of the temple leadership than John draws the reader's attention to Jesus who "saw a man blind from birth" (John 9:1). The verb "to see" is in the aorist, indicating a complete action. Jesus fully "sees" this man. The disciples of Jesus also see this man (John 9:2), but instead of seeing him fully as a person, they see only his disability. Their question to Jesus illustrates their theological perspective: "And His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?'" (John 9:2).

Here we have the two trajectories, side by side: recognition-redemption and stigmatisation-retribution. Both are in the Bible. Here we have evidence of an ancient site of struggle, centred on disability, with Jesus representing a minority perspective over against the majority perspective of the disciples. Significantly, John foregrounds the perspective of Jesus, placing it first. Significant too is how Jesus responds to this question by the disciples: "Jesus answered, 'He did not sin, nor his parents; but his disability was so that the works of God might be made manifest in him'" (John 9:3). How we are to understand this response should be left to those living with disability; they should guide our understanding of this text. This is precisely the approach of the Ujamaa Centre, where we adopt a liberationist approach to disability studies (Avalos, Melcher & Schipper, 2005; Eiesland, 1994).

Central to the biblical interpretation process of the Ujamaa Centre is the See-Judge-Act process associated with the Young Christian Workers movement in Europe (Sands, 2018), South Africa, Brazil, and the Philippines (ICT, 1989), among others. We begin our work with a particular organised community, with “Seeing” reality from their perspective, recognising the epistemological privilege of their experience and their conceptual understanding of this experience. There can be no theology of disability without those living with disability being the primary interlocutors.

This is why it was important for the Ujamaa Centre, in 2011, to receive an invitation from DisABILITY ConneXion, a national and local organised group of people living with disability.

4. Working with a Disabled Bible

We had our first workshop with disABILITY ConneXion on a Saturday, the 17th March 2012 (ConneXion, 2012; Ujamaa, 2012, pp. 61–63). The Pietermaritzburg branch is a small group, so we did not anticipate more than about 10–15 participants. However, Barbara Watt, the coordinator, and her team were surprised as more and more chairs had to be put out. The reason, we were told by the new people who had come on this particular day, was that they had heard from friends in the group that the workshop would be dealing with the Bible from the perspective of disability. This had never happened before in their experience, and they were eager to hear what the Bible might say from their own perspective. Everyone agreed that the Bible was often used to stigmatise and discriminate against them.

When all had arrived, we were 25, with 13 women and 12 men, and with various forms of disability. This was the first meeting with this enlarged group, so time was spent introducing ourselves to each other. We sat in a circle, making space for those who used crutches and those in wheelchairs. We used both English and isiZulu, as the group was composed of both language groups and was multiracial, including Africans, Coloureds, Indians, and Whites (in South African racial terms). Most of those present knew each other, for they were an organised group. However, it soon became clear to us that there were a fairly large number of new people, as numbers kept growing, and as people introduced themselves.

After personal introductions, the Ujamaa Centre briefly explained our understanding of Bible study, introducing the concept of ‘Contextual Bible Study’ (CBS) and how CBS as a Bible re-reading process was located within the See-Judge-Act process (West, 2015). We then began the CBS process, beginning with “See”.

The “See” part of the process was a very moving experience. Everyone shared about their experience. Their experiences of discrimination were divided by them into four categories: discrimination at school, discrimination in marriage, discrimination in church, and discrimination in the community. For example, at school other children mimicked the way they walked, in marriage family members did not think them worthy of being married, in church they were kept at the back out of sight or left at home, and in the community their special needs were seldom recognised and so they struggled to find work (ConneXion, 2012).

Clearly, these people living with disability experienced the ambivalence of their theological, social, and cultural traditions. When they first arrived at a church, for example, they almost all had a similar experience. They would be welcomed, because they were an “opportunity” for the pastor to show his healing power. But if they were not healed, then they were quickly kept at the back of the church, and the failure to be healed was considered to be their lack of faith. Their families would from then on often make excuses for not taking them to church with them. Here is classic version of structure legitimation theology (ConneXion, 2012). The normative system is not at fault; the fault lies with those whose disability disrupts and questions the normative system.

The “See” component of the See-Judge-Act process took most of the workshop time. Everyone wanted their opportunity to tell their story. We then spent considerable time together reflecting on and analysing the lived realities we had shared. The result, as indicated, was an analysis that identified four primary areas of stigmatisation, discrimination, and marginalisation: at school, in marriage, in church, in community (ConneXion, 2012; Ujamaa, 2012, p. 62).

There was a deep need for those present to express their own understanding of their reality, so this took a few hours. When each person had fully expressed their understanding of their lived reality, we then moved into the second phase, Judge. Here we began to identify biblical texts that

might be useful in the context of disability and in the context of the reality of those living with disability. We identified the following biblical texts as potentially useful: Mark 3:1–8, Exodus 4:1–17, 2 Corinthians 12:1–10, Acts 3:1–11, and John 9:1–41. The Ujamaa Centre offered three guidelines for reflecting on the potential of any biblical text: (1) Identify a general question to open the CBS, such as “What is the text about?”, which allows each of the participants to speak, enabling the Bible study to belong to the participants. (2) Identify a series of specific questions which allows the details of the biblical text to become apparent, enabling the voice/s of the Bible to come alongside the voices of the participants. (3) Identify a series of specific questions which connect specific disability contexts with the detail of this biblical text, enabling appropriation to take place, which in turn should lead to potential forms of action for transformation (ConneXion, 2012).

With each biblical text we then followed the three guideline questions. We used two CBS which the Ujamaa Centre had already developed with people living with HIV, the Mark 3 and the John 9 text (Ujamaa, 2015). The other three CBS were emerging CBS, and reflected the preliminary work being done by our colleague, Micheline Kamba Kasongo, on these biblical texts. The Ujamaa Centre was fortunate to have Kasongo working with us. She had participated in an ongoing way with disABILITY ConneXion and other organised groups of people living with disability, especially groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where she lived.

Kasongo had come to the Ujamaa Centre and the University of KwaZulu-Natal to do PhD work on biblical studies, CBS, and disability. She was herself a person living with disability, and so carried in her body the realities of living with disability in African (and other) contexts. Specifically, working together with Pat Bruce and I as her PhD supervisors, Kasongo constructed a series of three CBS. The first was on Exodus 4:1–17, and had as its generative theme (in Paulo Freire’s sense (Freire, 2006, p. 96)) disability self-identity. The second CBS was on 2 Corinthians 12:1–10, and had as its generative theme suffering as another way of discovering oneself, whether as someone living with disability or someone not yet living with a disability. The third CBS was on Acts 3:1–11, and was designed “for church leaders from the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa with the aim of helping church leaders to widen their understanding of healing for better

integration of and support for PWDs [People With Disabilities] in society” (Kasongo, 2013; see also Kasongo, 2019).

As we worked through each of the draft CBS, we showed how each CBS incorporated the three guidelines and how each CBS fitted into the See-Judge-Act process. The disABILITY ConneXion participants were fully engaged throughout this process, probing both each biblical text and how the Ujamaa Centre had shaped the draft CBS on each. Their contributions, as is common in the Ujamaa Centre’s CBS process, contributed to revised versions of a CBS. The See-Judge-Act process of CBS was itself a powerful resource. It began with their experience of disability and discrimination and only then turned to re-read the Bible from this perspective. They had never before had an opportunity determine how the Bible was read. They had become “subjects”.

Each of the biblical texts had resources that were identified as useful resources for their life situations. In the Mark 3 text the participants noted that Jesus became angry because of the way the synagogue treated the disabled man. They agreed with Jesus, “it is time for the church to change, putting people before their rules”, said one participant. In the Exodus 4 Bible study the participants were delighted to see that God used Moses, even though God had not healed Moses of his speech disability. God can and does use people with disabilities. In the 2 Corinthians 12 text there was a great deal of discussion about verse 7 in which Paul refers to disability as a messenger of Satan (2 Cor 12:7). The participants did not like this verse, but they found the rest of the text helpful. This was an important recognition for them, recognising that not all the Bible was empowering and redemptive for those living with disability. They realised that they had to contend for the meaning of the Bible from their experience. In this case it was important to read the whole text and not to focus on one verse. In the Acts 3 text what was most helpful was the recognition that the disabled man was healed in a number of different ways. This was very important for people living with disability, for all of them had been healed in many ways, even if their disability remained. In the John 9 text the group focused on the way in which Jesus identified with and stood in solidarity with the man who was blind. They wished, they said, that their church leaders would stand in solidarity with them (ConneXion, 2012; Ujamaa, 2012, pp. 62–63).

We did not complete the Act phase of the CBS construction process. This task was assigned as “homework”, inviting each participant to reflect for themselves on how one of these texts, or another they themselves had identified, might speak in an affirming manner into their lives, their family relationships, the theological orientation of their churches, and the attitudes and perspectives of their wider community (ConneXion, 2012). They were encouraged to use these CBS and to create their own.

In our evaluation at the end of the workshop there was agreement that the “See” component of CBS construction process was very important because it enabled those living with disability to break the silence around disability. As one participant said, “disability has never been given a voice, it’s shrouded in silence, at all levels and also in the church – in the church you either heal it or you ignore it” (Ujamaa, 2012, p. 63). The “Judge” component was vital too, because it enabled those living with disability to re-read the Bible from their experience, in order, in their words, “to bring life and healing, hope and inclusion, and transformation” (Ujamaa, 2012, p. 63).

My essay has devoted considerable space to this formative summons by disABILITY ConneXion to the Ujamaa Centre. This was not our first engagement with disability realities, but it was our first experience of working with an organised South African group of people living with disability. More than a decade earlier we had worked alongside Janet Lees, who had taken CBS methodology and worked with it among “people with communication difficulties” (Lees, 1997). Lees had trained and worked as a speech therapist and was completing her theological training for ordination when she encountered our CBS work while visiting South Africa in 1994. She immediately made the connections, and decided to do a Master’s thesis with the Department of Theology here at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, under my supervision. Citing Mark 7:31–37, Lees writes, “I met Jesus being a speech therapist, committed to the liberation of people with communication disorders”, and in so doing Lees recognised that “being a speech therapist and a reader of the bible were connected, not separate, parts of my life” (Lees, 1997, p. 9).

In a remarkably creative series of twenty-six CBS-type Bible studies, Lees engaged with the embodied realities and “bodies of knowledge” (Lees, 1997, p. 213) of people living with disability in England. She begins and

ends her Master's thesis, deconstructing the typical form of an academic thesis, with silence. Her Bible studies, she says, have "sought to explore many layers of silence. Yet almost as many remain to be explored. The way 'out of silence' for us all is in partnership with people with disabilities" (Lees, 1997, p. 213). Lees' work, then and now (Lees, 2007a, 2007b, 2022), enabled others, like Kasongo, who uses her work, to connect CBS and disability realities.

Both Lees' and Kasongo's work on doing CBS in the context of people living with disability have theorised biblical studies work on disability, alongside an emerging body of biblical scholarship from other contexts (cited in Avalos, Melcher & Shipper, 2005), and also offered socially engaged Bible study practice for those actually working among and with people living with disability. The work of the Ujamaa Centre continues, led by our colleague Noluthando Gasa, among local groups here in the KwaZulu-Natal region, and it has been taken up in various forms by socially engaged biblical scholars and theologians further afield (Lawrence, 2016; Mainwaring, 2014). There is now a considerable body of biblical studies and CBS-related praxis work on disability and the Bible, each summoned by particular realities of disability.

A significant recent CBS resource on various diverse aspects of disability was summoned by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Working with Mwai Makoka and colleagues from the World Council of Churches' Programme for Health and Healing, the Ujamaa Centre facilitated an online process in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in which participants from around the world contributed to a process of creating a range of CBS related to health and healing (West, Makoka & Chitando, 2022). The resulting resource, the product of a series of online workshops over many months in 2021, includes an introduction to CBS processes and a series of twenty-seven Bible studies. Each of the more than sixty participants worked through the See-Judge-Act process in their own context; most identified a potential biblical text which might resonate with and offer resources to the health and healing reality that had been identified; and thirty-one constructed a draft CBS, some of which were overlapping. Working closely with Makoka, who provided a health care perspective for each CBS, we produced a resource manual in which various forms of disability have a distinctive presence (Makoka & West, 2022).

What struck me as we worked together on this WCC project was how pervasive the theological trajectory of retribution is when it comes to health and healing across our global world.

5. Retribution Theology's Interlocking System of Exclusion

“Notwithstanding the lack of any systematic exposition of the subject in the canonical texts, we cannot help realizing that retribution, taken in a wide sense, is one of the basic Old Testament dogmas. All the strata of Hebrew life betray the pervading belief that prosperity follows a righteous conduct and calamity an evil one.” (Zerafa, 1973, p. 471).

This is one of the strands of Brueggemann's structure legitimation theology. And it does not stop at the end of the Old Testament, but continues into and constitutes a significant theological trajectory in the New Testament (Shauf, 2008). More troubling is how the retribution theological trajectory has shaped our churches, with Jonathan Kangwa persuasively arguing that “the success of prophecy and healing in these [African Pentecostal-charismatic] churches is based on their extensive engagement with the theology of retribution” (Kangwa, 2016).

What our work with disABILITY ConneXion demonstrated was how people living with disability clearly recognised this theological trajectory. The John 9 CBS generated this recognition, even though we had developed this CBS in the context of HIV (Ujamaa, 2015, pp. 32–34). As one participant expressed it: “This text deals directly with one of the issues we as disabled people have identified – which is the same in HIV, namely the question, “Where does this come from? Your disability, or your HIV+ status, where did you get it?”. This question destroys our church, it's an obsession of church people to ask that question” (ConneXion, 2012). Even though we went on in the John 9 CBS to identify the priority given to Jesus' recognition of the man who is blind from birth (John 9:1), his refutation of the disciples' retribution theology (John 9:2), and his affirmative, inclusive, and compassionate engagements with this person living with a disability (John 9:3–41) – demonstrating “the works of God” (John 9:3) – the theology of retribution haunted our workshop.

The theology of retribution had haunted other CBS workshops of the Ujamaa Centre, including workshops on HIV, on unemployment, on gender-based violence, on alternative masculinities, and on sexuality. “What you sow you will reap” (Gal 6:7), “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), “If a man does not work, he should not eat” (2 Thess 3:10), and many more such proof-texts dominate most African Christianities, condemning and excluding those living with disability, those living with HIV, those who are unemployed, those who are survivors of gender-based violence, those who are different kinds of ‘men’, and those who inhabit and practice and different sexuality. Brueggemann and Mosala are correct when they acknowledge that the theology of retribution is a biblical theology, it is in the Bible, it is not simply a problem of misinterpreting the Bible. Furthermore, the retribution theological trajectory intersects and forms an interlocking theological system across a range of marginalised realities. Those who are HIV-positive are reaping what they or their parents have sowed; those who are unemployed do not have enough faith; those women who are the victims and survivors of male violence should remain within the abusive household for their faith is being tested; those who are different kinds of men should be disciplined to become proper “men”; those who are and practice a queer sexual identity should be punished/corrected for their evil lifestyles; and those living with disability are being punished for sins committed by generations before them, to the third and fourth generation (Deut 5:9). The disciples’ question (John 9:2) and its idolatrous theology of condemnation and death lives on.

However, both Brueggemann and Mosala are insistent, as is the Ujamaa Centre, that there is a minority trajectory or voice within biblical text that can and must be recovered, heard, and mobilised in the struggle for survival, liberation, and the fulness of life. It is a struggle, to use the terms invoked by Pablo Richard, between the God of life and the idols of death (Richard, 1983). Crucially, as Mosala makes clear, appropriating this minority trajectory requires the reception presence of the marginalised themselves in order to discern these kindred minority voices in and behind the biblical text (Mosala, 1986, p. 196). Equally important, however, and this too is a point Mosala makes, we must acknowledge that the biblical text is a site of struggle and we must recognise the ideological perspective of any and every text. For, he says, it is only “through struggle

with the dominant forces inscribed in the text itself” that “the oppressed and exploited people today can seek to discover kin struggles in biblical communities” (Mosala, 1989, p. 188). There can be no redemptive re-reading of a disabled Bible without the actual presence and participation of those living with disability.

6. Conclusion

This essay uses the formative experience of the Ujamaa Centre’s work with a particular organised group of people living with disability – disABILITY ConneXion – to reflect on the biblical and theological significance of working with a disabled Bible – a Bible that is itself “a problem as well as a solution” (Mofokeng, 1988, p. 37). The reality of this kind of Bible is that its pervasive theological trajectory of retribution shapes the lived reality of those living with disability, among many others. We must not ignore these related realities. We also must not hand over the Bible to those in our families, churches, and communities who prefer and perpetrate its retributive theological trajectory. The God of life summons us to read with those voices in the biblical text and in our contexts that affirm and include those living with disability, and many others who have been condemned and excluded. We must contend with the God of life against the idols of death – both in the Bible and in our African contexts.

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Johanna Stiebert

18 Lesbians, Lesphobia and the Bible

Under the Udala Trees as Data

Abstract

Homophobia and other forms of discrimination against members of the LGBTQ+ community have drawn what is sometimes characterised as a divisive “pink line”. This applies also to Nigeria and Uganda, two examples of countries with laws that target male homosexuals particularly harshly. Religious rhetoric, including use of the so-called biblical “clobber texts”, plays a significant part in maintaining the pink line. This article centres lesbianism, which, while violent lesphobia is certainly attested in African and other settings, is often on the periphery of discussion. This applies to both depiction in and interpretation of the Bible and to wider discourse. The article discusses reasons for the lack of mention of lesbian sex and attraction in biblical writings before interrogating notions of lesphobia in what is widely depicted as “homophobic Africa”. This interrogation applies the life-story of Dhalie, a Ugandan LGBTQ+ refugee, which was gathered during fieldwork in Kenya, alongside the fictional story of Ijeoma in Chinelo Okparanta’s novel *Under the Udala Trees*. The article’s conclusion is that both the texts of the Bible and representations from so-called “homophobic Africa” are more diversified and more nuanced than unmitigated claims of lesphobia permit.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Homophobia, Africa, Bible, Okparanta

It is a pleasure to contribute to this publication in honour of Professor Joachim Kügler, on the occasion of his retirement. Joachim and I first met in person when I moved to Bamberg in August 2017. Joachim was my mentor during my year-long Humboldt fellowship and quickly became not just someone I admired for his scholarship and active support for re-

searchers working on the Bible in African contexts, but also a friend. Joachim is generous in every way, especially with his time. He is a delightful host, a formidable organiser, and he has a wonderful sense of humour. Joachim, I hope your retirement will create more time and more occasions for you to travel (including to come and visit us in Yorkshire) and to write about the things most dear to you. I wish you many years of good health and good spirits.

1. Introduction

South African journalist Mark Gevisser (2020) evocatively refers to LGBTQ+¹ rights as drawing a “pink line” that divides people, nations, and our planet. This line has become particularly pronounced in this millennium, which has seen both the legalisation of same-sex marriage, with the Netherlands in 2001 leading the way, and the passing of Anti-Homosexuality Acts, notably in Uganda (2014, 2023).² Such Acts constitute examples of legalised homophobia – that is, of the aversion to and prejudice against LGB persons.³ Religion is very much enmeshed in homophobic “pink line” divisions. Hence, countries, or regions, where Islamic Sharia law is enforced are especially harsh regarding even consensual same-sex adult relationships, prescribing and sometimes exercising the death penalty. In

¹ The abbreviation stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and/or Questioning, and more”. This “more” can, for instance, include gender fluidity. Hence, the label is a shorthand that subsumes a great diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities.

² At the time of writing, marriage between members of the same sex is legally recognized and performed in 35 countries. At the other extreme, two countries not only ban same-sex marriage but impose the death penalty for consensual same-sex sex-acts (Iran and Afghanistan). The death penalty also exists, though is not generally practised, in several more countries and is enforced as part of the adultery laws in northern Nigeria. Other types of LGBTQ+ rights, alongside marriage rights, that differ radically from place to place, pertain to laws concerning parenting and adoption, anti-discrimination in employment, housing, education and public accommodation, hate crime protection, access to sex-segregated facilities (for transgender persons), career opportunities in the military, access to reproductive technology, and laws proscribing some consensual sex-acts (e.g. the so-called “sodomy laws”), and laws pertaining to the age of consent.

³ As will be mentioned below, trans identity is denied by the 2023 Act – hence, the Act is transphobic also.

some Christian and Jewish settings, too, sacred texts are invoked to condemn LGBTQ+ expressions and identities.⁴ Intersections of religion and homophobia are widely attested in African settings, even if homophobia is by no means an African problem per se.⁵ Moreover, this is not the full picture: religion also plays active, inventive, and creative roles in affirming and celebrating LGBTQ+ expressions in many African settings (van Klinken & Chitando, 2021; van Klinken et al., 2021). Hence, while, yes, the Bible has been used in African settings, as elsewhere, to fuel homophobia and promote the status quo of heteronormativity. Such clichés as “It’s Adam and Eve – not Adam and Steve”, or the use of the biblical term “abomination” to malign homosexuality are examples of such Bible-propelled homophobia. But it is also the case that many same-sex loving Africans and their allies also turn to the Bible for inspiration and encouragement. The Bible is not the preserve of homophobic haters.

This paper contributes to the polarising debate on religion and same-sex loving in African contexts. It examines the Bible as a site of resistance and in doing so focuses most closely on same-sex loving women, or lesbians. Lesbians tend to be on the margins of debates on homosexuality, whether these centre on the Bible, or on contemporary African contexts. To illuminate the Bible as a site of resistance with reference to lesbian love in African settings, I will focus on both life stories and other data collected and published as part of a project in which I was involved,⁶ and on an acclaimed novel of lesbian life and love by Nigerian-born author Chinelo Okparanta, namely *Under the Udala Trees* (first published in 2015).

⁴ E.g., Uganda is a predominantly Christian country and has been called by implication “the worst place to be gay” in a BBC 3 documentary (2011) fronted by Scott Mills.

⁵ The United Nations report on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, while making frequent reference to cases in African settings, makes the global reach and widespread harm caused by homophobia devastatingly clear (A/HRC/19/41 2011).

⁶ This project was funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust Small Research Grants scheme (SRG1819\190405) and led by Adriaan van Klinken. Research findings are recorded in van Klinken et al. (2021).

2. The “L” of LGBTQ+ and Lesphobia

The designation LGBTQ+ encapsulates diverse and variegated spectrums. The label is often used, as here, as an open-ended shorthand, to describe a “package” of manifold non-heteronormative sexual and gender expressions. Admittedly, the origins of the designation are Western-centric even if it is widely used in African contexts, too. In many settings where same-sex orientation is condemned, trans identity and gender fluidity (which are separate phenomena) are also condemned and even rejected and denied.⁷ My focus here is on the Bible, because condemnation of LGBTQ+ persons, identities, or sexual expressions often appeals to the Bible, and most frequently, to the so-called “clobber” passages. These passages are: Genesis 19, the story of the destruction of Sodom; Judges 19, a narrative with similarities to the Sodom story where, again, male-male rape is threatened by a mob here identified as perverse (19:22); two verses in Leviticus referring to a male-male sex-act as an abomination (Lev 18:22, 20:13), with one prescribing the death penalty (Lev 20:13); and a number of Pauline New Testament passages (Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 1 Timothy 1:10).⁸ And yet, lesbian persons, identities, or sexual expressions are not clearly alluded to anywhere in the Bible, with the sole possible (if contestable) exception of Romans 1. Elsewhere, the clobber interpretations are based on interpretations of masculine words translated “fornicators... male prostitutes, sodomites” (NRSV) and on equations of male-male sex acts, including the threat of male-male rape, with same-sex

⁷ See for instance the definitions for “female person” and “male person” in the Anti-Homosexuality Act of Uganda (2023). The Act denies female identity to anyone not born with a female sexual organ (and male identity to anyone not born with male sexual genitalia).

⁸ Sometimes Jude 1:7 from The General Letters is included also. This verse associates Sodom and Gomorrah (of Genesis 19) with “sexual immorality” and “unnatural lust” (NRSV). The derivation of the word “sodomy” from “Sodom” has no doubt contributed to the identification of this “sexual immorality” with male-male homosexuality rather than rape. The cities are widely cited as symbolic of human sinfulness and the need for divine retribution. The crime of Sodom is sometimes identified as inhospitality rather than sexual deviance (e.g., Ezekiel 16:48–50; Okparanta 2017, pp. 75–76).

sexual orientation.⁹ Something that is likely to pertain to a penetrative sexual act between males is mentioned in pejorative terms in a few biblical passages (e.g., Lev 18:22, 20:13); but insofar as this can be interpreted homophobicly, as condemning female homosexuality, too, (that is, as lesphobically) such condemnation is extrapolated by extension.

In conservative Jewish interpretation, for instance, lesbian sexual activity is forbidden, even though it receives no mention and, consequently, no explicit prohibition, anywhere in Jewish Scripture. Hence, Rabbi Chaim Rapoport states it “must be avoided in all circumstances” (Rapoport, 2004, p. 105). Nevertheless, male homosexuality tends to receive more focus, more condemnation, and more vitriol. Hence, Rapoport mentions that (in Judaism) male homosexuality is “at least in theory, [...] a capital crime, and is also subject to the strictures of arayot – they are forbidden even if human life is at risk” (Rapoport, 2004, p. 105). Similarly, in much of public discourse, male homosexuality is particularly strongly abhorred.¹⁰ This cannot, however, be interpreted as deriving from a more lenient or tolerant attitude to lesbianism vis-à-vis male homosexuality – including in African settings.

South Africa was the first African country to protect sexual orientation in its constitution and to grant LGBTQ+ persons equal rights with other citizens.¹¹ This has not, however, eradicated homophobia, including such vicious forms as homophobic rape targeting lesbians (sometimes called lesphobic rape).¹² The case of the lesphobic rape and murder of South Af-

⁹ All of these biblical clobber passages and the various interpretations of them along a spectrum ranging from condemnation through to liberation are fully discussed and problematized by Holben (1999).

¹⁰ In many countries with the harshest anti-homosexuality laws (e.g., Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Yemen), the death penalty is reserved exclusively or predominantly for men.

¹¹ Cape Verde and Botswana are two more African nations ensuring some legal protections for LGBTQ+ persons.

¹² The crime has also been called “corrective rape” or “curative rape”. These terms are harmful because they (like “gay conversion therapy”) wrongfully suggest that such violence can “turn” a homosexual person heterosexual. By (heteronormative) implication, heterosexuality is proper, natural, and preferable.

rican footballer Eudy Simelane (2008) received particularly widespread attention but numerous other cases have been reported – predominantly in South Africa,¹³ but also elsewhere in Africa, as well as other countries.

3. Lesbianism and the Bible

While the Bible is widely drawn on to justify and propel homophobia, it does not, as already stated, provide much in the way of relevant content. Any mention of what might in today’s terms be considered in the orbit of LGBTQ+ topics is isolated and sparse. This is particularly the case with lesbianism. Hence, there is no biblical proscription equivalent to Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that pertains to female-female sexual contact, and there is no narrative of female-female sexual attraction and love.¹⁴

But what might be the reason for this absence in the Bible?¹⁵ After all, women are certainly depicted in the Bible as sexual, sometimes as dangerously and excessively so.¹⁶ The idea that there either were no lesbians in ancient Israel, or that the very idea of female-female sex-acts was so taboo as to be entirely repressed, seems unlikely. Regarding the former, the idea that lesbianism is entirely a modern invention has no traction (Stiebert, 2016, p. 116), any more than the idea that homosexuality is un-African or imported to African contexts from “the West” (Kuloba, 2016; van Klinken

¹³ See the United Nations report (A/HRC/19/41 2011: 10). In Western settings where such rape is reported the targets of violence are often trans men. The rape and murder of Brandon Teena, in the USA, is one violent example that received considerable publicity. As will be mentioned shortly, gendering in the Kenyan settings in which we conducted our research, was (as elsewhere) a fluid domain; hence determining whether homophobic violence is specifically lesbophobic, or transphobic, can be complex.

¹⁴ It has been proposed (Horner, 1978) that David and Jonathan were same-sex lovers. For a very full exploration of this idea, see Harding, 2013. Recently, Kahn-Harris (2023) has made the intriguing suggestion that the relationship of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz may have been a triadic, polyamorous one. This would permit for Ruth, Naomi, or both, being lesbian or bisexual.

¹⁵ I discuss this much more fully elsewhere (Stiebert, 2016, pp. 114–132).

¹⁶ Striking examples come from the lengthy and sordid prophetic descriptions of feminized Judah and Israel in Ezekiel 16 and 23. Hosea 1–3, drawing similarities between Hosea’s adulterous wife Gomer and Israel’s idolatry, is another example.

& Chitando, 2021).¹⁷ Regarding the latter suggestion, it would seem strange to proscribe some female sexual practices deemed deviant (such as adultery, incest, and bestiality)¹⁸ but for lesbian sex to be elided on account of being too taboo and hence repressed. Instead, more probably, lesbian sex was known of, and either disapproved of, maligned, even outlawed, without this being spelled out in the biblical text,¹⁹ or it was known of but not outlawed, maybe because it did not count as “real sex”. This demotion might be because it appears that all intentional abhorred sexual activity (be this male-female, male-male, or human-beast) involves penile penetration and emission, implying that it is penile penetration that “counts” as sex.²⁰ Something similar is implied by the – probably apocryphal – statement attributed to Queen Victoria, that lesbian sex is an impossibility (Stiebert, 2016, p. 116), as well as by the Jewish distinction between male homosexual acts as an abomination and arayot, and female homosexual acts as an indecency but not one that bars a woman from

¹⁷ Both our life-story research with Ugandan LGBTQ+ refugees in Kenya and Okparanta’s novel respond to and reject the fallacy of homosexuality in Africa being a Western import. Kyle reports in our book, “It’s certainly not white people who taught me to be homosexual. I was born in a very deep village, and I didn’t see any white person in my young age coming home [...] I disagree with that saying about white people teaching homosexuality” (van Klinken et al., 2021, p. 52). Meanwhile, in Okparanta’s novel the important detail (alluded to in the novel’s title) that Ijeoma, the narrator and main character, and her friend Amina meet under an udala tree, is “a means to counter popular claims of homosexuality as exogenous” (van Klinken & Chitando, 2021, p. 169). The presence of white people is limited and peripheral in Okparanta’s novel. Where they do appear, they represent the Red Cross and evangelical crusades (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 160–163).

¹⁸ E.g., see Lev 18:23 and 20:16, which contain prohibitions against a woman approaching an animal for sexual relations. While sexual initiative is mostly ascribed to males, not females, female culpability or co-responsibility is implied in this law, as well as, possibly, in the death penalty for both a man and woman participating in adultery (Lev 20:10), some forms of incest (Lev 20:11–12), and bestiality (Lev 20:16). There seems no reason for deeming female-female sexual contact more deviant than the other acts proscribed in Leviticus 18 and 20.

¹⁹ In Jewish sources recorded disapproval of lesbian activity does not predate rabbinical texts. Maimonides, for instance, refers to *mesolelut* (possibly female-female genital rubbing) as an indecency (Stiebert, 2016, p. 123).

²⁰ Women’s menstrual emissions are also referred to as defiling to males. For a man to have sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman is prohibited in Levitical law (Lev 18:19) and is punishable by eviction from the community (Lev 20:18).

marrying a man. Both reflect widespread and dismissive attitudes to lesbianism. Ignorance about sexuality and about lesbianism more particularly, alongside dismissal of lesbian sex as being not “proper” sex, have transpired in side-lining same-sex female sexuality, as well as in vicious claims about “curative” or “corrective” lesbophobic rape that allegedly teaches women that “proper” sex is only with a man.²¹ Given this context where dismissal and threat of violence coexist, lesbian sex is even more under the radar than male homosexuality (see United Nations report A/HRC/19/41). The situation, then, is that lesbophobia is real, including in African settings, even if lesbianism is widely and insultingly dismissed and even though it receives little or no mention in the Bible.

Up until now I have spoken in binary terms about male homosexuality and female homosexuality, pointing out that in the Bible lesbianism receives virtually no mention, whereas some clobber passages appear to refer pejoratively to something sexual between males (i.e., male-male rape, a penetrative sexual act). For me, projecting and imposing these clobber texts on same-sex loving, consenting adults is abhorrent – but listing the reasons and justifications for this position need not detain me here and are thoroughly discussed elsewhere.²² But a sharp or consistent dichotomy of “male and female” (and nothing other), deserves and needs to be challenged.²³ With the Bible this has been done very effectively and persuasively, primarily through queer-critical approaches, such as are explored in, for instance, *The Queer Bible Commentary* (Guest et al., 2006)

²¹ See note 12.

²² The distinction between sex-acts and orientation and the many reasons for reading the clobber passages in more nuanced ways is discussed fully and well by Holben (1999). Van Klinken et al. demonstrate how the Bible can be read to incite homophobia, but also as a friend (van Klinken et al., 2021).

²³ This is particularly important because attacks from on high denying trans and non-binary identity remain commonplace. This is apparent not only in Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality Act (2023) (see note 7). At the time of writing, the UK Conservative Party conference had just finished (October 2023). At this gathering several members in high office, including the Prime Minister, issued discriminatory statements towards this already vulnerable community (Billson, 2023). This coincided with a UK Home Office hate crime report attesting to a general fall in hate crimes but rising numbers of attacks on trans and non-binary persons (Home Office, 2023).

and in *Bible Trouble* (Hornsby & Stone, 2011).²⁴ But gender fluidity and queerness that contest binaries are not only evident in the Bible, they are a feature of human ontology, as was confirmed also in our research with LGBTQ+ refugees in Kenya – as discussed next.²⁵ This, in part, also indicates that lesbian identity and lesphobia also sometimes blurs with gender fluidity. This is the case with Dhalie’s story – if less so in Okparanta’s novel.

3.1 Dhalie’s story

The community in Nairobi called The Nature Network, in whose midst and with whom we conducted our research published in *Sacred Queer Stories* (van Klinken et al., 2021), consists of mostly Ugandan refugees, with the majority identifying as gay men, and some as trans women. Indeed, these categories, too, are fluid, with our interviewees often switching pronouns, or using multiple terms to describe their sexuality and their gender in a variety of ways – for instance, as gay, trans, non-binary, and/or gender-fluid.²⁶ A small minority of the LGBTQ+ community I met identified as lesbian or as trans men. Of our twelve life story interviews, only one (Dhalie) identified as a trans man and as gender-fluid (with pronouns they/them) – but, in the terms of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (2023) they would be designated “female” and their sexual attraction to or activity with

²⁴ Conservative voices continue to deny the presence (let alone any positive mention) of gender fluidity in the Bible, insisting instead on the claim that the Bible plainly advocates gender binaries and complementarianism. Gender fluidity (sometimes called “gender confusion”) is maligned as unbiblical by such advocates. For a full discussion with a focus on refuting the agenda of both the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and the Family Research Council, see Afzal & Stiebert (Afzal & Stiebert, 2024, pp. 12–35).

²⁵ Our project combining life stories and Bible stories to create new stories together with LGBTQ+ refugees in Kenya is now part of a growing queer African archive. To mention just a few, profiling lesbian stories (my emphasis in this article), see Azuah (2016), Mohammed, Nagarajan and Aliyu (2018) and Xaba and Biruk (2016). For a fuller discussion and more examples, see van Klinken et al. (van Klinken et al., 2021, pp. 8–12).

²⁶ There was only occasional reference to terminology pertaining to LGBTQ+ matters in any African language, such as the Luganda term *kuchu* (van Klinken et al., 2021, p. 1, n.2).

anyone else designated female, consequently, as lesbian, and hence, illegal in their native Uganda.²⁷

Dhalie recounts in their interview (van Klinken et al., 2021, pp. 72–80) how growing up they were a girl. Now, they say, “I know I’m a man but the hormone therapies are not accessible here and expensive” (van Klinken et al., 2021, p. 79). At around age 16, Dhalie met a girl at school; the two wrote each other letters, shared lunch, and then a bed. Dhalie explains that at the time the two were expelled, they had no real understanding about their own sexuality or even done anything sexual. Nonetheless, on being discovered sharing a bed, Dhalie was beaten, sent before a disciplinary committee, and shamed, both by their school and their parents. Later, Dhalie suffered so-called “conversion therapies”.²⁸ Once in Kenya, seeking asylum, even at the Refugee Affairs Secretariat, where they might have expected sensitive and inclusive treatment, they were asked inappropriate questions, like, “Why do you love girls? Why don’t you want to get married? Why don’t you want to have kids? [...] Why don’t you just stop?” (van Klinken et al., 2021, p. 76) – indicating profound ignorance about both lesbianism and about trans identity.

Dhalie’s story, with its details of being discovered with a girl and then being shamed and rebuked, of “conversion therapies” experienced as frightening and self-denying, of having religious texts weaponized against them, and of pressure to get married and have children, all resonate with Okparanta’s novel (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 124–125, 129), which I will turn

²⁷ See note 7. The Anti-Homosexuality Act of Uganda (2023) makes mention of inter-sex persons but does not acknowledge their existence, let alone rights, of trans persons.

²⁸ The name is dangerously misleading. There is nothing therapeutic about such practices and it is not possible to reprogramme or convert someone’s sexual orientation. Claims to the contrary, including by religious figures (e.g., Rapoport, 2004, pp. 102, 107), must be recognized as dangerous, and rejected. The documentary *Pray Away* (Stolakis, 2021) discusses the dangers and reasons for rejection fully. In Okparanta’s novel, too, following Ijeoma’s mother’s efforts to convert her daughter through systematic study of the Bible, when they reach the end of the Old Testament, Ijeoma, truthfully says, “Yes, I still think of her [Amina] in that way” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 85). This leads to Ijeoma’s mother redoubling her forcefulness (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 86–89). All this achieves is for Ijeoma to lie to her mother the next time she is asked (Okparanta, 2017, p. 92). The harm of the attempts at conversion, however, lingers, for all their ultimate ineffectiveness (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 192, 195).

to next. I argue that the novel, while a work of fiction, like Dhalie's story, reflects and illuminates aspects of lesbian life and love in an African setting. It does so, moreover, in a way that also reflects and illuminates the significant role and influence of the Bible in such a setting.²⁹ I am justifying my extensive focus on a novel, over empirical data for two reasons. First, as already established, such data, while growing, is still scarce and second, I agree with African literary critics (e.g., Ojaide, 1992; Gyasi, 1999) that African fiction is not art for art's sake but is characterised by its reflection and refraction of actualities. Okparanta's novel both gives an evocative and believable voice to Nigeria's marginalized lesbian citizens and engages extensively with the Bible. Let me turn to the novel next.

3.2 *Under the Udala Trees*

Chinelo Okparanta's novel *Under the Udala Trees* (2015) tells a story of both violence and tenderness, lesbian eroticism and lesphobia. It is narrated by Ijeoma, beginning in her early girlhood at the height of the Nigerian civil war, also known as the Biafran war (1967–1970). The story follows Ijeoma through these violent early years, that claim the life of her gentle, newspaper-reading father, and bring trauma to her mother. Ijeoma is separated from her mother and goes to work for a childless couple who can pay for her education. While with them, Ijeoma becomes attached to another uprooted, lonely child, Amina, whom she first meets under an udala tree. While Ijeoma is Igbo and Christian, Amina is Hausa and Muslim. When the teacher who has given both girls a home and a prospect of a future discovers them in flagrante, he is shocked and insists that Ijeoma return to her mother, while Amina remains with him. Ijeoma's mother, battling her own guilt and trauma, is horrified at and shamed by her daughter and becomes determined to root out what she considers

²⁹ On the Bible as an African text, see van Klinken et al. (van Klinken et al., 2012, 6–8). Dhalie's life story was the book's sole example by a Muslim. Dhalie, too, however, approached the Bible as a sacred text with sacred authority, through which God's voice could be discerned. Dhalie was a full and active participant in the reclaiming of one of the Bible stories (Daniel in the Lions' Den) (van Klinken et al., 2021, pp. 4, 152–177).

Ijeoma's sinful deviance with prayer and Bible study (a kind of home-grown attempt at "conversion therapy").³⁰ Eventually, Amina marries and fades from Ijeoma's life, and Ijeoma falls in love with another woman, Ndidi. Threats of multiple kinds put their relationship under pressure and Ijeoma, encouraged by her mother, marries Chibundu, who has loved her since their childhood. The marriage cannot fulfil either Ijeoma, or Chibundu. They have one child, Chidinma, who for a time fulfils Ijeoma and brings her closer to her mother. But it is when Ijeoma sees her own unhappiness reflected in her daughter, and then learns of Ndidi's persistent love for her, that she leaves Chibundu, goes to her mother, and returns to Ndidi. The story ends with a peace of sorts, albeit one that has to keep its head down, because the love between the women, Ijeoma and Ndidi, cannot ever be open, or public.

The novel is beautifully told, incorporating seemingly floating snippets of recollection, of dreams, or stories, without explaining their inclusion. It is a novel that captures moods and feelings; it tells of people and relationships in a way that makes us apprehend rather than fully understand them. No character is "flat", or easily made sense of in their entirety – be it the intelligent, affectionate father who submits to dying in a military attack, rather than abiding with his wife and daughter; be it the mother who is both perceptive but also represses and resists what she sees and intuits; or be it the distant grammar school teacher who feels shock but also compassion for Ijeoma and Amina and who fulfils his duty to them both.

The Bible plays a prominent role in the novel. At the novel's beginning, there is a biblical quotation (Hebrews 11:1); at the conclusion there are two short notes by the author. The first states that on 7 January 2014 Nigeria's president Goodluck Jonathan signed into law a bill criminalizing same-sex relationships, which are punishable with up to fourteen years imprisonment. Okparanta adds, "This novel attempts to give Nigeria's marginalized LGBTQ citizens a more powerful voice, and a place in our nation's history." The second note points out that in a 2012 Win-Gallup

³⁰ Ijeoma's mother is organised and systematic in her attempt to "cure" her daughter of lesbian orientation. She has, for instance, written copious notes "to serve as her guide" and for Ijeoma's "benefit" (Okparanta, 2017, p. 77).

International Global Index of Religiosity and Atheism, Nigeria ranked second only to Ghana for religiosity.

Homophobic uses of the Bible are certainly not obscured in *Under the Udala Trees* (e.g., Okparanta, 2017, pp. 68, 85–92;³¹ 125, 318),³² nor is the impact of these minimized. At one point, for instance, Ijeoma, recalling her mother’s attempts to exorcise her orientation through ongoing Bible study, describes how this sets in motion a “witch-hunt against [her]self” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 196). During her unhappy marriage, too, she finds her mind constantly going back to the Bible, “Because if people like Mama and the grammar school teacher were right, then the Bible was all the proof I needed to know that God would surely punish me” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 229). Okparanta also, however, shows that the Bible belongs not only to Christians and other religious homophobes but also to LGBTQ+ persons who also find in its pages affirmation and inclusion.³³ This is particularly strong in the novel’s epilogue where Hebrews 8 “fills [Ijeoma’s]

³¹ In these passages, Ijeoma’s mother is conducting her version of “conversion therapy” through rigorous Bible study. To Ijeoma, her mother feels “more like another warden than my own mother” (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 70, cf. 197). Reading the story of Adam and Eve, her mother concludes with the rhetorical question, “The bottom line [...] is that if God wanted it to be otherwise [i.e. for women to be with women], would He not have included it that other way in the Bible?” This is the “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” argument, which reads the mythological account in ways both literalistic and prescriptive. Ijeoma is subjected to months of Bible study, and to a summary of clobber texts (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 90–92). Unsurprisingly, none of this changes her orientation; it only teaches her to lie about it (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 92, 150). The participants in our project also reported homophobic applications of the Bible (e.g. Keeya and Doreen, van Klinken et al., 2021, pp. 113–114, 225).

³² The teacher who discovers Ijeoma and Amina sees and points to the Bible, crying out that their bond is an “abomination” and reviled also by the Qur’an (Okparanta, 2017, p. 125). Two lesbian students are stripped, beaten and have “666” (the number of the Beast in Revelation) shouted at them (Okparanta, 2017, p. 318). Chibundu, on the other hand, mitigates the force of religion and the Bible, claiming them to represent “basically a business, a very large corporation” with self-interest at their heart (Okparanta, 2017, p. 231). In this way, too, the novel shows nuance in its depiction of the setting and its people. The refugees in our story reported both homophobic uses of the Bible against them (see note 31 for examples) and ways of reading the Bible for vindication, affirmation, and solace (van Klinken et al., 2021, pp. 226–227).

³³ Again, there is a parallel with our Sacred Queer project, which centres the reality that the Bible is not only a tool for homophobia in African settings but also a tool for liberation (van Klinken et al., 2021, *passim*). Just as the refugees at The Nature

mind these days”, with its distillation of the lesson of the Bible, “this affirmation of the importance of reflection, and of revision, enough revision to do away with tired, old, even faulty laws” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 322).

3.3 The Bible in *Under the Udala Trees*: A Closer Look

As van Klinken and Chitando point out, the novel “sketches a religious culture of fervent worship, intense prayer and conservative biblical interpretation” (van Klinken & Chitando, 2021, p. 167).³⁴ Ijeoma makes frequent reference to church attendance but also to Christian co-existence with African traditional rites, such as those pertaining to ancestors (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 21–22), and African proverbs (Okparanta, 2017, p. 51). The Bible, moreover, is cited in Igbo (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 66–67). Indeed, the novel is saturated with references to Christianity, to tensions between Christians and Muslims (drawn along ethnic lines of Igbo and Hausa),³⁵

Network reclaimed biblical stories (of Daniel in the lions’ den and of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery) to speak to and defend them, so Ijeoma in the novel applies John 3:16 to include herself and her love for Amina in God’s love (Okparanta, 2017, p. 159). There is a particularly subversive and striking example that links our Sacred Queer project with the novel. In our research, when the refugees at The Nature Network retold and reclaimed the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, they set their retelling in a club called Little Temple. On the one hand, this points to a detail in the biblical story, where Jesus “went back to the temple” (John 8:2) but on the other, it names an actual one-time club in Nairobi that was frequented by queer people (van Klinken et al., 2021, p. 188). In Okparanta’s novel, meanwhile, which also alludes to this gospel story in John 8 in an affirming way (Okparanta, 2017, p. 202), there is a lesbian club hidden under the guise of a church purporting to be called “Friend in Jesus Church of God” (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 190–191). Both names, possibly, assert divine protection. As van Klinken and Chitando point out, “This name can be read as a subversive suggestion by the author that Jesus was a friend of same-sex loving folk” (van Klinken & Chitando, 2021, p. 168). In both Nairobi and in the novel’s setting, however, this protection is not enough, and homophobic attacks ensue. At the same time, for Ijeoma the “protection” of marriage to a man, Chibundu, also proves harmful (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 215, 220–221, 228).

³⁴ Van Klinken and Chitando devote a chapter to the novel (van Klinken & Chitando, 2021, pp. 165–180) with separate sections on the udala tree as tree of knowledge of good and evil, as well as on prayer, deliverance, and the Bible. Spirit children are said to gather above udala trees (Okparanta, 2017, p. 309), and udala trees come to Ijeoma in her dream (Okparanta, 2017, p. 310).

³⁵ There is frequent mention of Igbo and Hausa divisions (e.g. Okparanta, 2017, pp. 76, 125, 153).

with visits to church, and with the Bible (my primary focus here). Early on, Ijeoma refers to her father's love for his radio-gramophone, which he cherished "the way things that matter to us are cherished: Bibles and old photos, water and air" (Okparanta, 2017, p. 5). When Ijeoma's mother leaves her in the care of the teacher and his wife, her parting gift to her daughter is her father's Bible (Okparanta, 2017, p. 51), to which Ijeoma later clings for comfort (Okparanta, 2017, p. 56). Later, too, when she is a mother and in an unhappy marriage, the Bible is stored with her essentials and brings her peace (Okparanta, 2017, p. 254). Everyday words – like "rest" and "restless" – immediately call the Bible to Ijeoma's mind (Okparanta, 2017, p. 144); the Bible even features in her dreams (Okparanta, 2017, p. 311). The Bible is central to sermons (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 11, 37), to school (Okparanta, 2017, p. 23), and to private prayer (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 35, 197). Oaths are sworn on the Bible (Okparanta, 2017, p. 60); and biblical stories are told to provide comfort and explain day-to-day mysteries, like nightmares (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 122–123, 155). Biblical imagery suffuses the novel – not only does the *udala* tree of the title allude to the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis (van Klinken & Chitando, 2021, pp. 169–171), but Ijeoma's father, refusing to take shelter from an imminent military attack, is "like Lot's wife, a pillar of salt" (Okparanta, 2017, p. 9); bombs are contrasted with manna from heaven (Okparanta, 2017, p. 40); a boy child emerging from a pile of corpses at the height of the war is "like a resurrection" (Okparanta, 2017, p. 97); the frightening attack on the lesbian club is described by Ijeoma as "like the pillars of the Temple of Dagon, the walls of our pit crumbling all around us, and we, Samson-like in our decline, crumbling along with the walls" (Okparanta, 2017, p. 208).

The Bible moves to the centre of the novel after Ijeoma and Amina have been discovered and separated. Ijeoma returns to the home of her mother who is resolved to cleanse her daughter's soul, teach her penitence for sin (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 65–67), and rid her from the devil (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 72, 150). In the service of this aim, Ijeoma's mother leads an intensive study of the Bible. After pressing the point about Adam and Eve setting the template for heterosexual coupling,³⁶ the next biblical story she lingers

³⁶ For elaboration on this complementarian argument, see Afzal and Stiebert (Afzal & Stiebert, 2024, pp. 19–20).

on is the infamous clobber text of Genesis 19, narrating the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 73–74). Ijeoma’s mother refers to the behaviour transpiring in the cities’ destruction as “the very same behavior that you and that girl [...] engaged in” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 73). This is an illustration of extrapolating from the biblical text. The narrative, after all, has nothing to say about sexual attraction or activity between women; instead, a story of male violence and threat of male-male rape becomes a cautionary tale aimed at two girls with a consenting and affectionate bond. Ijeoma is quick to challenge her mother’s interpretation that this brutal story is an invective against same-sex relationships. Instead, she points out that Lot is not a worthy man, given that he offers his virgin daughters to a violent mob, but that inhospitality to visitors may be the crux of the story. Reflecting conventional conservative readings of this story (which are aided and abetted by the derivation of the word “sodomy” from “Sodom”), Ijeoma’s mother insists that “Everybody knows what lesson we should take from that story. Man must not lie with man, and if man does, man will be destroyed” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 74). Ijeoma asks (reasonably enough), “It couldn’t have been because they were selfish and inhospitable and violent?” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 74). Indeed, this kind of questioning is typical of what has been called a hermeneutics of suspicion: hence, Ijeoma is probing the text and resisting the notion of a single “obvious” meaning.³⁷

Something similar happens when Ijeoma’s mother pauses on the clobber verses from Leviticus (Okparanta, 2017, pp. 75–77). Ijeoma’s mother explains that “abomination” refers to “something disgusting, disgraceful, a scandal” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 75). For her, the verses are clear and condemning of all same-sex sexual relations (not just the male-male sex-act alluded to here),³⁸ not least because they cannot transpire in reproduction.

³⁷ Such questioning of this very story is becoming more common, including in African settings (e.g. West, 2016). On a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of trust, see van Klinken and Stiebert (forthcoming).

³⁸ Most commentators propose that the verses refer to a penetrative sex-act (possibly penile anal penetration) and possibly intercrural sex also. Some argue that something more specific is at issue here, namely a male-male sex-act that is not only penetrative but incestuous (Lings, 2009). Much is left unclear in the terse and probably technical diction of the verses. It is disturbing that while the penetrator is designated a man, the penetrated one is designated only “a male”, with no specification

Ijeoma, rather like her father who had taught her to probe the surface or literal meanings (Okparanta, 2017, p. 78), feels questions “like tiny bubbles in [her] head”, including questions that ask whether all sex that does not transpire in reproduction is therefore “abomination”. Ijeoma cannot accept this – just as she cannot accept that Judges 19 (the violent story of the rape, killing and dismemberment of the Levite’s wife) is a story about the sinfulness of homosexuality (Okparanta, 2017, p. 80). The Bible study does not have the effect on Ijeoma that her mother desires. Instead of accepting a plain meaning, Ijeoma asks questions, wonders if many passages have allegorical rather than literalistic meaning and becomes frustrated that church teaches acceptance rather than an interrogation of the Bible (Okparanta, 2017, p. 81). As Ijeoma continues to raise questions and ponder, the Bible sometimes come to feel to her “almost negligible” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 82), as she feels the gulf between the meaning in her own heart and what her mother and the teacher who had felt such shock on discovering her with Amina felt (Okparanta, 2017, p. 82). Yet Ijeoma cannot reject the Bible, as much as it is turned against what is in her own heart during the relentless Bible studies led by her mother. Instead, she comes to think of the stories in the Bible as recording specific threads of events and specific histories, asking herself, “why did that have to invalidate or discredit all other threads, all other histories? Woman was created for man, yes. But why did that mean that woman could not also have been created for another woman?” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 83) She also asks if the story of Adam and Eve is instead about the importance of companionship, irrespective of gender.³⁹ This fills her with a “joy of discovery” – even if she knows she cannot share this with her mother (Okparanta, 2017, p.

as to either adult age, or agency, let alone consent. Given the death penalty is prescribed for both parties (Lev 20:13) this could condemn to death a raped boy-child. Such should certainly be condemned (as it is in the Homosexuality Act of Uganda, where it constitutes an occurrence of what is called ‘aggravated homosexuality’) but on the basis of brutality not on the basis of orientation per se. Abuse of a child should be criminalized irrespective of the gender of either the perpetrator or victim.

³⁹ In a flashback recounting Amina and Ijeoma’s bond, the two speak of it as being marriage-like (Okparanta, 2017, p. 118) and Edenic. Ijeoma’s words are that the relationship is, “Tingly and good and like everything is perfect in the world” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 119). Suitably, when the two are discovered and shamed, they feel “as Adam and Eve must have felt in the garden” (Okparanta, 2017, p. 125).

84).⁴⁰ Ultimately, then, Ijeoma succeeds in finding a way for the Bible to speak to and include and validate her – much as the refugees of The Nature Network found ways to read themselves into the Bible and have it affirm and embrace them (van Klinken et al, *passim*).

4. Conclusion

The Bible comprises a diverse library of texts, polyvocal texts translated into many languages that speak in their different voices to multifarious audiences in the far-flung places where they are read and heard. This paper aims to contribute to an area of study close to Joachim’s heart: namely, the reading and interpretation of the Bible in African settings, with a special focus on topics of gender and sexuality.

I have focused particularly on the “L” of LGBTQ+, acknowledging that categories of gender can be blurry, as Dhalie describes. I have tried to emphasise the “L” because – whether in the Bible, or in contemporary discourses on homosexuality – “L” is often on the margins. The paper draws on both fieldwork with The Nature Network, a community of mostly Ugandan LGBTQ+ refugees in Nairobi, as published in *Sacred Queer Stories* (2021), and on the novel *Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparanta, which seeks to give “a more powerful voice” to marginalized communities of Nigeria. Uganda and Nigeria are African countries where the Bible has considerable presence and influence. On the one hand, the Bible functions in both as a weapon of homophobia, including lesbophobia, within a wider environment where the police,⁴¹ media,⁴² and churches, also play homophobic roles. But this is not all, because the Bible does not belong to homophobes alone.

⁴⁰ Later, Ijeoma also resists that the story of Onan (Genesis 38:8–10) is really about condemnation of self-pleasuring (Okparanta, 2017, p. 194). She is not prepared to be told what the Bible means, when for her other meanings are clearly possible.

⁴¹ The police is repeatedly identified as hostile to members of the LGBTQ+ community. In his life story, Kyle, for instance reports being tortured by police officers (van Klinken et al., 2021, p. 55). Okparanta also describes obstructive treatment by police officers (Okparanta, 2017, p. 205).

⁴² Both Raymond in their life story (van Klinken et al., 2021, p. 36–37) and Okparanta in her novel (Okparanta, 2017, p. 317) report on the damaging contribution of inflammatory homophobic press coverage.

Hence, taken together, the sources examined here, read alongside the Bible, illuminate also perspectives that are contributing to the growing mosaic of a queer African archive. Significantly, at the end of Okparanta's novel, Ijeoma sits with her Bible in her hands. She reflects that in the Bible "change is the point of it all" and she finds comfort that God is still speaking, including to her (Okparanta, 2017, p. 322). As much as a voice such as hers may often be drowned out by hatred against members of the LGBTQ+ community, we do well to hear it, and – more importantly – to listen.

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19 Mother Earth, Pandemics, Gender and Religion

Pursuing Social Welfare and Human Rights in Southern Africa

Abstract

Mother Earth hosts all members of the creation community. This common home makes members of the Earth community siblings and, inevitably, family. Their interconnectedness, however, does not automatically guarantee the rights of the Earth as the hosting mother; nor does it guarantee the rights of the women, animal and plant family. This chapter will explore the interface of Earth Crisis, Pandemics, Human rights and the role of religion in Southern Africa. It will weave Southern Africa narratives of the struggle for liberation and postcolonial disappointments with national, gender, health and Earth justice dream narratives. The essay will draw primarily, but not exclusively, from the work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, who have centered the theme Earth, Gender and Pandemics as their research focus in the past two decades.

Keywords: *Earth, Pandemics, Gender, Religion, Climate Change*

1. Introduction: Beautiful Dreams of a Beautiful Future

Dear Joachim Kügler, please join us to remember that proud and profound moment in Southern African history, and indeed for the whole world community, when the new South Africa constitution was launched on May 8, 1996. It was a proud moment and a turning point for the world community, given the number of energies, resources, dreams and prayers that were invested to dismantle the Apartheid regime, a racial economic system that structurally discriminated and exploited people based on the

color of skin. The new constitution was famed as the most progressive, or even the finest constitution in the world at the time. While the whole world was watching and listening, the then Vice President of the South African Republic, Thabo Mbeki, broke into one of the most beautiful and well-crafted Earth-Centered poems, stating:

I am an African
 I owe my being to the hills and valleys, the mountains and the glades,
 the rivers and the deserts, the trees and the flowers,
 the seas and ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native
 land.

My body has frozen in our frosts and in our latter-day snows
 It has thawed in the warmth of our sunshine
 And melted in the heat of the midday sun
 The crack and the rumble of the summer thunders
 Lashed by startling lightening
 have been a cause for both trembling and hope
 The fragrances of nature have been as pleasant to us as the sight of
 the wild blooms
 Of the citizens of the veld.

The dramatic shapes of the Drakensberg,
 The soil-colored waters of Lekoa, Qilli, NoThukela
 And the sands of the Kgalagadi....

At times, and in fear, I have wondered, whether I should concede
 equal citizenship of our country to the leopard and the lion, the ele-
 phant and the Springbok, the hyena, the black Mamba, and the pes-
 tilential mosquito

A Human presence among all these, a feature on the face our native
 land, thus defined, I know that none dare challenge me when I say I
 am an African (Mbeki 1996).

His poem then turned from animal and plant world to focus again on
 human beings. In the political context that was guided by the South Afri-
 can truth and reconciliation, Mbeki's poem continues to say:

I am an African
 I owe my being to the Khoi and San
 I am formed of the migrants who left Europe
 In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slave
 Who came from the east
 I am the grandchild of the warrior men and women
 of the Huntsa and Sekhukhune (Mbeki, 1996).

The moment of the poem's performance was a great day in celebration of the new South African democracy, for it was formed on the back of a long struggle against the Apartheid regime. Its new constitution was born on the back of many world democracies and the various movements for human rights. It was informed by the histories of many groups who lived in countries that proclaimed democracy but denied the human rights to some of their citizens based on gender, race, age, sexuality, indigeneity. The new South African constitution thus set out to protect the rights of all its members. Thabo Mbeki's poem, therefore, underlines the importance of the unity of humanity fighting against the monstrous structure of the Apartheid regime, which exploited both the land and black people based on their race. Mbeki also points out that he is a grand child of the warriors who fought for the liberation of the native land and people, thus reclaiming the history of liberation, from the colonial contact zone.

"To his great credit, Mbeki firstly begins by acknowledging 'Mother Earth.' He centers his poem on the importance of the land. Given that 1913 Native Land Act, debarred black South Africans from owning land... he begins by acknowledging the land as supreme, stating that he owes his being to 'the hills and valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers and the deserts, the trees and the flowers, the seas and ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land.' In putting the Earth first in celebration of freedom and rights, Mbeki acknowledges that celebrating independence for the formerly colonized, is not just freedom for human beings, but also for the land itself." (Dube, 2024, p. 1).

This earth-centred framework of liberation highlights that when the people suffer, the land also suffers. It underlines that colonization is the subjugation and exploitation of the land and its inhabitants. In his classic book titled, "*The Wretched of the Earth*" Frantz Fanon (Fanon, 2001, p. 34) argues that for the colonized people the most important thing is the land,

since it is the land that gives them dignity and honour (Masenya and Ramantswana, 2015, pp. 96–116). Mbeki underscores this a fundamental truth; namely, that human beings are interconnected to the land, and they are not above or apart from all other members of the Earth community. Mbeki's poem underlines that just as the people of South Africa want to enjoy their freedom and fundamental human rights, they should begin first by granting the same to rights to Mother Earth. It is the liberation of Mother Earth which grants them peace and prosperity in the envisioned New South Africa.

The second point to note, dear Joachim Kügler, is the identity that Mbeki constructs. He claims a very hybrid human identity, stating that his blood is a mixture of European migrants, Asians and Africans. He presents himself as related to all the racial groups of his new nation. Mbeki was in the delivery room, labouring to give birth to a new South African nation that celebrates the humanity of each and all of its members! In this space, there is neither a European, Asian nor African, for they are all one under their new nation. It was a dream. He was enacting Nelson Mandela's statement; namely, that, "my freedom and yours cannot be separated." This freedom is not only based on liberating interconnectedness between people of different races and ethnicities, but it is also based on interconnect- edness between people and the land, plants and animals. Mbeki was grounding his dream for a new nation on the philosophy of Ubuntu, which asserts that, "I am because we are" (Dube et al., 2024, pp. 1–4). As South African scholar Puleng LenkaBula has elaborated, Ubuntu is not just a philosophical call to build and live in communities that uphold the humanity of the other and all, rather, it is also a philosophical position that bids us to live in creation community, realizing that we owe our being not just to fellow humans, but also to plants and animals (LenkaBula, 2008, pp. 374–394). Mbeki's poem, "I am an African," seeks to articulate the interconnectedness between human beings and the Mother Earth as a whole. The new South Africa that he envisions is thus grounded upon the inclusive and liberating philosophy of Ubuntu. It was a dream, a beautiful dream.

We, the writers, come from the Southern Africa region and are part of this story. We spent a great deal of our time during the 60s to the 90s in an

intensified quest for the liberation of black people in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Eswatini, and Lesotho. We sought liberation for the lands and the people of Southern Africa (Dube, 2020, pp. 1–8). We sang liberation songs and we danced to liberation drums. We shook up our fists in the air and demanded, “Mayibuye iAfrica” (let Africa return). We chanted *a luta continua*. The songs and chants of liberation still ring in our ears. We dreamt beautiful dreams of liberation. I, Musa W. Dube, was born in Botswana to Zimbabwean migrant parents. My parents moved from Zimbabwe to Botswana because black people in Zimbabwe were dispossessed of their lands by the white settler colonizers of the time. They were moved to arid and crowded lands or given the option to stay in their original settlements, with new status as servants of the white masters who now proclaimed themselves the rightful owners the lands of Zimbabwe (Dube, 2014, pp. 139–140). I, Kenosi Molato, was born in Botswana to the descendants of the riparian people of the Okavango Delta, who arrived on the shores of the delta with canoes from Angola, fleeing from the atrocities of the deadly Angolan wars. Thus, the Okavango Delta became their refuge from these atrocities (Molato, 2020, p. 4–5).

In the early 1990s, when South Africa finally gained her independence from its settler Apartheid minority regime, we were very much looking forward to a time to re-build our region, communities, economies and to stabilize our young nations. We were looking for a time of peace and prosperity. We were looking forward to build and rebuild our nations. We had not foreseen the impending pandemics of neo-colonialism, HIV and AIDS, COVID-19, Global warming, and the neoliberal-economy. These new structures put further challenges on our young nations that were still learning to accept each other beyond the ethnic identities. Some young nations such as Mozambique, Angola and DRC regressed into wars. Other national leaders regressed into dictatorship while others faced continued struggle to regain their lands from settler colonisers, like in Zimbabwe and South Africa; and many others were reeling under the World Bank and IMF induced structural adjustments and debts. It is within this political and economic landscape of dire inequalities that pandemics and climate change further complicate the quest for liberation of all in South-

ern Africa countries. Indeed, only four years from his beautiful poetic introduction to the RSA constitution, Mbeki came under fire, for undermining the importance of providing ARVs for people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) (Boseley, 2000).

2. Exploding the Hijacked Dream

Dear Joachim Kügler, in this chapter, we hope to share with you some snapshots on the third struggle for liberation.¹ This is the struggle for liberation in the face of the devastating impact of climate change, HIV & AIDS, COVID-19, and Gender-Based Violence. These new oppressive structures have shattered our dream for liberation and demoralized our societies. In the words of Langston Hughes, our dreams became “deferred dreams.” As Langston Hughes asks:

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raising in the sun?
Or fester like a sore...?
And run.
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over, like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags, like a heavy load
Or does it explode? (Hughes, 2020, p. 45)

As we ponder on these questions in a new context, we are back in the delivery room in the quest for liberation. Dear Joachim Kügler, the struggle continues. Dreaming continues. We wish to share our stories from the Southern African region with you as the work of dreaming anew in the encounter with persistent oppression. We will share the response of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, commonly known as the Circle. The Circle is a continent-wide academic association, whose aim is to study religion, its impact on women as well as to work for transformation within the academic space and among faith-based communities,

¹ We regard the encounter with neo-colonialism and liberal economy as the second struggle, post-independence. These categorizations do not suggest separate and disconnected stages, for they are all intertwined.

particularly for the empowerment of women and girls. The Circle is a dream movement. It dreams and labours for the dream of liberation. It groans in the labor pains for the liberation of African women, lands, and people. I (Dube) am currently the Coordinator of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and I (Kenosi) I am an active participant in the journey, agenda, and dreams of the Circle. Above all, the Circle is a dream space and dream work in the context of persistent oppression. Calling on African women to stubbornly embody the dream of liberation, its founder (Mercy Oduyoye) says:

Dream, Girl Dream!
 What is the future going to be?
 Dream, Girl Dream
 What we may become—that's what matters
 Dream woman, dream...
 Woman, dream Africa's dream
 Be a woman and Africa will be strong (Oduyoye, 1988, p. 35)

The new context of the dream calls for deferred dreams to explode into new energy in quest to work out salvation. Salvation is liberation from all forms of oppression. This new context of is characterized by climate change, HIV and AIDS, COVID-19, GBV, neo-liberal economy, and escalating economic inequalities. These pandemics congregated in the Southern African region, complicating our quest to attain the human dignity and rights for all our members. The Mozambican Frelimo liberation war slogan, "*a luta continua*," the struggle continues, is thus in order, for three decades since South Africa gained independence, the struggle for equality is yet to be realized. Mother Earth is still facing degradation due to human's greediness and rapaciousness.

2.1 Climate Change, Global, Regional and Gendered Impacts

In today's context of climate change and global warming, the imperative to centre Mother Earth is evident for and to all of us. It needs no special pleading and persuasion. We are all witnesses, wherever we are based, to the major changes that are happening to our beloved Mother Earth. Mother Earth tears and weeps under persistent, longer, and stronger cy-

clones, hurricanes, droughts, tornadoes, wildfires, and hailstorms. Glaciers break, melt and float. At the time of writing this chapter, an intense heat wave in the range of 35–43° C (95–109 °F) swept across most of Southern African countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Mozambique and Namibia. It burnt crops and dried water for animals. Climate change is a hard reality in the Southern African region. Accordingly, the IPCC Sixth Report published in February 2022 notes, “Human-induced climate change, including more frequent and extreme events have caused adverse impacts and related losses and damage to nature and people” (IPCC, 2022, p. 9). The report points out that

“Widespread impacts to ecosystems, people, settlements, and infrastructure have resulted in observed increases in the frequency and intensity of climate and weather extremes, including hot extremes on land and in the ocean, heavy precipitation events, droughts, and fire weathers... Adverse impacts from tropical cyclones, with related losses and damages have increased due to the sea level rise and the increase in heavy precipitation.” (IPCC, 2022, p. 8).

In their paper, “Climate Impacts in Southern Africa During the 21st Century,” Robert Scholes and Francois Engelbrecht, point out that

“Southern Africa is particularly vulnerable to climate change, because of its geographical location and socio-economic development state. It is already warm and dry region projected to become warmer and drier; and has many demands on its institutions’ finances in addition to climate change. Warming in the interior of Southern Africa is occurring at about twice the global rate.” (Scholes & Engelbrecht, 2021, p. 2).

Scholes and Francois proceed to enumerate the various impacts and risks that will or accompanies this situation (Scholes & Engelbrecht, 2021, p. 2). They point out that agricultural production such as staple crops and livestock will be reduced; freshwater availability, which was already limited in Southern Africa, will be further reduced due to “decreasing rainfall & increasing evaporation; droughts can be expected to take longer duration; the number and intensity and duration of heat waves will increase (Scholes & Engelbrecht, 2021, p. 2). There is also risk of severe storms that will destroy some of the vegetation in the region. Thus, the tropical cyclones will become more frequent and more intense in the region due to

climate change. Furthermore, thousands of species are expected to become extinct, due to the destruction of their habitats (Molato, 2020, p. 31). This is evident in the Okavango Delta that due to human encroachment in the heart of the Delta some of the animals were forced to seek refuge in different places thus causing human and animal conflicts in the region (Molato, 2020, p. 31). Consequently, both the human and environmental rights are severely compromised by this state of climate change in Southern Africa.

Climate change, which was first perceived by some as a myth, is now a glaring reality in the Southern Africa. Our home country, Botswana, is a semi desert that always had fragile rains. The scarcity of the rain in Botswana significantly impacts its citizens. Chants for rainfall in public gathering and in ceremonies are part of the cultural fabric of Botswana (Molato, 2020, p. 53). When we were growing up, we knew the rainy season started in October and that we could expect drought almost once in a decade. However, today the seasons have shifted dramatically. Droughts have become more frequent, if not permanent, and heat waves have become unbearable. Our rains now begin around December and their unreliability is the only constant factor. During the days when we were growing up, all farms were ploughed during the rainy season because people were sure of their harvest. But now it is too risky and too expensive to plough and then watch one's crops burn and die due to insufficient rains and intensified heat waves. Most fields, therefore, lie fallow, and most people are forced to be dependent on the grocery stores, that is, if one is working and has a constant salary. These droughts are now more frequent in Southern Africa, particularly in Namibia, Botswana, Angola, and Madagascar, making food insecurity a real and constant threat.

Countries with coastal cities such as Madagascar, Comoros, Mozambique, and South Africa, have borne the brunt of frequent and more intensified storms. One thinks here of the 2019 Cyclone Idai, which did not only hit Mozambique, but flattened and drowned trees, animals, fields, cities, villages, schools, roads, bridges, and mountains through Zimbabwe up to Malawi. Cyclone Idai was described as the worst tropical cyclone on record to affect Africa and the Southern hemisphere. Within the period of five years (2019–2024), Madagascar, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi Madagascar endured Cyclone Idai (2019) and Freddy (2023). The impacts

of these extreme weather events on livelihoods are huge. Many therefore find themselves homeless, unable to produce their own food, facing sanitation and disease threats. Many girl-children drop out of school due to lack of resources, many are forced to migrate to cities in search for jobs in order to provide for their families. This also leads to high crime-rates and gender-based violence escalates, among other ills. According to The IPPC Technical Working and SADC Vulnerability Assessment Committee report of 2022, there are about “33 million people facing high levels of food insecurity in the region” (IPCC Sixth Report, 2022) of Southern Africa at the moment. They are primarily located in DRC, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Zambia.

2.2 Women and Climate Change

Dear Joachim Kügler, there is no doubt that all humanity and all continents are affected by climate change in major way. Yet African women and other marginalized people are disproportionately impacted by climate change. According to data from the UN Women website: “It is the world’s poorest and those in vulnerable situations, especially woman and girls, who bear the brunt of environmental, economic and social shocks.” (UN Women, 2017) In short, it is women who are responsible for feeding their families, and fetching water, who bear the burden of increased work as they must travel far to fetch water and work much harder to feed their families. Women watch their crops dry up and die before harvest. Young girls in such situations face higher chances of dropping out school, as teenage pregnancy and child marriages escalate, sometimes because impoverished families seek to rid themselves of what they experience as the burden of feeding and educating them. With economic insecurities facing communities, statistical attestation indicates that the rates of gender-based violence and human trafficking rise. Linking climate change and gender, Circle’s Ghanaian scholars Sylvia Owusu-Ansah and Beatrice-Joy Owusu-Ansah argue that it is women who bear a greater brunt when the Earth is subjugated and suffers from degradation (Owusu-Ansah & Owusu-Ansah, 2021, p. 55). Consequently, at the core of climate change is the issue of women who are greatly affected more than men.

Underlining that “*climate change is women’s issue*,” in March 2022, UN CSW66 chose a priority theme on “Achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction and programs.” They

“expressed concern that climate change, the pollution of the air, land and water; biodiversity loss and the decline in ecosystems functions and services threaten the full enjoyment of human rights of all women and girls and have acute impacts on women and girls, especially on rural, indigenous and migrant women and girls.” (UN CSW66, 2022, Point 18).

The commission further “recognized that the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental challenges increase and exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls to discrimination and all forms of violence” (UN CSW66, 2022, Point 39). In its conclusion, the commission calls upon various sectors, including Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) to implement the plan of action. Since most of FBOs are patronized by women, they are encouraged to be in solidarity with women’s struggles for justice. The persistence of subjugation of African women led to the formation of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians to drive the dream for the liberation both in the continent and the diaspora.

3. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians’ Response

3.1 What is the Circle?

Joachim Kügler, in this section we want to share with you the journey of African women theologians and their response to pandemics and climate change in Africa. Let us start by elaborating on the formation of the Circle. The Ghanaian scholar Mercy Amba Oduyoye founded the Circle in 1989 (Phiri, 2009, pp. 105–119). As a native Ghanaian woman, Mercy Oduyoye observed that while women patronized and participated in most religious and spiritual practices and movements, they were hardly leaders in these settings. Thus, their faith was mostly used against them (Egbeyle, 2018). Religion tended to be used to legitimate the oppression of women and to encourage women to accept their culturally prescribed status as second

citizens. She also noticed that African women were absent in most academic departments in Africa. Challenged by this observance, in 1989, Oduyoye gathered 69 women from all over the continent, from every religion, from both the academy and faith institutions and launched what became known as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Kanyoro, 2006, pp. 19–23).

The mandate of the Circle, therefore, is to undertake research on all Africa-based religions and cultures; to analyze how they characterize and construct gender; to re-imagine ways of interpreting religion/cultures in ways that empower both men and women; to mentor young women and to train women who will become scholars and leaders in faith communities (Njoroge, 2002, pp. 41–57). At the core of the vision of the Circle is the desire to transform oppressive, exploitative social structures that marginalize people on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, class, age, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability. Its approach seeks to create a space that welcomes women, girls, and other marginalized people as equal citizens. The membership of the Circle is currently around a thousand. The Circle includes both women and men in the academic and FBOs institutions who see the need to transform the society which oppress women. Mercy Oduyoye, the founder of the Circle, called for a two-winged theology. She asserts that a bird cannot fly with one wing. The struggle for liberation, in other words, demands the energies of all members in the society to come to fruition. The Circle's structure of operation consists of the overall Continental leader assisted by six regional coordinators covering South, East, Central, West, French Speaking and Diaspora regions. Lastly, each country has a country leader, who coordinates Circle activities at a national level. Sometimes there are Circles at institutional levels within each country. The main aim of the Circle is the transformation of the society not just theoretical undertaking. The Circle consists of academicians and the practitioners on the ground. The Circle is a force to be reckoned with in the African societies, academic and faith spaces.

3.2 HIV and AIDS Pandemic in the Circle

Dear Joachim Kügler, you will be glad to know that the Circle has a research structure, guiding its dream for liberation and justice. A common research theme is usually chosen, depending on the most pressing issues

confronting African women and their communities. Different regions, countries and individuals are free to interpret and research the focal theme according to their specific contexts, subject areas, methods, theories and interests. Specific countries and individual are also free to research themes that are outside the chosen theme. From 2002 till 2018, the Circle focused on theme of HIV and AIDS (Dube & Kanyoro, 2004; Dube, 2003; Dube, 2008) for it was a global pandemic that had a major impact on the continent of Africa, and for the Southern Africa region and women in particular. The HIV and AIDS pandemic raised many human rights issues and necessitated a human rights approach. Through its death-dealing forces and long suffering; through its stigma and discrimination; and through its tendency to raise GBV, a human rights framework became necessary to responding to HIV and AIDS. Stigma and discrimination, for example, did not only marginalize PLHWA from work and living spaces and from free social interaction, but it also often led to limited or hindered access to quality care; access to essential services and resources, and sometimes such hindrance leads to avoidable deaths among PLWHA. Realizing that HIV and AIDS placed African people, and women in particular, at the centre of the storm, in all its key areas of concerns—that is stigma and discrimination, prevention, caregiving, counselling and testing, access to medication, gender-based violence – the Circle decided to focus its research on the pandemic. It sought to investigate what and how each religion, culture, philosophy or ethics could say about the burning issues of HIV and AIDS. In the area of stigma discrimination, for example, a research project could investigate how a particular religion/culture constructs or justifies marginalization; how it is gendered and how it might be re-interpreted constructively to promote compassion and inclusiveness. Some research projects investigated how health and disease are constructed in religions/cultures, while seeking to identify and analyze user-friendliness perspectives or their capacity to further distance PLWHA from accessing care and enjoying their human dignity. In all cases, whether the project was approached from theology, ethics, religion, liturgy, philosophy, sociology, Bible, Quran, the Circle mainstreamed gender. Whenever the framework of human rights perspective was needed, the Circle interrogated and highlighted religious perspectives that supports the same. For example, arguing that all people are created in God's

image, a case is made that no person regardless of race, gender, sexuality, class, age, or health should be denied their human dignity. From the New Testament perspective, Jesus' radical self-identification with the Other, was one such perspective to consider. Matthew 25, for example, features Jesus saying, "you saw me naked; I was in prison, I was hungry, homeless, thirsty and you did not attend to me." It follows that in the HIV and AIDS context Jesus would certainly say, "I am HIV positive". A Christology of radical solidarity with the marginalized, therefore, calls for the dismantling of stigma and discrimination and protection of human rights for all. Similarly, an ecclesiological framework that constructs the church as one body with many parts, holding that "when one member of the body suffers, we all suffer," challenges churches to become welcoming and compassionate spaces. Using African Indigenous Religions' perspectives also offered many user-friendly frames of thinking and acting. The Ubuntu philosophy that urges us to express our humanity through the capacity to welcome, receive and empower the Other, instead of discriminating against them encourages building and sustaining welcoming and inclusive communities. The Circle also collaborated with various NGOs, FBOs, Developmental organizations and ecumenical movements, through providing training and producing relevant materials for mainstreaming HIV and AIDS (Dube, 2015b, 531–542). *Africa Praying: A Guide to HIV and AIDS Sensitive Sermons* (Dube 2003) is good example of a resource produced for equipping the church for a constructive response.

HIV and AIDS remains a challenge. Statistically and historically,

"Eastern and Southern African is the region carrying the largest share in the global burden of the HIV and the epicenter of HIV epidemic. Much progress has been made but the gains are fragile, and HIV continues to have tremendous impact on the lives of children and adolescents, especially girls and their families." (Schermbucker, 2016).

Accordingly, the UNAIDS 2020 Fact Sheet of 2020 also indicates that East and Southern regions are still on top of the world in the number of people living with HIV and AIDS: 20–23 million PLWHA in the world are currently in this region, between 700–900 thousand were newly infected in the year 2021, while 16.2 million currently on treatment. For quite a long time the countries with the highest infection and the highest numbers of

people living with HIV were both located in the region of Southern African. To their credit, some countries in Southern Africa have reached the 2030, 95–95–95 targets much early. Both Botswana and Zimbabwe reached this target by the year 2022 (UN 2020).

3.3 Climate Change: Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and Religious Imagination

In 2019, the Circle began to switch its research focus from the HIV and AIDS pandemic to the Earth and Gender crisis in African societies. Well, as you may remember, dear Joachim Kügler, that a new research area was launched in Gaborone Botswana under the conference theme of “Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and Religious Imagination.” You attended that Conference Joachim! Ja! One hundred and forty participants from all over the continent and the African diaspora attended this conference. The proceedings resulted in eight published books. Some of the books include: *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Biblical studies* (Berman et al., 2021); *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Theology* (Chisale & Bosch, 2021); *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions* (Penxa-Matholeni, Boateng & Manyonganise, 2020); *Mother Earth, Postcolonial and Liberation Theologies* (Chirongoma & Mombo, 2021); *African Literature, Mother Earth and Religion* (Gudhlanga, Muganiwa & Dube, 2020); and *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Mission* (Daniel & Kebaneilwe, 2021) and many more.

The Circle chose the framework of Mother Earth to interrogate how the oppression of the Earth and women, intersect with coloniality, neo-liberalism, gender, class, race, ethnicity, age and religion. Mother Earth framework was chosen to be in solidarity with the Earth in her role of birthing and nurturing life, a role that women share with Mother Earth. Although some western feminists have problematized the framework of ‘Mother Earth’ as potentially oppressive, Mercy Oduyoye argues that the ethics of motherhood are compelling and much needed by our world (Oduyoye, 2002, pp. 57–64). She maintains that mothers’ work is driven by the ethic of caring for the Other and working to see the Other become a person; and that our capitalistic and neo-liberal economic systems can learn a lot from the ethics of motherhood. Mother economics, modelled best by both women and Mother Earth, are thus in order.

In our journey of solidarity with Mother Earth, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians endeavours to be partners with the Earth against exploitative and oppressive economic systems that regard the Earth as an object for endless exploitation. African women recognize the sources and structures of exploitation that oppress Africa to be the same oppressors of Mother Earth. Our theological quest therefore needs to ask: Does water have the right to be clean and unpolluted? Does the air and the atmosphere have the right to be clean and unpolluted? Does the soil have the right to be clean and unpolluted? Do trees, plants, and animals have the right to live and thrive, without being subjugated to human exploitation for their humanity's own ends? Entering the discourse for the rights of nature from a religion point of view, we interrogate what our cultures and scriptures offer. In this we mean various cultures/religions African Indigenous Religions, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Rastafarianism, among others. We interrogate our sources for positive, negative and potential user-friendly perspectives. We ask ourselves about ways of reading and interpretation that sway us away from anthropocentric worldviews to perspectives that assist us to think of the Earth-community as interconnected and interdependent, without placing human beings above other members of creation. For example, instead of reading Genesis 1 from the perspective that say human beings were given dominion over the all members of creation, we choose to underlie that every member was created by the word of God; every member was pronounced good; and the whole creation was found to be very Good and that God's will is, above all, to see all members of the Earth remain in their goodness, in their interconnectedness and their sacredness (Dube, 2015a, pp. 1–17). The Circle seeks to interrogate what should constitute preaching the gospel in the context of global warming and climate change. African women and their communities have contributed less to global warming, but they are disproportionately impacted by climate change. It is imperative to seek for those perspectives that define the gospel as a gospel to nature, the whole creation, and the oppressed (Luke 4:16–22).

From African Indigenous Religions, we also interrogate our sources for their understanding of creation and relationships to nature. What, for example, is the function of animal totems? From an ecological perspective and African traditional religion (AIRS), totemism promotes a worldview

of self-identification with animals and animal world. It cultivates consciousness of interconnectedness with nature than encouraging dualism and hierarchy. It constructs inclusive perspectives of community.

For example, I (Dube) am a Dube, which means Zebra! I, and all the other Dube communities, hold the Zebra with reverence. We will not kill, eat, or use any of its products, for it is a member of our families and community (Dube et al., 2016).

I (Molato) am an elephant. This suggests that the ethnic group which I belong see themselves as one with elephant. In this regard, the Bayei ethnic group does not kill or eat an elephant (Molato & Dube, 2019, p. 220).

Most Southern African communities subscribe to animal totemism that constructs human beings as related to animal world (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991, p. 190). The Circle research on Earth equally interrogates perspectives towards plants, water, rain, land, and the rituals that go with it. At the same time, Mother Earth and Mother Africa frameworks explore African women's relationship with and knowledge of nature. It also investigates how patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and neo-liberal economies that oppress and exploit women also oppress Mother Earth. In sum, the current research focus seeks for ways of reading and re-reading of cultures and religions for creation justice and liberating interdependence.

Since the launch of the research theme on "Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Religious Imagination," eight volumes from biblical, theological, world religions, AIRS, mission etc. perspectives have been published.² Since 2019 the Circle has continued with the Earth-focused theme. The Circle seeks to work with faith communities, for the healing of Mother Earth and all its members in the context of global warming and climate change.

3.4 The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Circle Response

Dear Joachim Kügler, as you know, in 2020 there was the COVID-19 outbreak. It took the world by surprise, unleashing massive death and devastating impact. When it first appeared, most people did not think it would spread so quickly around the globe. The region of Southern Africa was plagued by a significant share of COVID-19, including variants that had

² Some of the works published are listed in the reference sessions.

us banned from travelling to certain countries at the time. African women found themselves locked down, denied the right to move freely and to carry their normal business activities as governments sought to control and contain the pandemic. African women found themselves masked and behind closed doors (Amenga-Etego et al., 2021). With schools closed, teenage pregnancy and child marriages went up. Moreover, lockdowns multiplied poverty among most African women employed in the informal sector (Hadebe, 2021). Gender-based violence soared by 20%, worldwide. As a research organ, focusing on issues impacting women, the Circle published two books, which interrogated how religion, gender, and COVID-19 impacted African women during the lock down (Hadebe, 2021; Amenga-Etego, 2021).

Be that as it may, Mother Earth received a sabbatical from human pollution during the COVID-19 lockdown. Skies became clearer and brighter; birds began to sing sweet songs in quietness (Maluleke, 2022). In some cases, animals began to repossess the abandoned city-centres. COVID-19 delivered a break to Mother Earth; a break from human-driven ecological degradation and pollution. The COVID 19-forced sabbatical refocused nature and the identity of the members of the Earth community. It demonstrated that human beings had colonized many spaces, which belong to other species, hence the hyenas and wolfs began to reclaim their memories and to re-enter the cities that belonged to them.

The struggle against various pandemics and climate change in the Southern African region continues. As we noted earlier, African women and societies are disproportionately impacted by climate change and their struggles to adapt and become resilient. Like Thabo Mbeki at the birth of a nation, the Circle is full of hope as it recites Mercy Amba Oduyoye's poem:

Dream, Girl Dream!
 What is the future going to be?
 Dream, Girl Dream
 What we may become—that's what matters
 Dream woman, dream...
 Woman, dream Africa's dream
 Be a woman and Africa will be strong (Oduyoye, 1988, p. 35)

4. Concluding Remarks

Dear Joachim Kügler, this chapter began by inviting you to the Southern African journeys of the struggle for liberation. It began with the classic poem of hope recited by the former South African President Thabo Mbeki. At the birth of a new nation, Mbeki envisions a country which is free from the shackles of Apartheid and ecological oppression. His opening underscores a very high ecological consciousness, for Mbeki asserts: “I owe my being to the hills and valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers and the deserts, the trees and flowers” (Mbeki 1996). He presents himself as having equal citizenship with “the leopard and the lion, the elephant and the Springbok, the hyena, the black Mamba, and the pestilential mosquito” (Mbeki 1996), thus underlining the interconnectedness between the African people, their land and all other forms of life. As Mbeki notes, “My body has frozen in our frosts and in our latter-day snows. It has thawed in the warmth of our sunshine and melted in the heat of the mid-day sun” (Mbeki 1996). Yet as the chapter highlights, the dream for liberation was hijacked by the rise of persistent structures of oppression such as neo-colonialism, climate change, the liberal economy, pandemics, and conflicts.

The Circle of African Concerned African Women Theologians emerged within the historical context of postcolonial disappointments and the quest to guard the beautiful dream of liberation for and with all. Circle members were invited to the work of dreaming the dream of liberation and justice. The women of the Circle were invited to counteract hijacked dreams of the liberation and justice to Mother Earth and her children. As we have highlighted, the Circle’s areas of interrogation and quest for transformation are patriarchy, colonialism/neo-colonialism, pandemics, climate change and Earth health. Given the impact of HIV&AIDS on African societies, and, on women in particular, the Circle could not be indifferent. It engaged with the monstrous pandemic through research, writing, publications and by equipping faith communities for a constructive response. Second, the chapter highlighted the Circle’s response to climate change, a context that impacts the whole Earth community. Yet African women are more affected than men due to their gender roles and economic status. Since the struggle for justice in various fronts continues,

the agenda and the engagement of the Circle will continue to “dream Africa’s dream” (Oduyoye, 1988, 35). The social wellbeing of African societies remains central to the agenda of African women. It is on these bases that the Circle continues to engage with global, regional, national, and local issues through research, writing, publishing, and community engagement. In this journey, Professor Joachim Kügler, you have been a beloved comrade in the struggle.³ We celebrate your friendship, your solidarity, and your socially engaged scholarship.

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3 Some recent examples include Berman, Dunbar, Dube & Kgalemang, 2021; Amenyedzi, Maton & Yele, 2023; Maseno, Najagu & Kavou, 2024; Mwale, Gabaitse, Kobo & Tembo, 2024; Etego, Stiebert & Aidoo, 2021.

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Kitche Magak

An African Odyssey

Hark!

Let the tales of true brilliance be told
Of passionate percipience many has bathed
A simple soul, a profound sage
A revered teacher robed in erudition
A beautiful mind.

Africa,

The canvas of lettered odyssey
A continent enriched, zest manifest
And through the sacred scriptures
Protégés continue to weave a humanising tale
Unraveling mysteries beyond the holy veil.

2004,

The journey begins with Honoured Serima
A scholarly plan laid out in Bayreuth
Fatherly mentoring guidance
Witnessing the birth of a firstborn
Who charts a path that crisscrosses the mother continent.

Zeus,

A man-god by another name in Kemet
From the banks of the Nile
To the Sphinx's gaze in Giza
The syndrome engraves the duplicity of man
Hieroglyphs whisper secrets in the dessert sand
A dialogue between divinity and mortality.

Trailblazing,

From East to West and North to South
 Traversing intellectual boundaries
 To create a boundless savannah of thought
 Where verses of the biblical lore
 Fuse into the vibrancy of daily life
 Not confined to the dusty tomes.

Minds,

A gathering of continental thoughts,
 Strength framed in the richness of diversity
 A fabric of melodious wavelength
 Presided over the drums of shared hope
 That still rings true in the vastness of the ageless Kalahari
 With a mysterious echo in the ancient ruins of the Great Zimbabwe

Soaring

Like the Martial eagle in the plains of Maasai Mara
 From Botswana's delta to Ghana's shores
 From the embrace of Cameroon to the grace of Ivory Coast
 Choreographing a dance of intellect
 Embroidered in multidisciplinary motifs
 That speak an easy universal language.

Landing,

The full grandeur of the Martial eagle emerges
 A respite from a rewarding long flight
 A time for reflection, not the final page
 For in the hearts of the dream merchants
 The ignited flames will ignite more flames
 To forever narrate the story
 Of the majesty of the Martial eagle
 In reverent silences and whispers.

~ END ~

This is an ode to Prof. Dr. Joachim Kügler on his retirement from University-based scholarship, Bamberg ~ 14 January 2024

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BiAS 41 ERA 15 | NEHANDA. Women's Theologies of Liberation in Southern Africa (Circle Jubilee Volume 3)/ Nelly Mwale, Rosina Mmannana Gabaitse, Fundiswa Kobo, Dorothy Tembo (Eds.), Bamberg: UBP, 2024.

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Since 2004, Joachim Kügler has intentionally focused on promoting and accompanying Biblical Studies in Africa, beginning with a focus on Zimbabwe's budding biblical scholars that he mentored. Over the years, the work of Joachim has spread to include Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Botswana, South Africa, Kenya, Namibia and Nigeria. Not only did Joachim do the one mile, he went the extra mile in his embrace and support of Biblical Studies in Africa. The launch of the Bible in Africa Studies (BiAS) Series in 2009 remains one of his greatest contributions. This volume is a reflection on *Bible in Africa Studies* and a celebration of the immense contributions of Joachim Kügler to this field. This volume is a festschrift in honour of Joachim as he retires from active academic service with the University of Bamberg in July 2024.

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